Communicating With Parents 2.0: Strategies for Teachers

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Abstract

Home–school communication is fundamental to parent involvement and student success. This essay and discussion article outlines the broad range of opportunities currently available for teachers to communicate with parents and associated strategies. The most frequent one-way modes of communication used with parents are discussed (websites, newsletters, email, texts, apps, report cards) as well as popular two-way interaction strategies (phone calls, home visits, parent–teacher conferences, virtual meetings). Key barriers to parent–teacher communication are also discussed, including racial stereotypes, language, teacher training, technology, and time, as well as the potential impact of a pandemic. Future directions for research in the area of school–home communication are also proposed. Ultimately, every communication exchange between teachers and parents occurs within the context of what has gone before and sets the stage for future interactions.

Key Words: communication, school, home, parents, teachers, strategies, partnerships, one-way, two-way, barriers, communicate, communicating, families, family engagement, parental involvement, technology, interactions

Introduction

We all want our children to learn and to thrive in school. However, these are challenging times for both schools and families. The ongoing impacts of an international pandemic cannot be underestimated on individuals and on society

as a whole. Teachers and parents have experienced disrupted work and family lives. Students have experienced disrupted learning and social experiences. More than ever before, the demands on teachers and parents have increased, economic pressures are significant, and time is at a premium for everyone. These increased stressors reinforce the need for better understanding and closer connections between teachers and parents built upon effective communication strategies to support all students.

Version one of this article was written a number of years ago (Graham-Clay, 2005). This second version describes the modes of communication between teachers and parents now in use some 20 years later. Several traditional modes of communication continue (e.g., parent–teacher conferences, report cards) while new technologies have dramatically changed the communication landscape. Technology has influenced the speed and cost of communication in addition to the quality and accessibility, the nature of the information that is shared (e.g., breaking news), as well as a change in style of communication over time (Alhadlaq, 2016). For example, in the current context, communication is often based on shorter, more concise bits of information versus a more detailed conversation. According to Kraft and Bolves (2022), new mobile technology is fundamentally changing the ways in which schools and teachers communicate with their parent community.

The purpose of this essay and discussion article is to outline key considerations, skills, and strategies that will support teachers to maximize the current communication opportunities with parents. The term "parent" used within is inclusive of designated adults who are responsible to care for a child and who would be the key person to communicate with the child's teacher (i.e., biological parent, guardian, foster parent, grandparent, etc.).

Partnering With Parents

Partnerships with parents have long been considered essential to the education of children. Epstein's work has been foundational to our understanding of the many types of parent involvement (Epstein, 1995, 2010; Epstein et al., 2019). Based on decades of research, Epstein et al. (2019) noted that "when students have support from school, home, and community, they are more likely to feel secure and cared for, build positive attitudes and school behaviors, work to achieve their full potential, and stay in school" (p. 14). Communicating is one of the six parent involvement strategies outlined in Epstein's framework. In fact, teacher communication skills have been described as the strongest predictor of parent involvement (Gisewhite et al., 2021; Park & Holloway, 2018).

Epstein and her associates described the communication function as the need to "design effective forms of school-to-home and home-to-school

communications about school programs and children's progress" (Epstein et al., 2019, p. 19). They highlighted the importance of viewing the school as a "homeland" that reflects an inclusive approach involving mutual respect, shared leadership, and ongoing communication. The expected results of an effective communication strategy include benefits for students, parents, and teachers. Epstein et al. (2019) suggested that "clear and useful" communication with parents will increase interactions between teachers and parents, promote better awareness and monitoring of student progress and behavior, foster a better understanding of school policies and programs (for parents and students), and enable teachers to elicit and better understand parental views regarding their child's learning progress (p. 201).

New frameworks for family engagement have also been proposed that have implications for school–home communication. Goodall (2022) described parent engagement as a "process to be lived" (p. 88) involving both relationship and action (versus an outcome). Within this framework, communication is considered key to the relationship that exists between teachers and parents who are both active partners in the child's learning. Goodall's framework defined home–school communication as a "process that supports the exchange of information, ideas, and understandings between school staff and families, in support of all aspects of learning" (p. 84).

A multitiered model of family engagement has also been proposed in which practices, services, and supports are categorized into different tiers available to staff and families in a flexible manner as needed (Bachman & Boone, 2022). The *universal* tier reflects engagement opportunities that exist for all families (such as parent–teacher conferences). The *tailored* tier focuses on groups who have common needs (such as parents whose work schedules prevent attendance at traditional conferences). The *intensive* tier provides unique opportunities to engage families with individualized needs (such as regular check-in meetings to review their child's progress). The authors suggested that the key is determining when to apply a particular tier to ensure the focus is on doing "better" rather than on doing more. This approach will require teachers to employ communication strategies that are flexible and adaptable based on the level of tiered approach needed for the parent community and for individual parents within that community.

Communicating With Parents

Communication has been defined as "the process of exchanging information between or among individuals, groups, institututions, and/or organizations in oral, written, or sign forms through any available media" (Nwogbaga et al., 2015, p. 33). Communication is complex and involves the sending and

receiving of information. Schools and teachers have many reasons to communicate with their parent community. General information may be shared regarding school policies and services as well as school-based activities and events. Classroom specific information may be shared with parents regarding activities and initiatives, assignments, projects, special events, as well as individual student progress and concerns. When schools communicate with parents, the information is typically shared in spoken or written form.

Communication can also be nonverbal in nature. The smiling face of the office staff greeting the parent registering their child for the first time, the artwork in the hallways, and the welcome sign at the door including in the languages spoken in the community are all subtle but important forms of communication (Chambers, 1998; Jones, 2010). The "Welcoming Atmosphere Walk-Through Tool Kit" is a user-friendly guide for schools to create an environment that will encourage family involvement (Moritz, 2018). The tool kit outlines four components of a welcoming atmosphere including the physical environment, practices and policies, personal interactions, as well as written materials and communications.

Communication is at the root of most misunderstandings (Fiore & Fiore, 2017). Hughes and Read (2012) encouraged teachers to "tune in" and to enter into a relationship with parents. The authors suggested that effective communication is based on learning the skills and taking the time needed to build relationships based on recognizing the feelings and perspectives of parents. Indeed, the development of a trusting relationship with parents has been highlighted "*before* there is anything substantial to talk about" (Leenders et al., 2019, p. 529). When teachers were asked how to build trust with parents, they identified the openness of the school, opportunities to communicate through informal contacts, as well as their own attempts to reach out to parents (Leenders et al., 2019). Rana (2015) also noted that effective communication is more than just exchanging information and involves "understanding the emotion behind the information" (p. 29).

A personal example illustrates the power of communication to build relationships. On the first day of school when my son was in Grade 3, he came home with a letter from his teacher. No doubt the same letter went home with every student in the class. The first two sentences were unforgettable: "I know that your child is important to you. Now that your child is in my class, your child is also important to me." This was a teacher who understood that establishing a positive and trusting relationship was key to ongoing communication throughout the school year, especially when future conversations might be difficult at times. The letter went on to explain the types of information to expect from the teacher and how to reach the teacher in the event of a concern.

The underlying message communicated to parents was one of genuine openess and shared vision.

An important question is the type of information that parents value most from teachers. Park and Holloway (2018) reported that parent involvement was enhanced by "informative" communication from the teacher regarding their child's performance at school and ways for parents to support their child, such as helping with homework. Epstein (2018) also reported that the most frequent parent request was for "information on how to help their child at home" (p. 402).

Teacher Training

Teachers play a key communication role with parents regarding their child's learning; however, many teachers do not feel adequately trained in effective communication practices. There is a need to specifically train teachers in their role as communicators and in the development of communication skills (Fuentes et al., 2017). In a survey of lecturers in a teacher training program, over 90% believed that communication skills were very important for teachers (Ortega & Fuentes, 2015). However, lack of formal training for teachers was highlighted in two cross-cultural reviews that reported the training of teachers on family–school partnerships seemed mostly dependent on the individual professors of education (Epstein, 2018; Thompson et al., 2018). Similarly, Luke and Vaughn (2022) noted that few teacher training programs require courses on collaboration or otherwise address the "interpersonal aspects" involved in teaching. Additional training needs of teachers have also been emphasized with respect to linguistic diversity (Piller et al., 2021), cross-cultural communication (Rubin et al., 2012; Weiss et al., 2019; Wood et al., 2018), as well as training in mobile communications (Burden & Naylor, 2020).

When family–school partnerships were reviewed as part of teacher training in England, communication skills were considered the most valued element to be taught, specifically preparing and running parent–teacher meetings and managing difficult conversations (Jones, 2020). Further delineation and review of the practical communication skills that will facilitate difficult conversations with parents are outlined in a companion article to this current article (Graham-Clay, 2024). In-service training for teacher trainees has focused on specific communication skills including active listening, nonverbal communication, and asking questions (Symeou et al., 2012). Tinajero et al. (2023) also described a set of practical experiences that improved the communication skills of preservice teachers with parents of English Learners. In outlining the positive effects of a communication skills training program for practicing

teachers, the skills taught were described as "learnable and developable" (Tuluhan & Yalcinkaya, 2018, p. 155).

The effect of teacher training programs on teachers' attitudes, knowledge, and family engagement practices was further explored through a meta-analysis of 39 studies (Smith & Sheridan, 2019). Results indicated that teacher training interventions had a significant and positive impact. The communication strategies described included one-way contacts between teachers and parents as well as two-way sharing of information.

