



# New York State Parental Information and Resource Center

## Technical Assistance Guide

### Communicating with Families

#### Why is Communication Between Home and School Important?

- Home-school communication is among the most important factors in developing strong relationships between teachers and families. (Epstein, 1996; Christensen & Sheridan, 2001)
- Parents and teachers consider communication the number one factor to increase trust. (Adams & Christenson, 2000)
- Positive results of parental involvement include improved student achievement, reduced absenteeism, improved behavior, and restored confidence among parents in their children's school. (National Education Association, 2007)
- For more information about communicating and working with families, visit the New York State PIRC website, [www.nyspirc.org](http://www.nyspirc.org) or e-mail us at [info@nyspirc.org](mailto:info@nyspirc.org).

Research shows that positive and on-going home/school communication leads to positive outcomes for students and for schools. Communication needs to be two-way and meaningful. It isn't just about providing families with information, but also asking them for their feedback.

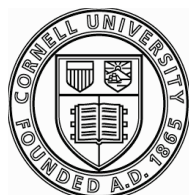
#### Communication Tools and Opportunities

Communication with families should begin before the school year even starts. Take the time to send a postcard, make a phone call, or do a home visit to introduce yourself to families and let them know you are looking forward to working with them and their children.

There are numerous ways to communicate with families, including the phone, e-mail, newsletters, notes, the child's planner, letters, websites, web-portal information systems, and in person at school or on home visits. It is important to remember that not all families will be comfortable or able to communicate using all of these formats. When communicating with families think about their ability to access technology, as well as their literacy levels.

Teachers and schools typically share information about school events and programs, children's progress, the school's performance on standardized tests, and school policies and procedures. The goal of communication with families is to let them know what their children are learning in school, to set a positive tone, and to build trusting relationships. It is also helpful to know your community and be able to serve as a resource to families who may need to access specialized supports or services.

Parents seek good communication skills in their children's teachers, citing it as one of the most desirable characteristics a new teacher could have. (HFRP, 2009)



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## When you have a concern

- Discuss student issues in private
- Begin the conversation with a positive
- Be polite and don't talk down
- Respect the parent's point of view
- Be clear and concise
- Stick with the facts

## Problem Solving

- State the issue and give an example
- Listen to the parent's explanation and paraphrase what was said
- Review the facts and brainstorm together
- Put an agreement in writing

## Tips

- Be fair, honest, and respectful
- Maintain eye contact and be aware of your own body language
- Seek first to understand...then to be understood
- Don't accuse, place blame, or pass judgment
- Don't use humor or sarcasm
- Provide your school contact information to parents
- Think ahead to be proactive rather than reactive
- Communicate regularly
- Keep administration informed
- Utilize parents' knowledge of their children
- Remember, schools need parents' help

## Principles for Effective Parent/Teacher Conferences

"Be Heard"

Best intentions assumed

Emphasis on learning

Home-school collaboration

Examples and evidence

Active listening

Respect for all

Dedication to follow-up

- *Before the conference:* Prepare a list of key issues you want to discuss about each student's progress and growth. Send information to families through flyers, notes, phone calls, and community meetings.
- *During the conference:* Ask questions and listen actively. Share ideas for how the family can support the child's learning.
- *After the conference:* Follow-up with families through a note or phone call. Thank families who attended and offer alternative ways to communicate with families who did not attend.
- Remember, parents know their children best and really do want what is best for them!

(HFRP, 2009)

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Families and Communities Together with Schools

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