



# Unatego Elementary School

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**A child seldom needs a good talking to as a good listening to.**

Robert Breault

**Speak quietly so your children can hear your words instead of your voice.**

L.R. Knost

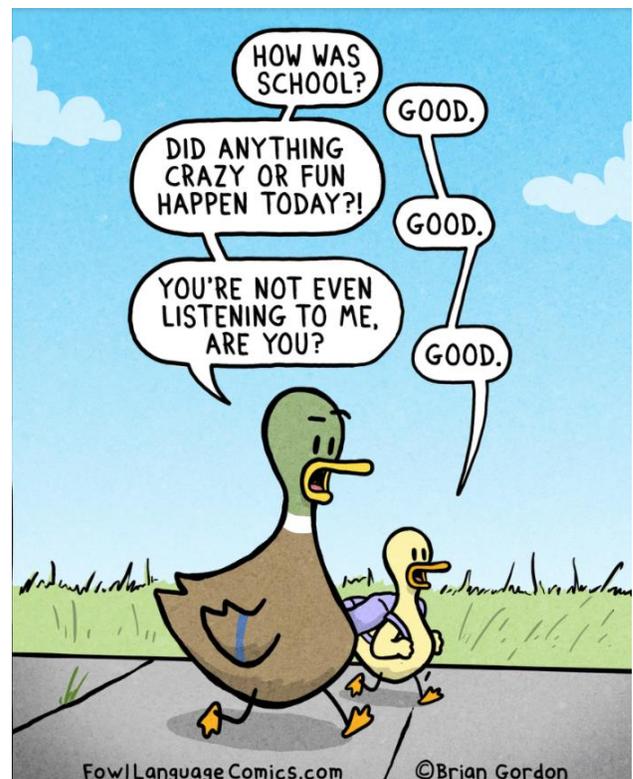
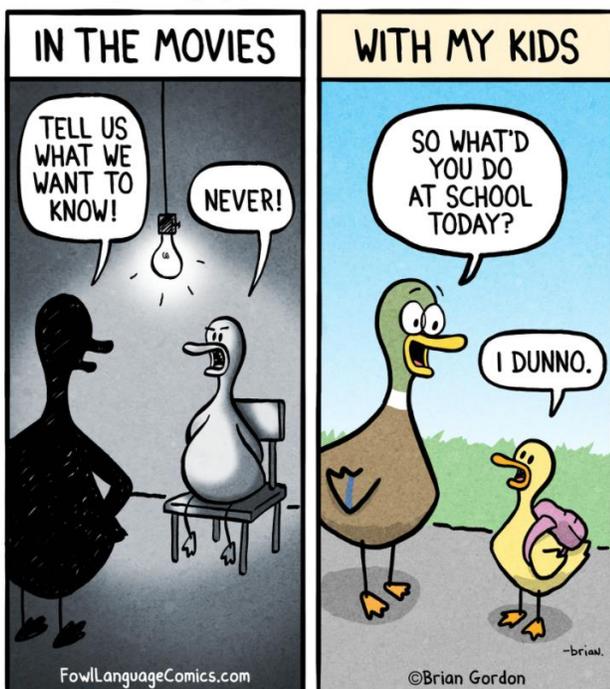
Dear Parent and Guardian:

Last spring and again this summer, I spent some time thinking about communicating with kids. That's what we do here at Unatego Elementary School. We talk to kids, we listen to them, and we try to guide them as best we can along their educational journey.

This year, we added a new wrinkle. As part of our OLWEUS bully prevention program, classroom teachers are now holding weekly class meetings where students discuss a variety of topics. The teacher is the facilitator, but the ultimate goal is for the students to talk to each other, discuss ideas and concerns, and become better friends and peers as a result. It is much more difficult to be mean or to bully someone if you really know them. Each week, students will gather together in their class or homeroom and talk about a wide range of topics. As the year progresses, I will share more about these class meetings. We will also be introducing a home component later in the year, since we need parents and guardians as partners on this journey.

One thing everyone can do is have a daily conversation about school. One of my favorite new cartoonists, Brian Gordon, has a cartoon called **Fowl Language**. It presents the trials and tribulations of a dad and his family. Here are two cartoons that poke gentle fun at the difficulty parents and guardians have getting kids to talk about school.