Channels of Communication

"The method by which an individual communicates an idea is referred to as the communication channel" (Fiore & Fiore, 2017, p. 46). The channels of communication that occur between teachers and parents may be one-way or two-way in nature. One-way communication occurs when the information flows in one direction to provide specific details (e.g., teacher to parent or parent to teacher). A response may or may not be provided. Two-way communication involves a reciprocal dialogue that occurs between a teacher and parent in real time. Information flows both directions between the sender and the receiver. The intent is to engage in the mutual sharing of ideas and information involving interaction and feedback.

It can be a challenge for teachers to determine the strategies that will work best "for the array of messages that must be communicated while individualizing the communication form" (González & Frumkin, 2018, p. 6). When considering the most effective strategy to use, it is helpful to keep in mind the relationship that currently exists with the parent(s), how the parent(s) will best access the information to be shared, how the information may be received, and whether personal interaction is needed to support the process and the message. Teachers are also encouraged to utilize several different methods to maximize communication with all parents.

Accessibility and Readability

Accessibilty is a key consideration when written communication is sent to parents. Accessibility includes both the format of the information as well as the language of the content. Many teachers survey the parents of their students at the beginning of the school year to request their preferred mode of communication (i.e., paper or electronic) as well as their preferred language (Shamash et al., 2022). A colleague recently shared that her son in Grade 4 had a Spanish-speaking child join the class mid-year. The teacher immediately taught the students in the class how to use Google translate to interact with their

new classmate. The teacher also ensured that all texts to parents and the class website were in both English and Spanish. The teacher's inclusive approach to make information accessible to all parents was clearly evident.

A second factor related to written communication is the concept of "readability" or the ease with which a reader understands written text. Readability is based on grade level expectations. The American Medical Association (AMA) and the National Institutes of Health (NIH) have recommended that the readability level of patient education materials should not exceed the sixth grade level (Eltorai et al., 2014). A number of studies have shown that the estimated readability level of educational information intended for parents was far too high (i.e., Grade 8 to college level). Examples have included COVID-19 protocols on department of education websites, Individual Education Plans, written communication to parents of students with disabilities, and school choice guides across a sample of large urban districts (Gordon et al., 2022; Lo, 2014; Nagro & Stein, 2016; Stein & Nagro, 2015, respectively). Education is not alone. Studies have also shown that the readability of health information intended for parents is often too difficult, such as information related to parenting a child with a cleft palate, cochlear implant information brochures, and online materials on talking to children about sexuality (De Felippe & Kar, 2015; La Scala et al., 2022; Suleiman et al., 2016, respectively).

School district staff and teachers should not make assumptions regarding the readability level of their own written content intended for parents. There are guidelines available online to estimate the readability of text. Based on the work of DuBay (2004), readability is enhanced by the use of "culture-and-gender-neutral language" (p. 2), simple graphics (such as bulleted lists and numbered steps), as well as correct grammar, punctuation, and spelling. If the information is to be translated, it is even more important to use clear vocabulary and to reduce the complexity of text to make translated versions more accessible to parents.

Nagro (2015) created a helpful checklist designed to improve written communications for school personnel. The checklist is based on the acronym PROSE and provides strategies to improve Print, Readability, Organization, Structure, and Ease of reading. Teachers and school district staff are encouraged to use the checklist when developing any written content for parents that will be online or in print.

One-Way Communication

There are many types of one-way communication that occur between school staff and parents. One-way communication most often occurs in written form but may also include radio or TV announcements (e.g., bus cancellations)

as well as robocalls (e.g., phone message home regarding an unexcused absence). Based on the National Household Education Surveys Program data from 2016, 89% of U.S. Kindergarten through Grade 12 students had parents who reported receiving a newsletter, e-mail, memo, or notice from their child's school during the school year (McQuiggan et al., 2017). One-way communication in various forms is typically a permanent product that requires careful consideration regarding format, content, tone, and wording. It is important to recognize that once one-way communication has been released, it becomes "on the record" so to speak, and cannot easily be retracted.

Schools commonly use a number of one-way written strategies to communicate with parents. Increasingly, communication with parents is digital (electronic) in nature. Millenials have become parents themselves, and it is important to align school–home communication practices with the needs and practices of the current age group of parents with respect to technology and social media use (Ray, 2013). The U.S. Census Bureau report (Martin, 2021) "Computer and Internet use in the United States: 2018" indicated that 92% of American households had a computer in 2018, and 85% had an internet subscription. Smartphones were present in 84% of households. Given the prevalence of technology use, the term "parental e-nvolvement" was coined to describe parental online endeavors to support their child's learning and to communicate with school staff and other parents (Sad et al., 2016). That said, it still holds true that sensitive topics such as problem behaviors, health issues, and concerning incidents should be discussed directly with parents in person whenever possible (Hernandez & Leung, 2004; Kuusimäki et al., 2019).

Technology has significantly impacted the way that society communicates and education continues to respond. It is interesting to note that Zoom was founded in 2011, and Zoom 1.0 only became available to the public in 2013. The use of video technology has now become commonplace a decade later. Similarly, the Remind app was also founded in 2011, and in May 2023, the Remind website reported nearly 30 million users in 80% of U.S. schools. "In this era of electronic communication, educators are faced with a choice: Continue to use traditional methods of communication with parents and students, or co-opt contemporary electronic communication and use it to their advantage" (Marshall, 2016, p. 66).

Prior to the pandemic, teachers had already moved towards a more technology-based form of communication with parents (e.g., email, GoogleClassroom, various apps; Natale & Lubniewski, 2018). "In the face of the COVID-19 pandemic, communication among families and professionals has been transformed out of necessity" (Shamash et al., 2022, p. 83). It is now recognized that rapport can be built with technoloy (Natale & Lubniewski, 2018) and

that most issues can be reasonably addressed through digital communication (Kuusimäki et al., 2019).

A number of considerations have been highlighted in the literature when communicating with parents digitally. For example, parents of children with disabilities may need more frequent contacts that are best supported by an "individualized" approach respectful of their preferred mode of communication (Shamash et al., 2022). Parents and teachers have emphasized the importance of maintaining a good balance of information when providing digital feedback (Kuusimäki et al., 2019). Administrative support for the use of digital communication has been deemed important by both parents and teachers (Bordalba & Bochaca, 2019). Technology can also support teachers who are parents themselves to connect with their own child's teacher given that scheduling conflicts may prevent them from attending events at their child's school (Sanders, 2016).

The following section provides an overview of one-way communication strategies commonly used by teachers to communicate with parents including websites, newsletters, email, texting, apps, and report cards. Teachers should ensure that their practices align with school district and union/association policies, procedures, and guidelines. As teachers consider various one-way communication strategies, it is important to develop a communication plan that provides flexibility to ensure information access for all parents.

Websites

Parents typically access school websites in advance of enrolling their child in school, for information about current school activities, or to find out what is happening in their child's class (Gilleece & Elvers, 2018). School websites have been promoted as an accessible and flexible way to foster parent involvement (Gu, 2017). School leaders are encouraged to know their audience, to incorporate unique and interesting content, to make the school website clean and simple in design as well as easy to navigate, and to expand the content through links (Williamson & Johnston, 2013). Sanders (2016) also suggested incorporating graphics to make websites more inviting.

Many teachers have also created class websites for parents to access classroom-specific information regarding their child's learning experience. In a survey of several hundred parents and teachers, participants indicated that class websites were the easiest way to provide parents with accurate information regarding daily school life, current news, the class calendar, and homework (Unal, 2008). The author noted that designing a class website was complex with limited information available regarding the type of content most desired by parents and teachers. The survey results were then used to create a suggested layout that included all the items that teachers and parents agreed upon (Unal, 2008).

A follow-up study by Roman and Ottenbreit-Leftwich (2016) noted that teachers typically did not receive coaching support on important features to include on their K–12 classroom websites. In a review of 20 teacher websites, the authors reported the typical information included:

*Name of the course/class *Contact information for the teacher (email, phone)
*Picture of the teacher   *Homework assignments and homework help
*Calendar information *Tips for parents, links to resources, educational games

Based on Unal's initial recommendations, Roman and Ottenbreit-Leftwich (2016) noted that a number of desired items were missing on the websites such as field trip information, class notes, spelling lists, parent–teacher conference information, and various forms needed for school.

Specific cautions have been identified with respect to websites. Dunn (2011) reinforced the time needed for teachers to create and maintain a website and encouraged teachers to check with school district technology personnel regarding set-up. Piller et al. (2021) stressed the need to incorporate strategies to engage linguistically diverse parents including access to translation options (such as Google translate). Even when translation was provided on school websites, Piller et al. (2021) noted that accessibility was still an issue due to the "monolingual logic" that may not make sense to a non-English speaker. They suggested that school websites should include a dedicated page in each of the school's most frequently used languages as a central hub for information in that language. They also recommended placing a link to the language-specific pages on the home page in the language itself (versus listing language names in English). The importance of web accessibility for those with disabilities has also been emphasized including missing alternative text (i.e., generic desciptors of pictures may not translate accurately), empty or confusing links, as well as issues with color contrast (Huss, 2022).

Newsletters

Newsletters provide an efficient and effective way to keep parents informed about what is going on in their child's school or classroom. Traditionally, school newsletters were in paper form. Back in 2010, Masseni cautioned that the "mediums of choice" were changing, and newsletters are now typically sent to parents in digital formats.

Newsletters provide a consistent and streamlined way to share a wide array of information with parents, including school and class policies, calendars, classroom practices, announcements, learning strategies, homework help, resources, and parenting tips. Jensen (2006) suggested that newsletters facilitate a "feeling of connection to the classroom" (p. 188), and Sims (2016)

described monthly newsletters as easy, inexpensive, and the "perfect opportunity to share the highlights of your program and the learning and teaching that take place" (p. 28).

