

NATIONAL PUBLIC RADIO "TEACHER TALK" PROPOSAL

- Purpose:** To educate and build consensus throughout the country in support of education and the work of teachers. We hope this consensus building will lead to action in individual communities. "Teacher Talk" would be targeted to a general audience and would engage teachers and others in a dialogue about teaching and learning. It is intended to portray teachers as real people who face tremendous challenges but who also receive great rewards from their chosen profession.
- Format:** A 30-60 minute national radio talk show with a moderator/host and 2-3 guests. A topic would be introduced and discussed by the moderator/host and guests. The listening audience would be invited to call in to expand the conversation. Rather than a question and answer format, a dialogue between the teachers and the audience would be encouraged.
- Taped segments of teachers working with students and other "real life" situations may be used to set up or extend the discussion.
- Startling statistics or a quick "pretest" should be used at the beginning of each show to engage the audience and stimulate individuals to take action.
- ED's Role:**
- ◆ Advisory board to help select topics and provide substance to the discussion.
 - ◆ Marketing assistance in building an audience.
 - ◆ Resource for:
 - Identifying potential guests
 - Identifying promising practices that producers could use in framing each show/topic
 - Printed materials to provide follow up on topics to listening audience.
 - Identifying potential corporate sponsors.
- Needed:**
- ◆ Producer(s) who can tell us what is needed-- use ED as a resource
 - ◆ Moderator/host who understands education but also has the skills needed to facilitate a dialogue between the guests and the listening audience
 - ◆ Technical/logistical expertise
 - ◆ Researcher
 - ◆ Writer

"TEACHER TALK" PILOT PROGRAMS

A philosophy guides the direction and substance of "Teacher Talk." Simply, the power to improve, change, and revitalize American education is in the hands of teachers whose voices are so rarely heard. This program will give them their voice.

Our vision for these programs reflect several significant dimensions:

- ♦ each program shows how adults can support the work of children in school
- ♦ each program gives the audience a more realistic, yet hopeful view of schools
- ♦ each program must always link back to teachers - how their work is affected either positively or negatively by what is going on in schools, families, or communities.

Our vision lies in the single belief that children and teachers are bonded in an inextricable way... that improving or changing the system in which teachers and children work will vastly improve teaching and learning.

SHOW ONE: CHANGES IN SCHOOLS

Moderator starts with some startling statistic or question which focuses the dialogue of the day. Example for the first show:

Since 1950, the facts and skills students must master by the time they have graduated from high school has:

a)doubled b)decreased c)tripled d)quadrupled e)not changed.

A second question meant to surprise listeners may also be asked.

The first show focuses on changes in schools over the last three or four decades. The moderator asks the audience to remember their own experiences in schools. Perhaps taped segments that capture the sounds, emotions, and the feel of all kinds of schools -- from the one-room school house to the lectures of the 50's, protest classrooms of the 70's, and the classroom of today could be played at some point to show the differences in classroom climate.

The moderator will invite listeners to call in to share their own memories of schools -- when they went to school, what they liked, what didn't work for them, what they would want for today's classroom, what positive changes in education they have noted, and the differences between their experiences and those of their children.

At this point, the moderator will address the teacher guests, asking for their comments and encouraging listeners to enter into

a dialogue on the air with these teachers. Teachers will discuss the differences in students, standards, and physical conditions in just the last ten years. Although we cannot script what kind of issues will be raised, we can speculate that teachers will talk about the breakdown of families, a knowledge explosion, the diversity of cultures within the class, new opportunities available to children, the many different roles teachers play, violence in schools and on the streets, materialism's hold on our children, and a general decline in students' respect and responsibility for themselves and others.

Research data can be incorporated here that verify these issues and point to the need for dramatic changes in American education.

The moderator will allow an honest discussion to pursue but at an appropriate time ask, "Where is the hope? Are all of these changes really problems? How can these crises be turned into solutions? If this is so hard, why do you do it?"

The show ends on a positive, uplifting note allowing teachers to talk about the great rewards they receive from teaching.

Moderator provides closure with a summary, and then bridges this program to the following week's topic. Perhaps something like this:

With school bells about to ring all over the country, with lists of supplies going up on the counters of stores, we invite you back next week when we focus on BACK TO SCHOOL issues. What does this really mean? Supplies? Anxiety? New clothes? Latch-key kids? How do children of all ages experience anxiety? What can we do as adults to alleviate their fears and support them?

Listeners are encouraged to think about the topic and their own experiences and perhaps some questions they may want to ask teachers. Moderator announces the names of teachers for the following show and states that next week's show will answer the question: How many children in America go home to an empty house after school?

