Teacher Tools Toolkit

Module 1: Improving Communication

Improving Communication

Overview

This module emphasizes the value of communication between home and school that is ongoing, two-way and meaningful. It also points to communication as the foundation of solid partnerships and the fact that when parents and educators communicate effectively, positive relationships develop, problems are more easily solved and students make greater progress.

Research Link

Research suggests that communication is effective when educators:

- communicate with families about school programs and student progress in thoughtful, clear and productive ways; and
- create two-way communication from school to home and from home to school, so that families can easily keep in touch with teachers, administrators, counselors and other families. (Epstein, 2004)

The quality of teacher and parent interaction contributes to student achievement:

Make it Positive: Teachers most often communicate with parents when the student misbehaves, yet parents also want to know when their child is doing well. This helps parents be more responsive when extra effort or modifications need to be made.

Make it Practical: By helping parents understand the curriculum, they will be better able to support their child’s academic achievement. Make specific suggestions about what parents can do to help their child manage difficulties they are having with schoolwork and help them build their child’s strengths.

Make it Personal: Collaboration between parents and teachers is enhanced when parents read or hear something personal about their child. Include specific examples and be as detailed as possible.

Make it Accessible: By meeting families in their own natural environment, rather than only at the school, educators are seen as reaching out to families and acknowledging them as partners.

“We cannot educate children without reaching their parents. Therefore, every teacher has to recognize that when students walk into a class, their families walk in with them.”

-Dorothy Rich
Teaching Practices to Improve Communication

Epstein (1989) suggests the following ideas about effective school-home communication.

- Make sure that memos and notices are written so all parents can read and understand them.
- Communications from school to home should be:
  - simple and readable,
  - jargon-free and
  - in the language spoken by the family.
- Communications can be done:
  - in print form,
  - via e-mail, by phone,
  - through TV, radio and newspaper,
  - at extra curricular activities and
  - in other creative ways.
- Sponsor program or community events that allow educators and parents to interact socially in addition to standard parent-teacher conferences or school/program meetings.
- Implement feedback opportunities for parents and family members such as surveys on current program issues or special parent guest columns in the school newsletter.

New Mexico Teacher Competencies

The New Mexico 3-Tiered Licensure System provides the framework for documenting teacher qualifications. In collaboration with the principal or designated administrator, New Mexico teachers are required to develop and maintain Professional Development Plans (PDPs) based on nine teacher competencies and accompanying differentiated indicators for their respective level of licensure (Level I, II or III).

This module, Improving Communication, addresses New Mexico Teacher Competencies 5, 7 and 9. The competencies and relevant differentiated indicators for Master Teacher – Level III are listed below. For more information and a complete listing of competencies and differentiated indicators visit [www.teachnm.org](http://www.teachnm.org).

**Competency 5:** The teacher effectively utilizes student assessment techniques and procedures.

Relevant Master Teacher - Level III Differentiated Indicator:

D. Develops a two-way system of communicating with students and families about student progress.

**Competency 7:** The teacher recognizes student diversity and creates an atmosphere conducive to the promotion of positive student involvement and self concept.

Relevant Master Teacher - Level III Differentiated Indicator:

G. Fosters the development of respect for individual, cultural, linguistic, disability and religious differences.

**Competency 9:** The teacher works productively with colleagues, parents and community members.

Relevant Master Teacher - Level III Differentiated Indicator:

E. Works collaboratively and creatively with colleagues, parents and community members regarding educational matters.
Teacher Self-Assessment Rubric

Use this rubric to help evaluate how well you communicate with families. Think about where you see yourself in the process and strategies you use to improve communication by marking the box that most clearly matches what you are doing now.