Newsletters serve three main purposes: to inform, to educate, and to encourage parents (Allen & McAtee, 2009). These authors outlined four helpful criteria for teachers to consider when constructing a newsletter for parents:

1. Be brief–focus on key points and keep it to one page;
2. Be diverse–include words and visuals and keep language simple and conversational;
3. Be interesting–include catchy titles and graphics to spark interest;
4. Be professional–pay attention to clarity, formating, spelling, and grammar.

Jensen (2006) reinforced the need to write in a warm, respectful, and caring tone; to consider the format (i.e., use a consistent font and design, a simple layout, and colored headlines); and to encourage parental feedback. Including examples of student work in newsletters has been suggested (Jensen, 2006; Nail, 2007). Sims (2016) also recommended including resources for parents such as links to videos, websites, and tutorials, as well as activities for families and books to read. Indeed, newsletters for parents have been used in a variety of creative ways to promote parent engagement with respect to mathematics learning at home (Hollingsworth, 2020), health messaging (Merga & Hu, 2016), and garden education (Vi et al., 2022). Many examples of school and classroom newsletters are available online for educators to review.

Email

Email has become a common method of communication between teachers and parents over time (Bouffard, 2013; Laho, 2019; Natale & Lubniewski, 2018; Thompson & Mazer, 2012; Thompson et al., 2015). Emails provide a quick, efficient, and personalized way to connect with parents on a variety of topics including student grades, student behavior, social concerns, health issues, and scheduling, with grades and academic performance listed as the primary concerns (Thompson, 2009; Thompson & Mazer, 2012). Email has been described as asynchronous in that communication does not happen in real time, but teachers and parents can send and receive messages when it is convenient for them. Some parents reported emails provided them time to think and to create a more effective message in response to their child's teacher (Öztürk, 2013; Thompson et al., 2015). The use of email also provides for the capacity to translate the content for parents who speak another language. In addition, mass emails based on a listserv can provide quick updates and information on special events to a large parent group (Hernandez & Leung, 2004).

Thompson (2009) reported that elementary and secondary teachers typically spent 30 minutes to one hour each week communicating with parents by email. Frequent email interactions with parents typically involved a limited number of two to five parents. Despite the common use of emails, a survey of over 100 teachers revealed over 75% reported having received little to no training on the use of email as a parent communication tool (Ferry, 2022). Thus, in addition to the advantages of using email, it is important for teachers to be aware of the cautions.

First and foremost is the need to maximize the security and privacy of email accounts through the use of effective passwords and procedures as per school district guidelines. A second important concern is the potential for miscommunication in emails. Most of us have received an email that made us feel uncomfortable due to content or tone. Miscommunication may occur for several reasons, such as the lack of nonverbal signals (e.g., facial cues) and the fact that the content of emails to parents often reflect a concern with associated emotions involved (Bouffard, 2013; Hernandez & Leung, 2004; Thompson, 2009). Teachers addressed potential miscommunication by regulating the tone of their email and by stating their feeling about the issue clearly in the email, rather than leaving interpretation to the parent (Thompson, 2009).

Several recent examples of the effective use of emails to parents have been highlighted. A study designed to examine strategies for disseminating online parent resources in schools during the COVID-19 pandemic found that positively framed emails had the highest numbers of "clicks" (Lasecke et al., 2022). Rates of on-task behavior and math problem completion and accuracy increased through the use of an Electronic Home Note Program that generated emails home to parents (Lopach et al., 2018). Another study found use of weekly emails to parents improved the off-task behavior of students with behavioral challenges (Fefer et al., 2020).

Teacher's experiences emailing parents are not always positive, however. An email sent to a parent may not be responded to, leaving a teacher unsure of the next step. Sometimes a parent's response to an email may be unexpected. A teacher who emailed a parent expressing concern that her son was not completing a project was met with an angry parental email response criticizing the teacher for not motivating her child (Fagell, 2023). Another teacher expressed frustration that an upset parent copied the principal on a series of emails with the teacher (Fagell, 2021). It is important to note that emails are a permanent product and can be retained as a record of information sent and received. Emails can also be shared and altered. As such, teachers may wish to create an email file, particularly when corresponding with parents by email on issues of concern.

A number of authors have provided advice for teachers on the use of emails. In summary, when using emails as a communication tool with parents, teachers are encouraged to:

- Create an email policy. Advise parents of the expected time frame for a response.
- Use a professional school district email address.
- Build a relationship with parents first. Avoid sending a concern in an initial email.
- Consider if email is appropriate for the topic or whether personal contact is needed.
- Keep emails friendly, short, and factual. Avoid using educational jargon.
- Check spelling and grammar to ensure a professional message.
- Use Cc and Bcc (Blind Carbon Copy) options thoughtfully. When emailing multiple parents, send the email to yourself and list parent emails in the Bcc field for privacy.
- Customize and create a clear subject line for the email.
- Create a balance between positive and negative information. Start with the positive.
- Consider the tone implied in an email. Offer support rather than criticism.
- Reread emails for accuracy and content. If unsure, wait to send, and reread again.
- Create a plan for personal time with respect to managing emails.
- Remember emails are a permanent product that can be saved, altered, and shared.

Texts

Educators need to constantly expand their communication techniques with parents to align with societal practices (Lazaros, 2016). Given the vast majority of parents have access to cell phones, texting has become a common tool for teachers to communicate with parents. The advantages of texting include its reach to multiple parents, immediate real-time sharing of information, low cost, and flexibility (Kurki et al., 2021). Texting also allows language barriers to be "bridged" as recipients can translate messages on their own phone or the message can be translated before sending (Snell et al., 2020). Texting has also been shown to build trust between teachers and parents and to improve teacher confidence in promoting parent engagement (Bachman et al., 2022).

Many teachers use their personal cell phone to text parents which can be a concern for some. Emails can be sent as a text message on various platforms as outlined by Lazaros (2016), thereby keeping teacher cell phone numbers private. Text messages can also be sent to parents via several apps. From a research perspective, texting parents requires a small time investment and has

been shown to improve the attendance of chronically absent students (Kurki et al., 2021), the literacy skills of Kindergarten children (Doss et al., 2019), parents' confidence to talk with their adolescent children about school (Bachman et al., 2022), and young children's vocabulary skills (Snell et al., 2020). Texts to parents have also been used to reduce summer literacy skill loss in primary students (Kraft & Monti-Nussbaum, 2017).

Lazaros (2016) suggested a number of class topics appropriate for texting a group of parents including: clarifying an assignment, requesting parental support to monitor an assignment or project, inviting parent participation in an event or activity, as well as various reminders (such as a special event, due date, permission sheets required, activity supplies needed, and so on). Before using texting as a communication tool, Lazaros (2016) encouraged teachers to ensure principal permission, to obtain parent consent and contact information in advance, and to send a test text at the outset requesting a simple parent response to ensure the text was received. Texts to individual parents to share student-specific information may also be appropriate at times. Doss et al. (2019) found that personalizing texts was more effective to engage parents in their child's learning.

Several considerations related to texting parents are noteworthy. Ralli and Payne (2015) reported that the "cadence and timing" of text messages was important. For example, sending a text message close to when the parent would see their child (e.g., picking up a child from school) was suggested. The use of emojis in texts to parents should be considered thoughtfully. Yang (2020) created an undergraduate class activity to demonstrate that emojis are a form of nonverbal communication with varying interpretations that tend to be rule-guided and influenced by culture. Lastly, Pakter and Chen (2013) noted teacher concerns that they could not confirm that text messages were actually received by parents.

Apps (Applications)

The past decade has seen an explosion of mobile applications (apps) designed to enhance teacher communication with parents. Several authors have reinforced the importance of "timely" communication between teachers and parents through the use of an app (Fisher, 2017; Jarvis & Martin, 2018). Apps provide instant messages to parents (typically through a text to their phone) on a range of topics such as reminders, student work, pictures, class activities, and more. Apps facilitate one-way communication to parents, and some apps also allow teachers to receive responses from parents. Apps may allow a teacher to communicate directly with one parent as well as save considerable time when communicating with all parents in the class at once.

Shamash et al. (2022) provided examples and descriptors of a number of commonly used communication apps by teachers for both one-way and two-way communication, including: Remind, Seesaw, Bloomz, Otus, Schoology, Buzzmob, AppleTree, Class Dojo, TalkingPoints, ClassTag, Parent Square, and School CNXT. Many additional apps are also available to support teacher–parent communication. The authors noted that compliance of apps with various privacy legislations is inconsistent and should be considered and explored. They also noted that technology is constantly evolving, and apps may change over time and should be reviewed periodically.

A number of criteria have been described online when teachers are reviewing a potential app to communicate with their parent community. Teachers are encouraged to first identify their current challenges and goals for using an app (Marshall, 2016). Based on identified needs, an app should be easy to use for both teachers and parents and should clearly outline the cost (if applicable). Apps should also contain features to meet the goal (e.g., translation options and mass messaging) and provide details regarding security of student data (e.g., pictures).

