Interview with Folder 1, File 6

Wednesday,

**This is the interview with, ah, LN. Ah, and, L, I’m going to start out by asking you some questions to give me context.**

OK.

**My first question is, will you tell me how many years you’ve been teaching and how many years you’ve been at this school.**

OK. I have been teaching, and I don’t teach math now, I ‘ve been teaching, I think this is my 15th year teaching. I say, that’s a long time. And I’ve been at Alder for ten years. It will be 10 years this June.

**OK. And, what, exactly, do you teach right now?**

Language Arts and Social Studies and I also do one period of, ah, English Language Development.

**OK. And, so, you have two cores?**

Correct.

**And are your cores tracked in any way?**

No.

**OK. And, ah, and it’s what grade?**

This is sixth grade.

**OK. Good. Now, also, I’m going to ask you some questions, well, about your parents. Can you just talk to me generally about, describe to me the parents of your students?**

Um, most of my parent are, you know, they’re working. They’re working parents, most of them. Um, most of them are immigrants from…

**Like, Moms and Dads are both working?**

Moms and Dads are both working. Most of them, you know, um, they’re the first to come to this country. Um…

**First generation.**

Yeah, first generation. Um, let’s see…I mean, that’s pretty much all that I know, as far as…I mean, do you want to know, education-wise?

**Ah, sure.**

Most of the parents, education-wise, have only, um, I think the majority have gotten through some high school in their country. And, um, so…

**OK. Do, do you think most of them have access to phones?**

Yes.

**What…can you guess…like, pretty much most?**

I would say 100% have access to a phone. Whether it’s a landline or a cell phone.

**Or maybe somebody else’s.**

Or someone else’s. Correct.

**What about Internet?**

Um, I would say maybe 50% of them have access to it at home. Um, you know, if they go to the library, they all have access to it. Everyone has access to it. So, if they don’t have it at home, I always tell them, go to the library. It’s free. Yeah.

**OK. And, if a parent wanted to come and meet with you to, for…would they, would any of them have transportation problems, you think? Or many?**

I’ve had no parent have an issue with transportation. Um, this year. Um, um, or any year, for that matter. It’s, most parents will make it, even if it means them having to walk over here or take the bus. You know, I mean, they’ll get here. When it comes down to it, if it’s, if there’s a meeting that needs to be held, they will be here.

**OK. What about, are they, would you say they are supportive of education, or…?**

Oh, most certainly. All of them believe that, um, it’s the key to success. Especially in this country. Um, coming from other countries where education is not given, you know, like we have here, they, you know, it’s their number one goal for their children to be educated. That’s why they’re here. And so, they support, they’re very big on education.

**And so, do you feel that a lot of your parents, what would their demeanor be? Are they mostly supportive of you and the school or…?**

Um, I would say a good percentage of my parents are. Not all of them. I wish it was, because then I wouldn’t have some of the low grades that I have, but I would say a good majority of my parents definitely support me and what I need, you know. If I make a phone call, I usually get a phone call right back. If I write a note…

**So, they’re respons-, most of them are responsive?**

I, I, you know, I want to say maybe 80 or 90% of my parents.

**That’s good.**

Oh, yes. They, um, and they’re on my side, because they know I’m on their children’s side. You know, we want to see them succeed. You know, we don’t want to see them fail.

**So they trust you? They, a lot of them trust you?**

I think so. Yes, most certainly.

**And it sounds like you have a common agenda, a shared goal.**

Right. Our goal is to have their children succeed. To become, you know, good citizens of this, you know, country and move forward.

**So, it sounds like you are really working together with your parents.**

I do.

**Almost is like a team effort?**

You know, I tell my parents at the beginning of the year and I tell my kids as well…And, when I say, “my kids”, I mean, my students, because I, sometimes they’re like, ‘huh?’…Um, you know, we’re like a….a…like a triangle, I tell them. I said, you know, there’s three points, I said, and your parents are one, you’re one, and I’m the other. You know, and, complete, we’ll make this triangle and this is a triangle that will lead you to success. I tell them, the arrow of success. You know, but it’s, it’s…you know, I tell them, without one, you know, one’s not going to work. Now, there are instances that you do have, you know, children who are just self-motivated and with whatever we can do here with them, they’ve achieved that success, but, for the most part, you know, we are a team. You know, we have to be a team. So…yeah.

**I love to hear how different people describe things. It’s very valuable. OK. So, they’re mostly, um, Hispanic. Any, any other ethnicities?**

We have Hispanic. We have, um, Hispanic, African-American, um, and that’s pretty much it.

**So you don’t, and what percentage of your parents, would you say, are not fluent in, in English.**

Over 50%.

**OK. Any that speak another lang-, that aren’t fluent, but it’s a different language than Spanish?**

No, I don’t. No others.

**OK. Um let’s see. What else. Ah, employment…ah, what do you think they do for their jobs? Do you have any idea? Is there…**

Um, a majority of my parents are, um, they either work in factories or they are, like, laborers, you know, working construction, work in restaurants, um, and then those that don’t are, you know, they, they stay at home, you know. Housewives or housedads, you know, if Dad isn’t working. I have one or two Dads who aren’t working, so they stay home with the kids and Mom’s off at work. So.

**M-hm. Um, OK. Desc-, now, my next questions are about, to get an idea of your communication style and your communication habits. So, will you describe for me the types of interactions you’ve had with parents, um, this school year so far?**

Well, you know, we have our Back to School Night and, um, so that’s the big one. That’s when everyone gets to meet each other and, um, you know, establish forms of communication. And so, because I’m bilingual, I’m able to let my parents know that English, Spanish, write me a note, send me an e-mail, you know, leave me a message at the front desk, you can communicate, you know, in any language with me.

