**Cohort Facilitation Guide**

**Communicating with Families**

**5 hr stand-alone**

This facilitation guide is designed for those leading cohort groups who are taking or have taken Danielson PD modules through Pennsylvania’s PD Center. Please be encouraged to steer your cohort group toward discussion that is most appropriate for your particular environment and needs.

In the table below, you will find guiding or essential questions related to the module content and applications in the left-hand column, and potential discussion points in the right-hand column. The last column of the table shares Pennsylvania-specific resources that might be of use or interest to the cohort group. At the end of this guide, you will find the alignment(s) between Danielson’s Framework for Teaching and this module as well as correlations to the Framework for Leadership, should any groups wish to explore those connections further.

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| **Guiding Questions** | **Possible/Guiding Responses** |
| What culturally responsive approaches can be implemented to effectively engage diverse families in the instructional program? | * Building trust and respect with families can engage diverse families in the instructional program.
* Each family has a unique history and culture. Part of building trust and respect with families is being mindful of how our experiences and views may differ from theirs, and planning communication thoughtfully.
* Assume the initiative. Many families will proactively reach out to you to get to know you. Others will not. When you assume the responsibility to build these relationships, there will be no delay or confusion about who should take actions. Make it a goal to build relationships with each and every family, whether they have communicated with you or not.
* Start with happy and neutral news. Be sure the families hear from you often, and share happy or neutral news about their child. By doing so, families will not hear something unpleasant about their child from you as the first point of communication.
* Be persistent. Building relationships takes time. Families may not respond to your first, second, or even third attempt to contact them. Be sure that you are sharing a variety of messages using different methods. There are endless reasons why a family may not be responding. Keep reaching out to them.
* Develop empathy. Mentally take the time to put yourself in the family’s shoes. Doing can help you shape your conversation to deliver the information a family needs in a way they will find agreeable. By imagining yourself to be the adult family member of the student, you can develop ideas about what to communicate, when to share it, and how best to deliver it. Consider the spectrum of information you need to share with families. For each message, think of three ways you could deliver it and what would be the likely reaction to each. By identifying the approaches that would most likely result in a positive outcome, you can avoid missteps without having to live through them.
* Communicate their way. Ask each family how they like to be contacted. They are likely to have preferences for a method (e.g., phone, email, postal), time of day, length of communication, and level of detail. Consider the literacy level of parents as well. The most recent results of the National Assessment of Adult Literacy (2009) shows that over 11 million adults in the U.S. are not literate. Chances are good that one or more of your student’s families have a member who is not literate. Verbal communication may work much better for them. Developing relationships with families takes an array of skills as well as repeated efforts.
* Start with establishing trust and respect with families, then focus on how culture impacts the way teachers and families relate to each other.
* Protect privacy. An important part of demonstrating respect for families and students is keeping confidential information private. This includes such things as test scores, documented or suspected disabilities or health conditions, performance, and behavior issues. You can probably think of a number of other examples of information the family would want you to protect.
* Deliver a good news sandwich. It is possible that, very early in the relationship, you’ll need to deliver some less than pleasant news. The approach you take can help families feel less defensive and understand that you believe their child is a valuable member of the class. Think of examples that showcase how the student is performing well. Place the news that is an opportunity for improvement in between two or more positive comments. Doing so will help families know that it’s not all bad news and that you appreciate their student as a whole person (Maroney).
* Verify your understanding. This is often referred to as active listening. Listen to the family without interrupting. Then summarize what you believe you’ve heard and see if the family agrees. By having a clear understanding of what you’ve heard before you respond, you can avoid having disjointed conversation.
* Prepare, prepare, prepare. By being prepared you can guide the conversation successfully. Think about what it will feel like to be receiving this information or news. Is it a happy occasion, such as the student has won an award? Is it a potentially stressful situation, such as when the student has had disruptive behavior? What kind of outcome do you want Developing Relationships with Families from the conversation? Determine what you want to say or avoid in order to steer the conversation to a positive outcome.
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| What strategies can be used for responding to family concerns and inviting family participation? | * “Put yourself in situations where you’re not dominant, where you’re a noticeable minority or in a group where you don’t know the norms and unspoken rules. Recognize what that feels like and sit with the discomfort. Ask yourself these questions: What did I do to make myself more comfortable? What did I do to be effective or survive in that situation? What did others do that either helped or hindered my effectiveness? What would have helped me in that situation? Use the answers to these questions help you to structure how you include students.”
* Being highly visible to families
* Adapt communication format
* Create shared values
* Communicate educational value
* Using technology to communicate with families
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| How can student involvement in the process of designing informational materials strengthen teacher/family relationships? | * Utilizing strategies to involve students in the communication with families.
* Part of the challenge in family communication is getting the message home. Students can be forgetful, disorganized, or not appreciate how important it is to deliver a paper to their family. Consider having the students design, write, edit and compile the communication.
* Have them discuss what is important to include. Teach them journalistic writing style so that families get answers to the important questions of who, what, where, when, why and how. Before handing the paper to the students, praise their efforts. Then, have them look at and appreciate their own work while emphasizing how important it is for them to get the paper to their families. By instilling this sense of ownership and pride in the communication, students are much more likely to present the paper to their family. Their excitement in having created the communication can then flow over to the family’s appreciating the importance of reading and responding to it.
* Inviting family participation.
* Provide the family with some specific, actionable ideas of how they can help their student grow. Make each idea into a short activity that the families will easily understand and not perceive to be too time consuming. Ask the family to commit to working with their child on these activities. By having several options of activities for the family to choose from, you are not presenting them with a single option (yes or no), but an assortment of options from which they can select one or more (Scholastic). Below are a few ideas to consider.
	+ Parents bring in their favorite book (that will still resonate with the students’ age group) and do a little book talk about it.
	+ Teacher gives guidance what points they should include.
	+ Parents present a talk on a subject they are comfortable with and would interest students.
	+ Teacher partner to discuss subject and how to present.
	+ Have a spot in the classroom where parents can find the tasks you need their help with and enable them to work independently so you don’t have to stop teaching to explain it.
* Developing action plans with families
	+ Clearly communicating expectations
	+ Be specific
	+ Offer ideas
	+ At-school family activities
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| \*How do you communicate information about the instructional program and student progress to parents? | * Communicating information to inform parents about the instructional program. Examples can include: Class newsletter, teacher/class webpage, weekly work folder, email, and regular good phone calls home.
* Providing individual student progress via phone conferences or in-school conferences.
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| \*How do you ensure effective family communications? | * Maintaining current contact information for all parents.
* Inviting parents/guardians to IEP meetings, parent/teacher conferences and open houses.
* Responding to parent concerns and questions in a professional and timely manner.
* Considering families’ cultural backgrounds and norms.
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| \*How do you engage families to promote student achievement? | * Enlisting parent support and participation in student learning.
* Providing opportunities for parents to participate in learning activities.
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| What PA-specific online resources are available that will enable you to communicate with families? | * PDE Guiding Questions for Principals and Teachers (p. 8)

