Building Individualized Family Communication Plans
Sample Questions

Establishing an effective plan of communication between the school and each student’s family is an essential step for strengthening family and student engagement, and for working in partnership to support student learning. Schools and districts can gather information in a variety of ways about families’ preferred ways to be in communication. This resource with sample questions can be adapted to best meet local needs and context, based on what information is already known and how the collected information will be used. For example, the questions can be modified by the school or district and can be asked on phone calls; or can be sent via an electronic survey shared via text or email, with follow up phone calls or other means of communication for any families that don’t reply. The important thing is finding out the best ways for educators to be in communication with each individual family, and then following up on that over time to build connections and share successes and strategize about challenges in ways that can advance student learning.

Having an individualized communication plan is useful for all learning circumstances and can be used whether a school or district is planning to utilize a remote, in-person, or hybrid learning model for the 2020-2021 school year. If the school already has knowledge that the parent’s or guardian’s preferred language is not English, then efforts should be made to have the caller be a native speaker or fluent in the language of choice, or be made using an interpreter. Additionally, given that some parents/guardians likely have multiple children in the school or district, note that it can helpful to streamline communication by having educators communicate with one another to identify one main point of contact or communicate with parents/guardians together, such as through a conference line, where appropriate.

**Sample Script**

“Hello, my name is \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_, from [STUDENT’S SCHOOL]. Am I speaking with [STUDENT and STUDENT…]’s parent/guardian? If not, are they available?

Before I continue, what is the language you prefer to speak? I can get an interpreter on the line as needed [or, I have an interpreter on the line].

We know this has been a hard time for everyone. How have you been doing? [Parent responds.]

One of the best ways for a child (student) to get a great education is for teachers and families to have strong and consistent communication with one another.

I am calling today to ask you some questions about how you prefer to communicate with [STUDENT]’s teachers.

You can say “no response” to any question and you can share only whatever you are comfortable sharing. Our goals are to find out what works best for each family and to strengthen communication between educators and families, so that we can work together to best support students

After you answer these questions, [STUDENT]’s teachers will have an understanding of how best to contact you in the future when they want to discuss matters related to [STUDENT]’s education. Keep in mind, these questions are specifically for your communication with [STUDENT]’s teachers, which means this doesn’t apply to any general information sent out to all families by the school or district. Also, we understand that some of these questions may not apply directly to your child(ren); if that is the case please just let me know and I can move on to the other questions.

Do you have any questions before we begin?”

**Sample Questions**

1. What is the primary *language* used in the home? What is the most comfortable language for you for speaking with the school? What is the most comfortable language for the student?
2. Are you the *main contact person* within the family for communicating about the student’s education? If not, who is?
3. [Ask the following question if age appropriate.] Do you wish for *your child to participate* in communication with the school (in addition to what they do while in school)? (*If yes, the interviewer should also ask the list* of Parent Questions *for Communicating Directly with the Student after reading* *the relevant instructions*.)
4. *How often* would you like ideally to receive communications directly from the teacher(s)? *What kind of communication* from the teacher(s) would help you support your child learning at home? For example, would you like *regular calls* to explain assignments or schedules related to your child’s learning?
5. *What time of day* is it most convenient for the school to be in communication with you (for example before school starts, the middle of the day, early evening, etc.)?
6. What is best way for your child’s (children’s) teachers and service providers to communicate with you: for example, *emails, texts, phone calls, voice mails, Whatsapp, and/or mail*?
7. If the best method of contact doesn’t seem to be working, are there *other ways* we can contact you?
8. Is there a person in the school you have a *strong relationship* with whom you would like to be the main person who communicates with you, whenever possible?
9. As you think about past communications from your child’s school, is there *anything that has worked really well* or is there *anything that has not worked well*?
10. Are there any *accommodations* or special supports you require in communicating with the school?
11. Is there *any other information* you would like to tell us that will help us understand the best way to be in communication with you?

“Thank you for your time today. I’m glad we had a chance to talk so we can support [STUDENT].”