**So, you’re giving them lots of options for what works for them.**

Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah. You know, um, our students have agendas. And so, um, they write their homework on these agendas. And I always tell a parent, you know, if you have a question, a concern, you didn’t get the homework done, there’s an emergency, write me a note, regardless of language. And that way, I’ll see the agenda and I’ll know what’s going on. And I can call you back or what have you. Um, so that’s been, you know, one of the ways. And then, through progress reports. I send home progress reports about every three weeks. My, my own, you know, progress reports that I print out and then, of course, we have the district ones. And on my progress reports, you know, I always have there, you know, “Please contact me”, especially if they’re not doing very well. You know, if it’s a C or below, I usually have parents contact me. Um, and I always, you know, I tell my parents I have an open door policy. My parents can come in whenever they want. Um…

**Do they have to give warning?**

No, not at all. ‘Scuse me for a second. [coughs] Um, to observe their children, to observe me, to see what’s going on. Now, if they want a meeting, just call me the morning or the afternoon during lunch time and we can set up something. But, if they just want to come in just to see what’s going on, they’re more than welcome. They don’t even need to let me know. I just tell them, “Just bring an ID”. Or else they won’t let you back here. But yeah, and that’s completely unannounced. I kind of like them that way, because it really throws the class for, like, “Oh, my goodness, so and so’s Mom’s here! My Mom’s going to be next!” So, you know, it works! It works!

**Sometimes the Moms go home and tell the other Moms!**

That’s right! Yes, they do! Yes, they do.

**It must be wonderful for the parents that you’re fluent in Spanish. I assume, from what you said.**

Not academically. Not academically. Not, I mean, there are certain terms that, you know, I kind of flub with a little bit and the Moms and Dads are so good. And I say, “Now, how do you say that the academic way?” and they’ll help me out. But, for the most part, yes, I’m able to communicate with my parents very easily.

**Yeah. It must help a lot.**

Oh, it does.

**So, um, so, you, so the kinds of communications, you said Back to School Night, the agendas, the notes you mentioned, ah, progress reports…**

E-mails, ah, phone calls, um, you know, parent meetings on campus.

**OK. In other words, they can set one up with you. It doesn’t have to be Parent-Teacher Conferences or…**

No. Oh, no, it can just be any...I mean, especially because the progress reports go out more often. You know, what happened? I saw so-and-so failed. What happened? We can discuss the test, why they failed. And I usually like the child to be here with me. That way, we can all talk about it and see what’s going on. So. Yeah.

**And also, you’ve got ParentConnect. I understand some of your parents can’t access that, but how often, would you say, you update your grades on that? That would be a form of communication also.**

I, I…maybe once or twice a week I update my grades. Um, sometimes daily. You know, I’ll do quick spot checks and that’s one way of, you know…I do have one child who, um, Mom wants to know if the homework the night before was the correct one and I just initial “OK”, or…because she cannot access online, so that’s another…you know, again, going back to the agenda. It’s really helpful.

**Ah-huh. Is that, would you say that’s your favorite? What, is there one you rely on more than another form?**

The phone. Yeah, I get on the phone. I, you know, I make a list for the day of anyone whom I need to call and I just pick up the phone and I call.

**So, you would say that you probably talk to at least one parent a day?**

At least. On average. At least. Yeah. At least one. So, and again, it can be through there or it can be through the agenda or, you know. I mean, we try. I try.

**Ah-huh. Great. Um, and then, can you think, um, can you give me an example of a time, either in the past week or the recent past, when you communicated with a parent about a student? A specific example.**

Well, just last week, we had a student who, who’s been not doing very well. He’s been struggling. And, unfortunately, um, there was a passing in the family that’s had a great impact on him. And so, um, we had a meeting, um, with our Community Liaison and, and the Mom and the child and myself and my partner teacher, and we talked about strategies to help him focus, you know, how to make up all of this work, um, and the meeting ended on a positive note. You know, he was being, he was going to be given an amount of time to, you know, make up as much work as he could. Um, you know, we are, make ourselves available in the morning, during lunch, and after school for our children. And so, um, there, you know, there were all these opportunities for him to come and, and ask for help or clarification, so, you know, the goal was, let’s get all this caught up, you know, let’s work on organization for him, um, so, that way, he could end successfully.

**Sounds like you were providing support, a lot of support for him, the team of people.**

Of course. Absolutely. Because we wanted him and Mom to know that we’re here for them. You know, it’s a very difficult time. Dad had passed and he had been very sick.

**Ooh. That’s a close passing.**

Yeah. So, it was, um, it was really hard. It was really hard.

**Wow. Um, and you mentioned, that you’re available. People, someone’s available after lunch, after school. Did you say before school?**

We’re available before school, um, during our lunch, and after school for our kids.

**That’s unwritten policy? I mean, everybody is?**

No.

**Does everybody do it?**

Well, I don’t know about everyone. I know my partner and I do.

**Ah-huh. You do.**

Well, I’m going to speak for myself: I know I do. Now, sometimes, at lunch, if I’m on the phone, can’t do it. Or, after school, like we have duties. Like, last week, in the morning, I was unavailable, because I had duty until the bell rang, so I couldn’t be here for my kids, but she would be, she would have her door open, so…if they needed help. Because, a lot of the times, our children, if they don’t understand the homework concept, I tell them, “Well, see me first thing in the morning. That way, we can get it done, so by the time it’s time to correct it, you have some work. You know, you have something. You have an opportunity to do it, instead of, “I didn’t understand. I got a zero”. You know, so there’s an opportunity for them to not get the zero. Because that’s not what we want. I mean, we want our children to succeed. Yeah.

**OK. So, um, now, that’s wonderful, um, and now I’m gong to move…very helpful, and the next group of questions about your beliefs, are about your beliefs. Um, for example, do you feel that your relationship with your students’ parents influences their success in school?**

Oh, absolutely, I agree with that. Um, you know, again, parents and I, you know, we’re the team or the support for our children. And, um, and so, we both have to be on track and we both have to agree to, you know, homework is first. I know that we all have lives after, you know, school and sports and family and stuff, but homework is gotta be the number one. And after that, you know, we get to do all our other things that we need to do in life. So, I, I do agree with that statement. Very much so.

