

Family Engagement Guidance Document

Family Engagement Vision/Definition

What is your vision/definition for family engagement? What about other stakeholders, teachers, support staff, principal, central office?

Think about post pandemic. How can family engagement be different than pre pandemic? You are creating that future now.

Review all streams and content of communication: District, Building, Classroom.

Is there one place where all communication can be found? Is it “need to know” or “nice to know,” consumer friendly, formatted and streamlined so it is inviting and easy to read? Is the frequency of delivery/posting consistent (i.e., First of the month, second Monday of the month etc.)?

Prior to communicating with families (written, verbal & face-to-face), take a few minutes to set your intention.

Communicating with families is about connecting and checking-in in an authentic way to make a connection and see each other as people first and principal/teacher/parent second. Parents and schools are very busy making sure the students get what they need, so imagine how good it would feel if someone first asked “how are **you** doing?” Connection allows compassion to flow both ways. Is your primary intention to connect or to correct a behavior (please don’t drop students off prior to the morning bell)?

Self-Check

Whether communication is written, a phone call, or in-person the communication is meant to reduce anxiety not increase it (including your own). Make sure you are feeling emotionally grounded. Emotions such as impatience, agitation, anger, are discharged intensely. Discharging those kinds of emotions or being on the receiving end of absorbing them from a parent rarely, if ever, results in a productive conversation. Giving something time (i.e., 24 hours, a walk outside, counting backward from 100) will always move communication in a positive and productive direction.

Meeting Environment

The goal is to create an environment where parents feel safe, accepted for who they are, and appreciated for their partnership in their child’s educational journey. This foundational piece is important. Practicing vulnerability and leading with warmth during a meeting will help parents to open up, calm down, ask questions they might otherwise be afraid to ask, admit where they are struggling or where they feel they are failing. When they see other parents having similar feelings, a supported community of parents is in the making. Until a connection is made it will be difficult for many to fully take in any information that can be helpful. Be open to everything rather than attached to a result.

Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) Competencies (CASEL)

Review these competencies and consider how this time can be an opportunity to strengthen everyone’s SEL muscles.

Lead with Wisdom and Compassion

Parents are looking for a soothing voice from someone who they see as an expert in teaching and child development. They want to know it will be okay. While you can't make promises, lean on your wisdom and assure them that together we will get through this. Practice the same strength-based approach used with students. Look for what they are doing right and help them look for the wins each day.

Quality Questions

Quality questions get to the heart of things. We want our students to be reflective and introspective so let's get the adults doing the same practice. We want a mix that will get all parts of the brain engaged and that includes laughter.

- What struggles do you encounter when trying to support your child?
- What has inspired you?
- What has been most frustrating?
- What have you done that makes you feel proud of yourself?
- Is there anything you hesitate to ask for help with?
- Do you have any good tips to share that worked for you?

You might start by sharing something first. It might take time for them to respond, so be comfortable with the silence (count to 10 in your head). Making yourself vulnerable by sharing will allow more transparent communication. Let's face it, it's hard to share openly in a group, but once we do, we realize we are not alone. The "what inspired you" question makes the brain switch gears from negative to positive. It helps us to realize we have had "wins" during this challenging time.

Productive Parent Meetings

If any information or updates that you give in a meeting with parents would be of value to all parents, then be sure to communicate the information to the wider audience of parents. You don't want any parents feeling like they missed out by not attending the meeting. It's important for parents to know where to locate the one place to go for all the "need-to-know" information.

Do a check in with parents at the end of the meeting to see if the time was valuable and ask for any thoughts about future meetings. If there were items you said you would get back on, make sure you do the follow up within 24 hours. Share the best way and time to connect with you either as a follow up to the meeting or to discuss other matters.

Always ask what parents would like to learn more about. Content of subsequent meetings will morph and change based on parent needs.

Post Meeting

You have received rich information. Take time for your own reflection and introspection. Some suggested questions for reflection:

- What did I hear that surprised me?
- What have I learned about myself by doing this?
- Did I facilitate calm and peace?
- Was there a shift in energy?