



CONNECTION TIPS

Supporting Families and Adult Caregivers

What's Going On?

Families may feel apprehensive or have mixed emotions about sending their children back to school. Strengthening the school-home relationship, and soliciting family input can help calm feelings regarding the shift back to the school setting.

Tips to Consider

- ❑ Prior to school beginning, develop a multi-staff/whole staff system for family communication.
 - Provide parents clear, concise, supportive information. Ensure this does not duplicate or conflict with other school information that they receive. Decide in advance how to convey information. For example, a principal may address changes in the school day, sanitation and cleaning procedures, physical changes to the building, while the teacher communicates classroom specific re-entry information.
 - Be supportive. Acknowledge that this transition back to school involves challenges for families and students. Doing so helps families normalize their concerns.
 - Welcome parent contact right from the beginning. Convey that communication this year will be two-way! You want to hear from parents more than ever—especially about any background information that can help you better support and teach their child.
 - Mental Health and Nursing staff may want to share their plan for parent outreach, gathering concerns, and offering services and support.
 - Name social and emotional health as a priority for children and staff and identify school-wide and classroom specific Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) aligned practices.
- ❑ Acknowledge the school's commitment toward furthering racial justice and equity, and identify anti-racist aligned committees and/ or practices. Consider, in advance of school opening, how to solicit concerns from parents/ grandparents/ guardians. They know that schools are swamped with re-opening details and are likely not to add their concerns to the pile unless they are asked. Some options that a building or district might initiate include:
 - Zoom Parent Discussion Groups: Create open-ended questions such as, "When thinking about your child (children) returning to school, what are you most concerned about?" and/ or "What are your children telling you and/ or feeling about returning to the classroom?"

- Anonymous Electronic Family surveys: If the response rate is high, this provides a lot of feedback quickly. Design no more than ten statements that parents can react to such as, “My child/ children are experiencing anxiety regarding returning to school” with response options such as a) strongly agree, b) agree, c) disagree d) strongly disagree. Other potential questions using this format could be: My child/children, while a bit apprehensive, are excited to return to school; While a bit apprehensive, I am excited for my child/ children to be returning to school; I am concerned about my child/ children being behind academically; My child/ children are concerned about being behind academically; I am concerned about my child/ children’s health and safety returning to school; My child/ children are concerned about their health safety returning to school; My child/ children are excited to see their friends; My child/ children have missed going to school; I feel confident that my concerns are important to the school; I believe that my child/ children’s social and emotional health matters to the teachers and school; Issues of racial justice have been discussed frequently in our home; I trust that issues of racial justice will be part of the curriculum and school culture. A final, open-ended question can be included as well such as, “What should the school understand in order to better support your child/ children?”. You might want to end the survey by reminding the families they can email or call the principal, social worker, or teacher to discuss specific child concerns.
 - Feedback Loop: Provide families with data gleaned from the information above and the plan to address concerns. It is okay to include a line to the effect of, “There are fears shared by families and staff that will be calmed once school gets rolling. This is all new to all of us, but as we move forward, we prioritize safety and well-being.”
 - Identify Parents with Higher Levels of Concern: Create a plan to reach out to them individually and proactively. Let them know the school appreciates their concerns, wants to partner with them and to provide support.
- ☐ Provide a format to help staff respond to parent/ grandparent/ guardian concerns. This may include Main Office, Counseling Office, Health Office and Security staff. Communicating responses can also take the form of a Zoom meeting if there is the capability to have large numbers of parents attend. In any response to parents; thank them for the huge lift they provided during virtual school; state the identified concerns non-judgmentally identified in focus groups or in the survey and thank them for their input; let parents know how you use their feedback to strengthen supports, and what those supports or resources are. Remind parents that their partnership is crucial to ensuring the success in yet another “new normal.” Identify points of contact for further parent inquiries or concerns.