**OK. Ah, and, um, the question was, “In what ways?” and “How does this happen” um. You’ve kind of talked about it already. Can you give me another specific example from your own experience? You’ve given me one, really, but one where working with a parent has helped the student?**

Um, yeah, definitely. Um, before Christmas break, we were having, ah, trouble with, with a student. He wasn’t doing it work and, um, he just wasn’t listening at home and so Mom and I were communicating and, you know, Dad is in the picture, but Dad is a long, long-haul truck driver, he’s not really home often. But, when Dad’s home, he’s, you know, angel, but when he’s not, he gets to pretty much do everything and so Mom came to me right before Christmas Break and said, “You know, I just don’t know what to do.” Hands in the air. “ I just don’t know what to do.” And I said, “Well, take me through your day. What happens when he gets home?” “It’s a fight to get him off the TV”. And I said, “Well, why is it a fight?” I said, “You’re the parent”. I said, “I know it’s easier said than done, but what’s the problem with the TV?”.“Well, he turns it on to this Jersey Shore thing”. And, I don’t know if you’re familiar with it. It’s terrible, terrible, terrible.

**Yeah, a little bit.**

Yeah. That’s all I have to see to nearly vomit. I’m, like, oh, my gosh. My kids are watching this. So, I said, “Well, um, get rid of the cable box”. And she just looks at me. I said, “Yeah, get rid of cable. Call ‘em and cancel it! It’s, it’s really, you know, it’s really that simple. You can block this stuff.” You know…and she said, “You know, I just don’t understand. My other two kids did so well and da-da-da-da-da.” And I said, “You know”, I said, “We, I will work with you.” I said, “You know, get rid of that. Just stop it altogether. And then he can’t watch TV anymore and then he’s going to get his homework done.” And then that’s when I told her about the agenda. I said, “Let’s you and I communicate through this agenda”. Because he would go home and say, “I did all my homework”. No, he doesn’t do all his homework. I said again, “This is one way where you will know immediately. When he gets home, “Let me see your agenda. Ah, you didn’t do your homework. You’re going to redo it.” Because, she’s Spanish-speaking, she doesn’t understand the homework, she’ doesn’t understand what he’s doing, but at least, if it’s written there and I can tell her, then she’ll know. In my very broken Spanish that I write in. And so, um, he was very upset with me. He came in the next day and, “How dare you tell my Mom to take the TV away from me!” and yada yada yada. And I said, “Yeah, yeah, I know, I know. You’ll, you’ll thank me later.” “No, I don’t like you. I want to switch from this class. I hate this class.” “I’m sorry. I’m really sorry you feel that way, but there’s nothing I can do.” I said, “So, if you want to switch, you can go to the principal” Well, of course, our principal’s not going to allow that, simply because…

**Mom and you are working together.**

Exactly. Um, and now, he’s not perfect, but he’s certainly doing a lot more homework than before because now, he doesn’t get to go home, because Mom’s blocked it and, you know, he can’t access these TV shows, so, now, he either goes home and does his homework or he goes and plays with his little brother and it’s a little bit more peaceful at home. You know, but, he’s definitely turned it around. And, and he apologized for….

**That’s wonderful.**

…saying that he hated my class. He says he really enjoys my class. He say, “You’re just like my Mom. You’re constantly on me”. I’m like, “You know what, it is what it is. We need to be on top of our students. We need to make sure that you succeed, you know, because that’s ultimately the goal. We want to see you succeed.” So, you know, that’s another example of, you know, communicating with the parent, helping the parent realize that they’re the parent, they’re the ones in charge, and that they can do this. You know? I just hope I…

**So, you help them through adolescence somewhat.**

I, I try. I think. I hope. Yeah.

**OK. Um, I told you I chose this school for a reason. Because of the success that you’ve had and because of your demographics. Ah, do you feel that the relationships between parents and teachers have contributed to that success in any way here at this school?**

I think so, because we know how important it is for our children to be, to do well on these state tests, and so we make it a big deal to talk to our parents about the state test. I know that’s something that I bring up on Back to School Night. You know, I, I ask the parents, “How many of you received your state scores?” “How many of you know what these state scores mean?” “How many of you know what it means to be proficient?”

**Do they usually know?**

No. No. A lot of them don’t receive them. And so, right. Because they, because our population tends to move a lot. You know, they’ll stay in the district, but they move a lot. They’ll have at least one or two moves a year, you know, from apartment to apartment or... Especially with what’s going on. A lot of our children are losing their homes, and so they’re having to move to an apartment overnight. And they have to do this, you know. Um, and so, a lot of parents, you know, they say that they never got the scores. And so, I said, “Don’t worry about it, because I’m sending you the scores tomorrow.” You know, and I send them the scores. And so, and now, as we’re getting ready for the state test, you know, um, on the progress reports, “State test coming up. Three weeks. Make sure children are eating breakfast. Make sure, you know, they’re resting the night before. Make sure that they’re ready. Please hold off major arguments until the weekend” [she laughs] You know, um, I tell that to the kids, but that’s another way of, you know, communicating the importance of, you know, their success on the state tests, and so, definitely, parents have contributed to our success. I mean, like I said, it, we’re a, we’re a 3-part team and, um, without them, you know, I don’t think we could have achieved that success. You know, I give my children all the support I can here, until 1:30. And, if they go home and they have no support, then they can’t come back and be successful. And so, those parents are obviously there, supporting and guiding their children. Most of them.

**You said something that I, um, have a question about. Mobility. Um, would you say this is a highly mobile population of students? In other words, kids moving in and out, um, or can you give me a rough estimate of how much that happens?**

Moving from home to home, you mean? Or from school?

**Ah, well, from school to school.**

Um, I’d say, maybe I have one or two students a year who do that.

**Yeah, that’s not bad. I mean, compared…I mean, it’s not easy to change homes, but changing schools is harder for, um, the teacher. Yeah.**

Definitely.

**Yeah. OK. What philosophy do you think, um, about the relationship between parents and teachers, do you think the administration of the school has?**

Um, that in order for their children to succeed, parents and teachers need to work together as a team. Um, and we need to be able to support each other in, you know, in order for our kids to, to do well in school. I think, I think that’s their belief.

