



District of Columbia  
Office of the State Superintendent of Education

# Family Tools: Effective School-Home Communication

Modified from Center for the Education and Study of Diverse Populations  
<http://www.cesdp.nmhu.edu/>

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## Overview

Modified from resources created by the [Center for the Education and Study of Diverse Populations](#), this document for families addresses the importance of effective school-family communication. Parents, families and teachers are invited to consider their understanding of school programs and policies, student progress, how to respond effectively to students' problems and how to improve communication with schools and community members.

## Research

Research indicates that it is the quality of teacher-parent interaction that contributes most to student achievement. *"Communication is clear when educators and families communicate about school programs and students' progress in varied, clear and productive ways"* (Epstein, 1996). The researchers recommend using the following strategies to improve family-school communication:

### Make It Positive

- Ask teachers to share positive achievements and student's progress regularly.
- Ask how teachers and parents can be responsive to the strengths and needs of the student.

### Make It Practical

- Ask and look for resources to understand the curriculum, content and language standards.
- Be specific when communicating concerns with parents or teachers.
- Ask specific suggestions about what parents can do to help their student in challenging areas.
- Talk with parents and students about learning objectives and how they are tested.

### Make It Personal

- Parents can request information regarding teacher qualifications.
- Check the school website for information about staff, programs and initiatives.
- Communicate in person, via e-mail, notes and phone call with any questions, concerns and praises.
- Parents can ask for information about their child's individual test scores, assessments data and samples of work.

## Practices to Improve Communication with Teachers

These recommendations will help you to establish an effective home-school communication. Check those that you have done and review the checklist every two months to keep track of home-school interactions.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Introduce yourself to your child's teachers early in the school year.</li></ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Find out what the overall learning expectations are, how much homework to expect and how you can reinforce the lesson being taught.</li></ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• If you cannot make a parent-teacher conference, reschedule for another date or time that fits your schedule.</li></ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Check-in with your child's teacher on a regular basis.</li></ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Parents can request a call to discuss student's progress or to order that progress reports be sent home.</li></ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• When you do not understand a memo, school policy or program, ask your school staff to explain it.</li></ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Fill out surveys sent out by the school.</li></ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Visit the school website regularly to find out more about the school, events and staff.</li></ul>

## Parent/Family Communication Reflection

Use this checklist to rate the school-home communication and think about specific questions and actions you can take to improve communication.

	Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Strongly Agree	Specific questions to ask at school	Actions to take to improve communication
1. I receive communication from the school in a variety of ways such as newsletters, e-mail, home visits, phone calls, notes, etc.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		
2. I have received or requested clear information about school policies and procedures, discipline procedures, assessments tools and school goals.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		
3. I receive information from the school in a format and language that I understand.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		
4. I feel parent-teacher communication is planned to fit into my schedule and meets my language needs.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		
5. I share information about my child's strengths, learning preferences, concerns, attitudes and what motivates my child.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		
6. I received or requested information about the curriculum plans, content standards, student expectations and how I can help.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		

## Communications Ideas for Parents

These actions will help you communicate with your child's teachers and school staff. Choose those that you think you can do and then revisit this list in about a month or two to check your progress.

<input type="checkbox"/>	<b>Introduce Yourself</b>	Introduce yourself to your child's teacher as early as possible in the year. Let the teacher know that you are a supportive parent and want to be involved in your child's learning experience.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<b>Don't Be A Stranger</b>	Parents can send a message to support when they take the time to visit the school. Make an effort to have regular contact with school personnel. Make arrangements with the classroom teachers to occasionally visit the classroom, have lunch with your child or volunteer at the school. Request a video conference to virtually meet with your child's teacher.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<b>Touch Base</b>	Talk with your child each day about what goes on at the school. Learn the language of the classroom and use it to question your child about his/her day.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<b>Conferences</b>	Attend parent-teacher conferences. Ask for a meeting if you have concerns or questions at other times of the year.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<b>Share Information</b>	Help your child's teacher by informing him or her of the learning styles and strategies that you use at home that work with your child. Also, share the language and culture of your home.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<b>Question Privately</b>	It is important that students view parents and teachers as a collaborative team. Questions or concerns should be handled privately between the parent and teacher. It is important to let your child know that you are communicating with the teacher.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<b>Ask for Email Visits</b>	Sometimes your schedule and the school don't match up. E-mail is an efficient way to communicate with school personnel. Check with your local library for internet access if you do not have a home computer.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<b>Keep Perspective</b>	Parents can sometimes have difficulty separating school concerns and issues from the emotional attachment they have for their child. Remember that the school is your partner, and by working together positively, you can help your child succeed to his or her fullest potential.