Research is still limited (albeit increasing) on the effectiveness of apps to support communication with parents. Ryan (2018) reported the Seesaw app provided parents an accurate idea of what their child was doing at school and helped teachers to communicate with parents who spoke another language (given the translation option). Can (2016) reported that the majority of surveyed parents in Nepal favored the use of the Meridian Connect mobile app to communite with teachers, and 95% viewed the app as easy and user-friendly. Dogan (2019) reported that school WhatsApp groups enabled teachers to provide instant communication to parents which improved relations and allowed for quick decision making. Deleon (2018) described the Seesaw app as an "accessible" way for parents to become involved with their child's learning when their child's work and photos were uploaded for them to view. Lambert (2019) noted that parents surveyed favored ClassDojo as a communication tool, although parents reported they only checked the app when they received a notification. Nisbet and Opp (2017) investigated the effect of the Remind app after four weeks and found that use of the app increased parent–teacher communication, was convenient, and saved time. Teachers typically spent about five minutes each week drafting a message to send to all parents as part of the study. Similarly, Castaneda (2019) reported increased communication with middle school parents using the Bloomz app.

Some school districts have strict media policies with respect to app use, and others provide considerable latitude (Jarvis & Martin, 2018). A number of concerns and cautions have been outlined in the literature regarding the use

of apps that teachers should be aware of. Privacy of information and student data are key concerns. Nisbet and Opp (2017) noted that parents needed clarification as to who would see their app message to the teacher. Teacher decision making in the selection of a specific parent communication app was described as "far from uniform," making individual parent consent inadequate to protect children (Rennie et al., 2019). In their survey of the top 50 educational apps in Australia, Rennie et al. (2019) described the complexity of the associated privacy statements and reinforced the need for school systems to take responsibility to select apps to protect student data. Even though apps are widely used, student privacy and data concerns related to app use is understudied and not yet well understood (DiGiacomo et al., 2022).

A number of additional concerns have been noted with respect to use of apps to communicate with parents. Dogan (2019) highlighted the misunderstandings that can occur in app messages with parents and noted that app use may minimize face-to-face communication. Time constraints for teachers have been a noted concern, including spending time engaging outside of school hours (Castaneda, 2019; Dogan, 2019; Ryan, 2018). Lack of technology is an ongoing barrier that impacts the participation of some parents (Ryan, 2018). Language barriers have also been identified with some apps (Castenada, 2019). Access to limited characters for a message can impact the content, and longer messages may needed to be divided into two (Nisbet & Opp, 2017). Lastly, teachers expressed concern that use of an app removed the "burden of learning" from students as information was sent directly to parents via the app (Wasserman & Zwebner, 2017).

Based on semi-structured interviews with teachers, Wasserman and Zwebner (2017) commented that media becomes an "equalizer," and teachers reported feeling use of an app tended to "demote teacher authority" in that parents might make comments within the app that they would not make face-to-face with the teacher. Further, some teachers described app communication with parents as somewhat "cold and alienating" in terms of the lack of expression and emotions involved. Some teachers also reported feeling app use created a sense of "surveillance" of their work by parents with the potential for their "pedalogical decisions" to be criticized (Davidson & Turin, 2021, p. 992).

Report Cards

Report cards are a traditional way for teachers to communicate to parents regarding their child's performance in school (Deslandes & Rivard, 2013; Tuten, 2007). Report cards provide a formal written record of a student's performance over time relative to identified curriculum expectations. Information within the report card should not come as a surprise to parents and should not

be the first indication to the parent of a concern (Hall et al., 2008). Teachers are encouraged to communicate and discuss concerns with parents early in a reporting period so that corrective action can be taken. Peltzman and Curl (2019) described report cards as a "conversation starter" that should generate dialogue and partnership in the child's learning. In fact, dissemination of report cards often occurs just before or just after parent–teacher conferences.

Teachers spend considerable time writing report cards with parents perceived as the primary audience (Hall et al., 2008). Although approaches to grading varies across jurisdictions, report cards provide teachers an important opportunity to communicate a range of information and observations to parents regarding their child, including academic performance, attitude, effort, class participation, work habits (e.g., following directions, organizational skills), behavior (e.g., self-regulation skills), as well as social development. The report card is considered a permanent product once released and becomes an important part of a child's learning portfolio over time.

Report cards are provided to parents in different ways, ranging from a hard copy sent home (both sealed and unsealed) to an electronic version to be downloaded (Barkman, 2017; Peltzman & Curl, 2019). The mode of release has potential impact on who views the report card first (Barkman, 2017). A consistent finding was that parents spent approximately 10 to 15 minutes reviewing the report card, and most parents discussed the results with their child (Barkman, 2017).

Teachers know a great deal about the students in their class; however, the format of report cards often limits the information teachers can communicate to parents (Tuten, 2007). Teachers are encouraged to use clear, uncomplicated language and to avoid the use of technical terms (Tuten, 2007). The readability level of the content is important to consider. It is helpful to begin with a positive comment that highlights the student's strengths. The information provided should be straightforward with respect to the student's knowledge and skills including an explanation of the grading criteria used (Munoz & Guskey, 2015). Specific ways for parents to support their child at home are also frequently included and valued by many parents. Comments about the child should be descriptive and personalized to inspire confidence (Barkman, 2017). Ultimately the goal of reporting is to improve student learning (Muñoz & Guskey, 2015).

Communicating student learning through report cards presents several challenges. A noteworthy finding is the association with report cards released on a Friday and an increase in verified reports of child physical abuse the following Saturday (Bright et al., 2019). When such concerns exist, efforts should be made to discuss the report card with the parent in advance. Cultural barriers

have also been identified regarding report card comments. Urabe (2006) noted significant differences in the dimensions that were prioritized for report card comments by Japanese and German teachers. It is important for teachers to appreciate that a cultural lens may be inherent in the comments they write and how comments are received. An additional challenge is the need for translation for parents who do not speak the language of the report.

It is also important for teachers to consider how to frame report card descriptors for students with a confirmed diagnosis. The following is a real-life case in point: An elementary-aged student was formally diagnosed with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). On the report card the teacher described the child as distractible and forgetful, often out of his seat, with difficulty initiating and completing tasks. All of these observations were true. The challenge was these behaviors are also diagnositic for ADHD. Based on the report card comments, the parent contended that the teacher did not understand the child's diagnosis and thus the school was not programming effectively for the child. This reaction could have been avoided with carefully worded comments. For example: "Liam is learning to respond to verbal cues to get started on his work" indicates the challenge is recognized and support strategies are in place with some progress made. Teachers are encouraged to approach every report card thoughtfully and intentionally in order to communicate student learning. Tuten (2007) eloquently described report cards as an "an intersection of parents' hopes and concerns about their children's education" (p. 319).

Two-Way Communication

Two-way communication between teachers and parents involes interactive opportunities that occur during phone calls, open houses (e.g., meet the teacher night), school-based activities (e.g., a sports game, play, movie, or literacy night), home visits, and parent–teacher meetings and conferences. With the onset of the pandemic, virtual meetings have also became a common platform for two-way communication between teachers and parents. Texting may also become two-way if the interaction becomes conversational in real time. Two-way communication may be informal and unplanned (such as conversing with a parent who is picking up a child or attending a school activity) or more formal and scheduled (such as a parent–teacher conference).

The relationship with the child varies significantly for teachers and parents, and this is an important factor influencing teacher–parent communication. Parents have a "close and highly emotional relationship with their child" along with potentially low school-related expertise (Gartmeier et al., 2017, p. 7); conversely, teachers have a "more detached and less emotional relationship"

with the child along with high school-related expertise (p. 8). Given these relationship dynamics, establishing "professionalism" in two-way teacher–parent conversations places high demands on teachers and can mean navigating difficult conversations at times (Gartmeier et al., 2017).

In-depth interviews with over 50 teachers identified the topics most discussed with parents during two-way interactions (Leenders et al., 2019). These included: gathering input on the child (e.g., asking how the child is doing), performance results, background and home life (particularly with families who spoke another language), social–emotional development of the child, and a range of educational concerns (e.g., difficult behaviors, bullying, poor listening skills, etc.). As previously noted, Leenders et al. (2019) reinforced the importance of building trust with parents before entering into more substantial conversations regarding concerns.

The following section outlines the common two-way strategies used by teachers to communicate with parents including phone calls, home visits, parent–teacher conferences, and virtual meetings. Virtual meetings between teachers and parents became commonplace during the COVID-19 pandemic and continue to provide a convenient option to promote the active participation of many parents.

Phone Calls

Phone calls home have been a traditional form of communication with parents for many years. These typically involve a call from the classroom teacher, the principal, or a recorded "school messenger" call with information regarding a student absence or a district announcement (Lavergne, 2017). Research suggests that phone calls have become less common as digital communication has increased (Thompson & Mazer, 2012; Thompson et al., 2015). Based on household survey data, McGuiggan et al. (2017) reported that 42% of students had parents who were contacted by phone during the 2015–16 school year (versus 62% who received emails/notes). Despite the decline in phone calls as a typical mode of school–home communication, parents reported that interactive contacts such as phone calls were more appropriate for some topics, such as classroom behavior concerns or peer challenges (Thompson et al., 2015).

Phone calls can be challenging to organize given that the synchronous nature of the interaction requires both parties to be available at the same time (Thompson et al., 2015). The ongoing challenge of parent and teacher schedules is a significant barrier to an interactive phone call. Many parents are not available during school hours, and teachers are not available outside of school hours. Another challenge is keeping parent cell phone numbers up to date (Lavergne, 2017). Many teachers use the school phone line to call parents (with

limited access at times), while some may elect to use a personal cell phone. To protect privacy, many phone providers have an option to block one's personal number (e.g., *67 in some locales).

Unlike writing an email that can be edited before sending, "you can't revise what's been said in a phone conversation" (Romano, 2012, p. 14). Thus, it is important to be prepared with a clear plan prior to calling a parent including the key points to raise as well as a plan for what to say if the student answers or the call goes to voice mail (Romano, 2012). It is also important to keep track of phone calls with parents (Greene & Voiles, 2016; Romano, 2012; Tutt, 2022). A phone call record may include the date, time of the call, who was spoken to, the key points of the conversation, suggestions made by the teacher, and the parent response (Romano, 2012).

