

# Education Policy Analysis: The Importance of Communication in Family Engagement

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# communication:

“a process by which information is exchanged between individuals through a common system of symbols, signs or behavior” (Merriam-Webster, n.d.).

# Communication Formats

- One-way communication is one party informing another. In this instance, typically teachers/schools to parents. Formats of one-way communication can range from beginning year introduction letters, classroom newsletters, report cards, webpages, communication books, etc. Information should be clear, organized and explicit in order to be friendly and useful to the reader (i.e. parent).
- Two-way communication involves a back and forth exchange of information. For example, the dialogue between a parent and teacher at open house, parent-teacher conferences, telephone calls, school based activities or home visits, etc. It is suggested that in-person is most effective.

Note: parents preferred style of communication should always be a priority.

# Why is communication with parents important? What does research say?

- Epstein states (1995), “Communicating with parents is one of six major types of parent involvement practices critical to establishing strong working relationships between teachers and parents” (p. 703).
- According to Graham-Clay (n.d.), “Strong communication is fundamental to this partnership and to building a sense of community between home and school” (p. 117).
- While Chase and Valorose (2019) further explain, “Communication efforts must have sufficient time to develop trust, an understanding of different cultures, and both organizational and communal relationships. While “one size does not fit all” is a cliché, effective communication strategies must move beyond printed and translated materials and websites to focus on relationships and to demonstrate respect for all types of families” (p. 1).

# Federal Policy Context:

An analysis of effective communication

# At the Federal Level parent communication is referenced in two policy documents.

Parental Involvement: Title I, Part A (April 23, 2004)

Policy Statement on Family Engagement from  
the Early Years to the Early Grades  
(May 5, 2016)



# Parental Involvement: Title I, Part A amended under the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESEA) (April 23, 2004)

- Communication is a fundamental part of the definition of parent involvement.
- The statute stresses the importance of involving parents in meaningful and ongoing twoway communication for the purpose of assisting, being actively involved and full partners in their child's education with regard to academic learning and school related activities.
- It explicitly outlines expectation of State Education Agency (SEA) and Local Education Agency (LEA) communication with parents; uniform and understandable formats with alternate formats provided where appropriate and with reasonable accommodations (i.e. printed translations, orally interpretation in parents native language, alternate formats for parents with disabilities, etc.).
- SEA and LEA must specify a written policy for parent involvement.



# Policy Statement on Family Engagement from the Early Years to the Early Grades

(May 5, 2016)

- This policy statement highlights and suggests **cultivating partnerships through the use of two-way communication** as a fundamental and systematic way to consistently, positively and effectively engage families:
  - to focus on **developmental outcomes** and **learning opportunities** for their children across settings (home, community and school)
  - to create a **welcoming atmosphere** where families provide educators with insight into other aspects of the child's life and development relevant to their personal cultural, language and traditions
  - with **considerations of accessibility** with regards to individual needs, user friendliness and diversity

# State Policy Context:

An analysis of effective communication

## Connecticut: At the State Level, policy under Sec. 10-221 general statute states: Boards of education to prescribe rules, policies and procedures;

- Every LEA and regional BOE will have written policies and procedures to encourage parent-teacher communication. Two specified requirements of this policy are parent-teacher conference occurring twice and “regular contact” during a school year with flexibility. (i.e. monthly newsletters, drop-in hours for parents, home visits, technology use for parents to check on their child’s assignments and/or to provide homework help, etc.)
- Update effective 7/1/2021: includes additional modalities for parent choice to attend parent-teacher conference by teleconference or virtual platform. It also specifies for students attending public school virtually, require additional conferences and at specific intervals. Last, the request for emergency contact information in the event the parent is unable to be reached to schedule a parent-teacher conference.
- Update effective 1/1/2022: a teacher is required to provide a copy of the document developed in section 10- 10h to the parent prior to the parent-teacher conference. 10-10h includes agencies resources (i.e. CSDE, DCF and mental health, etc.) and the services they offer. Three attempts must be made by the teacher to schedule a parent-teacher conference. They are required to report attempts to school administration so they can contact the person listed in the emergency information.