### IMPROVING COMMUNICATION

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ELEMENT</th>
<th>BEGINNING</th>
<th>DEVELOPING</th>
<th>PROFICIENT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Communication with families includes one-way and two-way communication processes.</td>
<td>I am not aware of strategies for two-way communication.</td>
<td>I am aware of strategies for one-way and two-way communication.</td>
<td>I actively seek opportunities for one-way and two-way communication by integrating the following activities:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I communicate with families primarily through one-way communication such as memos, newsletters and sign-off sheets.</td>
<td>I make an effort to communicate with families. I ask for parent input to enhance instruction and I avoid educational jargon.</td>
<td>___ I create a welcoming and safe environment where parents feel comfortable to discuss issues of concern.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>___ I use different forms of communication (e-mail, chapter house/community meeting presentations, newsletters, telephone, weekly folders, home visits, surveys, public service announcements, newspaper ads).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>___ I ask for parent input to enhance instruction.</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>___ I avoid educational jargon.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>___ I encourage immediate contact between home and school when issues (positive and negative) arise.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Communication is varied and honors family differences, individual needs and cultural preferences. | I have limited knowledge of the varied communications styles of the families served at the school. | I use a variety of strategies that are sensitive to the needs of diverse families. | I actively build my knowledge of families' cultural differences, individual needs and preferences by integrating the following strategies: |
|                                                                                                    | I seldom consider linguistic and cultural preferences of families when communicating with them. | I make an effort to honor family differences, individual needs and cultural preferences when communicating and interacting with families. | ___ I encourage parents to share information such as student strengths and learning preferences. |
|                                                                                                    |                                                                                           |                                                                                  | ___ I survey families, ask pertinent questions and utilize information I have gathered. |
|                                                                                                    |                                                                                           |                                                                                  | ___ I provide information in native languages as appropriate. |
|                                                                                                    |                                                                                           |                                                                                  | ___ I make connections to students' cultures and solicit ideas from families. |
## Improving Communication

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ELEMENT</th>
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<th>DEVELOPING</th>
<th>PROFICIENT</th>
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</table>
| Communication practices are part of ongoing staff development, addressing effective communication with diverse families and using resources in the school and community. | I have limited experience with staff development on communication issues with diverse families. I participate in limited professional development activities and seldom apply new communication strategies. | I seek out opportunities for professional development to enhance my communication skills with all families. I attend professional development with an open mind and attempt to integrate new strategies for communicating with families. | I actively participate in professional development and make systematic attempts to effectively communicate with families by integrating the following strategies:  
  ___ I participate in staff development regarding effective communication techniques and the importance of regular, two-way communication with families.  
  ___ I develop an understanding and sensitivity to changing families and cultural differences. |
| Information exchange involves families in setting student expectations and goals using the New Mexico Content Standards and Benchmarks. | I provide families with minimal information about the school's instructional program or individual student needs. I seldom disseminate information to parents about the New Mexico Content Standards, the school's instructional program, individual student strengths and needs or the New Mexico Standards-Based Assessment. | I regularly communicate with families about student progress and ways that school initiatives can help, while being available to respond to parent questions and concerns. | I communicate with families regarding student progress on a regular basis, eliciting and responding to parent questions and concerns by using the following strategies:  
  ___ I engage families by discussing the New Mexico Content Standards.  
  ___ I share and discuss New Mexico Standards-Based Assessment results.  
  ___ I work with parents to establish academic goals and outcomes for student learning.  
  ___ I distribute student work for parental review on a regular basis. |
| Effective communication practices enhance parent-teacher conferences.  | I provide information on student progress at parent-teacher conferences. I schedule parent-teacher conferences with parents, but make limited or no effort to involve students or reach out to families who cannot attend. | I am prepared and conduct parent-teacher conferences as a joint venture. I work with each family to schedule parent-teacher conferences and am prepared to share and discuss information on topics such as testing. | I am well prepared and maintain two-way communication with families during parent/teacher conferences by using the following methods:  
  ___ I conduct parent conferences and accommodate needs such as varied schedules and language translation.  
  ___ I explain the purpose of the conference and goals for parent participation.  
  ___ I provide opportunities to meet with families who cannot attend conferences.  
  ___ I follow up in a timely manner as needed. |
Teacher Reflection
What will I do to improve my communication skills?