## Understanding Standards-Based Education

If you have questions or concerns about student expectations and standards-based education, use the following suggestions and questions as a guide.

<b>1. Ask how you can better understand the standards. (WIDA, CCSS, NGSS...)</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• How do I get a copy of the standards?</li><li>• What is my child expected to learn?</li><li>• What can I do if my child needs more challenge or support?</li><li>• How can I support my child?</li></ul>
<b>2. Ask how your school uses the standards.</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Who makes the decision about what is taught and how it is taught in this school?</li><li>• How do I know how my child is doing in relation to the WIDA and/or Common Core State Standards?</li><li>• How often will my child be tested?</li><li>• How will I know the result of the tests my child takes?</li></ul>
<b>3. At the start of the school year, ask about expectations for your child's learning in content areas and language development.</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• What do you expect my child to learn this year in reading, math, science...?</li><li>• What are the most important things for the children in your classroom to learn this year?</li><li>• What can I do at home to help my child learn these skills?</li><li>• How much time should my child spend on homework each day?</li><li>• What types of writing projects will my child have this year? In which language?</li></ul>
<b>4. During the year, follow up on how your child is doing.</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• How is my child's work evaluated using the Common Core State Standards?</li><li>• How's my child's doing in the English language development?</li><li>• Do you use specific criteria (scoring guides, rubrics, etc.) to show progress? If so, can I have a copy of them?</li><li>• How often is the reporting of progress made to parents?</li><li>• How will I know if my child reaches the "proficiency" level that is expected? What does it mean?</li></ul>

## Ways to Communicate the Importance of Education to Children

The best thing you can do to help your child succeed is to stay interested in his or her education and share the joy of learning, as well as model good habits in reading and writing. Students actually spend much more time at home than they do in the classroom. How they spend their time outside school affects their academic success.

Which of these things can you do to help your child succeed?

<input type="checkbox"/>	<p><b>Let your child know that education matters.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Work with your child every day so that he or she knows that education is a top priority.</li><li>• Ask specific questions, such as “How did your math test go?” or “Was your science experiment fun?”</li><li>• Find out about specific activities carried out in the classroom/virtual learning to know what questions to ask.</li></ul>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<p><b>Learn as much as you can about your child’s school.</b> Get to know your child’s teachers and let them know you want to support your child’s education.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Attend parent-teacher conferences.</li><li>• Visit the school’s website.</li><li>• Join a parent-teacher organization at the school.</li><li>• Visit the classroom, or volunteer to do something for the school.</li><li>• If it’s difficult for you to get to the school, ask about how you can help at home or come up with ideas of your own.</li></ul>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<p><b>Extend your child’s learning.</b> Every waking moment is an opportunity to learn.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Limit the amount of time your child spends watching television and playing videogames.</li><li>• Make sure your child is reading and writing and that he or she sees you modeling reading and writing.</li><li>• Take your child to libraries, museums, zoos, outdoor sites, businesses and other places that can help him or her learn.</li></ul>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<p><b>Be sure your child is prepared for school daily.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Make sure your child gets a good night’s sleep and a healthy meal before heading out the door.</li><li>• Check with your child and his/her teacher to make sure that homework and instructional tasks assigned are completed.</li></ul>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<p><b>Encourage your child and talk about role models in your community.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Point out the people who have a college degree or a professional career and how they contribute to your local community.</li><li>• Talk about career and choices and how doing well in school is connected to having choices in life.</li><li>• Reinforce the importance of valuing your culture, heritage and language.</li></ul>

## Planning Guide for Parent-Teacher Conferences

Complete this form before attending your child's parent-teacher conference and bring it with you to the conference.