# Local conditions District Level: Bristol Public Schools



- Bristol BOE Student and Parent/Guardian Handbook 2023-24:
- Parent Conferences
- Parent Involvement/Communications
- Impact on special education services provided in the district

[https://www.bristol.k12.ct.us/board\\_of\\_education/boe\\_mission\\_and\\_goals](https://www.bristol.k12.ct.us/board_of_education/boe_mission_and_goals)

[https://www.bristol.k12.ct.us/board\\_of\\_education/boe\\_core\\_values](https://www.bristol.k12.ct.us/board_of_education/boe_core_values)



# Bristol Public Schools Board of Education (BOE)

## Student and Parent/Guardian Handbook:

- **Parent Involvement/Communications: Policy 1110.0; consistent with Title I, Part A regulations; & Connecticut General Statutes 10-221**
- LEA must specify a written policy for parent involvement:
- Acknowledges the need for strong home-school partnerships (communication and interactions) lead to academic success.
- Encourages parents to help their child make educational opportunities a high priority.
- Encourages parents/guardians to be familiar academic programs and activities including special programs within the District.
- Encourages parent attendance and participation in parent-teacher conferences, parent organizations (PTA/PTO/PAC and SEPTO), BOE meetings and volunteering at the District schools.
- **Parent Conferences:**
- Parents as partners is encouraged specifically for their child's educational success
- Parent-teacher conferences may be held "any time" within the school year and can be initiated by the following: parent, teacher, student, administrator or a school counselor.
- Parent or student initiated conference can occur with a group or individual staff member during school hours. Conference held during fall and spring (per calendar and teacher contract) may occur outside of the school day. However, it notes that every effort to accommodate the parents schedule will be made when necessary.

\*although not specifically said, this is inclusive of all student and family's within the district including SWD and their family. However, a separate sections, "special programs" describes Special Education Resources/Services

# Bristol BOE Student and Parent/Guardian Handbook 2023-24 (continued):

- **Special Programs:**

Includes gifted, bilingual and students with disabilities.

- questions about these programs are directed the school principal and/or the program coordinator to answer questions: (i.e. eligibility requirements, programs and services offered in the district or affiliated organizations)
- SRBI (Scientifically Based Research Interventions) process is defined and that parent will be contacted if this process is initiated and necessary for their child's success.
- Specific to Special Education programs, communication and decision-making regarding effective use of available resources occurs during PPT and the PPT is also responsible for follow-up and periodic review of all SWD.
- Lastly, it provides instructions for referring a student to special education and summarizes applicable next steps: Planning & Placement Team (i.e. evaluation, obtaining parental consent, determining if special education services are required, development and implementation of an IEP, etc.) and references Procedural Safeguard Notice Required IDEA Part B (aligning with requirements of the CSDE).

# Bristol BOE Student and Parent/Guardian Handbook 2023-24

## Parent Involvement/Communications:

Policy 1110.0; consistent with Title I, Part A regulations; & Connecticut General Statutes 10-221

### **Pros:**

It specifies parent involvement as critical to student success

The format is uniform and understandable

It follows state and federal policies regarding communication with parents.

### **Cons:**

It does not give empirical evidence as to why parent involvement is critical

No alternate formats were available online nor does the document reference accommodation for parents with disabilities, ELL, etc.

The document fails to go beyond the state and federal policies interpreted as a “compliance measure” then a true initiative by LEA as a policy.

