

School
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COMMUNICATION



School Community Network

Core Beliefs

A school community rests upon mutual respect, strong relationships, shared responsibility, and focused attention to students' learning. Its core beliefs are that:

- all parents have dreams for their children and want the best for them.
- all teachers are inspired by professional standards and personal conviction to see that their students succeed.
- student success is bolstered when parents, teachers, and other members of the school community work in unison in their behalf.
- school leaders are the prime movers in establishing and nurturing the processes and practices necessary in intentionally strengthening the school community.

Outcome Goals for a School Community

1. Reading & Literacy. Every student, and students of all ages, will learn to read well, read often, enjoy reading, and achieve literacy through a focused alliance of family support and powerful classroom instruction.
2. Self-Directed Learning. Every student will become a self-directed learner through teaching that incorporates study skills and learning strategies, homework practices that build effective study habits, and school and family guidance that encourages self-directed learning.
3. Respect & Responsibility. Every student will develop a sense of responsibility and respect for self and others that fosters social and emotional well-being through consistent direction and support from the family and the school.
4. Community. The school will function as a community of its members – students, their families, teachers, administrators, school staff, and volunteers.

Further Resources Available

<http://www.schoolcommunitynetwork.org/> - School Community Network website

<http://www.schoolcommunitynetwork.org/resources/> - Parent and School Resources, including Parent-Child Activities in English and Spanish, searchable databases, and more

<http://www.indistar.org/action/Community.html> - Indicators in Action - School Community Course, 5 professional development modules with video clips of effective practices in action (Courses on Instruction and Leadership are also available)

<http://www.centeril.org/personalcompetencies/> - Personal Competencies - Supporting the teacher's ability to influence a student's learning and personal competencies (cognitive, metacognitive, motivational, and social/emotional) by virtue of their personal knowledge of and interaction with the student and the student's family.

Communication

Communication between the school and the home includes five essential topics: 1) what parents can expect from the school – its programs, curriculum, activities, procedures, and policies; 2) what the school can expect from parents – the curriculum of the home; 3) how the parents' child is progressing; 4) how the school can help the parents; and 5) how the parents can help the school.

Typically, schools are good at providing information about their programs and some indication of how the child is progressing. The school probably provides some avenues for two-way communication about these two topics. A greater challenge lies in giving due attention to what the school should expect from parents, how the school can help parents in their role, and how parents can help the school in its role. Also, most schools need to work hard at creating opportunities for true communication – conversation – between parents and school personnel, and between parents and other parents. This requires outreach to parents, and it requires careful linkage between parent-child interactions and school learning.

From *The Mega System: Deciding. Learning. Connecting.* Available at www.adi.org

Please note that “parent” as used throughout this document includes any family member or guardian acting in the parental role for a student.

What You Will Find In Communication

Learning Standards

Information Technology

Teacher to Parent Telephone Calls

Passing Notes

Newsletters

Parent Bulletin Boards

Additional Resources

Community Building Ideas



Resources for Communication

The following information is from *Beyond the Bake Sale: The Essential Guide to Family-School Partnerships*, by Anne T. Henderson, Karen L. Mapp, Vivian R. Johnson, and Don Davies (p. 94).

Teacher outreach to parents pays off

In a study of Title I elementary schools, researchers found that teacher outreach to parents improved student progress in both reading and math. When teachers did these three things, student performance improved at a 40–50 percent higher rate:

1. Met face-to-face with each family in their class at the beginning of the year
2. Sent families materials each week on ways to help their children at home
3. Telephoned routinely with news about how their children were doing, not just when they were acting up or having problems

Henderson, Anne T., Mapp, Karen L., Johnson, Vivian, R., & Davies, Don. (2007). *Beyond the Bake Sale: The Essential Guide to Family–School Partnerships*. New York, NY: The New Press.

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Learning Standards



Learning Standards

Learning standards are guideposts that tell us what students should know and be able to do at each grade level. Schools base their curricula on learning standards. Teachers use learning standards to plan their lessons. Assessment tests show how students are doing relative to the learning standards for their grade level.

Most states post their learning standards on the state department of education's website. Parents can be directed to the appropriate site. The school might also link its own website to the standards. Districts might have their own adaptations of state standards.

It is important that parents understand learning standards. We don't necessarily expect parents to teach their children the concepts and skills included in learning standards – that is the job of teachers. But parents can certainly reinforce what children learn at school and provide enriching activities. Parents can also monitor their children's progress and know when extra help might be needed.

Most state departments of education and other organizations have developed parents' guides for learning standards. These are usually available at little or no cost and may also be found on websites. Some states and organizations have also developed early learning standards for children younger than school age. These are very helpful to parents of preschoolers.

Parent-teacher-student conferences and open houses are good opportunities to acquaint parents with learning standards.

