

Communicating With Families

Overview of communicating with families

Careful and sensitive communication between teachers and families supports student learning. Teachers communicate with families to learn more about children from the people who know them best. Teachers share information about children's activities, learning, and development, and seek ways to partner with families. Communication may take place in person, in writing, or in phone calls. Every conversation with a family is a chance for the teacher to communicate a respectful, open attitude and create a space for a two-way conversation. Teachers must be attentive to considerations of language and culture, respectful and valuing of families, and oriented to working with families to support children.

Advancing justice through communicating with families

Teachers can partner with families to access the specialized knowledge they have about their child including: a deep understanding of their strengths, what they care about, conditions for how they learn best, and expertise about home culture and family life. Communication offers opportunities for teachers to learn about a child's past experiences in school, how different family members have experienced school themselves, the goals families have for their children, and ways to best support children based on families' knowledge. Talking with families opens doors for teachers to see their students as whole, multifaceted human beings. Without careful consideration, communication with families can reproduce patterns of injustice in home-school relationships.



Decomposition of communicating with families

Table 1: Areas of Work and Techniques for Communicating With Families

Areas of work for communicating with families	Techniques for communicating with families
Planning for communication with families	• Gather artifacts, practices, or tools such as student work, teacher or student notes, assessments, and/or data. • Learn about families' preferred modes of communication. Involve appropriate English language supports. • Learn about and attend sensitively to cultural differences that may shape how a family interprets schooling, teachers, and/or their child's education. • Be aware of personal identities and how they may be perceived by families. • If a meeting takes place at school, create a pleasant communication environment; arrange comfortable seating, avoid distractions, adhere to predetermined times, etc. • If a meeting takes place over the phone, confirm that the time is convenient for the family and each person can hear and be heard easily. Teachers let families know their phone numbers so that they can see who is calling. • Identify questions to ask of families. Focus on questions that make use of families' resources and knowledge. • Identify important information to share with families and consider how to communicate that information. • Prepare for a two-way conversation, and to truly listen to families.



Areas of work for communicating with families	Techniques for communicating with families
Using open, respectful language and maintaining a professional tone	• Consider in advance some possible outcomes, suggestions, or actions from the conversation. • Begin interactions with families with a warm, genuine greeting. • Adhere to norms of good communication that are culturally appropriate; maintain eye contact while both speaking and listening, use appropriate body language, and monitor “talk time” that both you and the family members are given. • Make sure you give family members full opportunities to share their opinions, comments, concerns, or questions during an interaction. • Balance the conversation with information that demonstrates you care about, like, and appreciate the student, along with any concerns you want to discuss. Keep the conversation positive and constructive. • Do not divulge information about other students or families with whom you work. • Conclude interactions with a genuine, warm goodbye and appreciation for the opportunity to work with family members.
Using intentional language and evidence to share information about academic success, behavior, or development with families	• Use artifacts of practice and data to support what you describe about a student. • Use clear, plain language rather than acronyms or jargon. • Offer specific examples or anecdotes about student learning, behavior, or to demonstrate that you know and care about the student. • Use evidence-based language to describe student performance, growth, and/or interactions with classmates. • If students are present, involve them, inviting them to take ownership of their learning and speak to their own experiences. • Use, as appropriate, professional knowledge of content, language development, child development, and schooling.



Areas of work for communicating with families	Techniques for communicating with families
Collaborating with families to set goals for students and determine next steps	• Invite family members to share their goals for the meeting. Add those that were prepared in advance with care for how to express them. • Review main points of discussion; name the assets, resources, or supports that are identified; and determine next steps. • Recognize what you can accomplish in the given time, and be prepared to follow up if necessary.

Visual representation of communicating with families

