

TOOL: Strategies for Establishing School Family Partnerships

Use Two-Way Communication With Families

Orient families to what SEL is, why it's essential to high-quality education, and the roles in which they may provide feedback and input about schoolwide SEL. Two-way communication vehicles (see below) can maximize teamwork and minimize misunderstandings.

- Set a positive tone by communicating with families at the beginning of the school year. Start off by gathering information about family preferences, talents, and availability. Engage families with welcoming letters and learn more about them by asking them to complete brief surveys about family preferences for school-home communications and involvement and their perceptions of SEL (Albright, Weissberg, & Dusenbury, 2011).
- Ask families to complete “talent cards” or student information sheets to get family perceptions of their student’s strengths. Inviting families to write a letter describing what they love about their child, their strengths, and the ways they like to learn can help schools develop a better understanding of students and proactively begin relationship-building.
- Inform families about available school programs, activities, and policies that support SEL. Sharing SEL policies and practices helps families understand how the school operates and encourages them to partner with the school in supporting student performance.
- Communicate with families about SEL activities using regularly scheduled formal and informal communications, such as class or school newsletters.
- Be flexible and creative in communication about SEL. Find what works for different families. Some families may respond best to written or electronic communications, while others may respond to in-person communication.
 - Use “notes-back-and-forth” or a traveling journal where school staff can highlight students’ successes and SEL skills. Families can reply with information about SEL in the home. This encourages communication not only when students are experiencing challenges.
 - Use text or email communication.
 - Create a social media page to communicate to parents broadly about school events.
- Post important SEL information on the school’s website. Such information might be related to SEL curriculum, homework assignments, climate and culture, and upcoming events.

Engage Families

- Invite families to get involved in SEL by offering volunteer opportunities (e.g., in classes, outside of classes, extracurricular activities, or field trips) and welcoming their input.
- Have a translator available for face-to-face meetings.
- Encourage parents to attend events like family nights or a “family of the week” program to share occupations, interests, hobbies, culture, and stories.
- Give families access to school facilities like computer labs, libraries, basketball courts and weight rooms. Offer classes and engaging experiences so families can experience the school as a center of community activities (Jeynes, 2011).

<p>Increase Family involvement in Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide families with information about children’s social and emotional development and how they can support this development at home. • Provide families with information about homework policies and how to support student homework. • Assign SEL activities that involve families as homework. • Listen to families’ ideas about ways their children’s SEL skills are benefiting them at school and at home. • Listen to families’ stories and ideas about ways they are promoting SEL at home or suggestions for experiences that can be shared. • Host informational question-and-answer sessions for families so they can better understand schoolwide SEL and any other school activities. • Organize workshops to help families meet students’ developmental needs in appropriate ways. Workshops for families with younger children can focus on school readiness, mastery of basic skills, and motivation (Tolan & Woo, 2009). For families with older children, the content can focus on such topics as facilitating transitions to the upper grades, understanding their children’s growing desire for autonomy, or addressing risky health behaviors (Reschley & Christenson, 2012). At the high school level, family-oriented programming can turn to such issues as the complexities of the high school curriculum, graduation criteria, and college and career planning, including financial aid resources and support (Mapp et al, 2008). <p>Provide informational sessions about schoolwide SEL practices and standards and how they connect to learning goals for literacy, mathematics, and other core content areas. Discuss ways families can support their students’ success in these areas.</p>
<p>Involve Families in Decision-Making</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organize parent-teacher conferences and meetings that encourage families to be involved in decisions affecting their children’s learning. • Invite families to participate as members of decision-making committees and groups. Encourage participation on the SEL team, school improvement team, and district committees. • Encourage families to participate in school climate surveys and elicit feedback from families on how they think the school year is going.
<p>Bridge Constraints</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meet with families outside of the school or during evenings or weekends. • Provide interpreters for families to accommodate speakers of various languages. If resources allow, hire a family liaison to help address language and cultural challenges by developing newsletters, assisting in conferences and meetings, and planning family outreach events.
<p>Increase Capacity of School Staff to Partner with Families</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Facilitate professional learning opportunities related to partnering with families and encouraging family involvement in the school. <p>Focus professional learning on how to cultivate productive relationships with families, personalize connections and interactions with families, and collaborate and leverage cultural richness and diversity for effective engagement strategies.</p> <p>See the OST-enhanced version of this tool. (http://bit.ly/2KXmHG0)</p>