

Family/Parent Engagement -Teacher Practice

Goal: Establish **consistent two-way communication** between teachers and families to foster collaboration, support learning, and build trust.

Communicate

- **Digital Platform:** Choose a platform that allows for messaging, announcements, and file sharing. Examples include ClassDojo, Bloomz, Seesaw, or Google Classroom.
 - **How it facilitates two-way communication:**
 - Direct messaging between teacher and parents
 - Parents can comment on student work or announcements
 - Ability for parents to easily share information with the teacher
- **Email:** Use for formal communication, newsletters, and updates.
 - **Facilitates two-way communication:**
 - Parents can reply with questions or concerns
 - Allows for more detailed information sharing
- **Text Messaging:** Utilize a service that allows for group messaging while maintaining privacy (Remind, Bloomz).
 - **How it facilitates two-way communication:**
 - Quick updates and reminders
 - Parents can quickly respond to questions or requests
- **Phone Calls:** Reserve for sensitive matters or when a more personal conversation is needed.
 - **Facilitates two-way communication:**
 - Allows for real-time discussion and clarification
 - Builds rapport and trust
- **Navigating Difficult Conversation:**
 - **A Framework for High-Stakes Conversations:**
 - Use evidence-based models for managing conversations about sensitive topics like academic or behavioral challenges.
 - A five-step process
 - 1. Connect authentically,
 - 2. Listen to understand,
 - 3. Remain focused on facts,
 - 4. Work toward a common goal,
 - 5. Schedule a follow-up, providing a clear roadmap.
 - **Preparation and Mindset:**
 - Prepare for a difficult conversation, including gathering objective data, considering the family's perspective to build empathy, and focusing on collaborative problem-solving rather than blame.

Strategies

- **Regular Updates:**
 - **Weekly Newsletter:** Share key highlights, upcoming events, and learning topics.
 - **Digital Platform Updates:** Post photos and short descriptions of classroom activities.
 - **Individual Student Updates:** Provide personalized feedback and progress reports through the digital platform or email.
- **Opportunities for Interaction:**
 - **Online Discussion Forums:** Pose questions related to classroom learning on the digital platform to encourage parent participation.
 - **Virtual Office Hours:** Schedule regular times for parents to connect with you online or by phone.
 - **Parent Workshops:** Offer workshops on relevant topics like supporting learning at home, digital citizenship, or social-emotional development.
 - **Student-Led Communication:** Integrate student voice into communication practices. This includes strategies like preparing students to lead their own parent-teacher conferences or to co-create learning goals with their teachers and families.
- **Solicit Feedback:**
 - **Surveys:** Use online tools (Google Forms, SurveyMonkey) to gather feedback on communication preferences, curriculum, or classroom activities.
 - **Suggestion Box (physical or digital):** Encourage parents to share ideas and suggestions.
 - **Parent-Teacher Conferences:** Dedicate time for two-way conversations about student progress and goals.

Building Relationships

- **Welcome Activities:** At the start of the year, send a welcome letter or video introducing yourself and your communication plan.
- **Personal Touches:** Acknowledge birthdays, share positive anecdotes about students, and show genuine interest in their lives.
- **Culturally Responsive Communication:** Be mindful of language barriers and cultural differences. Provide translated materials and seek to understand diverse perspectives. Use inclusive language that affirms all family structures (e.g., "caregivers," "your family" instead of "parents") and to make an effort to learn about the cultural backgrounds and assets of their students' families to build genuine connections.

Timeline

- **Beginning of Year:** Introduce communication plan, establish digital platform, send welcome letter.

- **Ongoing:** Weekly updates, regular use of chosen communication tools, consistent interaction with parents.
- **Periodically:** Conduct surveys, host parent workshops, hold parent-teacher conferences.

Evaluation

- **Track Parent Participation:** Monitor platform usage, survey responses, and attendance at events.
- **Solicit Feedback:** Regularly ask parents for their input on the effectiveness of communication strategies.
- **Adjust Plan as Needed:** Be flexible and adapt your approach based on parent feedback and evolving needs. (Simon, B. S., 2004. *High School Outreach, The School Community Journal*.)

Peer-Reviewed References

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- **Hoover-Dempsey, K. V., & Sandler, H. M. (1997).** Why do parents become involved in their children's education?. Review of educational research, 67(1), 3-42. (Explores the motivations behind parent involvement)
- **Mapp, K. L. (2003).** Having their say: Parents describe why and how they are engaged in their children's learning. The School Community Journal, 13(1), 35-64. (Highlights the importance of understanding parent perspectives)
- **Simon, B. S. (2004).** High school outreach and family engagement: A study of practices in five cities. The School Community Journal, 14(1), 41-63. (Examines effective outreach strategies for engaging high school parents.)
- **Rhyand, Andrew.** "Five Steps for Having Difficult Conversations with Parents." *Responsive Classroom*, 27 Jan. 2023, www.responsiveclassroom.org/five-steps-for-having-difficult-conversations-with-parent

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