<http://www.portal.state.pa.us/portal/portal/server.pt/document/1375073/guiding_questions_-_principals___teachers_pdf>* PDE Guiding Questions for Learning Support (p. 9-10) <http://static.pdesas.org/content/documents/Guiding%20Questions%20For%20Learning%20Support%20Teachers.pdf>
* SAS link examples:

Website Creator (SAS Login required)<http://www.pdesas.org/module/edfx/website/>Pre-K–2nd Parental Permission for Information Sharing<http://www.pdesas.org/module/content/resources/21628/view.ashx>Pennsylvania's Promise for Children: Learning is Everywhere<http://www.pdesas.org/module/content/resources/21620/view.ashx>Communication<http://www.pdesas.org/module/content/resources/359/view.ashx>Single Parents<http://www.pdesas.org/module/content/resources/357/view.ashx>Welcome Parents<http://www.pdesas.org/module/content/resources/358/view.ashx>Overcoming Barriers to Parent Involvement<http://www.pdesas.org/module/content/resources/352/view.ashx> |

Primary alignment between *Communicating with Families* and the *Framework for Teaching:*

* 4c: Communicating with Families

Correlations between *Communicating with Families* and the *Framework for Leadership:*

* 1b: Uses Data for Informed Decision Making
* 1c: Builds a Collaborative and Empowering Work Environment
* 1e: Celebrates Accomplishments and Acknowledges Failures
* 2b: Ensures a High Quality, High Performing Staff
* 2d: Establishes and Implements Expectations for Students and Staff
* 2e: Communicates Effectively and Strategically
* 3a: Leads School Improvement Initiatives
* 3b: Aligns Curricula, Instruction, and Assessments
* 3c: Implements High Quality Instruction
* 3d: Sets High Expectations for All Students
* 3e: Maximizes Instructional Time
* 4a: Maximizes Professional Responsibilities Through Parent Involvement and Community Engagement
* 4b: Shows Professionalism
* 4c: Supports Professional Growth

*\* Modified from Guiding Questions: Conversations Between Principals and Teachers © Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2013.*