Reflect on your current practices in each of the elements highlighted in the left column. Develop a plan for improvement which includes support needed, how strategies will be implemented and how you will know if each element has been accomplished (Evidence of Mastery). Use the resources provided in this module to support your efforts.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Communication Elements</th>
<th>Plans for Improvement</th>
<th>Evidence of Mastery</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I communicate with families in a meaningful way, using one-way and two-way methods.</td>
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<tr>
<td>I communicate with families in ways that honor family differences, individual needs and cultural preferences.</td>
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<tr>
<td>I inform families of student expectations, including the New Mexico Content Standards and Benchmarks.</td>
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<tr>
<td>I communicate with families regularly and obtain feedback from students and families in a way that enhances student learning and understanding.</td>
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<tr>
<td>I carefully plan parent-teacher conferences.</td>
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**Resource 1**

**Worth a Click**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Resource Name</th>
<th>URL</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>12 Tips for Communicating with Parents</td>
<td><a href="http://www.vtnea.org/ti-3.htm">http://www.vtnea.org/ti-3.htm</a></td>
<td>This site offers a list of 12 tips for communicating with parents, as well as many resources for both teachers and parents.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dual Language Education of New Mexico</td>
<td><a href="http://www.duallanguagenm.org/family3.html">http://www.duallanguagenm.org/family3.html</a></td>
<td>The purpose of this site is to provide a basic primer identifying the distinguishing components of a Dual Language program.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educational Trust</td>
<td><a href="http://www2.edtrust.org/edtrust">http://www2.edtrust.org/edtrust</a></td>
<td>This comprehensive web site offers user-friendly information on the <em>No Child Left Behind Act</em>, as well as a wealth of other fact sheets and resources. It includes special sections on state and local policy, national policy, professional development and parents and community.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning First Alliance</td>
<td><a href="http://www.learningfirst.org">www.learningfirst.org</a></td>
<td>This site is stocked with practical guides for communicating with the community about schools, the <em>No Child Left Behind Act</em> and other issues. The “Resources for Parents” section allows families easy access to information about educational issues and practices. There are also downloadable tips and guides to help families become more involved in their children’s education.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Center for Family and Community Connection with Schools</td>
<td><a href="http://www.sedl.org/connections/resources/rb/rb5-diverse.pdf">http://www.sedl.org/connections/resources/rb/rb5-diverse.pdf</a></td>
<td>This site includes an article from the Southwest Educational Development Laboratory (SEDL) on reaching out to diverse populations which explains what schools can do to foster family-school connections.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technical Assistance ALLIANCE for Parent Centers</td>
<td><a href="http://www.taalliance.org">www.taalliance.org</a></td>
<td>This site offers families of children with disabilities information and guidance on how to talk to teachers, staff and schools about their child’s special needs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What Kids Can Do</td>
<td><a href="http://www.whatkidscando.org">www.whatkidscando.org</a></td>
<td>This site is an inspiration in reminding us what can happen when we listen to children. It offers resources for talking to kids about college, conducting teen-adult forums and engaging students as allies to improve schools.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Resource 2

Examining Assumptions About Families

Effective communication between home and school is the foundation of a solid partnership. When families and educators practice effective communication, positive relationships develop and students make greater progress. Effective communication does not happen by accident. Teachers and administrators must be diligent in making sure communication is meaningful and positive and that teachers practice communication skills such as good listening techniques, kindness, tact, empathy and a true understanding of parent-child relationships.

Positive Assumptions Yield Positive Results

It is important to examine assumptions about families and understand that for the home/school partnership to be effective, the following concepts must be adopted.

- **Assume all parents and families love their children.**
  Many family structures exist and all are legitimate. Parents or guardians may be absent from home or school for a variety of reasons, but this does not diminish their love and caring. Acknowledge the changes in what was once known as the traditional family structure.

- **Assume all children can and will learn and that all families have strengths to share.**
  Also assume that parents can learn new techniques in working with their children.

- **Assume all families want a positive school experience for their children.**
  Trust them and assume that they will work to ensure positive experiences from their end. Both parents and educators are committed to the nurturing, development and progress of children. Teachers must believe that parents and families play a critical role in a child’s development.

