



Using Effective Communication with Families

Strong communication is fundamental in building relationships between home and school. Family to family communication is also a way to increase family engagement in school. In order to communicate effectively with many strategies are put in place to communicate most effectively to diverse populations.

Consider how families are communicated with at your school. Are these some of the ways your child's school is using currently? Are there ways your school can grow in its communication strategies?

- Newsletter
- School to home notebook
- School Website – Parent section (templates)
- Blogs, D2L
- Social media
- Surveys/Questionnaires
- Report cards, frequent progress reports, phone calls, and/or e-mail messages
- Advertising in the community – outdoor signs/banners
- School Council bulletin board or newsletter
 - Council binder with minutes and news items (online or hardcopy)

Communication Strategies

Effective school-home communication has grown more complex as society has changed. The great diversity among families means that it is not possible to rely on a single method of communication that will reach all homes with a given message. It is essential that a variety of strategies, adapted to the needs of particular families and their schedules, be incorporated into an overall plan. Here are some strategies to consider at your child's school to increase family communication and engagement:

- Parent newsletters
- Annual open houses
- Curriculum nights
- Home visits (where applicable)
- Phone calls
- Annual school calendars
- Inserts in local newspapers
- Annual grandparents or "special persons" days
- Board of Education spokesperson or communications officer at PTA meetings
- Homework hotlines
- Annual field days
- Notices and handouts in local markets, clinics, churches, mosques, temples, or other gathering sites



- Communications that are focused on fathers as well as mothers, but also caregivers; family structures are varied and communication should be geared to a general population
- Good news calls (quick message, email, etc.) continue to build relationships with other families
- Videos on a variety of topics – work with teachers and students to record messages to parents/families.
- Offer workshops/S4 family sessions for parents on identified topics of interest
- Consider creating a welcome sign at the school in multiple languages

To effectively communicate, we must realize that we are all different in the way we perceive the world and use this understanding as a guide to our communication with others. ~ Tony Robbins

Parental feedback, participation, and support of the program not only reinforces the learnings of the child in the home environment, but allows the knowledge to permeate into other areas of the community as well. Programs which promote interacting more positively as a family and in the community support a sense of belonging within those groups.

Research on Communication

It is so very important to gain parental/guardian support and involvement in student learning. Creating a “Community of learners”, a place where administrators were learning, teachers were learning, parents were learning and children were learning” and a place where “adults foster children’s motivation by being motivated themselves” (Galinsky, 2010, p.11). Effective communication is key in supporting the community of learning for children and families.

Effective communication strategies involve:

(adapted from Graham-Clay, n.d.):

Initiation: Initiate contact with families as early as possible once the purpose of your connection has been determined. After the introduction, make clear the establishing expectations of families. When families are clear of their role, they are more likely to commit to participation.

Consistency and frequency: Families want frequent, ongoing feedback about what’s going in school. Consistent and frequent messaging helps peak people’s interests and keeps information at the forefront. Provide updates of progress when planning events for families. Determine a variety of ways for families to become involved throughout the process when planning events; there are always small ways to contribute, it’s a matter of finding out how to communicate it to families.

Follow-through: People want to know that everyone is accountable for their actions, doing what was said would be done. If appropriate, provide updates on progress of projects along the way. Remember – stay connected and others will stay connected as well.



Clarity and usefulness of communication: Consider accessibility of information to parents. Use a variety of forms of communication and translate information into multiple languages whenever possible to connect with the needs of a variety of families.

Timeliness: If issues arise, make sure to communicate right away to determine a solution. Waiting too long can create new problems, possibly through the frustration of those involved.

References:

Galinsky, E. (2010). *Mind in the Making: The seven essential life skills every child needs* (1st ed.). New York, NY: HarperCollins Books

Graeme-Clay, S. (n.d.). Communication with families: Strategies for teachers. *The School Community Journal*. Retrieved May 15 from <http://www.adi.org/journal/ss05/Graham-Clay.pdf>