NATIONAL STUDENT SUPPORT ACCELERATOR

equalizing access to quality tutoring

Family Engagement

In this National Student Support Accelerator Webinar, we will be discussing the ways in which your program can foster positive and constructive engagement with students' families. By communicating effectively with families, you can increase their trust in your program – and this communication can happen through a variety of different channels.

Throughout this webinar, we will walk through the importance and possible modes of communication between you and your students' families. We will first explain how an introductory statement can be used to begin this program-family relationship, and then describe how phone calls, texting, emailing, using shared drives, and meeting face-to-face can be strong ways to communicate with students' families.

When first working with students, sending an introductory statement to families can allow families to know what to expect from your program. If your program will take place within a school, any family communication should be coordinated with administrators and teachers beforehand, especially if it might make more sense for one of these people to introduce your program to families first. Within your statement, make sure to include a program overview in addition to your model dimensions, which can include the purpose of your program, who will participate, the setting, subject area, who will be the tutors, how tutoring will be delivered and how often, and what safety measures are in place – including how families can stay in touch. An introductory statement should answer the initial questions that families will have, so it is important to clearly describe to families the logistics of the program that their student will be participating in.

After initially introducing your program to families and answering any questions they may have, it is important to continue to stay in contact. This can ensure that your agreements and goals are upheld, and can encourage greater family engagement in students' goals. Depending on your program's design, tutors may communicate directly with families. This can be a good option when tutors are more experienced teachers or paraprofessionals, and your program should provide clear expectations and even training for this type of communication and relationship-building with families. Other programs may have a designated staff member or classroom teacher communicate with families and liaise with tutors.

One option for communicating with families can be through phone calls. In terms of best practices to employ when calling families, it is important to stay cognizant and respectful of family preferences, including what time is best to call, if you should leave a voicemail or text, and if it is okay with the student if you call home at all. Consistently practice doing things like always remembering to ask if it is a good time to talk, leaving a voice message, using the same phone number consistently, and considering asking families to come talk in person if you need to have a longer conversation. Topics that might warrant a phone call could be sharing successes of

the student with their family, reviewing what was covered in your session like the student's behavior, engagement, and progress, relaying any urgent reminders, and alerting families to potential student safety issues, like their student not showing up for tutoring.

Texting can also be a great way to stay connected with families, but it is important to still maintain a formal and professional relationship even with this more relaxed form of communication. Make sure to always introduce yourself and the program when first texting families, personalize your messages, keep messages short, and only send messages that are important and urgent now. Also, make sure that your messages are actionable, which will ensure a positive response from the recipient. Reasons to text students' families may include sharing photos or videos of their student positively participating in the program and sending quick updates or reminders on student attendance, assignments, or important upcoming dates.

For weekly updates like sharing the week's schedule, reminding families about upcoming deadlines and events, sharing additional resources, and sharing program contact information, email can be a useful communication tool. This can also be used for notifying families of an upcoming longer email that you will be sending to them, or for notifying families of upcoming celebrations and sharing pictures/ videos of that celebration once it happens. When using email to contact families, it is important to keep an upbeat and friendly tone, try to condense more information into less emails, send emails at predictable times during working hours, and utilize attachments or embedded links in order to shorten emails.

For sharing more substantive information with parents, using a Shared Drive can be a good option for your program. Shared Drives can be used to share tutoring session notes, summative data like assessments, weekly work, and attendance, and goal setting or action plans. It is important to explain to students and families what information they will have access to on the drive as well as when it will be updated. Teach families how to use the drive and interpret the documents within it before sharing the drive itself, and make sure that you have the correct settings on your permissions for who can use the folder and in what capacity they can access student information.

Lastly, some interactions with families may simply happen better if in a face-to-face format. This can happen either in person or through video calling, and can be great for introductory meetings, goal setting conferences, intervention meetings, and major celebrations. Before meeting face-to-face with families, consider whether another form of communication might serve you better, and consider if this is a situation in which it may be more appropriate to talk to the student individually first. When conducting your meeting, establish a shared goal and make sure to state your observations, not opinions. Explain the impact of the behavior that you observed, if applicable, and try to connect it to the students' goals. Make sure to also get input from both the student and the other family members present, and come to a conclusion and actionable step before ending the meeting.

Thank you for watching this National Student Support Accelerator Video on family engagement. Be sure to check out the Accelerator website at the link below to find the complete collection of Accelerator tutoring tools, including those utilized in this video. Thank you!