**M-hm. OK. Um, the next…we’re on to our next group of questions. It has to do with how you perceive the relationship between parents and teachers. What would the ideal one look like? So, describe what you would consider to be an ideal relationship between a parent and a teacher in middle school? What does it look like or sound like or feel like and what would be some of the qualities, or components of it? Some of these you’ve already mentioned.**

Right. Um, I think one is constant communication. And, and I mean constant. I mean, on a weekly basis. Yeah, from all sixty of my parents would be ideal. Whether it’s an e-mail or a text or a quick note or, you know, phone calls tend to, you know, because we talk about everything, so that might be a little, you know, too much for all sixty, but constant communication. And I, and I say sixty, you know. I have twenty in one, I’ve got twenty-five in another, and then I’ve got fifteen in another group, you know, my ELD. Um, that would be the most ideal. Um, parent, parent visits. I mean, if I could get every parent to visit my classroom, I would just be so thrilled. Um, because, you know, you have the one kid who’s maybe not doing well. “Oh, my goodness, my Mom’s here. How embarrassing, I am going to die. This is never going to happen again. I’m doing my homework every night.” Right? Then, you get the other kid who is doing really well, and “Oh, my Mom’s here! I’m so excited! Look, Mom!” So, either way, it’s a win-win. You know, so, you know, ideal, the most perfect is that I would have a parent here at all times. And, not, like working. You know, not…just sitting here. Not even next to their kid. I mean, if they would, that would be perfect…But, just sitting here, watching us. Watching what we do. Because, either way, for whatever level child you have, it, it just, it, you know, it would feel really good. Especially right now, in sixth grade. And so, then when he goes to seventh and eighth grade, it’s not going to be, like, “Oh how embarrassing, my Mom’s here”. It happened in sixth, it’s going to happen in seventh. It’s going to happen in eighth. And I think that’s the key, because last year I was in eighth and, um, there was very little parent communication. I mean, to the point where I remember we had one parent conference and we called to wake up the Mom and she said, “Don’t ever wake me up.” Yeah. Yeah. And I’m, like, “Ah, we have conference. Come on! I’m here. You’re supposed to…”. Yeah, no. And, um, and, it…

I don’t know. Something happens. You know, sixth grade, you still get, you know, you still have your parents wanting to know why, they get the 70% or the 60 or the 50 or the 40, you know, and then in seventh grade, it diminishes, and then in eighth grade, it’s like, you gotta pull ‘em in, you know.

**So, you’re thinking, train them early?**

Exactly. And, again, um, I tell this to all my parents, Back to School Night, Open House, or any conference, you know, don’t stop until they’re into college. Because it’s going to get harder.

**So good of you to say that.**

Well, because, it’s true. You know, it is going to become more challenging. And, if we lay back and, “Oh, well, you’re in high school. You can get it.” No! Are you kidding me? That’s like the most pivitol time, you know. It’s,…they’re getting ready to go to college. Or tech school or community college, you know. They need someone strong to support them and to guide them, because, I mean, high school sucks! I don’t know if I can say that. But, it’s tough! I mean, I remember high school. It was not easy, you know, and I was really fortunate to have parents who, you know, valued education and knew that it was the only way out. You know. They didn’t care where I went, but it was gonna be to college. You know, you know, just go. It wasn’t an option of ”Do I want…?” “You will go”. You decide where you want to go. You know, and not because we had the money, but just because they understood and I, and, and so a lot of our parents here understand the value. You know, because they see themselves and how, you know, they didn’t have the access to education and how they’re struggling and they don’t want that for their kids. You know, so…I’m sorry. Did I totally mess up that question? I don’t know, I kind of went off…

**No, no, not at all. So, I’m thinking about what some of the components would be. [looking back over my interview notes] That, um, actually, one component would be communication.**

Comunication.

**And, you’ve, we’ve talked about, you’ve mentioned mutuality, whether you’ve used those exact words or not. Trust.**

Absolutely. There has to be trust.

**Shared goals.**

M-hm.

**Responsievness. For the parents to be responsive.**

Absolutely.

**Maybe…OK. Do you want to add to that?**

I think that’s, I think that might be it.

**OK. Here’s another question. Do you think that ideal relationship would look the same for all students or would it look different for the high-achieving student versus the low-achieving versus the one that’s not behaving?**

Um, I think, initially, the low achieving or not behaving student might see that, you know, as a real negative. I mean, they’re not going to be happy that their parent is constantly being called in. That their parent is here. Is that what you’re referring to?

**Um, yeah, I’m asking if these same qualities that you’ve mentioned, would they exist across the board with all…?**

Oh, yes.

**And, and also, would the relationships, ideally, would they look different?**

No. No, not at all. I mean, it’s, it’s, regardless of whether the child is, is successful, and I make good calls, too. You know, I make good notes. I stamp their things, “Great day today”. You know, “Happy Day”. I mean, regardless, I think, the communication would be the same. I mean, talking to the parent, obviously, the content of what we’re talking about would be different, you know, because one is for behavior versus one is, “Hey, they had a great day today” or they’re improving, so I don’t know if that answers…

**Yup. That’s, that’s good. That’s helpful. Now, what do you expect of yourself in your relationship with a parent?**

What do you mean, what do I expect?

**What would be, um, what do you consider your responsibilities in that relationship?**

Um, letting my parents know what my expectations are of their kids. Um, letting my parents know that, um, they can come to me if they’re happy or if they’re not happy with…

**So, being available, for one thing.**

Being available. Absolutely. So, being available, um, we talked about, you know, communication, um…

**So, you’re soliciting feedback of all kinds.**

Absolutely. Right. Um, what else? I can’t think of anything else. We can come back to that one.

**Yeah. Um, what do you expect of the parents?**

I think the same thing that I expect out of myself. You know, that they communicate with me. That they, um, bring up any issues. You know, I guess it goes back to the same thing. You know, bring up any issues that they have, whether it’s homework or the lesson or…

**Maybe keep you informed?**

Absolutely. So, maybe that would go both ways, that would be on both lists?

**Definitely. OK.**

And that, that they make an effort for the sake of their children. I don’t know if that makes sense. You know, I understand that schedules are…

**Invest, maybe?**

Right. Absolutely. And I know a lot of my parents do, but there are some who I am a bother to. Because I e-mail or because I send a note or because I request a meeting once a week. And, um, and so, it’s not because I’m, I’m wanting to bother. It’s because I know that their child has the potential to be successful and I want them to know that and to believe that so that they can, like you say, invest in their child and work with their child, because, you know, I can only do so much here.

**Their child needs them as well as…**

Exactly.