Creating a script for phone calls to parents has been suggested to ensure consistent communication. Bergmann et al. (2013) proposed a "faculty phone blitz" where part of a staff meeting early in the school year could be spent with all staff phoning parents with a scripted message (such as checking on parent contact information or providing an invitation to an open house). Platt (2020) created several versions of a script for good news calls home to parents. Finally, Romano (2012) suggested creating a script to have on hand to respectfully end a phone conversation in the event that a parent becomes hostile.

Tutt (2022) noted that taking the time to make a phone call gives parents a powerful message that the school wants to connect. That said, traditionally, phone calls home have been viewed as negative in nature, such as expressing a concern about a child's problem behavior or incomplete work (Platt, 2020; Tutt, 2022). Some parents may even become disinclined to answer recurring phone calls from the school (Breaux & Whitaker, 2018). Platt (2020) noted the need to "flip that dynamic" and make more good news phone calls to parents. Seventh grade teachers in Tennessee made a phone call home each week for deserving students (Greene & Voiles, 2016). A number of positive reasons to call parents about their child include helping another student, turning in homework, or bringing needed supplies to class (Breaux & Whitaker, 2018), as well as asking a good question, telling a funny anecdote in class, or finishing an assignment (Platt, 2020).

Several suggestions have been offered in the literature for teachers regarding use of phone calls as a communication tool with parents. Tutt (2022) recommended teachers call parents early in the school year and pace the calls to keep it manageable. Asking students directly who they would like the teacher to call with good news has been suggested (Tutt, 2022), as well as calling home with a positive message in front of the student during class time (Platt, 2022). Phone calls have also been used to check on an absent student (Greene & Voiles,

2016) and to provide home support for the parents of students receiving special education services (Hurley et al., 2022). A daily phone call home during a summer school program positively impacted student engagement (Kraft & Dougherty, 2013).

Home Visits

Home visits have been described as an "evidence-based family engagement approach" that improves student outcomes (Sheldon & Jung, 2018, p. vii). Home visits to support parents and children have actually been used dating back to the late 1800s with a subsequent decline in the 1930s, then reestablished in the 1960s (Park & Paulick, 2021). More recently, home visits by educators have increasingly been used as a tool to build relationships with parents. The Parent Teacher Home Visits (PTHV) approach grew from a group of teachers and families in a low-income neighborhood in Sacramento, California in 1998 to over 700 communities in 25 states some 20 years later (Sheldon & Jung, 2018).

Home visits have been described as a way for teachers to significantly impact the two or three students in their class each year from the most challenging life circumstances (Stetson et al., 2012). Scher and Lauver (2021) reported that 70% of the home visits in their study occurred in the child's home with the remainder at a "neutral, non-school location" (such as a park, library, or community center). Visits lasted an average of 40 minutes, and students were present 90% of the time. A broad range of topics discussed during home visits have included: student interests; academic, social, and attendance information; expectations from the teacher and family; family experiences with school; resources; and the parent's hopes and dreams for their child (Cornett et al., 2020; Scher & Lauver, 2021; Wright et al., 2018). Teachers recommended bringing a small gift and photos to the family and visiting before or early in the school year (Johnson, 2014). Ultimately the goal of home visits is for teachers to learn from families (Paulick et al., 2023).

Johnson (2014) proposed a 3-phase procedural framework for home visits that outlined a series of "malleable strategies" that adapt to various contexts (p. 378). Examples included:

Phase 1: Before the visit—check school district policies, contact parents and set up visits, and research "culturally appropriate etiquette" for visits;

Phase 2: During the visit—greet everyone present, clarify what to call the teacher, use props to prompt conversation (e.g., pictures), and inquire about the child, home, and customs;

Phase 3: After the visit—record details of the visit, send a thank you note home with the student, and maintain informal communication with the parent going forward.

Cornett et al. (2020) subsequently developed a user-friendly protocol for teachers to organize and record observations during a home visit. Observations to note were based on five constructs, including relationships (e.g., body language, tone, cultural responsiveness), environment (e.g., home details, participants, meeting space), content (e.g., language used, details of the conversation, length of visit), physical artifacts (what did the teacher bring and leave with), as well as any additional comments and concerns (pp. 135–136).

Home visits by teachers have been found to decrease rates of chronic student absenteeism (Sheldon & Jung, 2018; Soule & Curtis, 2021), to improve student achievement (Franks, 2016; Ilhan et al., 2019; Sheldon & Jung, 2018; Wright et al., 2018), and to increase graduation rates when used by high schools (Soule & Curtis, 2021). Teachers have described more positive relationships with parents (Franks, 2016; Ilhan et al., 2019; Soule & Curtis, 2021), a better understanding of the child and the child's home environment (Meyer & Mann, 2006), and a "deep sense of empathy" and increased compassion towards the family (Lin & Bates, 2010; Stetson et al., 2012). Home visits also provide an opportunity to "level the barriers" and "give voice" to parents from culturally and economically diverse backgrounds (Johnson, 2014).

Despite the demonstrated value of home visits, concerns have also been noted. Finding time to make home visits has been a concern for many teachers (Franks, 2016; Soule & Curtis, 2021; Stetson et al., 2012). Teachers who were new to the experience expressed anxiety and uncertainty prior to initial visits (Johnson, 2014). Some teachers have expressed concerns about safety (Kronholz, 2016; Lucas, 2017; Soule & Curtis, 2021) as well as fears of making a "cultural mistake" (Paulick et al., 2023). Plans for a translation program (e.g., Google translate), or a translator attending in person were needed for many visits. In some cases, teachers visited in pairs, for safety and for an opportunity to reflect together on the visit later (Kronholz, 2016; Wright et al., 2018). Scheduling with families has also been identified as a challenge (Stetson et al., 2012).

"Simply visiting homes does not ensure listening" (Paulick et al., 2022, p. 72). Teacher training to conduct home visits varies across jurisdictions, and it is important to equip teachers with the skills they need to conduct home visits effectively (Jiles, 2015). Paulick et al. (2022) noted that home visits tended to reinforce the "hierarchical power dynamics" between home and schools in that teachers generally took charge, outlined expectations, asked the most questions, and determined the language of the visit. However these authors also noted that "well mediated" visits can be a way to promote "powersharing" with parents. Based on the literature reviewed, teacher training should include clarifying the purpose of home visits, recognizing and valuing the knowledge and assets that families bring, as well as supporting culturally responsive practices.

Parent–Teacher Conferences

Parent–teacher meetings are the most common form of two-way parent–teacher communication (Lemmer, 2012; McQuiggan et al., 2017). Such meetings may occur at any time during the school year (Ediger, 2016) and may be arranged to discuss student concerns, to review programming such as an Individualized Education Plan (IEP), and to review student performance as part of a formal and structured annual parent–teacher conference (Fiore & Fiore, 2017). For the typical parent, the parent–teacher conference is the most common meeting attended at the school for their child. Based on the 2016 National Household Education Survey of over 14,000 U.S. students, 78% of students had parents who reported attending a parent–teacher conference during the school year (McQuiggan et al., 2017).

Parent–teacher conferences have been described in a variety of ways in the literature, ranging from an "institutional encounter" (Pillet-Shore, 2015) and "ritualized school events" (Lemmer, 2012) to an "important bridge" between home and school (Oh & Pomerantz, 2022) and a "moment of interaction" that provides unique possibilities (Gastaldi et al., 2015). Many of us remember those stressful moments when our parent(s) went off to visit the teacher, and we worried about what would be said. These conferences have become traditional points of contact over many years and typically involve an annual one-to-one meeting with the parent and teacher initiated by the school in the student's classroom for about 15 minutes. Attendees at the meeting may include the teacher and parent only, or the parent, teacher, and student for student-led conferences.

Parent–teacher conferences generally focus on the student's academic achievement, behavior in class, attitude, work habits, and social development. Oh and Pomerantz (2022) reported that the parent–teacher conferences of young elementary students focused on literacy skills and ways to promote parent involvement related to literacy. For high school students when parental attendance at school meetings typically drops, student-led conferences demonstrated immediate success with 85% of parents participating in the first semester, reflecting a significant improvement from the previous semester (Clemensen, 2021).

Teachers have typically not been trained to conduct parent–teacher conferences (Lemmer, 2012; Walker & Legg, 2018). Conferences are sometimes problem-oriented with respect to student learning and/or behavior and can be challenging for teachers to navigate. The first set of parent–teacher conferences for new teachers can be particularly stressful. A number of tools have been developed to train preservice teachers to host parent–teacher conferences

including fictional video cases (Deng et al., 2020), digital simulations (Luke & Vaughnn, 2022; Thompson et al., 2019), and simulated conversations (Walker & Legg, 2018). Principals have been encouraged to train practicing teachers to hold effective parent–teacher conferences, particularly with the use of focused role plays (Potter, 2008).

Suggestions for effective conferences have been provided based on parent expectations for parent–teacher meetings (Gilani et al., 2020). Interviewed parents identified the need for advance notice of the meetings in order to plan. Parents valued a welcoming atmosphere, a clear agenda, an organized approach to the meeting, and a "fair and true statement" of their child's performance (including academic, behavior, and social development; p. 1065). Parents recommended that teachers take notes during the meeting and plan appropriate follow-up. Use of adult-sized chairs was also recommended for parent–teacher meetings to promote both comfort and equity in the interaction (Gilani et al., 2020).

