

Family Engagement

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Standard 2. Communicating Effectively

*Family Engagement
Is Key To
Increased Student Achievement*

As was indicated in the last Family Engagement newsletter, the Nevada Legislature passed legislation that requires schools, administrators and teachers to more fully engage families in their children's education. The results of that legislation can be seen in the state's School Performance Plan. Action Step 1.2 requires Family Engagement be part of the school plan.

Standard 2. Communicating Effectively demands that (a) there is a system for meaningful, consistent home/classroom two-way communication in place and (b) schools communicate with families in a manner and format that is accessible and easy to understand.

We know relationships with families are important, students are normally more cooperative and more willing to study if they know their parents will be regularly updated on their performance. The issue with increased communication is: so many students, so many responsibilities, and so little time. It is a tough juggling act with all the demands being placed on classroom teachers and administrators.

Elementary teachers have to prepare for and create resources for 30-35 students in math, reading, writing, social studies, etc. Secondary teachers have to prepare for 180-200 students per day in two or three subjects like Alg 1, Alg II, and Geo. That takes time.

Not only are the teachers required to prepare lesson plans, create resources, create and grade homework, quizzes, and tests, they are also "encouraged" to put all this information online. Just placing all that information online is very time consuming. But for the parents who check that information, it is invaluable. It keeps them up-to-date and gives them adequate time to intervene if their student is missing assignments or not doing well on quizzes and tests. In other words, families who have online access can be more engaged.

But, that is typically a one-way form of communication. That's not what Standard 2 requires. It's tough for parents to contact teachers. They are typically in class and can not take phone calls so messages have to be left. That often leads to a frustrating game of phone tag.

So, with the time issues, Nevada Revised Statutes require more communication between school and home. That written and spoken interactions between families and teachers are respectful and pleasant. That starting at the beginning of the school year, families receive positive, consistent information and affirmation from teachers on the importance of their engagement. And families receive regular, personal invitations to visit classrooms and engage in their child's education. That might take a little extra time, don't you think?

The standard also requires there to be a system of communication in place so communication isn't just haphazard.

That is, teachers communicate with families in a manner and format that is accessible and easy to understand. That the information is provided in a variety of formats; including phone calls, written and translated web blasts, home visits, or meetings in community forums. Clearly it appears some must think there are more than 24 hours in a day.

There is an expectation that teachers will differentiate communication for families with varying levels of literacy. If families speak a language different from their teacher(s), information is made available and meetings are conducted in the family's native language.

Like a dollar can only be spent once, teachers can only use an hour once. If legislators are serious about these standards, they need to extend the school day so teachers have adequate preparation time and time to communicate effectively with families.

Having said all that, as educators we have to be more welcoming to the parents and guardians of our students. We have to think of ways of getting messages home that will encourage greater family communication and participation in their children's education – in and out of school. It does make a difference in student achievement.

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