Tool: Questions to Ask Families and Educators to Improve Your Family-School Communication Systems

From online gradebooks and texting services to full-service learning platforms, the technologies that schools use to communicate with families vary widely. While these tools can help create strong family-school partnerships, school and district leaders must make time to listen to their community and reflect on their experience as users of these platforms and products.

Community conversations can provide leaders with valuable feedback, as well as an opportunity to reflect on what pieces of their technology strategies are most effective and what pieces could be improved. Use the following discussion guides to invite feedback from families and educators.

Discussion Guide: Gathering Family Input

The following discussion guide is designed for education decision-makers as they determine which communications technology to use and how to maximize its reach and effectiveness. Use the following goals and questions to gather input from families in your district. Consider customizing the questions based on what you already know about your communications strategies.

For honest and engaging conversation, do your best to make it a safe space for families to openly share how they use communication technologies and how they feel about the tools available to them.

Goals

◗ To learn about family experiences with the various platforms and/or technologies that they use to communicate with their child's school and teacher(s).

◗ To identify the most important features and capabilities for effective family communication, in order to make more informed decisions about family-school communication technologies

Discussion Questions

◗ What platform, apps or other technology do you use to communicate with teachers or school administrators? Which one(s) do you rely on most and why?

◗ How often do you typically use family-school communications technologies/platforms? What kinds of information are you looking for when you use them?

◗ What type of information is typically shared via your family-communication platform(s)? Is it primarily one way communication (like announcements) or two-way communication (like ongoing dialogue with the teacher)?

◗ Do you feel like you receive all the information you need about your child's classroom and school experience? Why or why not?

◗ What works—and doesn't work—when it comes to your family-school communication platforms? Are there features or capabilities you feel need improvement or need to be added to your platform? If so, what are they?

◗ Did you receive any kind of training on your school's communication platform(s)? If so, please share what you found helpful and what you feel could use improvement.

Discussion Guide: Gathering Educator Input

The following discussion guide is designed for education decision-makers as they determine which communications technology to use and how to maximize its reach and effectiveness. Use the following goals and questions to gather input from educators in your district. Consider customizing the questions based on what you already know about your communications strategies.

For honest and engaging conversation, do your best to make it a safe space for educators to openly share what tactics they are using and how they feel about the tools available to them.

Goals

◗ To learn about educator experiences with the various platforms and/or technologies that they use in their classroom(s).

◗ To identify the most important features and capabilities for effective family communication, in order to make more informed decisions about family-school communication technologies

Discussion Questions

◗ What platform, apps or other technology do you use to communicate with families? Which one(s) do you rely on most and why?

◗ How often do you typically use family-school communications technologies/platforms? What kinds of information are you looking to share with families when you use them?

◗ What type of information is typically shared via your family-communication platform(s)? Is it primarily one way communication (like announcements) or two-way communication (like answering parent questions)?

◗ Do you feel like the information tends to reach all families? Why or why not?

◗ What works—and doesn't work—when it comes to the family-school communication technologies you are currently using? Are there features or capabilities you feel need improvement or need to be added to your platform? If so, what are they?

◗ What kind of training was available for each technology you use? What parts of the training were helpful? What parts do you feel could be better?