Several challenges have also been reported in the literature with respect to parent–teacher conferences. The meetings are often scheduled during the school day or for a few hours on a single evening, with many parents unable to attend due to conflicts with work, child care, and/or other commitments (Clemensen, 2021). Difficult conversations may occur with parents during conferences that require important communication skills on the part of the teacher. Potter (2008) recommended ensuring a tactful, empathetic, and honest approach, monitoring tone, outlining positives about the child, and use of active listening strategies.

Concern has been noted regarding how to interpret the silence of some refugee parents during parent–teacher meetings. In this circumstance, silence may be easily misinterpreted. Matthiesen (2016) argued that refugee parents may become silent through "interactional processes" whereby the teacher is positioned as the expert with the right to speak, and the parent is positioned as the listener. For these parents, it is especially important to provide time and space for the parent to speak within the context of a welcoming and respectful interaction.

Pisani (2020) outlined a series of recommendations for teachers to maximize the effectiveness of parent–teacher conferences when communicating student learning. Teachers are encouraged to:

- Know each student's background including individual learning plans and medical concerns.
- Focus on the key areas taught and the student's strengths and weaknesses.
- Be organized. Have a file of work for each student prepared in advance to present.

- Know the meeting structure and who is attending. Stay on time.
- Schedule personal breaks.
- Clearly outline expectations for the meeting. Link expectations to the curriculum.
- Prepare in advance for difficult interviews. Request administrative support if needed.
- Consider booking more time or an alternate time for more challenging student concerns. Plan an "exit strategy" for longer meetings.
- Inquire and ask parents questions about their child to encourage a two-way conversation.
- Take notes and keep a record of parent–teacher conferences.
- Maximize time to discuss key topics. Know what the parent already knows (e.g., report card).

Virtual Meetings

The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in March 2020 required education to incorporate a new online reality. During school closures, teachers shifted to provide online instruction to their students once the infrastructure was in place. This initial adoption of technology was seamless for some and overwhelming for others, with limited time for training. As part of this new reality, there was also an immediate shift needed from in-person to virtual meetings, for staff as well as with parents. Now in the postpandemic years there is a return to in-person meetings; however, virtual meetings have broadened communication options and are welcomed by some parents.

The use of video technology in education has actually been described in the literature for more than a decade, well before the pandemic. Catagnus and Hantula (2011) utilized online collaboration with a multidisciplinary team to develop a behavior intervention plan resulting in a much faster product as well as time saved travelling. When inclement weather resulted in cancelled parent–teacher conferences at an Iowa school, teachers created 90 second video clips to share with parents about their child, including comments regarding the student's strengths, areas of concern, and suggestions (Grundmeyer & Yankey, 2016). Teachers appreciated they could create the videos in a flexible manner and re-record if needed. Parents were able to view the videos at their own convenience including more than once, and some parents watched with their child. McLennan (2018) outlined a pilot initiative involving video conference consultations used to deliver mental health services to students in six elementary schools across three school districts.

Also prior to the pandemic, several investigators explored the feasibility of virtual parent–teacher conferences. Parents and teachers were surveyed regarding

their experiences participating in face-to-face or virtual conferences (Winkler, 2016). The vast majority of the parents who participated in the virtual conferences (91%) reported a time saving. Interestingly, they also demonstrated better recall of the information shared than did parents who attended face-to-face meetings. Conversely, teachers reported some logistical and technical problems with the virtual meetings and overall were more satisfied with the face-to-face interactions. Hutton (2018) reported that use of video parent–teacher conferences was convenient for working parents and also helpful when it was difficult to schedule face-to-face meetings to discuss sensitive topics.

More recently, a research team explored the "barriers and facilitators" of virtual IEP meetings (Scheef et al., 2022). Over 90% of surveyed school staff reported they were comfortable leading IEP meetings virtually. Barriers included technology difficulties reported by half of the teachers (internet or computer-based), parents who did not have internet access, as well as the loss of "personal connections" (Sheef et al., 2022). Teachers reported that finding a location for a confidential meeting was challenging at times (for parents as well), it was difficult to see all participants when multiple people used the same computer, and there was a tendency during virtual meetings to talk over one another. On the positive side, teachers described the virtual IEP team meetings as "convenient and efficient" for both teachers and many parents, and noted there was less tendency to go off topic in virtual meetings. The authors recommended that virtual IEP conferences may increase attendance for working parents who are not able to leave work and should be offered as an option (Scheef et al., 2022).

Once again, teachers have received little training to conduct virtual meetings. Tiersky (2020) noted that virtual meetings are an entirely different medium and require specific strategies to ensure an effective interaction. One of the notable challenges with virtual meetings is to maintain the attention and engagement of the participants as they may become distracted in their own personal environment (Tiersky, 2020). A series of engagement strategies to enhance virtual meeting were outlined (Tiersky, 2020, pp. 70–71):

- request that cameras be on (to provide nonverbal input);
- dress professionally for the audience;
- reduce clutter in one's on-screen background;
- request participants mute microphones unless speaking (to eliminate background noise);
- utilize turn taking strategies (e.g., raising one's hand or typing into the chat);
- incorporate activities to promote interactivity (e.g., use of chat, small group breakouts).

The format of the meeting is also important. Meagher (2021) suggested identifying the chair of the virtual meeting, having a clear agenda, soliciting initial nonverbal feedback by starting with a request for a thumbs up for a low risk question (e.g., "thumbs up if you can hear me"), and ensuring chair approval of all who enter the virtual meeting platform. Baker and Murphy (2021) also suggested ensuring virtual meetings start on time, using visuals to maintain attention, and having a minute-taker so the chair can manage the flow of the meeting.

An interesting finding related to virtual meetings was outlined by Brucks and Levav (2022) who compared the generation of creative ideas for both in-person and virtual teams. Results of a field experiment across five countries showed that videoconferencing tended to inhibit the production of creative ideas, although the ultimate selection of quality ideas by the virtual teams was not impacted. The authors suggested that videoconferencing focused participants on a screen which prompted a "narrower cognitive focus" (Brucks & Levav, 2022, p. 108). Given this finding, when hosting virtual meetings with parents, it is particularly important for educators to use strategies to invite and encourage the ideas of all participants. Ultimately the goal is for each virtual team member to feel valued and invested with their voices heard and their ideas considered (Swift, 2020).

Barriers and Opportunities

Effective communication is key to developing relationships with parents based on trust and respect, and is fundamental to establishing strong home–school partnerships. A number of barriers to parent–teacher communication have been highlighted throughout this article with a range of strategies noted. This section summarizes the key barriers to parent–teacher communication that have been discussed in the literature. These include: racial stereotypes, language, teacher training, technology, and time. Opportunities to respond are also highlighted.

Racial Stereotypes

Piper et al. (2022) reported that racial and cultural biases can have direct influence on the engagement of families of color with school staff. It is also important for educators to be aware that racial disparities have been shown to exist in the actual contacts that teachers make with parents. Racial stereotypes play a role in shaping teacher communication (Cherng, 2016) and may create barriers and inequalities for many families.

A pivotal study by Cherng (2016) reported that differences existed in teacher contacts with parents from different racial/ethnic backgrounds. The patterns of teacher communications with parents was examined based on a nationally representative sample of high school sophomores in the U.S. Teachers were more likely to reach out to Black and Latino parents about disruptive behavior at school than they did for White students. Teachers were less likely to contact immigrant Asian parents about academic or behavioral concerns, even when the student was struggling. Teachers were also less likely to contact minority parents with good news related to student accomplishments. It was noted that the "patterns of communication" were "consistent with racial stereotypes that teachers may subscribe to different racial and ethnic groups" (Cherng, 2016, p. 29). Cherng suggested such stereotypes included disruptive youth in Latino and Black families who struggled to learn math, and stereotypes of Asian students as overachievers who were less in need of intervention.

A recent study by Zimmerman and Keynton (2021) also explored the impacts of race/ethnicity on the ways that teachers communicate with parents about student behavior concerns, academic problems, and accomplishments. Results were based on U.S. national early childhood education data (Early Childhood Longitudinal Study) from 2011 and 2012 for kindergarten and first grade students who were Black, Latino, Asian, and White. In comparison to White students, teachers were more likely to contact the parents of Black boys and Black girls about behavior problems. Teachers were less likely to contact the parents of Latino boys, Asian boys, and Asian girls about academic problems (versus White students). Lastly, compared to White students, teachers were more likely to contact the parents of Black boys and Asian students (both boys and girls) about accomplishments. Zimmerman and Keynton noted that "the patterned ways in which teachers contact parents about their children tells us something about the complex ways in which racial and gendered meanings work in society" (p. 16); thus, it is important that teachers become aware that their communications with parents may be influenced by "dominant racial and gendered ideologies in society" (p. 17) and not simply by children's actual behavior and skills.

A number of authors have addressed antibias efforts in education in a variety of ways. Bouley (2021) stressed that studies of teacher bias towards students and families of varying identities suggested a lack of teacher awareness and confidence to support students with diverse backgrounds. The importance of both school- and district-wide approaches to antibias education was emphasized. The need for educators (who are predominantly White and female) to understand the lived experience of families of color has also been highlighted (Marchand et al., 2019). Brown (2022) encouraged teachers to understand

that parents of color may be on "high alert" for stereotyping and may therefore "push back" when contacted by a White educator with concerns about their child. The importance of teachers building the trust of Black parents was noted by showing an interest in students' families (e.g., home visits) and by extending invitations to parents that are specific about how parent engagement can promote their child's success at school (Brown, 2022). Brooks and Watson (2019) highlighted the importance of working with school leaders and understanding the "contextual dynamics" with respect to race in leadership preparation programs. Antony and Vaughn-Shavuo (2022) developed a Tri-Fold Multicultural model that incorporated a class-based field experience and reflective journal approach to promote culturally responsive teacher education. Lastly, Kayser et al. (2021) suggested the need to "reimagine communication" that goes beyond making contact and sharing information to include listening to the experiences of marginalized parents and welcoming them as partners and stakeholders to develop true partnerships.