States organize learning standards in different ways. In some states, learning standards are listed for each learning goal the state has established and grade-level benchmarks are provided. The benchmarks are most helpful for parents because they show what is expected of a student at a specific grade level. When discussing standards, it is important to talk with parents about the grade-level expectations.

Discuss learning standards (and benchmarks). Discuss how learning standards relate to learning objectives, the curriculum, teachers' instructional plans, and the way your school reports student progress to parents.

Learning standards provide students, parents, and teachers with a clear understanding of what students are expected to learn at every grade level, and as such, serve as a roadmap to a quality education. Outcomes improve when students, their families, and teachers are on the same page, working together toward shared goals.

Example Standard for English/Language Arts:

Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English capitalization, punctuation, and spelling when writing.

Sample benchmark for the above standard:

Grade 2 (by the end of the listed grade, the student should be able to):

- a. Capitalize holidays, product names, and geographic names.
- b. Use commas in greetings and closings of letters.
- c. Use an apostrophe to form contractions and frequently occurring possessives.
- d. Generalize learned spelling patterns when writing words (e.g., cage → badge; boy → boil).
- e. Consult reference materials, including beginning dictionaries, as needed to check and correct spellings.

Suggestions:

1. Include information about learning standards in Student Handbook.
2. Discuss learning standards at the Open House.
3. Put a link to learning standards and explanation on school website.
4. Keep a set of learning standards in the Family Resource Library.
5. Provide parents with a list of learning standards to be addressed each grading period.
6. Review standards at parent-teacher-student conferences.
7. Base a Family Night parent-student activity on a learning standard and discuss how it is related to the standard.
8. At a Family Night, set up “fair-like” activity centers in the gym, with a teacher at each activity and the activity based on a learning standard.
9. Post example standards and related student work on a Parents’ Bulletin Board.
10. In the school newsletter, include parent-child activities that are related to standards.

“To Do” List for Acquainting Parents with Learning Standards and Benchmarks	
Activity (What)	Timeline (When)



Resources for Learning Standards

The following information is from *Beyond the Bake Sale: The Essential Guide to Family-School Partnerships*, by Anne T. Henderson, Karen L. Mapp, Vivian R. Johnson, and Don Davies (p. 99).

Prepare Parents to Ask About Academics

A middle school principal offers this advice: “Give parents workshops about asking good questions at conferences and meetings with teachers. Have them practice and do role-plays. They should not be asking ‘How is my child behaving?’ but ‘At what level is he reading?’

“Next, they should ask: ‘Show me level-four work so I can compare it to my child’s work.’ Questions focused on academics – this is what’s going to drive better instruction at the school.”

Develop an education checkup card for parents to bring with them. List questions that parents can ask (and – just as important – questions that teachers are expecting):

- Is my child performing at a proficient level (up to standard) in basic skills? If not, is my child above or below? (If it’s below, ask: What is your plan for helping my child catch up? How can I help?)
- What do my child’s test scores show? What are his/her strengths and weaknesses?
- Can we go over some examples of my child’s work? Will you explain your grading standards?
- Does my child need extra help in any area (including adjusting to school)? What do you recommend? How can we work together to help my child?

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Preparing Parent Advocates to Focus on the Main Thing: Achievement

To find out what they need to know about their children's program or placement, the Center for Law and Education recommends in *Urgent Message for Parents* that parents ask questions like these. Does your school encourage parents to ask these questions? Are your teachers and counselors ready to respond when parents ask them?

1. To find out if your child is in a high-level or lower-level program or class:
 - ◆ What are the different programs in the school? Are there gifted, magnet, advanced, or honors programs for high-achieving students? What about remedial or regular classes – are they lower-level? Is the school tracked by classroom, with some classes at a lower level than others?
 - ◆ What level class is my child in? How many learning levels are there? Where does my child's program or placement fall?

IF YOUR CHILD IS NOT IN A HIGHER-LEVEL CLASS:

- ◆ Is my daughter learning the same things as the higher-level classes? If not, how will she meet the standards for proficient work? What does she need to do to move up to a higher-level class?
 - ◆ How will the school help my son catch up so he can learn higher-level skills as well as the basics? What can I do to help him? Where else can he get extra help?
 - ◆ If my daughter stays in this program, how will she learn the skills needed to do well in middle and high school? What should my daughter be studying now so that she will be able to go to a four-year college?
2. To find out what your child is learning:
 - ◆ Is my child's work at or above standards for her age?
 - ◆ Does my child understand what he must do to meet the standards?
 - ◆ Are most students in the class above or below proficiency in meeting standards?
 - ◆ What do the standards say the students should know and be able to do?
 - ◆ What guidelines do you use for grading? How are they related to the standards?
 3. To find out if your child is getting the help he or she may need:
 - ◆ Is my son falling behind in any area? If so, what must be done to help him?
 - ◆ Does my daughter have any problems with learning? Is she getting the help she needs?
 - ◆ Is my child getting enough help to catch up quickly? Is it working?
 - ◆ How can I help?

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