

## 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 communciation

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



# Make Assumptions About Preferences

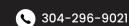
#### Don't Assume



- 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

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## **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



#### <u>How: Provide clear action steps or expectations</u>

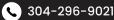
- What families should do with this information
- When and how to respond if needed
- · Where to go for more information

#### 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
- 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

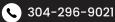
# Overrely on Technology



#### 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