## INTERROGATION





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Here are some strategies that I found on the internet that may help all of us engage in better school-related conversations.

1. **Ask open-ended questions.** If you ask a question that can be answered with one word — *yes* or *no* — that’s what you’ll get. A one-word answer. Try asking open-ended questions instead.  
**Example:** “What was the best thing you did at school today?”
2. **Start with a factual observation.** Kids often have a hard time answering questions that seem to come out of the blue. Making an observation gives your child something to relate to.  
**Example:** “I know you have a lot of new kids in your class this year. What’s that like?”
3. **Share something about yourself.** When someone tells you about themselves, it’s natural to want to do that in return. Share something with your child and see what you get back.  
**Example:** “We always played freeze tag at recess. What do you and your friends like to do?”
4. **Avoid negative questions.** If you think something isn’t going well, your questions may come out in a negative way, with emotion-packed words like *sad* or *mean*. Asking in a positive way lets your child express concerns.  
**Example:** “I heard that you sat with new people at lunch today. What did you talk about?”

Getting kids to open up about their day can be challenging. I raised two kids of my own and even though they are adults now, I still have to try different strategies to get through. It’s worth the effort every time.

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## Important Dates for October and November

- October 8 NO SCHOOL for students – This is a faculty and staff conference day.
- October 11 NO SCHOOL – Columbus Day Holiday
- October 15 District Early Dismissal Drill – students will be dismissed 15 minutes earlier than normal.  
First bus riders – dismissed at 2:15 PM; Walkers and self-transport at 2:35 PM.  
Second bus riders at 2:45 PM – Please make arrangements for the earlier dismissal time.  
The elementary after-school program will run as normal on October 15<sup>th</sup>
- October 28 Super Spartan Star Assemblies – students, faculty, and staff only
- October 29 Students can wear Halloween costumes to school. We will send home guidelines for costumes this week.
- November 11 NO SCHOOL – Veterans Day Holiday
- November 12 End of the first marking period
- November 19 Elementary Report Cards sent home for the first marking period
- November 24 – 26 NO SCHOOL – Thanksgiving Break

**\*\* Please see the next page for information on events or activities that have been cancelled or postponed. \*\***



# Unatego Elementary School

Unfortunately, we are still dealing with COVID-19 and the pandemic. We are following social distancing guidelines that put restrictions on what we can and cannot do at school. Out of an abundance of caution, we have cancelled the following events or postponed the following events.

## Cancelled events

### **Elementary Open House**

There isn't a safe way for us to conduct an open house since we will have hundreds of students and family members in the building at one time. There isn't a realistic way to maintain social distancing. The district decided to cancel a Fall open house as a result of the ongoing pandemic. I encourage you to reach out to your child's teacher or teachers if you have questions or want to share information about your child.

### **Super Spartan Star Assembly Attendance by Parents or Guardians**

We still plan to hold grade-level assemblies to recognize students. However, because of social distancing guidelines, we cannot invite parents and guardians this year. Based on where we are with the pandemic in the spring, we may be able to start inviting parents and guardians if social distancing guidelines are relaxed.

## Postponed Events

### **Elementary Luncheons – UPK – 5<sup>th</sup> Grade**

Following social distancing guidelines means that we must postpone our elementary luncheons for now. My hope is that we can reschedule these for the spring and that by that time we are in a much better place, in terms of the pandemic, so that we can conduct the luncheons inside as normal or, perhaps, hold them as outdoor picnics when the weather warms up again. I'll provide more information later this year.

## Undecided Events

### **Parent-Teacher Conferences (November 19 and 22)**

I will provide you with more information soon about parent-teacher conferences. We may have to hold these over the phone or as ZOOM videoconferences.

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We are doing our very best to follow the social distancing and COVID-19 mitigation requirements put forth by the New York State Education Department, the Department of Public Health, and Otsego County Public Health while trying to provide students with a high-quality school experience. It is challenging at times, and I want to thank all of you for your patience and your support.

Please don't hesitate to call or email me with questions, concerns, or if you would just like to chat about elementary education.

Sincerely,

Mike Snider