Language

Language differences have been identified as a key barrier to effective communication between teachers and parents (MacPhee, 2021). Fiore and Fiore (2017) reported that English was not the primary language spoken in 20–25% of American homes (p. 49). They reinforced that non-English speaking parents have the same legal and moral rights for communication from school that English-speaking parents have. Language diversity is complex and often associated with additional barriers, such as low socioeconomic status, multiple jobs, issues with transportation and scheduling, family obligations, a range of experiences with formal education, lack of free time, and different belief systems (Barone, 2011; Foulidi & Papakitsos, 2022; Grace & Gerdes, 2019).

"No one sets out to misunderstand or to be misunderstood" (Kreuz & Roberts, 2017, p. 1), yet this happens frequently in cross-cultural communication. "The real culprit of cross-cultural communication failures is when differences in language use go unrecognized, unheeded, or unacknowledged" (Kreuz & Roberts, 2017, p. 2). It is the responsibility of educators to acknowledge the language needs of their school community (Bibby et al., 2016) and to make communication with parents meaningful and responsive by finding creative ways to bridge the language divide. Even when language is a barrier, parents appreciated when teachers attempted to communicate in an open, effortful, and consistent manner (Li et al., 2021).

A number of strategies have been utilized to address language barriers with parents. Personal invitations to parents to meet at the school at convenient times will welcome many parents (Grace & Gerdes, 2019). Students can often

provide information as to what language is spoken at home (Olmos, 2020). Several studies have described innovative approaches to involve linguistically diverse parents, including parents participating in reading activities with young children (Barone, 2011) and parents who were trained in specific English content who then tutored their child (Hartman, 2017). "How can we help?" cards in five languages were created by one school district to provide parents with staff contact information to address common questions as well as information about translation services (Howell, 2017). Parent education classes have been proposed as a way to invite parents into the school to build language capacity (Ferlazzo & Sypnieski, 2018). Specific hiring practices with diverse staff that reflect the background and cultures of the broader school community can also improve communication and interactions with families (Jacques & Villegas, 2018). Some districts have created a dedicated "cultural liaison" staff position focused on diversity initiatives (Tipton & Furmanek, 2016).

For parents who speak a different language from the school, access to translation services has been highlighted (Rossetti et al., 2017; Yan et al., 2022). Translation into the parent's home language is important for digital and written communication (including legal documents such as an IEP; Vassallo, 2018). Use of Google translate can be helpful (e.g., for emails), and some apps provide translation options for messages. However, translation of educational jargon is challenging and requires special attention (Soutullo et al., 2016). It is also important to distinguish between the translator and interpreter roles as expertise in one skill does not imply expertise in the other (Tipton & Furmanek, 2016). For example, an interpreter may be fluent in speaking a specific language but may not have the expertise needed for translation to read and write the language well.

A further concern has been the use of children as "language brokers" when children are asked to interpret when teachers meet with their parents. This can be a "paradoxical position" for the child (Garcia-Sánchez et al., 2011) and is generally not recommended. The experience can be stressful for some children (Tuttle & Johnson, 2018), may create a power dynamic in the family, and may violate civil rights (Ferlazzo & Sypnieski, 2018; Jacques & Villegas, 2018). That said, peer translation can be appropriate in some contexts and may serve to recognize and reinforce a student's multilingual skills (e.g., supporting a new student).

Access to interpretive services is key to communicate orally with parents who do not speak the language of the school. Interpreters have supported a range of school activities, such as family meetings, parent–teacher conferences, graduation exercises, Kindergarten welcome meetings, and so on (Tipton & Furmanek, 2016). These authors noted that sometimes bilingual staff in a

school building have been asked to interpret when the individual staff may not have the language skills required. Privacy and confidentiality are additional concerns in this scenario.

Access to a trained interpreter requires advance consideration and organization. Lack of experience working with interpreters during face-to-face meetings is also a barrier for many educators. Tipton and Furmanek (2016) provided a series of helpful recommendations for teachers when working with interpreters including advance planning, introductions, seating, a clear meeting agenda, and opportunity to debrief with the interpreter. It is also recommended that teachers avoid jargon when interpretation is required, incorporate visuals and student work samples (Rossetti et al., 2017), and plan additional time to meet (Zaidi et al., 2021). Interpreters should be well versed in educational terminology and acronyms and knowledgeable about various educational proceedings, such as IEP meetings (Tipton & Furmanek, 2016). In reducing the barriers inherent in language differences, the use of trained and qualified interpreters "create and strengthen cultural bridges between families and schools" (Tipton & Furmanek, 2016, p. 191).

Teacher Training

The importance of teacher training with respect to home–school partnerships has been highlighted by many authors. A significant barrier is the number of skill sets required for both preservice and practicing teachers to communicate effectively with parents. These include an understanding of the importance of home–school partnerships; awareness of linguistic diversity, ethnic/racial stereotypes, and culturally responsive practices; practical communication skills; as well as technology skills needed to facilitate digital communication.

Although the training of preservice teachers with respect to family–school partnerships has long been recognized as important, relevant coursework remains inconsistent, although improving (Epstein, 2018). In a review of the literature on teacher education in North America, Australia, and Europe, Willemse et al. (2018) described the lack of preparation of preservice teachers to engage with parents as an ongoing concern. Lack of a consistent standard and multiple course priorities often leaves training to the discretion of the instructor. In the case of practicing teachers, the number of professional development days in a school year are limited with multiple and competing system training priorities impacting opportunities for needed training.

A number of innovative approaches have been utilized to address the communication training needs of teachers. Examples include simulations (Walker & Legg, 2018), videos (De Coninck et al., 2018), and an afterschool professional development course (Szech, 2021). Miller et al. (2018) developed an

innovative cross-discipline certification training course for graduate students in education, school psychology, and social work designed to develop knowledge and skills to foster home–school partnerships. Preservice teachers developed and implemented a series of parent workshops that provided the opportunity to talk with and learn from parents regarding the challenges they face supporting their children (Tinajero et al., 2023).

Additional training initiatives have included workshops on communication skills and emotional intelligence (Tuluhan & Yalcinkaya, 2018), a "how-to manual" for teachers to engage with English Language Learner (ELL) parents (Davies-Payne, 2022), and a series of professional development workshops for teachers to engage with culturally and linguistically diverse families (Olmos, 2020). Mentoring by experienced teachers has been described as an effective way for novice teachers to establish good communication with parents (Mosley et al., 2023; Ozmen et al., 2016) as well as Professional Learning Communities whereby interested teachers can collaborate together regarding new and innovative practices (Wages, 2021).

The practical skills that teachers need to facilitate difficult conversations with parents are discussed at length in a companion article (Graham-Clay, 2024). These include the use of clear vocabulary, active lisening, I-messages, questioning techniques, paraphrasing and summarizing information, as well as awareness of the use of leveled information and the impact of nonverbal messages.

Technology

Goodall (2016) suggested that schools should incorporate technology as they do other changes in education, by establishing clear aims and objectives. However, the use of technology to communicate with parents has been described as somewhat of a "wild card" (Patrikakou, 2015) as both teachers and parents have attempted to develop and manage online interactions. One barrier to technology use has been the "fragmented approaches" used by schools to communicate with parents, resulting in many parents having to navigate an array of communication channels (Kraft & Bolves, 2022). This sometimes happens with different children in the same family. According to these authors, 75% of school administrators surveyed reported use of multiple and different apps within their school to communicate with parents. To address this concern, Kraft and Bolves (2022) recommended the need for school-wide expectations for a common communication platform as well as common practices across teaching staff. Another approach was developed by Laho (2019) who explored the potential for a Learning Management System (LMS) to serve as a "one-stop location" for information sharing for both teachers and parents.

A number of barriers to the use of technology have been reported by teachers including the lack of time to prepare to integrate technology, need for training and technology support, lack of resources, lack of ability and/or confidence, and limited access (Dinc, 2019; Francom, 2020; Nikolopoulou et al., 2023). Interestingly, Francom (2016) reported more access to technology tools and resources in smaller school districts and communities versus larger districts and cities in a North Midwestern state in the U.S., thus location may be a barrier in some cases. In terms of overcoming barriers to technology integration, Durff and Carter (2019) reported that a team approach comprised of teachers, administration, and technology support personnel provided training and collegial support with positive results. Limited budget for technology has also been a concern for some schools. When funding is a factor, Wages (2021) suggested exploring the range of free apps available (e.g., Class Dojo, Seesaw, Classtree).

From a parent perspective, the complexity of technology has been described as a barrier. The ease of use was deemed to be critical for parents, defined as the capability and effort required to access the specific technology tool (Osorio-Saez et al., 2021). Another barrier to technology use is the type of information that is appropriate to share. Some parents and teachers expressed concern that digital communication should be reserved for academic issues and concrete information (e.g., deadlines, appointments) and that more "sensitive, complex, and serious" issues should be addressed through personal contact (Bordalba & Bochaca, 2019). The potential for the misinterpretation of digital information has also been identified as a barrier as the lack of nonverbals to support the message can result in disconnects at times (Bordalba & Bochaca, 2019). Access to technology and the internet will always be a key barrier for some families (Bordalba & Bochaca, 2019). In a survey of the National Network of Partnership Schools in eight states, Epstein et al. (2021) described the "digital divide" as very real and highly variable. Schools reported that between 25% and 75% of their students did not have the resources needed to access online classes during the pandemic. Wages (2021) proposed a number of creative approaches to address access concerns such as "hotspot buses" parked in under-resourced neighbourhoods at the end of the day to provide free internet access for families during the evening.

