



Family Engagement

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The Six Standards – Standard 1. Welcoming All Families

*Family Engagement
Is Key To
Increased Student Achievement*

The Nevada Legislature passed legislation that requires schools, administrators and teachers to more fully engage families in their children's education. The results of that legislation can be seen in the state's School Performance Plan. Action Step 1.2 requires Family Engagement be part of the school plan.

The six Family Engagement Standards are:

1. Welcoming all families in the school community
2. Communicating effectively
3. Supporting student success
4. Speaking up for every child
5. Sharing power
6. Collaborating with the community

History suggests family engagement decreases as students progress through grade levels. Parents, grandparents, and extended family members often volunteer in schools, come to open houses, attend teacher conferences, and help with homework in primary grades. By the time these students reach high school, parents, guardians, and extended family members not only do not volunteer at the school, but they tend not to attend open house activities, they don't come to parent conferences unless they are required to do so through a "required parent conference", and their kids get little help at home with homework assignments. From many teachers' points of view, parents and guardians are very difficult to reach to discuss the progress or needs of their students.

This legislation is meant to address the concerns of many teachers and administrators about communicating and working with the family.

The first standard, *Welcoming all families in the school community*, requires teachers and administrators to demonstrate positive educational environments for all students and their families by treating them in respectful and culturally sensitive ways and welcoming their engagement in the school and classroom.

The standard demands that teachers and administrators value, respect, and welcome families and sees them as assets in supporting student learning. The Advisory Council on Family Engagement believes that all families want the best for their children and that family engagement will help students reach their achievement goals, regardless of the families' socioeconomic background or educational level. I have no doubt that families *want* the best for their children, but there has to be more than a *want*. What works is work – for all children and their families. Teachers and administrators have to do more than just play lip

service too. Teacher -Parent/guardian relationships clearly make a difference in student performance in the classroom and in achievement. This is a two-way street - both educators and families have to do their part in coming together.

The Council has provided some examples that administrators and teachers might use at their schools. I have included a few for your consideration.

- a) Have welcome signs in schools and classrooms reflecting the language of your students' families
- b) Offer your students' families varied volunteer opportunities that acknowledge unique experiences and skills, at home and in school
- c) Make home visits the summer before school starts to begin to build a relationship with each family
- d) Work with your students' families to help prepare their children's year in the classroom
- e) Offer your students and their families tours of the school and opportunities to visit, observe, and volunteer in the classroom
- f) Hold family related activities in the classroom at various times and days of the week to respect families work schedule
- g) Hold activities at community locations instead of just classrooms or schools

While I don't have any issues with these examples, it is clear to me that the people most responsible for these suggestions have most of their experience in the elementary schools. Teachers in elementary schools have up to 35 students per day, their schedules are easily flexed, the schools have a student population under 1000 students, and they serve smaller communities that may not have a great deal of diversity. That's a little different in high schools. Teachers have up to 200 students per day, their schedules are not flexible, the high schools have student populations up to 3000 students, and they serve very large, diverse communities that are culturally different.

Having said that, as educators we have to be more welcoming to the parents and guardians of our clients. We have to think of ways of getting messages home that will encourage greater family communication and participation in their children's education – in and out of school.

One of the best ways to foster a positive relationship is to contact family with good news. Talk about how nice their kids are; how they act like young men or ladies; and discuss what you are going to do to help their children succeed. The only time most families hear from schools is when the news is bad; or when someone is hurt, failing or in trouble. Under those circumstances, who wants to speak with school personnel?

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