# Policy Improvements Suggestions for BPS District Parent/Guardian Handbook:

1. Offer information from research as to **why** parent participation/family engagement is important to student achievement and closing the gap.
2. Offer **alternate formats** with reasonable accommodations to meet the needs of parents and the community (i.e. printed translations, orally interpretation in parent's native language, alternate formats for parents with disabilities, etc.).
3. Go **beyond policy compliance of parent involvement/communications** to offer resources to parents and the community. For example add a person in the district who you can contact to get involved, links to surveys for volunteering, links to contact information for special programs coordinators, etc.
4. **PD opportunities** for staff on effective communication strategies
5. Set BOE **goals for parent involvement** and utilize a guide such as CA's "Family Engagement Tool" to measure the outcome. (Allot resources from Title 1 funding to support parent involvement as a District initiative.)  
<https://www.cde.ca.gov/ls/pf/pf/documents/famengageframeenglish.pdf>





Local conditions  
Building Level:  
Edgewood Prekindergarten Academy

## Targeted Problem of Practice

Going **beyond compliance with BOE policy 1110.0 regarding parent involvement/communications** to offer resources to parents and the community utilizing alternative formats specific to individual family need.



# Edgewood Prekindergarten Academy Building Level Focus: Improving Parent Communication

**Goal:** By the end of the 2024-25 academic school year, the Preschool Evaluation Team will provide every family referring from the Birth to Three system page 14 from the CT Birth to Three Family Handbook Guide 3: Transition to Early Childhood Special Education entitled, "Things I want the School District to Know about My Child" as part of the Pre-PPT paperwork packet. Parents will utilize the provided material in order to actively participate in meaningful two way communication during the referral process by articulating their child's individual strengths and concerns across all developmental domains. Criteria for success will be measured by mastery of the outlined objectives.

<https://www.birth23.org/files/Families/FamilyHandbookIII.pdf>

# Parent Communication beginning with Transition

## OBJECTIVE 1.1

OBJECTIVE 1.1: During the first month of the 24-25 academic school year, a member from Bristol Public Schools Part B team and Part C Birth to Three providers and discuss utilizing, Things I want the School District to Know about my child during visits prior to PPT1.

- TIMELINE: September 2024
- PERSONS RESPONSIBLE: Preschool Evaluation Team, Birth to Three staff involved in the transition •
- \*RESOURCES NEEDED: Things I want the School District to Know about my child form (B-3 Handbook) <https://www.birth23.org/files/Families/FamilyHandbookIII.pdf>
- OUTCOME/ CRITERIA FOR SUCCESS : B-3 providers and parents will begin dialogue about what the district will want to know specifically about their child's development.

*\*alternative formats per needs of individual family.*

# Parent Communication beginning with Transition OBJECTIVE 1.2

**OBJECTIVE 1.2:** Throughout the 24-25 academic school year, Birth to Three providers will incorporate and utilize the following resource, Things I want the School District to Know about my child, as standard practice during family visits prior to the transition conference and PPT1.

- **TIMELINE:** On or before PPT1
- **PERSONS RESPONSIBLE:** Preschool Evaluation Team, birth to three staff
- **\*RESOURCES NEEDED:** Things I want the School District to Know about my child form (B-3 Handbook) <https://www.birth23.org/files/Families/FamilyHandbookIII.pdf>
- **OUTCOME/ CRITERIA FOR SUCCESS:** With support from the LEA and Birth to Three providers, families will describe their child's present levels of performance (including strengths and areas of concern) with regards to developmental milestones to/from the LEA during the transition conference and PPT1.

*\*alternative formats per needs of individual family.*

# Parent Communication beginning with Transition

## OBJECTIVE 1.3

**OBJECTIVE 1.3:** By PPT2, as part of the team, parents will engage in effective two-way communication in order to develop a Individual Education Plan (IEP) for their child. •

- **TIMELINE:** On or before Prior Written Notice date for Free and Appropriate Education (FAPE)
- **PERSONS RESPONSIBLE:** Preschool Evaluation Team, birth to three staff, family
- **\*RESOURCES NEEDED:** drafted IEP, Things I want the School District to Know about my child form (B-3 Handbook)  
<https://www.birth23.org/files/Families/FamilyHandbookIII.pdf>
- **OUTCOME/ CRITERIA FOR SUCCESS:** Parent input into development of the IEP, specific sections targeted: Present Levels of Performance and Goals and Objectives.

\*alternative formats per needs of individual family.

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