

Communicating with Families Around Academics—Dos and Don'ts

	Do	Don't
Manageable for teachers and families	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pick something that you are already assessing or doing. • Pick information that you think is most important for your families to know. • Keep your analysis and learning support recommendations short and sweet. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collect new information simply to send it home. • Share information on every single academic subject and standard. • Send a long, written explanation of the child's data and five suggested activities per week for parents to support learning.
Regular	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Share information on a consistent basis; it doesn't have to be every week. • Pick how often you will be sharing information and stick to it so parents know when to expect it. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Share information only at parent teacher conferences or through report cards. • Over-commit and spend more time than you have sending home information to families.
Explicitly explained to families	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use an event where you have many families in your classroom, such as back to school night, to share your data-sharing system with families. • Follow-up with families who did not attend your training on your system to make sure they understand it. • Ensure your students understand what's going home to their families so they can explain it to them as well. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assume families will understand the data or information you are sending home without an explanation. • Forget about families who aren't responsive to or interested in the system at first. • Start sending information to families without explaining it to students.

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Positive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Start any communication about academics with a student strength • Cast skills students are struggling with in an optimistic light—“challenges, areas for growth, etc.” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Only list things the student needs help with. • Make student performance sound dismal and impossible to improve.
Transparent and placed in context	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide perspective—what is the class average? The state average? • How does the information relate to progress toward a student’s goal? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Share information in a vacuum (i.e. Daiquann is a Level “F” in reading. Parents won’t usually know what an F means for their student’s grade level.)
Clear, plain language	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tell parents what standards or skills mean in everyday language. • Provide visual examples—copies of books, math problems, scenarios, etc that illustrate what scores or levels mean (i.e. Daiquann reads “F” level books. This is what an “F” level book looks like. It has 3-5 sentences and a picture that clearly illustrates the sentences. Many of the words have the same sounds or letter patterns.) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Write standards verbatim. • Share only numbers or levels with families without visual aids or explanations.
Actionable	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Give parents one or two concrete suggestions on how they can accelerate learning at home. • Tailor each suggestion to a specific skill a student needs to work on to improve the score (i.e. understand the difference between addition and subtraction, read fluently without stopping to break up words, etc.) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide no action steps for parents to take to help their kid’s data improve. • Give generic suggestions like “read with your child.”

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Check for and sustain family understanding	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ask parents to write comments or questions on the information and send them back to you so you can confirm they've read it.• Follow up by phone or in person with families who are not providing written confirmation they receive and/or understand the material.• If using an online grade book, track how often parents log on and reach out to those who don't by phone, email, or personal contact.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ask parents for a signature only.• Send information home and have no way to follow-up or check who received it.
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