



Do's and Don'ts of Communicating with Families of ELL Students

Regardless of their English proficiency levels, parents, guardians and other adult caregivers depend on basic school communications to stay involved in their children's education. ELL students have the greatest opportunity to succeed when the lines of communication between family and school are nurtured at both the classroom and building levels.

Be clear about the purpose of meetings. Set goals and communicate them prior to every meeting or conversation so teachers and families have shared, realistic expectations.

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Be mindful of the potential power differential between parents or guardians and teachers. Negative past experiences (as either a student or a parent), immigration status, different cultural norms and expectations, and lack of English language fluency can cause discomfort and lead families to disengage from the school.

Provide a translator if you don't speak the parents' or guardians' primary language fluently. The nuance and detail necessary to convey how adult family members might best engage in the student's education should be communicated in the family's primary language.

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Start the meeting on a positive note. Try to find an area where the student is doing well academically, socially, athletically, etc. Beginning the meeting with what is wrong or what needs improvement diminishes trust and can make parents feel defensive and anxious about their child's prospects at the school.

Use terms that everyone understands. If there are some concepts or terms that need explanation, provide necessary detail and consider providing additional preparatory materials to families in advance of the scheduled meeting. Avoid acronyms and jargon.

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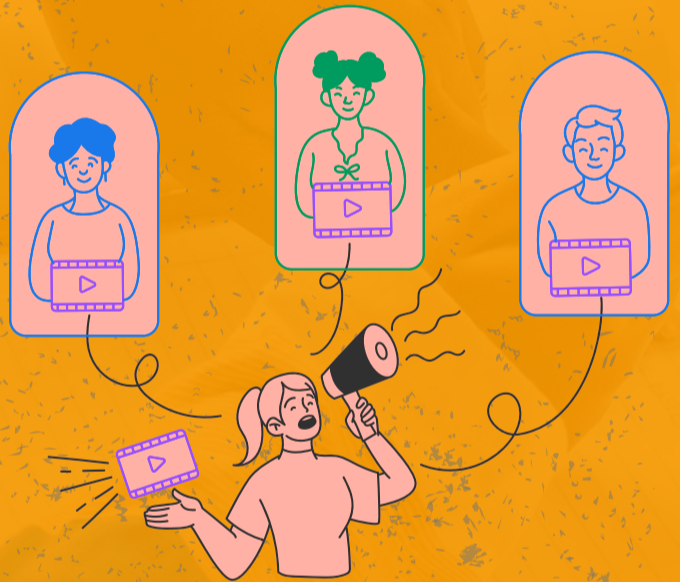


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Visit the family in their home. The goal of this practice is to learn about how knowledge is transmitted in the student's home, to get to know the family, and to discover their expectations related to schools and teachers, and to understand the family's academic goals for their child.

Don'ts

Use the student as the translator. Even if parent-teacher conferences are student led, they may well become misled if parents and teachers are unable to communicate independently. Using the student as the translator can put the student in an awkward position where loyalty and respect for their teachers and their family can feel contradictory.



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Assume that any bilingual adult will be a successful translator. Using families of other students, or other students themselves, compromises privacy. What is gained in increased clarity will be lost if families feel embarrassed or disrespected.