- **Respect parents and families and communicate that respect.**
  Tone of voice, body language, a teacher’s enthusiasm, facial expressions, word choice and how long we make people wait all communicate respect or lack of it. Many family members have personal, work, health or other problems that we know nothing about. Avoid being judgmental and give parents the benefit of the doubt.

- **Recognize that schools and homes have shared goals.**
  Parents and families have important perspectives of their children. Expect all parents and families to partner with you in the educational process. Clarify your expectations from the beginning. Help parents to understand their role in the educational process by:
  - asking parents what they want or need from their relationship with the school;
  - determining together, what you both need and expect from the student;
  - defining what those high expectations are; and
  - inviting them to attend professional development activities.

- **Make sure parents feel welcome when they come to school.**
  Ensure that the school has a parent handbook or volunteer manual, training procedures, parking spaces and a parent room so that parents can be welcomed and know they have an important place and role in the school.
  - Be specific about parent roles, tasks and schedules.
  - Thank and recognize parents regularly.
  - Enlist parents to help reach other parents, but don’t abdicate responsibility to one group.
Respect and Celebrate the Diversity that Students and Families Bring to School

Cultural differences are valuable to student learning and should be celebrated at school.

1. Make use of local expertise, especially elders as co-educators, whenever local language and cultural knowledge is addressed in the curriculum or local skills are used as examples.

2. Make every effort to utilize locally relevant curriculum materials with which students can identify, including materials prepared by local Native authors.

3. Participate in local and regional language immersion camps to learn and hear traditional language, cultural ways and their meaning in contemporary life.

4. Ask a parent, elder or community member to help you create a language immersion environment in your classroom.

5. Recognize and validate all aspects of the knowledge students bring with them and assist them in personal and cultural affirmations.

6. Provide enough flexibility in scheduling family participation so everyone is able to fully share. Provide enough advance notice for family members to make the necessary preparations to attend.

7. Be patient when students make mistakes speaking English and encourage their efforts.

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Don’t Teach Me My Culture, Use My Culture to Teach Me
Resource 3

A Model for One-Way and Two-Way Communication

Use this model to reflect on your communication style with families.

Communication can travel in two directions:

- One-way communication is *linear* and limited because it occurs in a straight line from sender to receiver and serves to *inform, persuade or command*.

  ![One-way Communication Diagram]

- Two-way communication always includes *feedback* from the receiver to the sender and lets the sender know the message has been received accurately.

  ![Two-way Communication Diagram]

In two-way communication, communication is negotiated. Both sender and receiver listen to each other, gather information and are willing to make changes to work together in harmony. Their intent is to negotiate a mutually satisfactory situation.

How can I assure that I use both one-way and two-way communication with families?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>One-way communication strategies I have used:</th>
<th>Two-way communication strategies I have used:</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>One-way communication strategies I plan to use:</th>
<th>Two-way communication strategies I plan to use:</th>
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</table>
Resource 4

Family Involvement Ideas: Communication

Use the following checklist of ideas to determine those you can incorporate into your family involvement program.

- I know strategies for getting parents to attend meetings at school such as making sure they know they’re genuinely invited. A personal invitation often makes a difference in the effort to attend.
- I establish friendly contact with parents early in the year.
- I don’t wait until it’s too late to tell parents about potential or serious problems. Early contact helps.
- I focus on the strengths of students and families.
- I know how to deal with angry parents by separating the parent from the argument.
- I use active listening. I don’t get angry. I look for areas of agreement.
- I provide a short parent newsletter regularly.
- I use short surveys to identify family attitudes about the school and classroom.
- I send “quick notes” home on the day something happens.
- I put up “Welcome” signs in every language spoken by the students and parents at my school.
- I use voice mail or e-mail to keep parents up-to-date on such things as homework and school activities.
- I make sure any automated voice messages are easy to use and do not frustrate parents.
- I ask parents to fill out a “Contact Sheet” with their home and work addresses and phone numbers as well as the best times to be contacted.
- I use refrigerator notes and tell students to share them with their families.
- I understand that a key reason for parent non-involvement is lack of information. One memo won’t do.
- I try letters, notes, signs, calls, the newspaper, radio and TV.
- I share experiences I have had with my own children to break down barriers, get me out of my “role” and help parents see me as a parent too.
- I arrange to have announcements made on local radio stations in the native languages of parents.
- I send announcements to the tribal newspaper or tribal/chapter house meetings.
Resource 5

Positive Phone Calls Can Make a Difference

Use these suggestions when making phone calls to families.

