

Checklist for Assessing Your Site

Schools That Say Welcome

Directions: Think about the experiences you have had while working in your school. Evaluate your school's relationship with families. Read and mark each statement below. Compare and discuss results.

++ = always

+ = almost always

* = sometimes

0 = needs much improvement

- ___ 1. Office staff greets visitors in a friendly, courteous way.
- ___ 2. Teachers, staff, and students answer the telephone in a friendly, professional way.
- ___ 3. A welcome sign and school map are displayed near the entrance.
- ___ 4. There is an area where visitors can easily find information about the school and curricula.
- ___ 5. An orientation program is provided for new families in the district.
- ___ 6. Informal occasions are provided where staff and families can get to know each other during the school year.
- ___ 7. The principal offers monthly hours when families can stop in; regular office hours are available for students.
- ___ 8. There is a suggestion box where teachers, students, and families can contribute ideas.
- ___ 9. Families can make appointments with the teachers to visit classrooms.
- ___ 10. The building is used by the community for planned events.
- ___ 11. Alternative communication methods are used with families speaking limited English in order for them to understand the curriculum and participate in activities.
- ___ 12. Information about school rules, parent-teacher conferences, school and classroom policy, and bus and lunch schedules is available to families.
- ___ 13. Assistance is given to families to help them choose an appropriate educational program for their children.
- ___ 14. Students are encouraged and praised by staff.
- ___ 15. Local businesses and associations offer information to and enrichment programs for students.
- ___ 16. A resource center that provides parenting information is available for families and teachers.
- ___ 17. There is a bulletin board on which families can post news and announcements.

- ___ 18. A computer or other source is available for families to gain access to information about events and curricula.
- ___ 19. Principals and staff are willing to listen to family concerns about incorrect student placement and are willing to make adjustments when appropriate.
- ___ 20. Whenever possible, staff is willing to honor family requests about class assignment.

Family-School Communication

Research and practice show that successful communications are most likely to occur when educators work with families and others to identify the most useful content, form, frequency, reading levels, and locations for sharing information. Channels of communication must be designed to flow in all directions. Schools must know which families they are not reaching in order to improve their communications with families who cannot come to the school building for meetings or workshops, new families who arrive after the start of the school year, or others with special needs. Public information must be continuously updated and connections renewed. None of these is an easy task (Epstein, in press).

Some Things to Think About

- How are parents involved on a routine basis to be partners with the school regarding their children's learning?
- How does the school reach out to parents to ensure that they are participating in their children's education?
- What communication methods are in place? How are they reaching all parents?
- What goals does the school have to make sure the parents are aware of the curriculum, have an opportunity to develop a learning plan for their child, and know how the learning plans fit with the learner outcomes of the district?
- How are parents participating in the decision making for the school?
- How are the views of all parents solicited?
- How are members of the governance council representing nonmembers?
- How is information communicated to the other parents?
- How do you know the messages are being received?
- What strategies does the school have for reaching parents?