Each week the show should end with a question that will peak the interest of the audience so that they will want to listen to the next show.

SHOW TWO: BACK TO SCHOOL

Moderator introduces the show by reminding the audience of the topic of the last show and posing the question, How many children in America go home to an empty house after school? As the show progresses the answer to the question will be revealed.

The introduction might be similar to this:

Last week we were talking about how schools have changed. Many of you may be watching your own children go off to school. But what does "Back to School" really mean? Let's listen to some of the people we interviewed talk about going back to school. (Tape of children and parents -- we anticipate responses about buying school clothes and shoes, arranging after school care, juggling schedules, etc.)

Moderator turns to teachers and teachers respond. We anticipate that teachers would notice the ironic absence of any type of academic preparation. A teacher might note that in Japan, back to school means parents will purchase a desk for their son or daughter.

Teachers should be prepared to talk about:

- ◆ how students are feeling as they make the transition -- from home to kindergarten or first grade, from elementary to middle school, from middle school to high school? Moderator asks, "You mean even seniors are feeling anxious about school starting?" (Teachers may explain that high school seniors are trying to live up to the myth that their last year will be their best, while simultaneously dealing with making serious decisions about their future.)
- ◆ how the adults in children's lives -- the teachers and parents -- help them make this transition smoothly and turn that anxiety into positive energy? What do teachers do in class that calms students, helps them to adjust to new surroundings and change?
- ◆ how teachers deal with this transition. (Teachers must deal with summer learning loss, begin forming new relationships, etc.) What do teachers try to do that first six-week period?

Moderator may ask: "If it's true that we have this great loss of learning over the summer, what can we do about it?"

Conversation shifts to a discussion of how instructional time loss can be avoided and "down time" continue to be a "growing time" through summer activities, year-round schools, and other activities which enhance learning. Moderator invites audience to call in to share ideas.

One teacher may insert something to this effect: "There is another way that instructional time is lost. Children come back to us all fired up and ready to learn. But instead of capitalizing on that enthusiasm, we often have to spend our energy and our time handing out textbooks, health forms,

collecting insurance forms and fees, etc."

Moderator: "Is that true in all schools? Are there better ways to handle this necessary paperwork? How should schools begin? If you could set up that ideal day, what would it be?"

Teachers respond with a variety of responses. Moderator should ask for creative solutions from listeners as well as teachers on how to handle the necessary paperwork at the beginning of the year.

Again, moderator summarizes at closure. "You heard teachers tell you what "Back To School" should look like -- at home and at school. In our next show, we'll look at ESTABLISHING THE GROUNDWORK FOR A GOOD SCHOOL YEAR. We'll look at some interesting research about the correlation between hours spent in front of television and the quality of school work. Meanwhile think about this:

How many hours a day does a thirteen-year old average in front of the TV?

We'll also look at that one common denominator that all Presidential Scholars share, and it is something that ever single family can give their child.

Tune in next week and find out...

SHOW THREE: ESTABLISHING THE GROUNDWORK FOR A GOOD SCHOOL YEAR

Moderator leads into show three with the questions from last week and an introduction that might be similar to this:

Last week we talked about what it means when people talk about getting ready for school. For most people it involves working out the logistics of getting children to school and back home, buying supplies and new clothes, and meeting new people. But how many of us have thought about how we get ready or help our children get ready academically? How do we create a home, school, and community environment which supports the academic work of students?

Teachers may begin by giving practical tips on how parents can establish a home environment that encourages a student to do homework. This could include such things as designating a specific time and place each evening for academic study (never say homework because a child will invariably tell you he/she has none), working or reading next to your child to model the type of behavior you want to encourage, and carefully examining and monitoring your child's work. There are many statistics that can be cited about the amount of homework American students do compared to students of other countries and the correlation

between television viewing and academic performance. This can be used as a way of hammering home the point that young people need to spend more time in academic study outside of school if the U.S. hopes to be internationally competitive.

Teachers may also talk about ways they design assignments to involve family members and other adults in a positive way in the work of students. These could range from oral history projects to journal writing in which parents are asked to respond to student entries.

Moderator should invite listeners to share their experiences in this area. But the conversation undoubtedly will expand beyond just homework to a discussion of the need to build a partnership among teachers, parents, and students to support academic work. The moderator may ask, "What kinds of questions should parents ask teachers about their class and expectations? What do teachers need to know about a child to work successfully with him/her? How can teachers and parents communicate effectively with one another so that they work as a team to help a child."