When a telephone call from school is a positive one, the atmosphere between home and school is improved and encourages the belief that all children can learn. Make positive phone calls at least two or three times during the school year to:

- introduce yourself to the parent;
- comment on the child’s progress;
- share particular strengths of the child and an anecdote about the child;
- invite parents to open house, conferences, volunteer opportunities and other school functions; and
- describe the school curriculum.

Making a positive phone call to parents is simple in concept, but requires:

- time and effort;
- strong support from school administrators to provide teachers with time, feedback and resources to maintain open lines of communication;
- planning to ensure commitment; and
- contacting parents in the evening or during the weekend since many work during the day.

Tips For Making Phone Calls

- Establish rapport and an effective working relationship with parents by making positive calls early in the year and often.

- Communicate about student growth, rather than student problems, to get parents on your side. If there is a problem later, you will have laid the foundation for their support in helping to solve it.

- Contact parents at the first sign of a problem, but avoid making your first contact a problem-solving call.
Sample Worksheet for Phone Calls (Positive and Problem Solving)

Use this worksheet to help plan your phone contact with families. Thinking ahead about what you want to discuss and why will help make your call more effective.

**Student Name**
______________________________________________________________________________________________

**Phone Number**
______________________________________________________________________________________________

**Parent/Guardian Names**
__________________________________________________________________________________________

**Reason for Calling**
Hello, this is (your name & position). Is this a good time to talk? _______________________________________________________

**Reason for calling (positive call)**
I would like to let you know how well your child is doing in____________________________________________________________

**Statement of Goal (problem solving call)**
I need your help in ___________________________________________________________________________________________

**Statement of Objectives**
________________________________________________________________________________________________________

**Rationale**
It is in the child's best interest that we work together to_______________________________________________________________

**Discuss how parent can support the goal**
_________________________________________________________________________________________________

**Solution and Follow-up (problem solving)**
So, to review, we've decided to _________________________________________________________________________________

**Resource 6**

**Teacher and Family Grams**

Use these grams as a simple and concise way to stay in touch with families.

**Teacher Gram**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>To: ____________________________</th>
<th>From: ____________________________</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Child’s Name: __________________</td>
<td>Date: ________________</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good News: ____________________</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Please help with: ______________</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Family Gram**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>To: ____________________________</th>
<th>From: ____________________________</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Child’s Name: __________________</td>
<td>Date: ________________</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good News: ____________________</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I’d like to talk to you about:</td>
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</table>

Resource 7

Half and Half Letters

Review these two sample half and half letters. How could you use these with families in your school and community?

**Dear Parent(s),**

We would like you to help us improve our school. On “Your Half” give us your suggestions about the idea or topic in “Our Half.” Letting us know what you think helps us make the right decisions about our school. Thank you.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>OUR HALF</th>
<th>YOUR HALF</th>
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</thead>
</table>
| **Sample:**
Dear Families,

As you know, we are thinking about having a “closed” campus next year. This means that juniors and seniors who leave campus for lunch and breaks would not be allowed to do so. All students would remain on campus until they are finished with classes unless they have parental permission to leave for a dentist appointment etc.

Please respond by completing this half and turning it into the school office.

( ) In favor of idea
( ) Not in favor of idea
( ) Like idea, but needs___________________________

Strengths of Idea:_______________________________

Weaknesses of Idea:_____________________________|

**OUR HALF**

Sample:
Dear Families,

Next year is New Mexico’s year to select a new math series. Each school can select materials from a state list. We would like to improve our math program and are looking at materials that have research suggesting that they improve student understanding. We would like to know your thoughts and priorities in looking at new math materials. If we were to get new materials, what kind of information would you like to have about them?

