Standard 2:
Communicating Effectively

Families and school staff engage in regular, two-way *meaningful communication* about student learning.

Ideas for Implementation

1. Use all types of communication channels to connect with or inform parents. Scaffold communication approaches for various groups of targeted parents based on preferences and what works. Go beyond traditional means of communication by not just doing it one way, but every way! Place notes on the school marquee, create public service announcements, send emails or text messages, use the call system, hang posters, send personalized notes or invitations, place phone calls, and pass out flyers in neighborhoods and housing complexes. Make communications accessible by taping meetings and allowing parents to access a condensed version on the website or check out a DVD.

2. Ensure parents are considered partners by including a two – way communication mechanism on all home and school contacts. Incorporate a question and answer section in the school newsletter, send home simple evaluations or surveys, or ask for parent feedback by using social media to display a question of the week and encourage parent responses through facebook, twitter, or the school website.

3. Provide and publicize the hours for when the principal, teachers, and staff are available for parent visits or phone calls. Develop procedures for school and parent contacts to ensure that both parties know the manner in which to initiate, respond, and follow up. Have teachers log their communications with parents and set goals of reaching out to a certain amount of families each month.

4. Take time to engage in positive communications with families. For many parents, the only time they hear from the school is when something is wrong. Reach out at the beginning of the year to establish positive contact with every family at the school. Send positive notes, emails, or place phone calls home. Develop an easy system for teachers to regularly report student achievements.

5. Offer opportunities for parents to learn important information at various times and places. Be understanding that parents have various schedules and may not always be able to attend events and meetings at the school. Be as flexible as possible by scheduling workshops at various times, conducting meetings at various locations in the community, or using online tools such as skype to hold parent-teacher meetings. Advance notice is always good too!

6. Take time to be responsive to parent feedback. The two-way communication process is only meaningful to parents if they know their opinions or contributions matter. Make it a point to highlight solutions or improvements made based on parent feedback. For example, if there was a school survey or evaluation, be transparent by posting the results and highlighting what plans are being made to address them. Also, be proactive by letting parents hear about school-wide issues from you first.

7. Hold smaller meetings or provide the opportunity within large settings to create small groups. Parents may feel intimidated or less likely to ask questions when in large group settings. To ensure the best comprehension possible of the information presented, when possible, hold class or grade level meetings. For other events, target small groups of parents to attend on a rotating basis.

8. Ensure communications are understandable to all parents. Break flyers, letters, emails, newsletters, and websites into family – friendly language. If legal language is required, attach a cheat sheet or flyer that breaks the message down into easy to understand information. When possible, provide communications in other languages representative of your school community.

9. Develop a communication plan that keeps parents informed of their child's academic progress and development beyond parent – teacher conferences and report cards. Send home notices about what students are learning each week or month. Make grades and teacher feedback easily available.

10. Show respect through your communications with parents. First impressions are everything so be mindful that your conversation with a parent will set the tone for the entire school year. Be respectful and think about the little things. For example, if you call yourself Mrs. Smith then address the parent in the same manner and not just by their first name. Remember to speak in family – friendly terms.

Reference:

National Parent Teacher Association (PTA). (2009). *PTA National Standards for Family-School Partnerships: An Implementation Guide.* Retrieved from http://www.pta.org/2757.asp

Your Ideas for Implementation

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