

FAMILY ENGAGEMENT COMMUNICATION

THE DO'S AND DON'TS GUIDE

Clear, inclusive, and purposeful communication is a critical part of successful family engagement. This evidence-based guide provides practical do's and don'ts for schools to strengthen their family engagement practices through enhanced communication strategies.

COMMUNICATION FOUNDATIONS

Do's

Establish Early Communication Style



Ask families at beginning of year

- Language & contact method
- Best contact times & recipients
- Special considerations



Create simple form to collect information

- Multilingual options offered
- Digital & paper option
- Accessible at multiple points



Set clear expectations about communication

- Teacher-family communication protocols
- Emergency notification procedures
- Access to translation services

Don'ts

Make Assumptions About Preferences

Don't Assume



- All families have internet access
- All families use email
- Parents are the only caregivers
- Your preferred method works for everyone
- Families check backpacks/folders regularly

CULTURAL RESPONSIVENESS

Do's

Practice Cultural Humility



Demonstrate respect for diverse families

- Use inclusive language about family structures
- Acknowledge different cultural perspectives
- Honor various forms of family involvement
- Recognize linguistic diversity as an asset



Provide meaningful translation

- Translate all important communications
- Arrange for interpreters at meetings and events
- Use translation apps for informal communications
- Check that translations maintain cultural meaning, not just words

Don'ts

Communicate Through a Single Cultural Lens



Avoid:

- Using idioms or cultural references that don't translate well
- Making assumptions about family roles or structures
- Writing in ways that require high literacy levels
- Ignoring cultural differences in communication styles
- Using Google Translate without checking for accuracy

CRAFTING EFFECTIVE MESSAGES

Do's

Use "What, Why, and How" Structure



What: Clearly state purpose

- Clearly state what you're communicating about
- Be specific and concrete
- Use descriptive subject lines or headers
- Front-load the most important information



Why: Explain why this matters for their child

- Connect to student learning or development
- Explain the purpose or benefit
- Make relevance immediately clear



How: Provide clear action steps or expectations

- What families should do with this information
- When and how to respond if needed
- Where to go for more information

Overload or Underwhelm



Don't:

- Send lengthy emails or newsletters that bury important information
- Use educational jargon or acronyms without explanation
- Include decorative elements that distract from key content
- Send communications without clear purpose or action steps
- Only communicate when there are problems

COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES FOR ALL FAMILIES

Do's

Ensure Equitable Access to Information



Reach all families

- Use multiple communication channels
- Offer flexible meeting times
- Create accessible formats (large print, screen reader compatible)
- Establish personal connections with hard-to-reach families
- Use varied approaches for different needs



Employ strategic outreach

- Personalize invitations and communications
- Connect through trusted community members
- Go where families are (community events, sports games)
- Use peer-to-peer family networks

Don'ts

Rely on Passive Communication Systems



Avoid:

- Posting information only on websites or social media
- Sending home paper notices as the only method
- Waiting for families to approach you
- Giving up after initial attempts to connect
- Creating barriers through complicated systems

BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS

Do's

Establish a Positive Foundation



Start with positives

- Share good news first and often
- Highlight student strengths and successes
- Recognize family contributions
- Communicate genuine appreciation



Create ratio of positive to constructive feedback

- Aim for at least 3 positive communications for every challenging one
- Find authentic positives for all students
- Send "good news" notes or texts regularly

Don'ts

Create a Negative Communication Pattern



Avoid:

- Only contacting families when there are problems
- Using accusatory or judgmental language
- Presenting issues without solutions or support
- Focusing only on deficits
- Creating a "reporting" rather than "partnering" dynamic

TECHNOLOGY AND COMMUNICATION

Do's

Use Technology Thoughtfully



Leverage digital tools effectively

- Select platforms that are mobile-friendly
- Use apps with translation capabilities
- Keep messages brief and scannable
- Ensure consistent formatting across devices
- Consider accessibility needs



Balance digital and personal approaches

- Combine technology with personal connections
- Use video to create a human connection
- Offer tech support for families
- Provide alternatives for those with limited access

Don'ts

Overrely on Technology



Avoid:

- Assuming all families are comfortable with technology
- Using too many different platforms
- Allowing technology to replace personal connections
- Sending excessive notifications
- Requiring accounts or downloads for essential information

COMMUNICATION ON CHALLENGING SITUATIONS

Do's

Maintain a Problem-Solving Approach



Frame challenges constructively

- Focus on solutions, not just problems
- Use "we" language to establish partnership
- Maintain a strengths-based perspective
- Provide specific, actionable feedback
- Offer resources and support



Listen first, then respond

- Create space for families to share their perspective
- Acknowledge emotions without judgment
- Ask clarifying questions
- Show empathy before problem-solving
- Follow up after difficult conversations

Don'ts

Take an Adversarial Stance



Avoid:

- Becoming defensive when concerns are raised
- Using blaming language
- Making assumptions about family circumstances
- Bringing up multiple issues at once
- Communicating when emotions are heightened