We would like to know how you feel about the math program. Please share your thoughts, opinions and ideas.

Signature (Optional):_____________________________

Making Parent-Teacher Conferences Meaningful

Parent–Teacher Conferences are a good time to share information, develop personal relationships and welcome families into their child’s school life. Being prepared and having goals for the meeting can help the conference run smoothly for everyone.

Use these questions to gather information from families prior to the parent-teacher conference.

Should conferences be student led?

Teachers in New Mexico are beginning to have students lead parent-teacher conferences. Students are taught how to talk about what they have been working on, share their best work and improvement goals and address what assistance they need to make specific improvements in their schoolwork or behavior.

Should parents come prepared?

A parent-teacher conference can flow smoothly if parents know what to expect and what their role is. It is helpful for them to identify questions they want to ask and what kind of information they can share that would be helpful to the teacher. Parents should involve their children in this planning process.

What preparations should I make?

It is helpful to have at least two positive remarks to share about each student, actual student work, detailed information on grades and how the student can improve, specific feedback on student skills that need support and handouts on what parents can do at home to help. Prepare about two or three questions you would like to ask the family that would support the child. Ask about strategies they know work at home that you could apply in the classroom.

Families often appreciate information about topics of interest or concern to them. For example, middle school years are often challenging for parents and information on student self-perception, changes in the adolescent brain and what kind of boundaries parents need to set may be helpful for parents.

Planning for Parent-Teacher Conferences

On the following pages are some sample forms you can share with families at least two weeks before parent-teacher conferences. They can be used as a springboard for planning and discussion. Adapt them to suit your needs.
Our Parent-Teacher Conference

Child’s Name:_________________________________________ Parents Names:_________________________________________
Teacher’s Name:_______________________________________ Grade Level:_______________________________________
Conference Date:______________________________________ Time:_______________________________________

Things I Want To Talk About
Please fill this out before our meeting and bring it with you.
A. What I think my son/daughter does well at home:
________________________________________________________________________________________________
B. What I think my son/daughter does well at school:
________________________________________________________________________________________________
C. Questions I would like to ask:
________________________________________________________________________________________________
D. One issue I would like to discuss:
________________________________________________________________________________________________

About My Child
Ask your child what he or she would like to have you talk about or what he or she would like you to know.
1. Important things in my child’s life I think you should know about:
________________________________________________________________________________________________
2. Talk to your child. Ask him/her questions like: What do you like about school?
________________________________________________________________________________________________
What do you dislike about school? ________________________________________________
Is there anything you would like me to ask or tell your teacher?
________________________________________________________________________________________________
3. Other questions or concerns my spouse, partner or family members and/or I have:
________________________________________________________________________________________________
### At the Conference

(Please read these questions to help you plan what questions you would like to ask at the conference.)

1. Is my child at grade level with his/her reading, writing and math?

2. May I see something my child has written?

3. May I see an example of grade level or excellent work?

4. What are my child’s strengths in class?

5. What are my child’s weaknesses in class?

6. Which content standards has my child achieved so far?

7. What do you expect from children in your class (behavior, work habits, etc.)?

8. What can I do at home to support you and my child in school?

9. How can I reach you if I have any questions or want ideas on how to help my child succeed in school?

10. Do we need to meet again? When will we meet?

### After the Conference

1. Talk about it with your child. Praise your child’s strengths.

2. Decide how you will follow through with any plan that you and your child have agreed upon with the teacher.

3. Start a folder about your child. Include in it:
   - Report cards
   - Samples of work
   - Notes from the teacher
   - Test scores

4. Make a calendar and mark:
   - Meetings
   - Important events
   - Social events at your child’s school

5. Check your child’s class work and homework every day.

6. Keep talking with the teacher to discuss your child’s progress.
Action Plan:
Ways we can work together to ensure my child’s success.
(Do this with the teacher at the conference).