**Um, OK. And, what does the school’s administration…And also, the other thing I think you’ve also mentioned about expectations of the parent, or you’ve at least alluded to, is they should monitor their children’s progress?**

Oh, most certainly. Because, I give them the tools to do it. If they can’t access online, they have a progress report from me at least, you know, once a month from me, the ones that I print out. Then, they’ll get another one that, you know, that comes from the district. You know, so, they’ll get, they know, they should know how their children are doing every two to three weeks.

**How do they receive those? Do they come home with the child?**

I send them. And so, what I do…

**With the child?**

With the child, yes. Um, and so, what I’ll do is I require signatures and, you know, I check them the next day. And, um…

**What’s your success rate for getting those returned?**

Um, I would say, like, 90% of them come back. And, if I’m lucky, I will get phone calls. You know, because, I’ll write, “Give me a call.” You know. “Call me back. E-mail me. Something. We’ve got to talk about this grade.” You know. And then, I’ll get some phone calls. So…

**OK. Um, what does the school’s administration expect of you in your relationship with the student’s parents?**

Again, communication. I mean, I think that’s the key theme for today. You know, that we communicate with our parents. Um, policies, homework policy, discipline policy, expectations, goals, you know, um, in that we are able to communicate with one another, um, to solve any issues, you know, whether it’s a behavior problem or homework or, you know. Whatever it is that the child may be not doing in class, you know, that we talk to one another so that we can help that child. And that’s where the Parent Conference comes in or Parent Meeting, or, you know, e-mailing, so yeah.

**OK. Um, how, if at all, do you think the ideal relationship between the parent and the teacher, um, would look? Um, would it be the same or different from elementary school versus middle school?**

Oh, I don’t know, because I’ve never taught in elementary, so…No, all my years are in middle school. Yeah.

**Alright. So, we’ll just move right on to the next subject. The next subject, we’ve talked about what you envision as being ideal. So, the next questions have to do with what the, what the reality is. What actually is this year. So, how do your actual relationships with parents compare to the ideal you described?**

Um, I think, when it comes to discussing, you know, and, again, talking, and communicating about children’s progress, I think it’s pretty close. I mean, there’s one or two kids right now that I’m really concerned about and I’ve already sent several notices home to please call me and um, for one reason or another, they haven’t, but when I, when I request a phone conference or when I request a meeting, it happens. It happens. I’m very lucky that way. Um, I don’t get many parents just come and sit down, if ever, you know, and just visit or sit with the class. It just doesn’t happen as much as I would like to see it happen. Um, but, when it comes to those meetings, they happen. And, ah, if not that day, the next morning of the next day.

**So, they’re responsive**

Very responsive.

**And, maybe, supportive.**

Oh, yes, certainly.

**OK. So, how do you think this came about? Was it accidental? Um, you said you’re lucky, but do you think there are things you’ve done that have helped form those types of relationships? You’ve already mentioned some things that you’ve done. So…**

Um, I think it’s from our first meeting. You know, when it comes back to school. And, um, you know, I, ah, because our, our parents, you know, are first generation here, they, they understand that our country is a giving country and that we give education and that, you know, it’s for free. And it’s, it’s the one thing for free and if you take it and run with it, you can do all sorts of amazing things. And, and I tell that to my parents and they know that and so, because we both see eye-to-eye that education is the key to success, I think that’s why they’re so responsive and that’s why we’re able to communicate and have that kind of relationship, because they know I’m here for one purpose: and to help their kids get to seventh grade. And to help them, you know, start thinking about careers and, you know, we talk about things like that on Back to School Night and make it a point, you know. We talk about, you know, our futures and education and we talk about, you know, the state test and its importance and, you know, I kind of take them through a little time line. I was really lucky to teach sixth, seventh and eighth to the same group of kids. I looped with them. And I told them about how amazing it was and what the insight that it gave me, because, now, as a sixth grade teacher, I know what they’re going to get in eighth grade come state tests in Social Studies. So, I tell them, I said, “You know it’s really important when it comes to Social Studies sixth grade, they hold on to these things. And so, they know that I’m planning for their kids, and so they see that same plan, and that same goal and so I think that’s why. It’s just easier that way. Does that, does that answer it?

**Yes. And let me, let me ask something that’s been on my mind. When you have Back to School Night, how much time do you have with the parents? How long is that meeting when they’re with you?**

You know what, we have about thirty minutes. We have thirty minutes. And, well, it’s really 15, I want to say, but because I have my kids…What happens is, Back to School Night, they follow their kids’ schedule, so I have my kids’ for two periods. So, they get to stay with me, you know, for 30 minutes and then, you know, we switch and stuff. So, um, in those thirty minutes, I try to crunch as much as I can and then, [announcements on PA} and then, you know, through progress reports. You know, those are consistently going home. Phone calls are being made. Especially that first months of school, there’s a lot of phone calls on, you know, a couple of students, good and bad. You know, just to say, “Hey, I’m accessible. I’m here”. “You’re not just going to see me Back to School Night”. Whatever you need, please come see me. And so I think, that’s, that’s what’s helped as well.

**One thing I’ve noticed sometimes in meetings like that, is that the whole family comes and the babies are crying. Is it hard to, do you think parents can…Is it, does it work? Um, do they hear what you say? Or, do they have to be short meetings, because you’re trying to keep the kids still and…?**

No. Oh, no. They’re really good, like we had about 3 or 4 newborns this year for Back to School and, you know, Moms are great, you know. They give the baby to the, you know, my student. They walked out and Mom sat, you know. And they did not move. You know, and we did have crying babies, running toddlers, and I’m just like “That’s fine.” No, because parents were here for that. And then, of course, we do prizes and stuff, you know, to make sure that we get the parent’s in. So, we had little raffles and um, school supplies and lottery tickets. You know, I mean. I, I want my parents to be here, so I always tell my kids, “I have great prizes and”, so we, we get a pretty good turn-out here.

**Very interesting.**

Ya gotta do what you gotta do.