[Review any next steps and/or agreements and let the parent know when they can next expect to hear from the school.]

## Communicating Directly with the Student

(Parent Questions)

This questionnaire is designed for parents/guardians who wish for their child to play a role in communications with the school, typically older students. You should ask the following questions during the initial parent interview if the student’s parent/guardian indicates in response to Question 3 that they would like their child to play a role in communicating with their school and teachers. This may be because the parent simply wants their student to play a role in his or her own education or can be due to a range of other factors such as language capacity, technology literacy, schedule, or other family considerations. The following set of questions is designed to help the school understand how best to communicate with the student to improve engagement in remote learning and overall family engagement. School staff should first ask these questions to the student’s parent/guardian to understand his or her preferences and then have a trusted adult at school schedule a separate time to ask the student these same questions. Both the parent’s and student’s responses should be recorded in the Family Communication Plan.

**Sample Script**

“Earlier you indicated that you would like teacher to communicate directly with [STUDENT] about] their learning. Now I would like to ask you a few questions to help us understand your preferences for how we communicate with your child. With your permission, we will also ask someone from the school to ask these questions to your child. Is there anything you would like to share with me or any questions you would like to ask before we begin?”

**Sample Questions**

1. What is best way for your child’s teachers and service providers to communicate with [STUDENT]: for example, *emails, teacher web pages, Whatsapp, and/or mail*?
2. *Which adult from school would your child most like* to communicate with about school?
3. *What time of day* is it most convenient for the school to be in communication with [STUDENT]?
4. Sometimes *lack of technology* or *difficulties with technology* makes it harder to communicate about remote learning with the school. Does your child have the technology they need?
	1. What kind of technological *devices* does your child have access to for remote learning (smart phone, tablet, Chromebook, laptop, desktop) and are the devices working? Do they share these devices with anyone? Is [student] in need of a device?
	2. Does [STUDENT] have to access to *wifi or other internet connection* through any of these devices? [If responds no, then ask if the student in need of a wifi connection.] [If responds yes, then you may ask if they know about the quality of the wifi connection – e.g., if it consistently works, etc.].
	3. [Provide information about resources available from the school (i.e., tablets, Chromebooks, hotspots, wifi) and confirm whether the student needs any of these resources].
5. As you think about past communications between the school and [STUDENT], is there *anything that has worked really well* or is there *anything that has not worked well*?
6. Is there *any other information* you would like to tell us that will help us understand the best way to communicate with [STUDENT]?

“Thank you for your time today. I’m glad we had a chance to talk so we can support [STUDENT].”

[Review any next steps and/or agreements and let the parent know when they can next expect to hear from the school.]

## Communicating Directly with the Student

(Student Questions)

This questionnaire is designed for students whose parent/guardian has indicated they would like the student to play a role in communicating with their school and teachers during periods of remote learning. This may be due to a range of factors such as language ability, technology literacy, schedule, or other family considerations. The purpose of these questions is to help the school understand how best to communicate with the student to improve engagement in remote learning and overall family engagement.

Before planning this conversation with the student, please ensure that the student’s parent/guardian has already been asked the questions for *Building a Family Communication Plan* and *Communicating Directly with the Student*. The person having this conversation with the student should be the person identified by the parent as the student’s preferred contact at the school, someone whom the parent believes the student trusts. Outreach to schedule the time, place and medium for this conversation should be conducted according to the individualized communication plan and preferences identified by the student’s parent/guardian.

**Sample Script**

“Thank you for setting up this time to speak with me.

Before I continue, what is the language you prefer to speak? [If helpful, I can get an interpreter on the line (or, I have an interpreter on the line).]

This has been a hard time for everyone. How have you been doing? How about your family? [Student responds.]

As we discussed, your parent/legal guardian shared that it would be most helpful for us to communicate directly with you about your learning.

