

# Evaluating & Improving My School's Communication

It's parent teacher conference season again! This is the perfect time of year to take a good hard look at our school's communication with parents and families. What do they want to know? Are we communicating enough? How can we do a better job? Fear not, this month we've compiled resources and inspiration to help your school improve communication with parents and families!



## Are We Really Communicating?

Research shows that to make a sustainable impact, **activities need to engage 90%** of the population of parents/families. Take our quick 3 question quiz below to see how strong your school's communication really is!

1. More than **90%** of parents/guardians attend parent teacher conferences at our school.  
 Yes  No
2. Our school has a predictable process for updating and informing parents/guardians of important information on a **regular** weekly or monthly basis.  
 Yes  No
3. Our communication is **two-way**, meaning parents/guardians have an outlet to communicate with us as often as we communicate with them.  
 Yes  No

\*If you answered "No" to one or more questions above, check out our resources below, and consider attending a FREE Parent Engagement training in your area!

## What do parents want?

Research from a 2016 survey completed by the Speak Up Research Project indicated parent preferences when it comes to communication. With both teacher communications and school communications, parents have identified six essential characteristics for effective communications and engagement:

1. **Convenience:** Make it easy for parents to get the information in a way that is most convenient for them.
2. **Push, not search:** Don't make parents search for the information, push it out to them so it is easy to see it in a timely manner.
3. **Personalized, not standardized:** Give parents information that is appropriate and applicable for their child, his or her class, grade level, and school.
4. **Timeliness:** Make sure the information being communicated is timely and current.
5. **Realization of busyness:** Realize parents are busy and need communications to be concise, to the point, and relevant.
6. **High impact/high ROI information:** Make sure the information you are providing is actionable for parents and important for them to know.

Source: [Speak Up Research Survey with Blackboard](#)

# Expectation vs. Reality

Table 2: Comparative views: Parents vs. principals' perspectives on the most effective ways for teachers to communicate with parents

COMMUNICATIONS VEHICLES	PARENTS OF ELEMENTARY STUDENTS	ELEMENTARY SCHOOL PRINCIPALS	PARENTS OF MIDDLE SCHOOL STUDENTS	MIDDLE SCHOOL PRINCIPALS	PARENTS OF HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS	HIGH SCHOOL PRINCIPALS
Personal phone calls	32%	72%	33%	75%	33%	71%
Face to face meetings	45%	73%	35%	67%	30%	58%
Personal emails	74%	64%	82%	72%	83%	73%
School portal	21%	30%	26%	42%	25%	37%
Push info through a mobile app to parents' devices	22%	28%	22%	30%	20%	26%
Auto phone messages	15%	23%	13%	22%	11%	21%
Handwritten notes sent home	27%	31%	16%	13%	10%	10%

Data from the [Speak Up Research Project Study](#) found that there may be a disconnect between what principals think is effective communication, and what parents see as the best way to provide them with information.

Have you asked parents for feedback on communication? Which of the vehicles in Table 2 you use to update your school families?

## Strategies to Improve Communication with Parents

- ✓ **Ask Parents What They Want:** Make sure you ask parents about the best way to communicate with them. See a sample survey [here](#).
- ✓ **Use Various Methods of Communication:** Many parents are not able to check personal email or social media at work. Sending communication in multiple ways can ensure that all parents have access to the information!
- ✓ **Create A Two-Way Communication System:** Parents need the opportunity to ask questions, clarify, or provide feedback on the information given. Giving them an outlet to do so goes a long way in improving communication.
- ✓ **Make it Regular:** Communication should be sent out at regular and predictable intervals so that parents know when to expect information.
- ✓ **ENGAGE!:** Provide action steps and opportunities to get involved.

## Technology to the Rescue?

For some schools using technology to improve communication with parents can be a little intimidating. Check out the videos below for a little inspiration on using technology to communicate with parents and families.



Teacher2Teacher: Family Engagement



Teachers using Facebook to Engage Families

### Resources:

[FREE Professional Learning Trainings on Parent Collaboration](#)  
[ASCD Article on Increasing Communication](#)

[Edutopia Article on Building Community](#)  
[Responsive Classroom Article on Strategies](#)