**Um, what kinds of parents do you have a hard time developing relationships with?**

The absent parent. You know, um, and not because they choose to be absent, but because maybe their work just takes them away from home or they’re so involved in other things in their life that they can’t, um, accept whatever I’m saying about their child, you know. Um, or they just, you know, “You’re wrong” and they just, they just don’t want to see that, you know, um, it’s not me. It’s, you know, the child. And so, um, you know, I have one or two parents who, like I said, I’m a thorn in their side because it’s, you know, I bother them. They see it as a bother. And I can tell, because of their short e-mails or their body language when they’re here. You know they’re upset, they don’t want to be here, it’s a waste of time, they had to leave work three hours early, you know, it’s, you know, um, and that’s why I’m saying, it’s not absent parents because they don’t want to be here. It’s because they just have so many other things in their lives going on that it’s hard to…

**How do you handle those parents that think you’re a bother? Anything in particular that you found that works?**

You know, I, I, with one Dad, I’m just always going to be a bother.

**You just said that to them?**

No, no, I’m saying to you, that I know that, no matter what…

**He’s not going to change.**

No, oh, no, because, you know, I just bother him too much, you know! Um, and like I said, for the most part, most of my parents are really, really awesome parents. I mean, they just, they are, you know. Um, and I always tell them, “I’m here to help you. I’m here to help your child and your child needs help. You know, um, this is what’s going on. They’re failing. They’re not doing their homework. Is it because they don’t understand something? Did I go through the lesson too quickly? Was I not clear with my instructions, you know? You tell me and I can fix it. And 99% of the time, my parents will say, “No, you know, um,…”

**“What can I do differently?” You sometimes ask them?**

Right! Oh, yeah! Because…

**And, maybe if they say you’re too demanding? Or have you ever had anybody say that?**

Um, no. None of my parents have ever told me that. Um, that I move too quickly, I’ve been told. “Well, you know, your, your lessons go to quick”. And so I said, “You know, I apologize. Um, I just came from eighth grade where, you know, it was ‘Go, go, go, go, go” and I realize you’re coming from elementary school, so I’m going to slow down the lesson. Or, you know, let her know that, if even after changing my, modifying my lesson, she still needs help, I’m available after school or before school. And so I kind of always put it back on them, because, I mean, I can always change. That’s not a problem. But, it can’t always be the excuse for not doing your homework or for not studying for a test, you know.

**And what, what…oh, OK. Um, what kind of parent do you have the easiest time with? …developing a relationship with?**

The one who’s open to suggestions on what they can do at home, um, with their child. You know…

**To how they can help, maybe?**

Right. Exactly. Um, whether it’s them sitting down and just reading a book together? A magazine or newspaper, or, you know, just, those…the easiest parents are the ones who make the time for their kids. Because, um, when the parent is involved, the kid has no choice but to do what they have to do. You know what I mean?

**They’re kind of out-numbered, maybe?**

Well, yeah. Yeah. It’s us against them, you know. And so, um, you know, there’s just no room for wiggle for the kids. So, you know, they just have to do their homework, because they know Mom’s going to check it because Mom talks to Ms. Larios or because Mom’s going to e-mail her, or because Mom or Dad are going to call me, so, yeah, the easiest parents are the ones who are very involved. Yeah. Definitely.

**Um, suppose I were a parent of one of your students and my child came home and told me something. It wasn’t true. They told, made up a story that, well, let’s say, for example, you gave my child, supposedly gave my child a detention, but my child didn’t do anything wrong. Your typical parent, how would your typical parent respond to something like that?**

If they had that response?

**If the, if the child came home and told them a story like that.**

Oh, um, I would say most of the time, I won’t give a number, because I don’t know how to give a number, but most of the time, the parent would call me and say, “Ms. Larios, you know, Johnny said that you gave him a detention because he threw paper at you.”

**But he says he didn’t do anything.**

He said, he said,… Yeah, he said he didn’t do anything, and so what’s going on? And then I’d say, “Well, this is what happened.” And, I would say, the good majority of the time, the parent would be like, “OK”.

**So, they don’t necessarily rush to judgment before talking to you? Most of them would not make up their mind until they talked to you first?**

Exactly.

**OK. How…was that something you just developed , do you think that was the trust, is there anything you did to create that kind of relationship?**

You know, um, I, I think it has a lot to do with, with the parent. Um, and, again, their views on education. You see, um, Latino parents are, you know, Hispanic parents are, you know, to us, a teacher is like a parent. Whatever the teachers says, goes. If the teacher says you did wrong, you did wrong. If the teacher says you said this, you said this. You know, you respect the teacher like you…and so, I think that just comes from within them. To trust me because that is…

**It’s cultural.**

Yeah. Absolutely, it’s cultural. You know, that’s how I was raised. You know, um, I, I’m not that kind of parent. I’m the person to believe my child. I have a three year old son. “What happened?!”. You know. He’s my baby. I think, maybe it will develop later. Um, but, most of my parents, they come directly to me. I don’t think I’ve ever had a parent go to administration and say, “This is what she did”.

**So, you don’t have any idea what administration would do if they went directly to the administration.**

No. I mean, I would think they would come talk to me. But, I don’t, I don’t, it’s never happened. You know, they always call me or see me. So.

**And, what do you like most about developing relationships with parents?**

Um, when the kids are successful, the parents are so happy! To see the joy in the parents’ face, I think, for me, that’s, that’s the best part. You know, because, sometimes …Like, this one child in December. You know, Jersey Shore. Mom was just pulling her hair out. She was just like, “I don’t know what to do!” You know, she has two other successful high school kids. He is just blah, you know. And she was frustrated and just hands in the air, like “What do I do?”. And so to now see the child change and to hear that, “Oh, yeah, I came home and he does his homework and it’s just so different and…” And it just, it gives me, like, the goose bumps, because I know that now, it’s a happy home. You know, there’s not that constant struggle. That battle.

**So, you even helped the relationship between the Mom and the student.**

I hope so. I mean, I think so. You know, I’m no Dr. Phil. But, you know, I mean, well, because a happy home is a happy kid. I mean, I think. You know, if they’re not happy at home, it’s going to come out at school. And so, if they’re constantly bickering, you know, about “I did my homework.” “No, you didn’t”, la la la. And then it comes here and then, it just…they’re not happy and they’re not going to learn. And so, I think, now that we’re all on the same page, you know, he is starting to value, he is starting to see that, you know what, it is important in sixth grade. It might be many years away from college, but it is important. So, yeah.

**What do you like the least about developing relationships with, with parents?**

I don’t think that there’s anything I don’t like. Yeah, I don’t think there could be anything. [bell rings] I mean, I don’t go as far as giving my home number, or anything like that, um, because then I can see that going bad. Giving me a call on Saturday, “What happened?” But, yeah, no, I don’t think…I don’t see anything bad in establishing relationships with our parents. Yeah.

