



communicating with  
**FAMILIES  
AROUND  
ACADEMICS**



**FLAMBOYANT**  
FOUNDATION

At Flamboyant, we see family engagement as a partnership rooted in shared power between educators and families in a way that elevates and honors the value of family voice in collaboration and decision-making.

This resource will help educators communicate effectively with families around academics and social-emotional learning to build that partnership and support student learning inside and outside the classroom. Use it as you prepare to communicate with your students' families around academics.

In this document you will find:

- Guiding principles for communicating with families around academics;
- Insight into why those principles matter; and
- Helpful do's and don'ts to consider before reaching out

# GUIDING PRINCIPLES

*Effective communication with families around academics is...*

## Manageable for teachers and families

Effectively communicating with families around academics and social-emotional learning should be manageable for teachers and families. First, sending home more resources than a family can feasibly use with their student is probably counterproductive. Second, sending home a ton of resources is likely not targeted to students' specific needs.

DO	DON'T
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Pick classwork, homework, or assessments you are already doing or utilizing.</li><li>• Pick information that you think is most important for your families to know.</li><li>• Choose student work samples and scoring linked to their mastery of specific skills so that families know how to support their child. E.g., "Tasha scored 7/10 on her exit ticket after our Drawing Inferences lesson. To demonstrate mastery, she needs to earn 8/10."</li><li>• Keep your analysis of student performance and development as well as learning support recommendations short and sweet.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Collect new information simply to send it home.</li><li>• Share information on every single academic subject and standard.</li><li>• Send a long, written explanation of the child's data and five suggested activities per week for families to support learning.</li></ul>

## Regular

Communicating regularly with families around academics ensures that there are no surprises regarding students' performance, what's coming up in the school year, or any other important information. When families are kept in the know about what's happening academically, they're in a strong position to partner with you and support student achievement.

DO	DON'T
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Follow families' leads for setting a cadence for communicating. Would they like to receive an update every week, every two weeks, or at a different cadence? At least try to share updates monthly so that families have ample time to intervene and support student growth. Whatever the cadence, share updates on upcoming assessments, skills covered, and any other relevant information.</li><li>Provide consistent updates aligned with content areas' scope and sequence so that families can engage in supporting students as they master skills and provide necessary interventions.</li><li>Pick how often you will be sharing information and stick to it so families know when to expect it.</li><li>Ensure families understand how to get in touch with you.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Share information only at parent-teacher conferences or through report cards.</li><li>Over-commit and spend more time than you have sending home information to families.</li></ul>

## Explicitly explained to families

Data systems can often be challenging to navigate without context. When sharing data, whether it's from an assessment or a report card, provide information about what the data mean, how the student demonstrated strength and areas of growth in the context of the system, and how to interpret the student's data.

DO	DON'T
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Use an event where you have many families in your classroom, such as back-to-school night, to share your data-sharing system with families.</li><li>Follow up with families who did not attend your training on your system to make sure they understand it.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Assume families will understand the data or information you are sending home without an explanation.</li><li>Forget about families who aren't quick to adopt the system.</li></ul>

DO	DON'T
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure your students understand what's going home to their families so they can explain it to them as well.</li> <li>• Provide families with essential data and an agenda before meetings or conversations so they can prepare questions and feedback.</li> <li>• If sharing information about a student's performance on an assessment or test, emphasize that it represents a point in time, not what the student can and will achieve.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Start sending information to families without explaining it to students.</li> </ul>

## Positive

Having five positive interactions for every negative interaction helps build relationships. Sharing strengths is an excellent opportunity to have a positive interaction with families! Strengths can go far beyond official academic data like benchmarks or standardized tests. Think about the socio-emotional strengths you see in your students and their performance on classroom assignments.

DO	DON'T
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Start by asking what families have observed as a student's strengths, including their social-emotional strengths.</li> <li>• Start any communication about academics with a student's strength.</li> <li>• Be aware of your language and opt for strengths-based terms rather than deficit language. For example, cast skills students are struggling with in an optimistic light: "challenges," "areas for growth," etc.</li> <li>• Ask families to share how their child best learns and engages.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Only list things the student needs help with.</li> <li>• Make student performance sound dismal and impossible to improve.</li> <li>• Only focus on academics – include students' social-emotional strengths as well.</li> </ul>

## Transparent and placed in context

Families need to clearly understand what you're sharing to monitor their child's performance and support learning at home. Ensure that any information about a student's academic performance or student data is transparent and placed in context.