We know that sometimes, especially during remote learning, it can be complicated to keep track of what is going on at school. I would like to ask you a few questions to help us understand your preferences around communicating about school opportunities or concerns with teachers. These questions are voluntary, and you can share whatever you are comfortable sharing. The answers to these questions will help your teachers plan for how best to get in touch with you about remote learning. Is there anything you would like to share with me or any questions you would like to ask before we begin?”

**Sample Questions**

1. What is the most comfortable *language* for you to communicate with the school?
2. *How involved* would you like you to be in communicating with the school about your work during remote learning?
3. What is the best way for your teachers and service providers to communicate with you: (for example, *emails, texts, phone calls, voice mails, Whatsapp, and/or mail*)?
4. If the best method of contact doesn’t seem to be working, are there *other ways* we can contact you?
5. *Which adult from school would you most like* to communicate with about school? Does it depend on the topic?
6. Is there a *time of day* when it would be convenient for the school to communicate with you during remote learning? Please think about whether there are any activities or responsibilities that you have (for example a job, medical appointments, sports practices, or helping take care of younger siblings).
7. Sometimes *lack of technology* or *difficulties with technology* makes it harder for students to communicate about remote learning with the school. Do you have the technology you need?
	1. What kind of technological *devices* do you have access to for remote learning (smart phone, tablet, Chromebook, laptop, desktop)? Do you share these devices with anyone? Are you in need of a device?
	2. Are you able to access *wifi or other internet connection* through any of these devices? What is the quality of the wifi connection? Are you in need of a wifi connection?
	3. Do you know what *applications or programs* your teachers are using for remote learning (Google Classroom, ClassDojo, etc.)?
	4. *Would you like any help* learning how to use these devices, applications or programs? What would be the best way for us to provide this support?
	5. Have you already received *technological support* from the school? Has it been provided in the language you prefer?
	6. [Provide information about resources available from the school (i.e., tablets, Chromebooks, hotspots, wifi, tech support) and confirm whether the student needs any of these resources.]
8. Are there any *accommodations* or special supports you require in communicating with the school?
9. As you think about communications between you and the school in the past, is there *anything that has worked really well* or is there *anything that has not worked well*?
10. Is there *any other information* you would like to tell us that will help us understand the best way to communicate with you?

“Thank you for your time today. I’m glad we had a chance to talk so we know how to communicate with you about your learning.”

[Review any next steps and/or agreements and let the student know when they can next expect to hear from the school.]

## Communicating with Parents/Guardians of Students with Disabilities

This questionnaire is designed for parents/legal guardians whose child has an IEP or 504 Plan. The purpose of the questions is to supplement the information in the Family Communication Plan for general communications between the child’s teachers and parent with *specific* information about how best to include the parent/legal guardian in the specialized communications and meetings that are part of the IEP and 504 process. These questions should be asked *by a member of the student’s IEP team*. Outreach to schedule the time, place and medium for this conversation should be conducted according to the Family Communication Plan already developed by the school (including in the preferred language identified by the parent). If such a plan does not exist, the caller should begin with the initial set of questions designed to help build a Family Communication Plan.

**Sample Script**

“Hello, this is \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ from [STUDENT’S SCHOOL].

Before I continue, what is the language you prefer to speak? I can get an interpreter on the line.

Is now a good time to speak with you for a few minutes? [If not: when would be a good time for me to call you back?]

I am calling today because [STUDENT’s] IEP/504 Team would like to be sure we are doing everything we can to communicate well with you [and/or STUDENT] about [STUDENT’s] IEP/504 Plan. As you know, the IEP/504 process involves a lot of documents and special meetings. Sometimes, especially during remote learning, communication barriers can arise between the school and home, and we don’t want to see that happen. I am hoping to ask you a few questions to help us understand the best ways to communicate with you as part of the IEP/504 process. With your permission, we will add this information to the Family Communication Plan that the school has already developed for other communications with you about [STUDENT]. Would it be alright if I asked you a few questions?

Is there anything you would like to share with me or any questions you would like to ask before we begin?”