**OK. Nothing particularly, that you don’t…dislike?**

No.

**OK. The next set of questions are about language barriers. And, ah, you speak Spanish.**

Yes.

**So, but, do you find language to be an issue between yourself and parents? Or a barrier?**

No.

**And so, you probably don’t, may not be able to answer any of these questions. How adequate and available you think translation services are. You don’t really need them.**

I don’t need them, but I know that it’s, on campus, I mean, we need them.

**Yeah. People need them.**

A good percentage do. Um, I know that I, like I said, I’m not academic. You know, I don’t know all the academic terms, um, I can communicate, you know, for the most part. And when I mean academic, I mean, um, like when they have their IEPs there’s like, “triannual”. Like that word. I’m, like, “Tre-veses?”. You know, I mean, I can communicate through those, but, um, but I know that there’s a need because many of a times, I will find myself translating for other teachers. You know, um, whether it’s in person or via phone, you know, I end up translating.

**So you really haven’t needed to use them yourself?**

No.

**OK. Let’s scoot, move ahead, then…The next questions are, um…**

And don’t worry about time. I’m good.

**OK. Um, next questions are about your current school policy and practice. And that can mean a lot of things that you’ve already mentioned. Um, one practice would be Back to School Night, translation services, parent-teacher conferences, um, how the administration just does things, um, it could be a lot of things. So, what belief, and we’ve talked about what your beliefs are, we’ve talked about what you perceive the administration’s beliefs are, what belief do you think the policies and the practices of the school reflect in regard to the relationship between the parents and the teachers? And parents involved in their kids’ education? And stuff like that?**

So, what is the policy?

**What kind of a, is there an underlying assumption, um, that the policies and the practices are based on, regarding, regarding how, um, the school feels about the relationships between parents and teachers? You know, in other words, is, maybe the school would send an implicit message or an explicit message, “Parents are not welcome on campus”, you know. Or, kids are in middle school now. They shouldn’t need their parents any more. That would be an example.**

Yeah, no. On the contrary, I think that, um, parents are consistently notified by our administration about events that are occurring at our school. Um, parents are most certainly welcomed. I mean, I, I feel that our administration at our school does that. That they are welcome to be on campus. Um, you know, for example, at the beginning of the school year, I don’t know if it was this year or last year, you know, they have a, like, a, not a Back to School, but before school even starts. An event where every grade level is invited to look at where their schools are, not their schools, their classroom is. Come, get their books. You know. The principal does a presentation.

**Orientation?**

There you go. That’s the word. Yeah, so, um, I think that, most certainly, our administration, our school um, puts out the welcome mat for our parents, because they know that they are the key to our children, you know, doing well. And so, they need to, you know, they need to team up with the parent right away, from the beginning. From the very first day.

**And they show that in their actions.**

Absolutely. Oh, yeah. And, and the orientation is a perfect example. Because, I, you know, um, that hadn’t been done before. I mean, just recently, like in the last couple of years it started. I mean, one time they had like a free barbeque, you know. I mean, what other way, you know, other than food…I mean, that’s a perfect way to get people to come together. You know, I mean, you do that as a family. You sit down and have dinner. You share a meal. You know? You create that, that relationship. So, I, I definitely think that the school goes out of its way to, to welcome and to make parents a big part of their children’s education.

**OK. Thank you. Um, what school policies and practices do you find particularly support your efforts to build productive relationship with parents? Is there a…**

Um, well, I think, you know, sending out progress reports. Because, you need, you know, there’s a link there, you know. Parents know what’s going on. Um, having, you know, school functions, like a basketball game, too. I mean, I know that’s not academic, but it allows the parents to come and be part of their childrens’ lives. School related, but not really school related. You know what I’m saying? It gives them an opportunity to be here on campus and maybe they might run into their teachers or maybe they might run into, you know, someone to talk about their kids and, you know, have an opportunity to, to discuss. So, um, I think that’s another, another practice, you know. Um…

**Anything, um, that you think impedes your efforts to build relationships with parents? Anything that makes it hard?**

Um, you know, I was going to say work, because a lot of, a lot of my parents work and stuff, but, you know, there’s always a way to communicate and to establish, you know, um, a relationship with them. You know, like I said, text, e-mail, quick note home, phone call. So, yeah, um, no, I mean obviously, language isn’t one of them, but again, I know that for some teacher, it is. You know, they struggle with that. You know, I’m very lucky, so…

**OK, on to the next one. Um, we’ve talked about…the next section of questions are about, ah, expectations and we’ve talked a little bit about that already. We’ve talked about what they are. Now, let’s talk about how they’re established, how they’re communicated. How does the school or the principal communicate to you what’s expected of you in the relationship with, in your relationship with parents?**

You know, um, at the beginning of the year, you know, sending letters home, you know. Um, creating, um, a, a parent letter, a welcome letter that states, you know, expectations for homework, um, you know, grades, you know, as far as, you know, what an ‘A’ is, what a ‘B’ is, um…

**Let me ask you a question about that. Is that something you do on your own? Or are you saying that you’re req-, you’re expected to do that by administration?**

Oh, yeah. No, we’re expected to it. But, I mean, it’s a given. You have to. It’s a new set of kids. You know, you’ve got to welcome them, you know, to your classroom, so, it’s just, you, know,…Regardless of whether or not they expected us, I do it, because that’s just what you do.

**Do they give you guidelines for what to include in the letter? Or you just know, because you’ve been teaching…**

Um, sometimes, they do. Like, next year, they want us to create a syllabi for, you know, for the year and, you know, for our parents and so, it’s never been requested. You know, for next year, they want us to include something like that, so. Yeah, they pretty much give us guidelines. Yeah.

**Um, and so, they’ve communicated that. How do they communicate, um, their expectations, do you think? It’s just assumed? Or…**

Oh, no, no. It’s either a staff meeting or an e-mail that goes out…Oh, yeah.

