

January 2018 Question of the Month

What are 1-2 things that district leaders can do to signal that engagement with families is important to their staff?

Communication

- Be intentional with messages and communication with staff about parents, positioning parents and caregivers as valuable partners, worthy of respect, knowledgeable, and caring.
- District Leaders might show a willingness to hear/we heard you-parents and families by scheduling and engaging in face to face conversations. Actions taken and/or being taken by District Leaders to address parents and families concerns and challenges should be shared.
- Post pictures of staff with parents!
- Multi-generation Families are committed to the success of their children as they learn. However, data shows an inordinate number of parents and families are experiencing additional needs for understanding about 'how to' explicitly and intentionally teach the requisites: literacy, critical thinking and language at home. Therefore, Districts Leaders should continue to encourage and support the development-provide multi-generations of families relevant and practical resources and information, strategies, processes, and methods for reading proficiently, problem solving, listening, and communicating-writing, speaking clearly.

Accountability and Support

- Place family engagement on every district leadership meeting agenda.
- Provide time and require staff to receive high quality professional development to develop their knowledge and skills for partnering with families.
- Fund family engagement efforts and look at how we're holding people accountable via evaluations, etc.
- Create policies and expectations for school building leaders to communicate regularly with families and to have a variety of communication methods that support two-way communication. This could include a Facebook group, web site, texting, paper documents.
- Require family engagement strategies in all building school improvement plans, linked to each school goal for academics and climate.
- Provide supports for data collection and analysis of family feedback for schools. This could include supporting regular family surveys and focus groups. This data collection process should be intentional, gathering feedback from families who are representative of the community and student population. I like to call this a "culture of listening" where the schools are continually seeking,

welcoming and acting on family feedback. Probably the most critical component is the action. Families need to see that their input makes a difference.

- Create a district parent/caregiver advisory council or work group that has parent/caregiver representatives from each building who relay information to and from the district committee to the school and families.
- At DCPS, we just recently went through a strategic planning process, both for the organization as a whole and for the Office of Family and Public Engagement. The resulting guiding principles signal to both internal and external stakeholders that engagement with families and the broader community is critical. The [DCPS Capital Commitment](#) calls out “Engage Families” as one of the top five priorities for the district, and [the vision statement for the Office of Family and Public Engagement](#) is “Every student’s success is accelerated by partnerships with families and the community.” Of course, you can’t just put your values on paper and expect them to be true, you have to live them. The “putting them on paper” is just an important first step for setting clear and common expectations about how we engage families.

What are 1-2 ways teachers can signal to families that their involvement is welcomed?

Communication

- Contact parents early in the school year with a welcoming message via video, print, photo, etc., and support families by providing understandable information and listening to families throughout the school year.
- Send personal invitations for parents to participate or have visible sign-up sheets.
- Let families know what ways they can be engaged at school and use tools such as the [Remind App](#) to communicate.
- Make personal, positive phone calls.

Relationship Building and Support

- Reach out to parents with requests to learn more about the family and the child (Funds of Knowledge) – and using this information in their classroom instruction.
- Reach out as close to the start of the year as possible to welcome families, introduce themselves and express how excited they are to get to know the child and family throughout the year. After that initial conversation, we encourage a ratio of 5 positive communications to one negative communication to reinforce the foundation of a trusting relationship.
- Promote [home visits](#).
- Use family feedback and input to inform their practice. We call this the “feedback loop”. When teachers honor the knowledge and expertise that families bring to the table, they are able to enter into a true partnership that ultimately benefits students.

- Support the need to provide parents and families with additional support as they work to teach-educate their children.
- Understand and respect the varied levels of parent and family preparedness to support and advocate for the successful education of their children.
- Recognize the many ways families are involved and honor their efforts. Too often teachers create such limited roles for families, or expect families to enact school at home – rather than recognizing and encouraging the learning and encouragement that is happening in homes every day.
- Universally designing parent and caregiver involvement opportunities so that all families can access them. This requires motivating parents and caregivers and helping them understand the importance of their involvement. Families are busy and facing many responsibilities. They need to know that their involvement will benefit their child, it's doable – and it will be enjoyable. It also requires multiple ways to be involved. This could mean attending an event at the school OR, watching a video OR, reading an article in their home language OR, doing an activity at home OR.....