The issue of access also applies internationally. Households in North America and Western Europe own far more digital devices than those living in Eastern and Central Europe, Latin America, the Middle East, and Africa (Papadopoulos & Cleveland, 2023). When creating a communication plan, it is important for teachers to consider ways to provide information to the parents of all their students, including those for whom technology is a barrier due to lack of access as well as location (including connectivity challenges in some rural and remote communities).

Time

Lack of time has consistently been described as a barrier to communication for both parents and teachers (Baker et al., 2016; Brock & Edmunds, 2010; Gokalp et al., 2021; Hornby & Blackwell, 2018; Ozmen et al., 2016; Schneider & Arnot, 2018; Turney & Kao, 2009; Williams & Sánchez, 2011). In fact, a historical review of barriers to communication identified lack of time as an issue back to the 1950s (Gerardi, 2007). The time barrier has also been reported across socioeconomic levels. Lack of time for parents to connect typically reflects their busy lives including family obligations and work schedules. For example, Turney and Kao (2009) noted more than half of parents reported that work schedules prevented their involvement with their child's school. It is noteworthy that many school events (such as assemblies, parent meetings, etc.) are often organized during the school day when many parents are unable to attend.

Several authors have recommended surveying parents to determine times that will accommodate their needs when planning and scheduling school events. This could include an evening event, an extended school day on occasion to meet teachers after school, and/or a weekend activity (such as a school BBQ). As previously noted, video conference options during the workday will facilitate involvement for some parents. Associated considerations have also been noted to encourage parental attendance after school hours, including food provided (to avoid evening meal prep) as well as child care options onsite to allow parents the freedom to engage in the event or activity. Providing notice well in advance of school events has also been recommended to ensure parents are aware and have an opportunity to plan (Williams & Sánchez, 2011).

Additional Barriers and Opportunities

Fiore and Fiore (2017) noted that physical challenges are often forgotten barriers to effective communication. A parent who is visually impaired may miss the nonverbals in communication and will benefit from a focus on clear verbal input. A parent who is hearing impaired may benefit from an agenda to read, a quiet meeting space, and a slower pace of discourse. Similarly, it is important that parents with mobility issues feel welcomed with accessible parking or drop off, clearly marked access into the school, and an accessible meeting space.

Practical barriers to parental involvement in their child's school include financial restraints (Ozmen et al., 2016) and transportation challenges (Hirano et al., 2018). Many schools offer food and some offer prizes and raffles to promote parent attendance at events (Williams & Sánchez, 2011). Some schools have addressed the transportation barrier by designating "visitor only" parking

spots and by providing group bus pick up stops for special evening events at the school. Parent–teacher meetings held in easily accessed community locations near public transportation is another creative way to reach some families.

Parent's own negative experiences (Hornby & Blackwell, 2018) and lack of trust (Ozmen et al., 2016) have both been identified as barriers impacting the willingness and ability of some parents to engage with school staff. It is important for teachers to empathize with parents and to build trust to address these challenges (Gokalp et al., 2021). The development of trust takes time and is based on multiple and purposeful interactions between teachers and parents (Buchanan & Buchanan, 2017). Ultimately "it all comes down to the leadership," according to Barr and Saltmarsh (2014) who reinforced the important role of the principal in fostering a positive school culture where the relationship between school and home is valued. Similarly, Willis et al. (2021) highlighted the importance for school principals to communicate a strong school vision that supports trusting and respectful relationships with parents.

The COVID-19 pandemic that began in the winter of 2020 also significantly impacted parent–teacher communication. Teaching was already listed as one of the more stressful professions (MacIntyre et al., 2020). The pandemic was highly impactful on teacher mental health with high rates of stress and burnout reported (Agyapong et al., 2022; Ozamiz-Etxebarria et al., 2021; Silva et al., 2021). Similarly, the stress level of parents increased during this time (Adams et al., 2021; Li et al., 2022). The pandemic brought with it with multiple pressures related to technology, health concerns, and job security (McCarthy et al., 2022). Educators were forced to communicate with families quickly as online learning platforms unfolded. As stressful as this was initially with many barriers to overcome, the limited research thus far suggests there may have been a "silver lining" to the pandemic with respect to parent involvement (McCarthy et al., 2022).

Interestingly, positive family–school relationships (known to benefit families) appeared to be a protective factor on pandemic-related stress for teachers (Haines et al., 2022). Rather than attending events at the school during the pandemic, new connections were forged between teachers and parents through video meetings, phone calls, and digital communication. "Educators and parents designed new ways to communicate using high-tech and low-tech about children's attendance in class, how work would be collected and graded, children's well-being, health, and education services needed by families, and more" (Epstein et al., 2021, p. 16). Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, necessity meant that communication with most families was "attainable" and parents, teachers, administrators, and students "grew to appreciate each other more than ever before" (Epstein et al., 2021, p. 15). It is important that educators continue to build on these connections and the lessons learned.

Future Directions

Communication between teachers and parents is essential to support student learning. As the range of communication opportunities continues to expand, focused research is needed to better understand and strengthen the effectiveness of teacher communication to support student success.

Continued research focused on effective training practices for both preservice and practicing teachers is needed with respect to the application of key communication skills, the effective use of both in-person and digital communication strategies, and the development of culturally responsive practices. In particular, the effect of racial stereotypes on the communication patterns of teachers is a relatively new and important area of research.

With respect to teacher training, Leonard and Woodland (2022) argued that antiracism cannot be achieved in education through "top-down, short-term approaches to school improvement or professional development" (p. 212). Rather, they demonstrated that robust professional learning communities supported teachers to recognize and transform racist beliefs and positively impacted their practice. They described this approach as a powerful way to promote both individual and institutional change. Continued research of such innovative approaches is needed to inform teacher training.

Due to the evolving landscape of technology, including the speed of development of new platforms, it seems that independent research is constantly catching up with the communication technology that is already in use in schools. This is particularly true with respect to the use of various apps by teachers to communicate with parents. DiGiacomo et al. (2022) noted that student privacy and data concerns of communication apps are not yet well understood. More research is needed to better understand how various apps address issues of student, teacher, and parent privacy as well as the retention and storage of student data (e.g., pictures and work samples). Guidelines that school districts, administrators, and individual teachers can use to make informed choices would be welcome regarding the use of apps to communicate with parents.

There has been a significant increase over time in the use of digital technology to communicate with parents (e.g., email, texts, apps); however, research is needed to explore specific themes and trends that may exist. For example, do the parents of young preschool and early primary students tend to prefer text communications, whereas the parents of middle and high school students prefer another format, such as email? On the other hand, it may be that the age of teachers themselves is a critical factor with respect to the type of technology selected for use.

Going forward, it will be particularly important for educators to practice "digital wisdom" (Prensky, 2009) as they apply new technologies to communicate with parents in pragmatic and thoughtful ways. The use of different modes of communication in education is widespread; however, there is a need to more systematically assess the effectiveness of various modes of communication with respect to efficiency, actual reach to parents, and meaningfulness of the message. For example, are texts as effective as emails to convey specific types of information? Future research efforts focused on comparing the effectiveness of different modes of communication for different types of messages will be important to inform practice.

Final Thoughts

Although many barriers to parent–teacher communication continue to exist, it is gratifying to see that many educators and researchers are addressing these challenges in new and creative ways. As teaching becomes more complex and the student population more diverse, better understanding and closer connections between teachers and parents become even more essential to support student success. My son's grade 3 teacher had it right. She understood that communication with parents is critically important and needs to be positive, invitational, and built on relationship, trust, and a shared vision for the child.

The literature suggests that many modes of communication exist with parents and that one size will not fit all (Chappell & Ratliffe, 2021; Schneider & Arnot, 2018). In fact, a range of online communication strategies have the potential to promote quality relationships between schools and families (Chappel & Ratliffe, 2021). It is highly recommended that teachers conduct a survey at the beginning of the school year to evaluate and plan for the needs of their diverse parent community with respect to communication preferences (e.g., phone calls, email, texts, apps), technology access, and languages spoken. With this information in hand, teachers are encouraged to start at the beginning of the school year and to make communications with parents personalized, positive, and linked to learning (See et al., 2020). It is important for teachers to streamline so that parent communication is efficient, yet also ensure that the modes of communication are flexible enough to be accessible and meaningful for each parent.

Schools that seek to welcome families as part of the school community will naturally encourage communication with parents. School leadership is key to promote the value of engaging parents through frequent, respectful, and culturally responsive interactions. A systematic communication framework and a consistent platform within a school (especially with respect to the use of apps) have both been recommended to support effective communication between

teachers and parents. That said, the use of technology, while offering many benefits, does not replace a kind voice. Parents, teachers, and administrators reported that "personalized, face-to-face, informal communication best supported positive family–school relationships" (Chappel & Ratliffe, 2021, p. 18). The importance of face-to-face communication between a teacher and parent cannot be underestimated, especially when the subject matter is sensitive in nature. Teachers are encouraged to develop and use practical communication skills to support difficult conversations with parents (Graham-Clay, 2024).

It is important for educators to appreciate that every communication exchange with a parent occurs within the context of the exchanges that have gone before (be they positive or negative), and sets the stage for the communication exchanges to come. From this perspective, every interaction with a parent provides an opportunity for the future.

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