Standard II
Element D

3   ***Uses a variety of methods to initiate communication with families and/or significant adults in the school and community.***

Effective and open communication with families and/or significant adults is the cornerstone for building positive, respectful relationships between the classroom and a student's home. It impacts the degree to which families become engaged in supporting a student's academic and social growth at school and their sense of partnership with the school.

> School life has changed. Many classrooms are profoundly different from those in which parents sat 30 years ago. The adult is no longer the single authority figure imparting wisdom to the uninitiated. Students often command authority with their knowledge. There is a focus on talk as students share and learn from each other…teachers are challenged to help students learn how to convey the world of school to those who are not participating in it and may not even be familiar with it. (Costa & Kallick, 1995)

Tips for communicating effectively with families and/or significant adults:
- Communicate with families early in the school year as a means of introduction. This may include expectations for the classroom and opportunities for family involvement. Also provide contact information so families feel free to communicate with the teacher when they have concerns or questions.
- Communication should be timely and consistent. Families should be notified of concerns as soon as they arise. Waiting to contact families can create frustration and distrust. Families should never be "surprised" to hear of the teacher's concerns because of lack of communication.
- Communicate positive news about student performance more often than negative news. When families only receive negative communication about a student, it can discourage them from becoming involved as they may begin to feel they are unable to effectively support the student.
- Share ideas and resources families may use at home to support a student. Helping families to use the same language at home for student expectations at school can create a strong partnership between the school and a student's home that promotes consistency and structure.
- Involve families in creating strategies for use in supporting students. Asking families what they have used at home can communicate the importance of family partnerships and the importance a teacher places on their involvement.
- Use language that is clear and understandable to families and significant adults. The teacher should avoid using educational terms or acronyms that may be unfamiliar to families. This can cause them to feel inadequate to support the student and reluctant to become engaged in the educational process.

Refer to this external resource for additional information:
- Student Observation Form for Parents
  http://printables.scholastic.com/content/collateral_resources/pdf/00/COL00_002.pdf
  > Document is an example for how teachers may involve families in identifying a student's strengths and areas of needs.

4   ***Shares feedback on student progress with families and/or significant adults.***

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The school-home connection is critical for student success, which makes providing feedback to parents so important. When parents have an understanding of what their child is learning and how they are progressing towards academic goals, they feel connected. They are motivated to be involved and contribute to their child's success.

A teacher who provides actionable feedback to families gives clear suggestions for how families and/or significant adults can support their student's success. At the elementary level, for example, a teacher can talk to parents and/or significant adults about reading with their student and asking comprehension questions or about math facts and counting money, Feedback to parents and/or significant adults can be provided in a variety of ways, during parent-teacher conferences, phone calls, emails, and/or written notes.

One of the most common avenues for providing feedback to parents and significant adults is the parent-teacher conference.

> Everyone likes to be an insider—someone "in the know." Play on this human trait during your annual parent-teacher conferences. Because every parent has an inherent interest in attending their child's conference, this is a unique opportunity to invite input from parents and help them feel comfortable working with you. This comfort can prove to be a base from which parent engagement can flourish. (Ridnouer, 2011)

Elements of effective feedback to families and/or significant adults:
- Provides specific data on a student's academic work and explains what a student is doing that is helping him make progress towards academic goals.
  - Sharing student needs and progress can be a collaborative decision between the teacher and student. While the teacher should select some student work to share, students should be allowed to select others. Student selections should be accompanied by a written explanation of why they chose a particular item to share. This explanation may reveal how the work reflects the student's view of himself/herself as a learner and why the piece of work is important and representative of their progress. Sharing the student's reflections with families and/or significant adults can bring them into the feedback spiral of reflection and learning. It can also support the development of a relationship that is built on respect for the student and their family and/or significant adults.
- Identifies next steps by explaining what the student is doing successfully as well as areas for growth.
  - When the teacher only provides feedback that is negative, parents can feel overwhelmed or defensive. Therefore, it is important for the teacher to recognize a student's progress and share this with families and/or significant adults. This can lead families and/or significant adults to be more open to receiving feedback about areas that need to improve. No matter how problematic a child's behavior might be, noting improvement in some area, even though small, establishes a tone that can contribute to further progress.
- Provides clear actionable ways the parent can support at home. This may include resources such as websites, flash cards, practice worksheets, etc.
  - When providing feedback to parents and/or significant adults, the teacher needs to provide specific examples of how the student has grown as well as areas for improvement and ways families and/or significant adults can support a student's growth.

Refer to this internal resource for additional information:
- [Examples and Non-examples of Quality Feedback to Families](#)
  - Document provides explanations for why feedback examples are of high quality for families.

Refer to these external resources for additional information:

[Click here to go back to the table of contents and view the resource guide in its entirety.](#)

- Article: "Parent–Teacher Conference Tip Sheets for Principals, Teachers, and Parents" from Harvard Family Research Project
  http://www.hfrp.org/var/hfrp/storage/fckeditor/File/Parent-Teacher-ConferenceTipSheet-100610.pdf
    - Article provides tips for how to ensure parent-teacher conferences are effective for teachers and families.
- Excerpt from Everyday *Engagement* by Katy Ridnouer
  http://www.ascd.org/publications/books/109009/chapters/Making-Inroads-with-Resisters.aspx
    - Excerpt provides ideas for how and why teachers should involve students in parent-teacher conferences.

Planning/Coaching Questions

- How do you best create a classroom environment that is inviting to students' families and/or significant adults?
- How do you ensure that the relationships you have with students, families, and/or significant adults are respectful?
- What methods have you used to communicate with families and/or significant adults?
- How do you coordinate the flow of information between students' families and/or significant adults and other colleagues who provide student services?
- How do you ensure families and/or significant adults are aware of services available to students and their families?
- How do you recognize and seek solutions to obstacles to family and community participation?

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