A. What the teacher will do at school:
__________________________________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________________________________

B. What we will do at home:
__________________________________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________________________________

C. How we will check our progress (notes, telephone call, e-mail, follow-up conference, etc.):
__________________________________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________________________________
Resource 9

Parent and Child Rights in Special Education

Use this information, from the New Mexico Public Education Department’s Special Education Bureau web site, to review the rights of children in Special Education. A similar guide is included for families in the Family Tools for Module 1.

What Is Special About Special Education?
Special education is instruction designed specifically to meet the unique needs of children with exceptionalities—those who have one or more disabilities as defined by federal law,* or in the state of New Mexico, who are determined to be gifted. It is important to note that not all students who have a disability or who are struggling qualify for special education. To be eligible for special education or related services, the child must meet two requirements. First, he or she must be found to have a qualifying exceptionality. In addition, the nature of the exceptionality must be such that it directly affects his or her opportunity or ability to learn and progress in the educational program or environment provided for the general student population. Special education and related services are designed to help a child learn the information and skills that other children are learning.

An Overview of the Special Education Process
Every child is special because he or she is a unique individual. In the United States, we provide a free, public education to every child. Schools provide a general curriculum designed to meet the needs of most children and prepare them to function independently as adults and participate in their community. Special education services are provided to those students who, because of exceptionalities, need additional support in order to learn and attain these same goals. It is also the goal of special education to provide services and supports to students in the least restrictive environment (LRE) along side students without disabilities.

Decisions about a child’s program and/or placement are not made lightly or easily. It takes a team using their combined knowledge and expertise to make decisions that are in the best interest of the child. A specific process is followed and you, the parent, are an essential part of the team. The child is also included whenever possible and must be invited to participate if he or she is 14 or older.

In order to better understand your role and your rights in the decisions made about your child, it may be helpful to first take a look at how the special education process works in general.

Step 1 - Pre-referral/Referral Interventions
The child is referred for consideration of the possible need for special education and/or related services. Referrals can come from the school or parents. Local school districts must provide screening and appropriate interventions through a Student Assistance Team (SAT) child study process before referring a child for a full special education evaluation unless a student has an obvious disability or a serious and urgent problem.

Step 2 - Initial Evaluation
The child is evaluated. This may involve formal testing, observations or even outside specialists. Written parental consent must be given before an initial evaluation or a reevaluation.

Step 3 – Determine Eligibility
Based on all the information gathered, a group of qualified professionals and the parent decide whether the child is eligible for special education or related services. A student may be found to be eligible because he or she has a defined exceptionality that directly affects learning or found to be ineligible because either the exceptionality does not directly affect learning or there is no concrete evidence that an exceptionality exists.

*Definition of Exceptionalities

**Definition of Exceptionalities**

1. Disabilities as defined by federal law
2. Giftedness

In addition to the definition of exceptionalities, the student must also demonstrate a qualifying educational need. This means that the child's exceptionality must directly affect his or her opportunity or ability to learn and progress in the educational program or environment provided for the general student population. Special education and related services are designed to help a child learn the information and skills that other children are learning.

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Step 4 – IEP Development
If the child is found eligible, a team is assembled and a meeting held to develop an Individualized Education Program (IEP). The IEP is the master plan for the child’s special education and any related services, such as speech therapy or physical therapy that the child needs to benefit from instruction. Parents must be invited to the meeting and to participate as members of the team.

Step 5 – IEP Implementation
Parents consent is required before beginning any special education or related services.

Step 6 – IEP Review/Revision
The IEP must be formally reviewed at least once a year, more often if necessary, or as requested by the school or parent.

Step 7 – Reevaluation
A child receiving services must be reevaluated at least every three years (unless you and the school agree that a specific reevaluation is not necessary).

Step 8 – Determine if Eligible
Eligibility must be reexamined and re-determined after a reevaluation as in Steps 2 and 3.

Step 9 – Exit from Services or Continued Services
If the child is found to still be eligible, the team begins again at Step 4. If not, he or she exits the program.

*Federal law (IDEA-Part B 34 CFR Sec.300.7) defines thirteen categories of disability: autism, deafness, deaf-blindness, hearing impairment, mental retardation, multiple disability orthopedic impairment, other health impairment (including ADD, ADHD), serious emotional disturbance, specific learning disability, speech or language impairment, traumatic brain injury and visual impairment, including blindness.

