

Strategies for Communicating with Students' Families

Communicating with your students' families is essential. Here are some basic strategies for communicating effectively.

- **Start Early.** Build relationships and set expectations with your students and families early in the school year. Before test results are released, provide students' families with information about the testing process and how they can learn more about their children's performance.
- **Think Local.** Teachers and schools know their students' families best and are the most effective communication channels.
- **Keep Messaging Short, Punchy, and Clear.** Avoid jargon and acronyms; if you must use them, be sure to offer definitions. Simple words and short paragraphs facilitate reading and comprehension. Consider using URL shorteners or labels when including long URLs in written material.
- **Be Prepared to Communicate with All Types of Families.** Be accessible to all types of families, including those with disabilities and those who use languages other than English. For example, do not rely on color-coding or images without explanatory text and translate, translate, translate.
- **Use a Multipronged Approach.** Refer to this document's Communication Channel Suggestions section to review the communication channels at your disposal and consider using more than one suggestion.
- **Train Staff.** Ensure that you train your support staff, especially the front desk staff, and provide them with information about the Family Portal. In addition, provide staff with sample scripts they can use to answer questions about the Family Portal.
- **Use Direct Contact.** Remember that direct contact is ideal, and follow up as needed!

For School Administrators

To ensure that the school reaches as many families as possible, confirm that your teachers and staff are familiar with the resources and information on the Family Portal, can navigate the Portal easily, and are equipped to answer potential questions. Discuss the benefits of the Family Portal with your staff, and ensure that they understand the following details:

- The Family Portal is a one-stop shop that provides families access to their children's performance results and other family resources. The Family Portal is accessible through the state's online assessment portal or the district's parent portal.
- Families will need a unique access code and the student's first name and date of birth to log in.
- Families should be notified as soon as assessment results are posted on the Family Portal using any communication strategy listed in the following section.
- Staff should be trained to retrieve unique access codes from the Test Information Distribution Engine (TIDE). Refer to the Instructions for Providing Access Codes to the New Family Portal brochure for school personnel.

Communication Channel Suggestions

As previously outlined, you have various communication channels as available options. Let us review some of the available communication channels.

- **The Family Portal.** This website is a one-stop shop for student performance results and family resources.
- **Materials Sent Home with Students.** These materials can include text, charts, tables, URLs, and QR codes directing parents to specific online resources.
- **Meetings.** Schedule meetings with families, including events like back-to-school nights.
- **Phone Calls.** Having a conversation over the phone is a great way to make direct contact.
- **Emails.** Emails provide a convenient means to convey information and documents directly to families.
- **Text Messages.** Families that opt in for communication via text may find this channel efficient, as texting may allow educators to update parents in real time.
- **Social Media Posts.** Provide links to your official social media accounts and post regularly to keep Internet-savvy families up to date.
- **Online Videos.** If you have an official video channel, provide the link to your students' families. Create videos with introductions to the assessment programs and tutorials.

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