



Created by Kira Kliment

## Connecting with “Hard to Reach” Families

Communicating with each of your students’ parents individually is essential to establishing a strong positive relationship with each family. Often times, there are a few families that are just harder to reach; you have tried calling the phone number on the enrollment form but it is disconnected, you have emailed them but they don’t respond. This can be extremely frustrating! Remain positive, and consider the child and family while trying the following strategies.

In this artifact, you will find different methods to go about connecting with "hard to reach" families, as well as how they can be used by general education teachers, special education teachers, and administrators. You will also find some examples and templates that can be used for communication with parents and families.

### At the beginning of the year:

Families often assume that if a teacher is contacting them, it is because of something negative about them or their child. To deter families from this assumption, start the year off with positive communication, either to each family individually or to the whole class:

| Initial Positive Communication   |  |
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| Start with a <b>positive</b> communication until you are able to truly reach the parent or family and have established a relationship with them. This can be done through: |  |
| Home Visits  | These could be at the student’s home or offer to meet somewhere other than the home (nearby park, coffee shop, library, etc.) if the family is hesitant to have you come to their home.  |
| Send Emails  | Start by introducing yourself, describing how the year will look, and how their students fit into the class. Give them your contact information and explain how best to reach you *see artifact 1 for an example e-mail.             |
| Phone Calls or texts   | If they answer, great! If not, leave a short message saying who it is, something positive about student or school year, anything else you need to talk about, and a way to return communication *see artifact 2 for example message. |
| Information Surveys  | Gain as much information about the child and family as possible. Send home surveys asking best mode of contact, parent goals for students, what they are looking for from you, etc.  |

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**Throughout the year:**

All of the methods used at the beginning of the year can, and typically should, continue to be used as ways to communicate with families throughout the year. Continue with persistent (but not pushy) positive communications before sending negative information within these strategies.

| Continued Communication Throughout the Year   |  |
|---|--|
| <p>Along with the above methods of communication, the following methods can be used throughout the school year to reach "hard to reach" families:</p> |  |
| <p>Meet families at drop off or pick-up</p>   | <p>If students are dropped off and/or picked up from school by their family (nannies, grandparents, etc.), make an effort to pick up or drop students off directly from/to the family and set up communication through this interaction. This is an easy face-to-face communication.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ask for the best mode of contact</li> <li>• Invite them into the classroom to</li> <li>• Share positive information</li> <li>• Ask permission to take and send home pictures</li> </ul> <p>*For students who are not picked up by parents, talk with their nanny or babysitting about contacting parents, send a note or information home with the bus driver or older sibling, or wait for students to be picked up from aftercare.</p> |
| <p>Send notes home</p>  | <p>Start with something positive and make notes two-way. Allow families to send information back to you easily</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Send great work or pictures of students home</li> <li>• Ask for families to reply using a comments section</li> </ul> <p>*For students without backpacks, necklaces, bracelets and pins are great fun ways to send information home.</p>   |
| <p>Work with a previous teacher</p>   | <p>Often times, previous teachers have already established a great relationship with parents and families. These teachers are useful resources for you in developing a trusting relationship.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ask for correct contact information</li> <li>• Ask how they established a relationship</li> <li>• See if they are willing to reach out to the family and put you in contact.</li> </ul>   |



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These types of communication can become routine and, when done with authenticity and care, will begin to establish a better relationship with the family over time.

## **Who can use these methods?**

All teachers and administrators can use these methods. Administrators should ensure that the most up to date information is available for teachers to have access to at the beginning of the year. Giving teachers access to phone numbers, email addresses, and other contact information early is important in allowing the teachers time to see which forms of communication may or may not work for families and for starting the year off strong. Administrators can also help in the form of phone calls, emails, and notes home as well as speaking to families in person when appropriate and necessary. Teachers should be the first option for communication with families and administrators can step in to help if something becomes an issue.

Special education teachers should collaborate with general education teachers when they have a student in common. Both teachers are able to reach out individually, but it should still be collaborative so that families are not overwhelmed by too much information or repeated information. Collaboration before and after communication with families from each teacher is important and necessary in this case.

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## Artifact 1 – Example e-mail

### **Whole Class Example:**

Hello Pre-K 4 Families!

I hope you are all enjoying a great summer!! I wanted to reach out to you all to introduce myself to those I have not yet met, and give you some information about the upcoming year. For those who I have not yet met, my name is \_\_\_\_\_ and I will be your child's pre-k 4 teacher this coming school year! I joined the \_\_\_\_\_ School community last year after receiving my master degree from The George Washington University as the early childhood special education teacher and have now moved into my new role as one of the pre-k 4 teachers at Maury. \_\_\_\_\_ will be my teaching partner this year! We are both so excited to have all of your children in our class and think it is going to be a great year!

I was hoping to get to know you as well as your children this summer before the school year begins or throughout the first couple weeks of school with home visits. I will be reaching out to you individually, but please let me know if there are times/days that you are not available or that you would prefer for your home visit. Please also let me know if you would prefer to meet at a location other than your home.

I look forward to partnering with you all this year and having your children in our class. Please let me know if you have any questions or concerns and feel free to reach out to me with anything you may need. I cannot wait for the upcoming year!

Thank you,

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## Artifact 2 – Example phone message or text

“Hello! This is \_\_\_\_\_, **student**’s teacher at \_\_\_\_\_ school this year. I wanted to call to tell you (something positive about student) and (anything else that needs to be talked about). If you have some time, please give me a call back at \_\_\_\_\_, or feel free to text or e-mail me as well at \_\_\_\_\_. Thank you and I look forward to hearing from you!”

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## Artifact 3 – Example survey

### Family Questionnaire

Hello and welcome to our Pre-k 4 Classroom! Please take a moment to help us get to know you and your child a little better this school year. Please fill out this short survey and send it back to school with your child. Thank you!

**Describe your child's strengths.**

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**How does your child best communication with others (spoken language, sign language, written language, pictures symbols, gestures, etc.)**

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**Describe some of your favorite activities to do at home as a family.**

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**What is the best way to contact and communicate with you?**

- Phone** **Phone #** \_\_\_\_\_
- E-mail** **Email** \_\_\_\_\_
- Text** **Cell Phone #** \_\_\_\_\_
- Other** \_\_\_\_\_

**Anything else you would like us to know about your child or family**

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