**Sample Questions**

1. Have you been receiving special education or 504 documents *translated* into your language? Has an *interpreter* been present at IEP or 504 meetings?
2. Generally, *when is the best time* for us to schedule IEP or 504 meetings for your child? They typically last between 1 and 2 hours. Also, please be aware that if an IEP meeting is ever scheduled for a time you are not available, you always have the right to ask the school to reschedule.
3. How do you prefer to participate in IEP or 504 meetings: *in person, by phone, or virtually*? Are there any accommodations you require for any of these types of meetings?
4. During remote learning, *how has the communication been* between you and your child’s IEP/504 Team? How could it be improved?
5. *Which member of the IEP/504 Team* are you most comfortable receiving communications from in the future? *[NOTE: Team member options can be offered.]*

“Thank you for your time today. I’m glad we had a chance to talk so we can support your participation in [STUDENT]’s special education and/or 504 Accommodations Plan.”

[Review any next steps and/or agreements and let the parent know when they can next expect to hear from the school.]

## Identifying Barriers to Communication

This questionnaire is designed for parents who seem to be experiencing barriers in communicating with the school. It should be used in situations where the school has completed an initial Family Communication Plan with the parent/legal guardian, but it does not seem to be working. The purpose of these questions is to help the school understand why a school’s previous communication with the parent/legal guardian has not been as effective as it could be and how difficulties with technology, access to the primary contact, and/or language barriers may be getting in the way. The person asking these questions is ideally the person identified in the Family Communication Plan as their preferred contact, someone with whom they feel a sense of comfort and trust. Outreach to schedule the time, place and medium for this conversation should be conducted according to the Family Communication Plan already developed by the school (including in the preferred language identified by the parent). If such a plan does not exist, the caller should begin with the initial set of questions designed to help build a Family Communication Plan.

**Sample Script**

“Hello, this is \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ from the school.

Before I continue, what is the language you prefer to speak? I can get an interpreter on the line.

Is now a good time to speak with you for a few minutes? [If not: when would be a good time for me to call you back?]

I am calling today because [STUDENT’s] teachers would like to be sure they are doing everything they can to communicate well with you [and/or STUDENT] about [STUDENT’s] learning. We are concerned that maybe our communication has not been as effective as it could be.

I am hoping to ask you a few questions to help us understand how we can improve our efforts to communicate with you. If you are willing, I would like to consider some possible solutions with you so that we can do better. Would it be okay if I asked you a few questions?

Is there anything you would like to share with me or any questions you would like to ask before we begin?”

**Sample Questions**

1. Is there anything we should know or anything we could do to *make communication better*? Are there any accommodations or special supports we could provide to make our communication better?
2. When the school communicates with you, do they use a language that is easy to understand? Have you been receiving communications from school in the *language* you told us about when we spoke to you before? Has the school been following the communication plan that we developed with you when we spoke before, including providing any accommodations or special supports you need?
3. Sometimes issues with technology can get in the way of communication between school and home. Are you having any *difficulties with technology* that are getting in the way of communication with the school?
	1. Are you having any difficulties with *devices*?
	2. Are you having any difficulties with *wifi or internet access*?
	3. Do you know what *applications or programs* your student’s teachers are using for remote learning (Google Classroom, Class Dojo, Bloomz, Zoom, Google Meet, etc.)?
	4. *Would you like any help* learning how to use these devices, applications or programs? What would be the best way for us to provide this support?
	5. *Have you already received technological support* from the school? Has it been provided in the language you prefer or you can understand?
	6. [Provide information if needed about resources available from the school (i.e., tablets, Chromebooks, hotspots, wifi, tech support) and confirm whether the student needs any of these resources].
4. Are there *any responsibilities or time considerations* that we should take into account in planning communications and meetings with you (for example, work, medical appointments, taking care of family members, etc.)?
5. I know a lot of paperwork is sent home (via email or mail) and can be hard to get to for everyone. Would it be helpful to have someone call you to share the *information by phone as well?*
6. Is there a *back-up contact person* who can be contacted if you are not available? [Note: the parent should be provided with an appropriate release form if they indicate a back-up person who is not a custodial parent or legal guardian.]
7. What is the best way to communicate with any back-up contact people: *emails, texts, phone calls, voice mails, Whatsapp, and/or mail?* And what is their contact information?
8. Is there anything else you want us to know that can help us share important information about [STUDENT] over the course of the year?