DO	DON'T
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Provide perspective: how does the student compare to the class average? The state average?</li><li>• Explain how the information relates to progress toward a student's goal.</li><li>• Include how the information shared relates to the overall scope and sequence of content and skills, i.e., prerequisite skills for the next standard being covered.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Share information in a vacuum (i.e., Daiquann is a Level "H" in reading. Families won't usually know what an H means for their student's grade level).</li><li>• Set goals without input from the child's family. Instead, use their present performance relative to the end of the year or benchmark goal, and collaborate with the family to set an ambitious but feasible performance goal for their child.</li></ul>

## Written in clear, plain language

As an educator, you are probably familiar with education jargon. Phrases and concepts that seem plain to you might prevent family understanding. Clear, straightforward language allows families to engage deeply with what you share.

DO	DON'T
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Tell families what standards or skills mean in everyday language.</li><li>• Provide visual examples—copies of books, math problems, scenarios, etc., that illustrate what scores or levels mean (i.e., Daiquann reads "F" level books. This is what an "F" level book looks like. It has 3-5 sentences and a picture that clearly illustrates the sentences. Many of the words have the same sounds or letter patterns.).</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Write standards verbatim.</li><li>• Share only numbers or levels with families without visual aids or explanations.</li><li>• Use common educator acronyms without explanation of meaning, e.g., STAR assessment.</li></ul>

## Shared in the family's primary language

One facet of using clear, plain language is communicating in a family's language of choice. Being proactive about interpretation and translation services is critical to establishing open lines of communication with families and building trust.

DO	DON'T
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Send all communications home in the family's primary language.</li><li>• Ensure ample time to secure translation and interpretation support/services. For example, submit materials like data and activities for translation, secure interpreters for meetings and conversations, provide interpreters with a guide of expectations, and plan to respond to things you do not know or are best explained by someone else.</li><li>• Provide families with a point of contact to connect them with a translator and easy access to interpretation supports and translated materials (e.g., Zoom Interpret, Google Translate, or Teams closed captioning translation).</li><li>• Provide families with the opportunity to share feedback on language accessibility offerings.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Rely on bilingual staff, students, or family members to translate on-call.</li><li>• Exclude individualized information that families need to support their child academically, e.g., excluding collaboration with families on student academic growth</li></ul>

## Actionable

Two key tenants of how families accelerate student learning are supporting learning at home and guiding their child's education. Sharing suggestions or resources to do so that are tailored to a student's needs sets families up to do this successfully.

DO	DON'T
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Start with what families have observed by asking what they see as an area of growth for their student.</li><li>• Give families one or two concrete suggestions on how they can accelerate learning at home.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Provide no action steps for families to help their kid's data improve.</li><li>• Give generic suggestions like "read with your child."</li></ul>

DO	DON'T
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tailor each suggestion to a specific skill a student needs to work on to improve the score (i.e., understand the difference between addition and subtraction, read fluently without stopping to break up words, etc.).</li> <li>• Provide space for families to share strategies you could use in the classroom to support their child.</li> </ul>	

## Proactive in gauging family understanding

After you communicate with families, follow up with them and provide space for any comments or questions and their suggestions for how you can better support their child's learning. This is built on learning from each other as partners to support a student's growth.

DO	DON'T
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ask families to write comments or questions on the information and send them back to you to ensure two-way communication.</li> <li>• Follow up by phone or in person with families who do not respond in written form.</li> <li>• If using an online grade book, track how often families log on and reach out to those who don't by phone, email, or personal contact.</li> <li>• Create space to check for understanding of ways they can support their student in school.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ask families for a signature only.</li> <li>• Send information home and have no way to follow up or check who received it.</li> </ul>

## Inclusive of family voice

Listening to families and getting their feedback is vital in sharing power, and it makes your job easier! When designing an exit slip or simply asking how using a resource at home went, consider what types of questions you might ask to really get insight into what families experienced, what went well, and what could improve.

DO	DON'T
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Immediately or as soon as possible after you talk to families, ask them for feedback on how it went. This could be a few simple rating questions on a half sheet of paper or open-ended prompts completed on a Google Form. However you do it, design the feedback to get a sense of what you should continue to do or do differently next time to support families in academic partnering.</li><li>• Ask for family feedback regarding teaching and learning practices and opportunities given for support.</li><li>• Solicit feedback from ALL families, prioritizing families with low touchpoints.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Provide no action steps for families to help their kid's data improve.</li><li>• Give generic suggestions like "read with your child."</li></ul>



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