

## I-6: Respectfully inform, involve and invest students' influencers

### Guidelines for Effective Communication

Leveraging student influencers requires deliberate and on-going communication efforts on your behalf. Work to convey a sense of openness and availability. Make sure that families know you are at their disposal any time they wish to check in with you. The communication process is not only about the teacher delivering periodic updates, but is also about family members sharing their general or specific concerns. This process cannot be limited to a first week of school introduction. Throughout the school year, you will want to continue to share your students' social, academic, and behavioral progress so that family members know how their child is doing, and can reinforce your expectations.

<p><b>Establish These Relationships Early</b></p>	<p>Many methods involve contact with families early in the school year. Given the compounding benefits of investing students' families in your students' academic goals, it makes sense to begin building those relationships immediately.</p> <p>Many teachers make it a point to share each student's success during the first week with his or her family. Harry and Rosemary Wong, authors of the popular and helpful <i>The First Days of School</i>, give an entertaining explanation of how he encourages his students during the first week of school. Every member of his class earns four or five A's in the first two weeks with somewhat challenging but perfectly doable, bite-sized assignments. Mr. Wong then calls each child's family to report on these initial successes. Similar simple acts of sharing positive reports early on will set the foundation for later conversations in which you want to enlist your students' families to help you.</p>
<p><b>Keep in Mind The Four P's</b></p>	<p>There are four essential ingredients to building healthy, open communication between schools and families:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <u>Positive</u>: Too often students and parents are wary of a note or call from the teacher. Sending home words of praise and encouragement can change this perception and improve communication with the family. Remember, parents need a pat on the back too!</li> <li>• <u>Personalized</u>: Parents can be overwhelmed by impersonal copied memos that seem irrelevant to their child. To avoid the "junk mail syndrome," jot a quick personal note on letters home or have students decorate them to draw parental attention.</li> <li>• <u>Proactive</u>: Keep parents informed of your class rules, expectations, and current activities. Provide plenty of notice for special events. Let parents know immediately if you have a concern and work together to prevent problems from developing.</li> <li>• <u>Partnership</u>: When they are well informed, parents can work as partners in their children's education. Encourage parents to respond to your notes by leaving space for comments or including a few quick questions for return—this practice keeps you informed of parents' ideas and concerns.</li> </ul>

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<p><b>Sensitivity to Foreign Language Speakers</b></p>	<p>If you have reason to believe that there is no English spoken in some of your students' homes, you should find someone in your school to translate the letter into the predominant language of that home. If you have no up front information about what language a family might speak, but know, for example, that the majority of students in your school come from Spanish-speaking families, you will probably want to have several copies of a Spanish version of your introductory letter available, and ask students which version they need. Be sure to add relevant information about the best way for non-English speaking families to reach you (if you don't speak their language, phone calls will not be an option). You will need to find a translator who will be willing and able to attend pre-scheduled conferences, and/or to translate any correspondence you wish to send. School or district officials should be able to help you locate a qualified translator.</p>
<p><b>Customize communication methods</b></p>	<p>You will probably rely on different methods for different students, either due to logistical concerns, or due to the nature of the information you need to share. Families themselves may express distinct preferences about how they wish to be contacted. Whenever possible, respect these preferences. Try alternative methods to follow-up with hard-to-reach families.</p> <p>Create "family profiles" to track communication efforts. Record the best method and time for reaching family members, the name of the family member with whom you usually speak, any specific notes from conversations you may have had, and the dates and relevant details of any conversations you have had with specific family members, etc. This could be easily done with a spiral notebook, with a different page designated for each student.</p>