Communication Protocol for Schools

Communication plays a key role in creating and fostering strong, positive relationships between the school and the home. Communication is a two-way street; our schools share information with our families and community, and our families share information with our schools.

The purpose of this document is to guide, manage and improve school-home communication by offering a standard format, structure and sequence for regular, ongoing communication.

Communication Channels

Communication can take place in a variety of formats. The message and the purpose of the communication can help determine which format is most appropriate. Generally, the more issues-driven and/or detailed the information is, the more direct the communication channel chosen should be.

Communication channels include:
- Face-to-face communication – one-on-one meetings, School Council meetings, Parent-Student-Teacher interviews
- Telephone conversations
- Hard copy, written communication – letters sent home from the school, paper school newsletters
- Electronic communication – email, electronic newsletters, websites, social media

When the communication requires a dialogue, such as bringing forward a question or concern or when a discussion is required on a particular topic, the preferred channels of communication are ones that allow for an immediate and ongoing interaction between the people involved. The best formats for this kind of communication are face-to-face conversations or telephone conversations.

Schools and families are encouraged to use these direct channels of communication when a topic is complex or requires a dialogue. These more direct forms of communication also help us establish a personal connection, which helps build relationships that we don't get in other forms of communication.

When it comes to communication from the school to our families, very rarely do we use only one communication channel. Often we use multiple communication formats together with one another to help ensure the message reaches everyone it needs to.

All staff at a particular school are encouraged to collectively select one common communication tool to use as their primary channel when communicating with parents (for example, email). This will help ensure consistency throughout the school, so parents have a consistent place to go for information. Some staff may then choose to also use other communication tools to supplement the main communication channel, if they wish.

School and Division Use of SchoolMessenger

SchoolMessenger is a communication tool used by EIPS' schools and the Division office to provide information to families via telephone and email messages (using the contact information families provide during the registration process). SchoolMessenger is used to share information about:
- Upcoming school and Division events and activities
- Community engagement opportunities
- Provincial initiatives
- Emergency preparedness and crisis response

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The Role of Social Media

Social media has become a common communication tool used throughout education and the world. The speed at which we can share information using social media and how easily accessible that information becomes, makes it a valuable tool in our communications toolbox. However, social media has its limitations, and therefore it is just that – one tool in the toolbox.

Some social media channels, such as Twitter, only allow the sharing of very short messages. Therefore, it is difficult to share a complex message via Twitter. Instead we sometimes see Twitter being used to share a link to another communication channel (for example, a website) where the audience can find the detailed information.

Social media platforms may work well for:
- Sharing snippets of good news stories and celebrations
- Sending reminders of key dates
- Communicating important information during a crisis (however, keep in mind the information can change quickly in these situations and our first priority is always responding to the situation to ensure students and staff safety)
- Providing links to more detailed information or sharing resources
- Asking basic questions of clarification (however, more complex questions may be better asked using email or a telephone conversation when more detail is required in the answer)

Expectations

Addressing Concerns Directly

If parents/guardians have a concern about something at the school or in the classroom, they are encouraged to bring the concern forward in a timely manner directly to the appropriate person. These discussions should take place in the following order:

1. Discuss the concern with the classroom teacher to determine if the issue can be resolved at the classroom level.
2. If this issue cannot be resolved at the classroom level, bring it forward for discussion with the school principal or assistant principal. Most concerns can be addressed at the school level when school staff and administration as well as parents/guardians engage in open and collaborative discussion.
3. If the issue cannot be resolved at the school level, bring it forward for discussion with the appropriate Central Services personnel.

Any level of the above discussions may be initiated by telephone or email, but may evolve into a face-to-face meeting, which allows for the best and most collaborative discussion to take place.

Being Respectful in All Forms of Communication

Regardless of the communication channel used or the people involved, all communication should adhere to Board Policy 19: Welcoming, Caring, Respectful, and Safe Learning and Working Environments (www.eips.ca/about-us/board-policies/535); Administrative Procedure 311: Welcoming, Caring, Respectful, and Safe Learning Environments for Students (www.eips.ca/about-us/administrative-procedures/311); and Administrative Procedure 170: Welcoming, Caring, Respectful, and Safe Learning and Working Environments (www.eips.ca/about-us/administrative-procedures/170). Everyone has the right to be treated with respect, whether it's in a face-to-face meeting, in a telephone conversation or through email.

Response Time Frames

Every effort should be made to respond in a timely manner, whether the response is required from the home to the school, school to the home, or among schools and departments. While there is no guarantee on the specific time frame for a response, generally families can expect a response within two business days.

Just because a school or teacher uses a communication channel that lends itself well to quick communication (for example, email or social media), doesn't mean they can always respond just as quickly as that format allows. Schools and staff are encouraged to establish processes or guidelines to ensure those they are communicating with have an understanding of how and when they can expect a response.

Other Resources

Additional information and resources related to home/school communication is also available from the Alberta Teachers' Association (ATA).

ATA: *Staying Connected to Your Child's School*
https://www.teachers.ab.ca/Public%20Education/ResourcesforParents/ParentFriendlyArticles/Pages/Staying%20Connected%20to%20Your%20Childs%20School.aspx

ATA: *Preparing for a Parent-Teacher Interview*
https://www.teachers.ab.ca/Public%20Education/ResourcesforParents/ParentFriendlyArticles/Pages/PreparingforaParentTeacherInterview.aspx