For more information, this document, “Parent and Child Rights in Special Education”, can be accessed in its entirety from the New Mexico Public Education Department’s Special Education web site at:
http://www.ped.state.nm.us/seo/library/procedural.safeguards.interim.draft.pdf
Resource 10

Bilingual Education in New Mexico

Consider this information when talking with families about the value of bilingual education. A similar guide is included for parents in the Family Tools for Module 1.

Research studies have found many benefits of bilingual education programs, including:

- Building self-esteem and improving academic achievement by incorporating the students’ cultures into classroom instruction;
- Enhancing student intellectual flexibility, creativity and problem solving;
- Developing students’ literacy skills in English and in the home language;
- Building lessons from resources that exist within students’ experiences and backgrounds in order to promote more active student engagement and increased student learning;
- Encouraging parent participation in school activities and goals;
- Expanding student access to people and resources;
- Increasing opportunities to compete in the workplace; and
- Supporting the development of a stronger national economy.

What is Bilingual Education in New Mexico?

Bilingual Education is an instructional program that uses two languages, one of which is English, as a medium of instruction in the teaching-learning process (New Mexico Bilingual Education Regulation, June 2002).

Models of Bilingual Education in New Mexico and Their Purposes

- A Two-way Dual-Language Immersion model is designed to develop bilingualism and biliteracy in English and another language for both English-speaking and students with a home language other than English.
- A Maintenance model is designed to develop and maintain proficiency and literacy in the student’s home language and English.
- A Transitional model is designed to transfer students from instruction in their home language to an all-English curriculum.
- An Enrichment model is designed to further develop the home language of fully English proficient students and to teach the cultures of the state.
- An Indigenous Language Revitalization model is designed to support and revitalize a student’s native language and culture through oral and/or written language instruction with tribal approval.
Important Facts About Bilingual Education

- Bilingual/ESL Teachers teach English more effectively. They have more training on how best to instruct children learning English.
- Bilingual Education is PROVEN to close the gap better and faster than English Immersion.
- English Immersion is proven to widen the gap.
- Bilingual Education is supported by second language acquisition research and experts.
- A person who speaks two languages increases his or her marketability in the work place.
- Bilingual Education enriches academic productivity, creative talents and self-esteem in students.
- In the era of globalization, the rest of the world prepares their students to communicate in more than one language. We should join in.
- Bilingualism is a window into two worlds.
- Bilingualism and multilingualism ultimately provide a competitive advantage in the workforce and allow for additional job opportunities.
- The student’s native language supports the learning of the second language and the comprehension of all subject areas.

Source: New Mexico Association for Bilingual Education (NMABE) web site www.nmabe.net (2006)
Resource 11

Progress Report Template

Districts, schools or classrooms might like to consider using this template to develop progress reports that can enhance parent-teacher communication by providing parents with a record of their child’s performance. Progress report formats need to be teacher friendly and easy to complete for an entire class. Parents and students appreciate this information and can use it as a guide towards improvement or encouragement.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Core Subjects</th>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Missing Assignments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reading</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>A...B...C...D...F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language Arts</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>A...B...C...D...F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Math</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>A...B...C...D...F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Science</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>A...B...C...D...F</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Comments: (All that apply are checked)

_____ does good work                      _____ making progress                                          _____ missing assignments
_____ working hard                           _____ absences or tardiness affecting work   _____ turning his/her work in late
_____ works well with others            _____ socializing is affecting their work                  _____ has had detention

_____ Please contact me about your child’s lack of progress in the following area(s)...  
Reading                                    Language Arts                                 Math                                     Science

Notes:

Please sign and have your child return this Progress Report to me. If you have any questions or concerns please write them on the “Notes” section of this document or call me at ________________________. Thank you.

______________________________________          _______________________________________
Teacher initials                           

Parent Signature                     Student Signature

Adapted from: Alicia Benavidez, Santa Fe Public Schools (2005)