

Communicating with Families

Introduction

One of teachers' most valuable resources is the families of children. Research shows that family involvement enhances children's self-esteem, increases academic achievement, improves family relationships, and helps family members develop better understanding of the educational process.

NM PreK supports teachers' efforts to increase communication with families and to involve them in children's learning experiences.

After viewing this section, you will be able to describe:

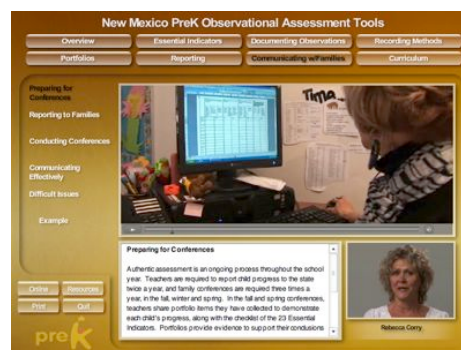
- how to report progress to families;
- how to conduct conferences; and
- how to communicate about difficult issues.



Preparing for Conferences

Authentic assessment is an ongoing process throughout the school year. Teachers are required to report child progress to the state twice a year, and family conferences are required three times a year, in the fall, winter and spring. In the fall and spring conferences, teachers share portfolio items they have collected to demonstrate each child's progress, along with the checklist of the 23 Essential Indicators. Portfolios provide evidence to support their conclusions about the child's growth and development.

In preparing for the conference, teachers review observation notes, photos and work samples, and Quick Check Forms to reflect on each child's accomplishments. Using all of this information, they complete the New Mexico PreK Family/Teacher Summary Report. For each domain, they record the child's growth and accomplishments, as well as continuing goals for the child.



Reporting Progress to Families

Teachers need to be sensitive to the emotional power of having one's own child "evaluated."

One way to diminish anxiety is to invite family members' perspectives, thoughts and suggestions.

In reporting, focus on what the child can and does do, rather than what he or she cannot do. Organize your reporting by accomplishments, areas of significant progress and areas to work on, all related to the PreK outcomes and indicators.



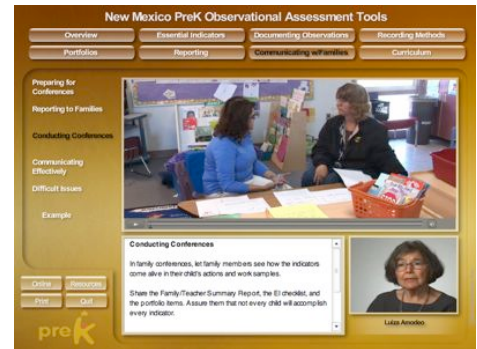
Conducting Conferences

In family conferences, let family members see how the indicators come alive in their child's actions and work samples.

Share the Family/Teacher Summary Report, the EI checklist, and the portfolio items. Assure them that not every child will accomplish every indicator.

Share your goals for helping the child continue to grow and learn and invite family members' collaboration in developing a plan for addressing their concerns.

At the conclusion of the conference, wish family members well and explain how future communication will take place.



Communicating Effectively

Sometimes, interactions with family members are highly charged and involve behaviors that can either facilitate communication or inhibit it. Being intentional in the use of positive communication strategies is key to successful outcomes.

Before meeting with family members, think carefully about the ways you will communicate with them. Such reflections will help you grow as a professional and present information about each child in the best possible way.

Some common sense behaviors that promote effective communication are:

- Speaking respectfully
- Fully explaining
- Touching (for some)
- Taking enough time
- Providing options
- Using humor (for some)
- Expressing care and interest
- Following through
- Being accountable
- Being flexible
- Speaking informally
- Listening, not telling

Behaviors that may inhibit communication are:

- Telling, not listening
- Using first name on a one-way basis
- Shrugging shoulders
- Looking at clock/watch
- Inappropriate humor
- Using jargon
- Being rigid
- Being overly familiar
- Concealing information
- Acting inconsistently
- Blaming
- Giving the brush-off



Difficult Issues

Issues arise in working with young children that may make communication with their family members difficult. Thinking about these issues in advance and strategizing approaches to communicate effectively will help you discuss difficult issues more successfully.

Think about how you might communicate with family members about these common issues to ensure that you are working together in the best interests of the child:

- The child is chronically absent;
- You have some concerns about the child's hygiene;
- You have a concern about things the child is telling you are going on in the home such as inappropriate video games or movies;
- The family member wants the child to "fight back" when hit, pushed, or pinched;
- The child is always dressed in "Sunday best" even down to dressy shoes for school;
- The family member wants to make sure the child is drilled in the ABCs and numbers before kindergarten;
- The family member wants the child to play only in areas that are "gender specific" (i.e., boys at the workbench, girls in housekeeping);
- You have some concerns about the child's development.

A good strategy for communication about difficult issues is to start with a positive description of the child's accomplishments and attributes and to end on a positive note. "Sandwiching" the difficult issues in a positive framework facilitates communication.



Example

Watch the video clip focusing on the conflict between Maida and Mahala, the two girls in blue.

Communication of this nature involves problem-solving and collaboration with the family.

You might ask about the child's behavior at home and how the family responds to their child's behavior. How you handle these conversations will depend on the kind of relationship you have established with the family.