“Thank you for your time today. I’m glad we had a chance to talk so we can improve our communication with you about [STUDENT].”

[Review any next steps and/or agreements and let the parent know when they can next expect to hear from the school.]

## Understanding How Communication Barriers Might Be Related to Lack of Engagement with Remote Learning

This questionnaire is designed for parents/legal guardians in situations where teachers have noticed that the student has been inconsistently engaged in remote learning. The purpose of the questions is to help the school understand how communication barriers between the school and home may be contributing to a student’s lack of engagement with learning. To be clear, there may be many potential reasons why a student is not consistently engaging in learning; these questions focus *exclusively* on the issue of communication and how it may be playing a role. The person asking these questions of the parent should be the person identified in the Family Communication Plan as their preferred contact, someone with whom they feel a sense of comfort and trust. Outreach to schedule the time, place and medium for this conversation should be conducted according to the Family Communication Plan already developed by the school (including in the preferred language identified by the parent). If such a plan does not exist, the caller should begin with the initial set of questions designed to help build a Family Communication Plan.

**Sample Script**

“Hello, this is \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ from the school.

Before I continue, what is the language you prefer to speak? I can get an interpreter on the line.

Is now a good time to speak with you for a few minutes? [If not: when would be a good time for me to call you back?]

I am calling today because [STUDENT’s] teachers would like to be sure they are doing everything they can to communicate well with you [and/or STUDENT] about [STUDENT’s] learning. We have noticed that [HE/SHE] may have be having some difficulty engaging consistently in remote learning lately and we would like to be able to help if we can.

We know that sometimes, especially during remote learning, one of the reasons it might be difficult to engage consistently is that communication barriers can arise between the school and home. I am hoping to ask you a few questions to help us understand whether lack of communication may be playing a role. If so, I would like to brainstorm some possible solutions with you so that we at school can improve the way we communicate with you. Would it be alright if I asked you a few questions?

Is there anything you would like to share with me or any questions you would like to ask before we begin?”

**Sample Questions**

1. Have you been receiving communications about your child’s lessons, assignments, schedules, etc., *translated into your language*?
2. *How often* would you like ideally to receive communications directly from the teacher(s)? *What kind of communication* from the teacher(s) would help you support your child learning at home? Would you like *regular calls* to explain assignments or schedules related to your child’s remote learning?
3. Would you like me to *check in with you* periodically to answer any questions you might have about remote learning?
4. Some families have multiple children in the home with remote learning plans, which can make it hard on parents to keep track of all the communications with teachers. If there are any *other children in your home who have remote learning plans* would it be helpful to consider ways we could simplify and coordinate communications to help you manage these different plans?
5. Sometimes *lack of technology* or *difficulties with technology* makes it harder to communicate about remote learning with the school. Is this a problem for your child?
	1. What kind of technological *devices* does your child have access to for remote learning (smart phone, tablet, Chromebook, laptop, desktop)? Do they share these devices with anyone?
	2. Does your child have access to *wifi or other internet connection* through any of these devices? What is the quality of the wifi connection?
	3. Do you know what *applications or programs* the school is using for remote learning (Google Classroom, Class Dojo, Bloomz, Zoom, Google Meet, etc.)
	4. *Would you like any help* learning how to use these devices, applications or programs? If so, what might be helpful to learn more about?
	5. Have you already received *technological support* from the school? Has it been provided in the language you prefer?
6. Is there anything else you would like to ask or let us know that might help make *remote learning more effective* for [STUDENT]?

“Thank you for your time today. I’m glad we had a chance to talk so we can support [STUDENT] to engage in remote learning more consistently.”

[Review any next steps and/or agreements and let the parent know when they can next expect to hear from the school.]

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