This show will provide teachers an opportunity to talk about the current situation in schools that make it almost impossible to build a personal relationship with every child -- 150 students a day, no time to plan, to communicate with parents, counsel students, etc. Teachers can begin to make the case for change in the structure of both student and teacher time to enhance learning. The factory model that most schools use is not conducive to learning. Do adults work or learn in seven 45-50 minute segments a day which are totally unrelated to one another.?

The discussion should also address how the larger community can support the work of students. This would be a good place to talk about how businesses can support parents becoming more actively involved with their children's education by providing family-friendly policies that grant leave time for employees to attend parent conferences, volunteer in school, and serve on school improvement councils.

It could also lead to a discussion of the need for businesses to provide incentives for young people to do well in school. For example, employers rarely ask to look at report cards or a student's high school record. They often do not consider how a teenager's work schedule interferes with his/her academic work. Businesses and civic organizations need to encourage young people to put forth their best effort in school through their hiring practices and by working in partnership with schools to provide mentors, tutors, and programs that encourage academic performance as much as athletic performance. Listeners would be invited to provide examples in their communities.

Moderator summarizes major points. Information can be provided to listeners about where they can get more information about how parents can help their children in school and how communities can support an academically focused education. (For example, the Department has a "Helping Your Child" series and information on business-school partnerships.)

Lead-in to the next show might be: "This week we looked at how to establish the groundwork for a good school year and much of our discussion centered around ensuring an academic focus. But we all know that young people need a balanced life. Determining that balance, however, is not always easy. Next week we'll look at the data on the type of extracurricular activities that the most successful students engage in as we explore CHILDREN AND SCHEDULES: WHAT'S A BALANCED LIFE?"

SHOW FOUR: CHILDREN AND SCHEDULES: WHAT'S A BALANCED LIFE?

Moderator may begin show by getting the listening audience to think about how hectic all of our lives have become -- especially those of us that have children. As we rush to get children to piano lessons, scouts, ballet, after-school jobs, and soccer practice, many of us may wonder if it's worth it. Is all this necessary? Will it really help my child?

Research data clearly show the benefits of extracurricular activities. The most accomplished students are also the most involved in other areas beyond academics. But how do students and parents make decisions about which activities to participate in? How do you ensure that extracurricular activities enhance a child's performance in school, rather than detract from academic performance? What is a balanced life?

Teachers discuss how these hectic schedules are impacting students and teachers. Depending on the age of the child, the issues could be very different. For a young child, having too many activities planned for them can stifle creativity and leave them no time to reflect. This can result in a situation where children are unable to entertain themselves and expect adults to always do things for them.

Teachers will likely talk about the different type of student that enters our classrooms today -- the media child, computer game whiz, etc. that requires a very different type of instruction. Teachers are also dealing with the socially advantaged child whose family can afford such things as season tickets to ball games and insist that the child cannot be given homework on certain nights.

High school teachers will talk not only about extracurricular activities, but also about the impact of after-school jobs on what goes on in schools and in their classrooms. A taped segment

of students talking about why they work and what they do with their money could lead to a discussion of the responsibility of employers to support the work of students in school. If a student is falling asleep in class because his boss asked him to work until 1:00 a.m., who should share the responsibility for the resulting decline in academic performance?

Care should be taken to ensure that the discussion does not focus just on the middle-class, privileged child. The issue of a balanced life is often the reverse in poor communities. Many inner-city schools and communities, for example, have no extracurricular activities for students -- young people have nothing constructive to do, and therefore, end up "hanging out" on the streets. The impact of budget-cutting measures in schools has often resulted in eliminating the arts, music, and sports. How does this situation impact students and teachers?

In looking at a balanced life, the issue of how much homework should be required is a very likely to come up. Teachers and listeners should share perspectives.

The moderator provides closure and leads into next show.

FUTURE SHOWS: The topics are limitless. The four shows outlined here could easily spin off many other topics as the listening audience responds and reacts to the reality of today's schools and the experiences of teachers. Topics should range the whole gamut of education issues from practical concerns like...How do I help my child with homework? to...Why do we need national standards?

Shows can focus on topics or individuals. For example, the 1994 National Teacher of the Year runs a school for youth who have been abandoned and live on the streets of San Diego. Her attempt to be an advocate for homeless children is an inspiration and a wake-up call to Americans.

"Teacher Talk" should strive for a balance of perspectives -- grade levels, types of communities, and diverse student populations. It should aim at being engaging, not entertaining. "Teacher Talk" must show teachers as real people struggling with real problems. It must touch people's hearts as well as their minds if we hope to move them to action to improve education in their communities.