

A Checklist For Encouraging Family Engagement

☐ **Send something home to families to start the year on a positive note.**

Good relationships are built over time and based on respect and trust. You can start this process now! Think of ways you can reach out to families.

For example:

- An start of year message to say how much you are looking forward to collaborating with them and supporting their children through 2021
- An email about what your hopes are for 2021 and inviting them to share theirs
- An invitation for them to give you feedback about the year and suggestions for this one.

☐ **Get to know your students' parents/caregivers.**

Remember that conversations with families should not only be focused on admin and student progress. From day one, make an effort to get to know the families of your students. It can be as simple as learning their names and showing interest in them as people (not just as parents/caregivers).

For example:

- Make sure you have a list of students and the names of their parents/caregivers.
- Be present and available before and after class and look for opportunities to chat with the adults who drop them at school/appear on screen - even if it's just a quick "Hi, how are you?".
- Send home a video introducing yourself and invite families to do the same.

☐ **Find out relevant information about your students' home context.**

In 2021, schools should start the year by inviting families to share what is going on at home. Have they lost family members, been affected financially or had problems adjusting? This is the kind of background information that can help educators and school management make better decisions about how to support families and students in the new school year.

☐ **Be the voice of reason and reassurance.**

From the very beginning, show parents that you are prepared and ready for any new challenge. Reassure them, with words and actions, that you are reliable and committed to working in partnership with them to make 2021 a success.

You could:

- Hold an informative meeting at the start of the school year to propose this home-school partnership.
- Educate them by sharing research-based information
- Ask for and respond to feedback regularly

☐ **Choose an appropriate channel of communication and make sure everyone knows how to use it.**

This has always been important but these days, it has become essential. Without a user-friendly and reliable channel of communication, it becomes incredibly difficult to maintain a good relationship with families. Regular updates are useless if no one is reading them or able to respond.

☐ **Don't wait for families to reach out to you.**

By then, it may be too late. Especially in the first few weeks of the new school year, make an effort to contact them regularly. Check in and see if they have any questions or suggestions. This will create a culture of communication and make them feel more comfortable opening up to you if they need to.

☐ **Send parents regular messages about how the school plans to respond to the changing situation.**

Establish realistic expectations and hear their opinions about a possible closing/reopening of the school in the future. Be transparent, honest and open to hear their opinions.

☐ **Share health and safety procedures with families**

Many families will be worried about how you plan to keep their children safe if returning to the classroom. Anticipate their questions by providing them with the official health and safety guideline that the school is following. You could also let them know how you plan to support the children emotionally and academically during the new school year.