

# STRATEGY 1: WELCOME CALLS

Today, there are many ways to welcome families to your classroom! FaceTime, Zoom, Google hangouts, and traditional phone calls are all options for doing a Welcome Call. In the Appendix, find example [Questions for Trust Building](#) and a [Planning Tool](#).

## Before the Call

- **Challenge Assumptions.** Research has shown that one of the most significant barriers to effective family engagement is deficit-based views about families, particularly when working across lines of racial or economic differences. During times of stress and trauma, our implicit biases can drive our actions. Consider using the [Challenging Assumptions Reflection Tool](#) in the Appendix to examine and interrupt your assumptions.
- **Include your colleagues.** Keep other colleagues who work with your students in the loop, such as a special educator or ELL teacher, support staff, or educators in your department—plan for how you will support others to connect with families during or after your conversation. Connect with partners ahead of your Welcome Call to consider how they – or their questions or wonderings – might be included.
- **Consider families' preferences.** Welcome Calls can take place as traditional phone calls or over a video platform such as Teams, Zoom, or Facetime. Welcome Calls should be scheduled in advance at a time that is convenient for the family. Texting or emailing families is an excellent way to organize Welcome Calls.
- **Prepare.** Families will have questions, so make sure you take a few minutes to review any recent updates or information from your school or district that families might wonder. Educators will not have all the answers, and that is okay! Your job is not to fix everything, but to help alleviate concerns, share what you can, and communicate when and how you will follow up to get them the information they need. Use the [Planning Tool](#) in the Appendix.



# School Leader Moves

- ✓ Provide class lists early
- ✓ Ensure the “what and why” of Welcome Calls are part of school-wide mass communications
- ✓ Message expectations to staff about logging and tracking Welcome Call data
- ✓ Line up translation and interpretation supports proactively and make sure all staff and families know how to access these supports
- ✓ Prioritize time for teachers to reflect on the impact of relationships with families after the first few weeks of school and plan next steps accordingly
- ✓ Analyze data to ensure equitable engagement regardless of race, gender, grade, teacher, etc.
- ✓ Put in place strong systems and clear expectations for internal communication between teachers who share students

## During the Call

- **Remove distractions – as much as possible.** To be able to do everything else listed here effectively, you will need to make sure you are in a space and place where you can actively listen and focus on this conversation.
- **Share yourself authentically.** Share who you are with the family, such as your background, interests, what you love about teaching, and what excites you about the new school year.
- **Listen.** Ask families to share about themselves and their student(s). See [Trust Building Questions](#) in the Appendix!
- **Provide answers as you can.** Preparing beforehand can help, but it’s important to be honest when you do not know an answer.
- **Ask and share hopes and dreams.** This is a critical part of a relationship building conversation with students and families, and signals you genuinely care about what they want for their child — now and in the future.

**SECONDARY TIP:** Include the student in the Welcome Call! Anything you ask the adults, also ask the student.

- **Invite families to stay connected.** Think about the cadence of your communication moving forward. Should the family expect a weekly call from you? A text? Ask what works best for them. Make a note of their communication preferences and share how they can stay connected.
- **Include the student.** This is especially important for secondary students. Allowing students to share in trust-building conversations with their families will signal aligned partnership and teamwork on their behalf.

## After the Call

- **Follow-up on next steps.** Doing what you say you will is critical for quickly establishing trust.
- **Share insights with your team.** This is especially important for departmentalized grades and for students who work with other staff in your building. Share insights to make sure everyone is on the same page.
- **Keep lines of communication open.** A strong Welcome Call will start the process of building a trusting relationship, but consistent communication builds a meaningful partnership. Relationships grow through frequent and positive conversation, so reach out to families regularly.



# Guiding Principles for Beginning of the Year Relationship Building

Regardless of the strategy you choose, these principles should guide your approach to building relationships with your student's families.



## **Be authentic.**

Family engagement is people work— sharing yourself authentically with families will help quickly build trust and rapport. Creating a strong sense of shared humanity can help us feel connected.



## **Center on the student.**

Ask about hopes, dreams, and expectations. This is an incredible opportunity for the teacher, student, and family to align on what's most important to each of them in supporting the student's academic success.



## **Focus on what is important to the family.**

These conversations should emphasize building connections. Focus on the relationship while following the family's lead. Some families might want to share and get to know your background; others might want academic information. Many will want both!



## **Consistency is key.**

Relationships take time. These strategies will start the process of building relationships. Still, it is frequent and consistent communication that allows relationships to grow and sustain, especially if you do not have the opportunity to connect frequently with families in-person.



## **All families receive outreach.**

Every family deserves to have a trusting relationship with their child's teacher. Families should see that relationship building is for everyone!