Communicating with Families

What this means: *Families and school staff engage in regular, ongoing communication about student learning and opportunities for supporting student learning at home and in the community.*

Good communication is at the foundation of successful partnerships. Schools need to establish frequent and consistent two-way communication with families and community members. All school communications should be available in a language that is understandable for the families in their community. Practices and policies that ensure families feel welcome and safe to share information to the school are important. It is critical that schools have a variety of communication strategies that reflect the types of communication preferred in their community. Texting, written notes, Web sites, phone, print, face-to-face meetings, television, blogs, e-mail and other new communication methods should be considered to reach today's families.

Sample Action Steps

Universal Strategies (for all students and families)

- Teachers encourage and plan for parent-teacher conferences with all families.
- Teachers send home daily communication in student agendas.
- Develop electronic grade booklets so families can monitor their child's progress frequently.
- Send school or class newsletters to every family and post them on the school Web site.
- School policies are clearly communicated to all families in the home language.
- Ensure that teachers and administrators have positive communication contacts with families about students before they contact families about negative issues.

Targeted Strategies (for some students and families)

- Staff members hold parent–teacher conferences as needed.
- School staff members make frequent phone calls or send special weekly notes updating parents on their child's progress.
- Explain specialized or technical terms about a child's academic or behavioral issues and interventions to families in everyday language.

Intensive Strategies (for a few students and families)

- Staff members including nurses, social workers, teachers or parent mentors conduct home visits to build relationships and share important information with the families of students receiving intensive interventions.
- The school works closely with families of students who are chronically absent to communicate promptly when a student is not at school.
- The school works with highly mobile and homeless families to establish a communication system that fits the families' needs (frequent changes in phone number, home address and adult caregivers).

Resources

National Network of Partnership Schools: Communicating
The NNPS offers a handbook, training and support for implementation of Epstein's *Six Types of Parent Involvement*. Communication is highlighted as the second "type." The Web site offers examples of communication, challenges and redefinitions.

http://www.csos.jhu.edu/p2000/nnps_model/school/sixtypes/type2.htm

January FINE Newsletter: Home–School Communication, Volume I, Issue 1, January 2009
This newsletter issues of the Harvard Family Research Project's Family Involvement Network of Educators focuses on school-home communication.
http://www.hfrp.org/family-involvement/fine-family-involvement-network-of-educators/fine-newsletter-archive/january-fine-newsletter-home-school-communication

Reaching Out: A K-8 resource for connecting families and schools by D. Kyle, E. McIntyre, K Miller and G. Moore. Corwin Press, 2002.
This book offers practical steps for building trusting relationships and communicating effectively with families.