Parent-Teacher Conference	
Child's Name: _____	Parent's Name: _____
Teacher's Name: _____	Grade Level: _____
Conference Date: _____	Time: _____
Things I Want to Talk About	
1. What I think my son/daughter does well at home:	
2. What I think my son/daughter does well at school:	
3. One issue I would like to discuss with the teacher:	
About My Child	
1. Important things in my child's life I think the teacher should know about:	
2. Ask your child: What do you like about school?	
3. What do you dislike about school? Is there anything you would like me to ask or tell your teacher?	
4. One question or concern I have:	
Share these with the teacher.	

### **At the Conference**

1. Is my child at grade level with his/her reading, writing and math?
2. What are my child's strengths in class?
3. What are my child's weaknesses in class?
4. What do you expect from children in your class (behavior, work habits, etc.)?
5. Which benchmarks and standards has my child achieved so far?
6. How can I reach you if I have any questions or want ideas on how to help my child succeed in school?

### **After the Conference**

1. Talk about the parent-teacher conference with your child. Praise your child's strengths.
2. Start a folder about your child. Include in it:
  - Report cards
  - Samples of work
  - Notes from the teacher
  - Test scores
3. Make a calendar and mark:
  - Meetings
  - Important events
  - Social events at your child's school
4. Check your child's class work and homework every day.
5. Keep talking with the teacher to discuss your child's progress.

## Home Habits to Support Learning<sup>1</sup>

Healthy routines can help students with the transition to remote learning, and families can support their students to set up and maintain these routines. Use this checklist to prepare a learning environment at home to promote continuous education.

<input type="checkbox"/> Always <input type="checkbox"/> Sometimes <input type="checkbox"/> Never	<b>Make a schedule.</b> Most kids are used to having a schedule for the school day, recreating something similar at home can ease the transition to a different learning environment. Ask your child’s teacher for the schedule and date and time for online sessions.
<input type="checkbox"/> Always <input type="checkbox"/> Sometimes <input type="checkbox"/> Never	<b>Build in breaks.</b> Incorporate some sort of recess to promote physical activities and outdoor time following the social distance recommendations. Outside time and fresh air have huge physical and mental benefits.
<input type="checkbox"/> Always <input type="checkbox"/> Sometimes <input type="checkbox"/> Never	<b>Get crafty.</b> Use resources easily accessible at home to create art projects. Art is an important part of education. Creating art at home provides parents with the opportunity to share quality time and culturally relevant traditions with children.
<input type="checkbox"/> Always <input type="checkbox"/> Sometimes <input type="checkbox"/> Never	<b>Stick to a sleep schedule.</b> Encourage your child to keep healthy sleep habits and avoid staying up late playing video games or excessive use of electronic devices, especially at night.

<sup>1</sup> OSSE Distance Learning Resources for LEAs and Families <https://osse.dc.gov/distancelearning>

## Supporting Student's Distance Learning

Family members can support the student's distance learning by knowing what your child will do, learn and practice. The effective use of technology devices and quality offline activities have a great impact on student's transition into virtual or hybrid instruction. Use this checklist as a guide to ensure that your child is ready for distance learning.

### 1. Stay connected with your child's school and teacher.

- Ask your child's school or teacher about procedures, online instruction, dates and times.
- Identify the platform, username and password to access the online instruction.
- Have your child's teacher's email, phone number or another communication channel available.

- Provide a journal or notebook to your child.
- Provide the space and time where your child can write, sketch or draw.
- Set a time to talk as a family about how everyone is feeling.

### 3. Check your child's work.

- Make sure to know and understand the assignments, discussion boards, forums and projects that are accomplished at the student's own pace.
- Establish a time during the day to check on the instructional tasks assigned to your child.
- Talk about what content and/or learning tasks were assigned.
- Ask your child what was his/her favorite activity and why.
- Ask your child which task was most difficult to accomplish and why.

### 4. Establish clear and consistent communication with your child to share learning activities.

- Always use the language in which you feel more comfortable talking with your child. You don't have to speak English to help.
- Read aloud and describe what are you thinking about the text.
- Describe what you will do during the day and ask your child to describe what he/she will do.
- Describe step by step the procedure to cook or fix something at home.
- Include your child in activities such as taking care of pets, setting the table for dinner or other housework.