**OK. Um, how does the school communicate with parents about what’s expected of them? Or do they?**

They do. At the orientation, they give them handbooks. A school handbook of rules and, you know, class schedules, ah, you know, the bell schedule, what time to be here, you know, what time is…so definitely. And then, you know, our administrator, during the orientation, talks to parents. You know, “We’re going to work hard this year.” You know, “This is what we expect the children to come and learn”. You know, so, he lets them know, you know, with the presentation and, of course, through the handbook.

**And, you know what…and I, I hope I’m not rushing you too much, but there’s a question I missed. Can you walk me through a typical parent-teacher conference?**

Um, sure. So, parent and student will be here. Yeah, parent, student, and myself will be here.

**Because you request the student to come?**

Oh, yeah. Yeah. Um, well, because, if the student isn’t doing well, we need to know why and I don’t know why if they’re not…, you know.

**You need their feedback.**

Right. Right. And I need to know what’s going on. And so, um, they’ll be in here. You know, greet them at the door. Come in. I have my progress report out and it’s printed out and, you know, I’ll point out all the great things that they’ve done. And that’s why I’m concerned about all these low scores, because I can see that they did really well here, here, here, so I’m concerned and what is the issue? And, um, I, typically, the first thing Mom says, “What’s going on?” to the child. Right? And so, that’s how we open, that’s how we start. And the child says, “Oh, well, I didn’t do my homework.” Or “I didn’t study” or “You went too fast. I didn’t understand”. You know, um, and so then, we’ll talk about what we’re going to do, how we’re going to correct it, making up tests, making up homework, um, before school, after school tutoring, um, and then, you know, parent signs that we’ve met, you know, on a sign in sheet. I give them the progress report and that’s pretty much it. And, you know, of course, if they have questions or comments or anything.

**I think, um, also, you use the parent-school compact?**

Oh, yes! For the parent conference, right. And it’s, ah, what the parent will do, what the child will do, and then what I will do in order to have a successful year.

**And how long do you think an average meeting takes? A parent conference, a parent-teacher conference takes?**

Um, 15-20 minutes, maybe.

**M-hm. OK. Um, OK. Now, ah, jumping back to expectations. Um…**

[Another teacher interrupts…conversation].

**Um, how do parents know what’s expected of the students?**

Um.

**The parent-teacher compact.**

Well, the parent-teacher compact is one of them. And then, of course, my stated…

**Back to School Night.**

On there, um, Back to School packets. You know, it’s stated right there. You know.

**And your welcome letter.**

And my welcome letter, of course. And then, of course, any communication that I have with, with my parents.

**Um, in the future, are there school policies or practices that you think are particularly valuable, um, anything that you think needs to be continued, should be improved, should be added, is not helpful,…**

Um, one thing is definitely the orientation. I know that it has been a great success. Um, because it has alleviated, a lot for the kids, as well as for the parents, first day. First day jitters are just bad. And so, I know that that is awesome and I really would like to see that continue. One of the things that I would like to see added is, um, you know, parent participation in the class.

**Uh-huh. More parents in the class.**

More parents in the class. Um, and, like I said, not to necessarily help me do anything, but just their presence. I, I think that, you know, ‘cuz I hear a lot of that happening in the elementary schools, like first, second, you know. Moms always want to be there, Dads want to be there, and then they don’t want to, you know, do it here. And I know that a lot of my parents, you know, again, if they’re not working, they’re at home. And so, when I know that, I’m like, “Well, come on down”. “Come in. You can always come in”. So, I would like to see that as a component. You know, something that, um, not mandated, because that’s kind of a harsh word, but just…

**Encouraged?**

Encouraged, exactly. You know, just maybe one hour a month. You know.

**And let me ask you another question. Back to Parent-Teacher Conferences, do they happen just in the fall? They don’t happen in the Spring?**

No, well, the one that we are supposed to have, is only in the Fall. But, we have conferences all the time.

**OK. So, it’s just not official. It’s not like official set days set aside.**

No, no. We will meet…No, we consistently meet with parents. We just have to. You can’t. One meeting isn’t going to…doesn’t always work. You know. And so, and like I said, I like to get my parents involved.

**Ah-huh. Do you find that your SIT process works pretty well?**

I think it does. It’s a little lengthy, you know, because things take so long to process and you have to wait…

**Six weeks.**

Six weeks in order to see if interventions or modifications have achieved any success. So, you know, but I think it does work. For the most part.

**Now, you are… Just two more questions.**

No worries.

**Um, you did work at another school.**

I did. I worked at Sierra Madre in Pasadena.

**Ah-huh. Is there anything that, ah, comparing those two experiences in regard to parents, ah, anything they did better or this school does better? Or, how do they compare? Anything that, any comments you would like to make? Was that a middle school, as well?**

That was, no. That was an elementary school with a sixth grade. Yeah. Um.

**So, maybe it’s hard to compare.**

Well, yeah, it is. Um, there, I had a…I mean, I was only there for five years. Um, there, I had more of the parent who told me how to teach…you know. Here, I…

**Other end of the economic…**

Right. I mean, a lot of our students were being bussed in from South Pas, but I had a lot, a couple of children from Sierra Madre. I don’t know if you’re familiar with the area?

**Not really.**

Um, it’s, it’s a more exclusive area. I mean, you’ve got million dollar homes up in there. Um, but, again, a lot of our children were coming in from the south side of Pasadena. Um, lower economic, much lower. And, um, so, occasionally, I would have at least one or two parents a year tell me how to teach, because, you know, they knew better. Even though they didn’t have any teaching experience, but they knew better.

**So, it’s almost hard to compare the two, because the populations were so different.**

Yeah.

**OK. Last question: Is there anything I haven’t asked you. Something I need to know that would help me better understand your relationship with parents?**

Um, no, I don’t think so. I think we’ve…I don’t know. I mean, do you understand my relationship?

**I, I feel pretty good. I do have a question. It’s not on here, but I’m just curious. It’s got nothing to do with you. Leadership classes. Are there some kind of leadership classes at lunch? Someone mentioned that in passing and I was just curious.**

I don’t know anything about a leadership class. Is that for students? Or for teachers?

**I thought it was for students. I’ll ask Mr. Swanson. He should know.**

Yeah, ask him. Yeah, no. I don’t know anything about that. But, no, I hope I was helpful.

**You were incredibly helpful. It was definitely worth waiting for.**

Oh, thank you.