Effective COMMUNICATION

Family Engagement

ACROSS LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS

"All families can be involved in their child's education."

"I can help all families in my class to be involved in their child's education."

Shared by a New York State educator

"Our most recent department meeting began with our principal posting the above two statements on our whiteboard. As we moved into a pair-share, we considered the similarities and differences between the two statements. The common themes generated were that as a department we **presume positive intent,** and we recognize the significance of striving for both **schoolwide-efficacy** and **self-efficacy** - our belief in our ability to succeed."

In Module 5, Session 2, we explored the three building blocks of effective family engagement and identified those as trust, transparency, and capacity. To build our capacity around family engagement while honoring our self-efficacy, this session will focus on developing our personal and schoolwide communication processes, as well as strengthening our personal communication skills.

As educators, we recognize how the pandemic created challenges to the way that we balance our work and home lives. The Pew Research Center studied the way parents spent their time between 2019 and 2020 and found that while there was minimal change in the amount of time parents spent directly caring for their children, the time they spent supervising their children while doing other things increased significantly (Aragáo, 2022).

These challenges provide us with opportunities to reflect on our communication processes to assess their effectiveness in reaching families in a meaningful and manageable manner. The first criteria to consider is the **method of communication** we use as teachers and as a school. According to Project Tomorrow's annual Speak Up Research Project, parents indicate the most effective method for both teacher-to-home and school-to-home communication is by email. Face-to-face meetings were reported as the second most effective method for teachers to communicate with parents about academic progress.

The pandemic may have acquainted schools and families with virtual options to convene "face-to-face" meetings, yet there remain time considerations and scheduling constraints for facilitating these interactions. When determining the best method for communication, we are compelled to consider the purpose of our communication, as well as the intended outcome.

What Parents Want

Teacher to Home
COMMUNICATION

1 in 3 parents are not satisfied with teacher to home communication

Top 4 Effective Methods

for teachers to communicate academic progress with parents

1 email

2 face to face

3 text

4 phone call

ONE - WAY
COMMUNICATION

has the purpose of informing the recipient, and the intended outcome is for the recipient to be a listener or learner. One-way communication is an asynchronous message that does not require a response. Examples of one-way communication are a classroom newsletter, a flier announcing an event, or an informational webpage. Text blasts, social media posts, and recorded video messages are also forms of one-way communication. The advantages include being able to reach a large and diverse audience with one message that does not require personalization.

TWO - WAY
COMMUNICATION

has the purpose of being an interactive experience that engages both the sender and receiver through the sharing of information. The intended outcome is for everyone to be partners, listeners, and learners. Two-way communication can be synchronous or asynchronous, with the expectation that the communication will engage all parties and generate a response. Examples of two-way communication are individualized emails, personal text messages, virtual or in-person conferences, home visits, and phone calls. Two-way communication can occur in one-on-one relationships, as well as within groups, such as committees. A key component is developing an individualized message for specific recipients. Our classroom software programs may help us to utilize unique and convenient methods for engaging in both one-way and two-way communication activities.

Communication Skills

Preparing for and reflecting on our communication can help us to evaluate our own skills and make adjustments that will lead to skill improvement. Strategies for effectively partnering with families before our meetings can include providing date and time options and alternatives for conducting the meetings virtually or in person. **Collaborative scheduling** empowers families to choose a time that will bolster their participation and avoid potential conflicts with employment obligations, child care, cultural considerations, or community events.

Additional planning strategies *before* our meetings include ensuring that the doors of the building are unlocked or that families have the correct virtual meeting information, learning the correct pronunciation of the families' names, planning our method for greeting families, and having several examples of the students' work on hand.

Considerations for our two-way communication skills *during* our meetings would include practicing our **active listening skills**, respecting others' points of view, and using our nonverbal communication while noting the family's **nonverbal cues**. Partnership-building skills involve intentionally monitoring our percentage of teacher talk and family talk, as well as the frequency of the use of the words "we," "you," and "I."

Software companies have developed effective products that can enhance teacher-family communication and school-family communication. Most products are available as application tools that families can download and install on their cell phones. While there are <u>many choices</u> for family engagement tools, when choosing a product we should consider our purpose and intended outcomes. Products often provide options for both one-way and two-way communication.

TALKINGPOINTS

allows teachers and schools to send individual or group messages and provides translation of your messages. Videos and documents can be attached to messages. The app allows you to send polls or set office hours to schedule meetings. Unique feature: translation <u>Bloomz</u> provides coordination tools, such as calendars and volunteer sign-ups. The app allows teachers to post assignments, activities, and send reminders. Options include sharing files, photos, videos, and text. Unique feature: secure document delivery for confidential information .

TEACHER'S TIP:

Plan and record an app installation party where students demonstrate downloading and installing the application for their family members. Provide an alternate option for those families who might not have a cell phone or might not have unlimited data.

Meetings

→ By enhancing our own communication skills, we can strengthen partnerships that empower families to actively engage in goal setting during our meeting.

→ Reflection questions after the session include reviewing our notes to consider what we learned and how we can use the information to improve future meetings.

STRATEGIES for ACTIVE MEETING ENGAGEMENT

☑ Discuss both the student's educational growth and the student's social development.

☑ Express confidence and belief in the student's ability to learn; provide specific and candid information about the student's performance.

☑ Consider the frequency or methods of sharing information with families so they will have meaningful information to support their child's learning.

☑ Paraphrase, restate, check for our understanding, and acknowledge the expressed emotions.

☑ Express commitment to open and frequent teacher-family communication and ask families about the best method for communication.

☑ Plan an **optimistic closing** for the meeting. State how the conference has helped you better understand the student and how the partnership will help the student achieve success.

Setting goals to improve our one-way and two-way communication can lead to improved personal skills, enhanced teacher-family relationships, and enriched family engagement. After all, as educators we believe that we can help all families in our class to be involved in their child's education.

Your Turn!

Next, as you explore resources and complete activities, ask yourself:

- How can I improve the way I send messages so that I reach more families?
- How can I improve the way I receive messages so that families are heard and acknowledged?

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About Us

The TALE Academy

The TALE Academy is a series of virtual learning experiences available to all New York State educators and offers a rich array of resources on topics related to teaching across learning environments (TALE). The TALE Academy is built upon the work New York State educators carried out during emergency remote teaching (ERT) throughout the COVID-19 pandemic and extends it toward the future. TALE invites educators to think beyond online learning to consider a broader perspective on teaching and learning that encompasses teaching across multiple environments (in-person, remote, and hybrid).

The Teaching in Remote/Hybrid Learning Environments (TRLE) Project

The TALE Academy is part of a broader New York State Education Department (NYSED) initiative known as Teaching in Remote/Hybrid Learning Environments (TRLE). In July 2020, NYSED was awarded funding through the United States Department of Education's Education Stabilization Fund-Rethink K-12 Education Models Grant to implement TRLE – a three-year project to build the capacity of teachers and educational leaders to effectively implement remote/hybrid learning for all students. Launched in the depths of the pandemic, the first phase of the TRLE project focused on getting resources to the field through partnerships with Boards of Cooperative Educational Services (BOCES) and school districts across the state. The second phase, which began in February 2022, focused on aggregating lessons learned and emerging teaching and learning strategies to address a broader field of practice: teaching across learning environments.

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