

---

# Communication

Schools have a duty to support parents and families to better understand the language of formal learning. Effective communication among students, parents, schools, and communities helps develop and maintain strong partnerships of mutual benefit.

## Some questions to consider

- How is student progress communicated to parents in helpful and meaningful ways?
- How do teachers and parents clarify what they need to discuss?
- Is there a shared language of learning to explore students' learning development, challenges, and successes?
- How can the school work with parents and communities to establish shared expectations about schooling?
- How does the school accommodate the needs of parents with complex lives?
- How does the school communicate with industry and business partners?

## Some potential strategies to apply

Have some staff work between home and school to support parents in better understanding the language of schooling.

Model positive ways to communicate with their children and teachers, and explain the features of classrooms.

Use lots of different communication tools and channels to reach different kinds of parents, including newsletters, websites, e-mails, assemblies, parent/teacher interviews, P&F meetings, web conferencing, and text messages.

Develop a school transition calendar charting key points in the school year where engagement with parents and communities is vital.

Detail specific activities for the calendar.

Be aware of and communicate how to access information and forms in other languages.

Provide professional development for teachers to effectively communicate with parents.

Be consistent with messages that outline the school's high expectations for all students and their learning.

## Make the most of the Internet and new media

Schools can communicate and foster relationships with parents using email, websites, blogs, podcasts and social networking sites.<sup>i</sup>

### Using these technologies can

- reduce scheduling barriers that restrict opportunities for face-to-face meetings,
- convey information to multiple families at once,
- efficiently share information about school policies and assignments, and
- provide tips for engaging in learning.

### To develop relationships with parents online

- Promote key messages to them about the school and its aims.
- Promote the use of home-based learning materials and websites.
- Provide access to resources parents can work on with their children or by themselves to then support their children.
- Provide links to accessible resources and publications.
- Provide interactive workshops and chat rooms for parents.
- Have an area on the school website showcasing how parents can support children.
- Link parents with organisations that can provide various forms of support to them.
- Inform parents about special programs that operate in the school.<sup>ii</sup>

## Be aware of the challenges of online communication

Communication strategies that use new technologies have the most benefit if they account for diverse parental needs, focus on connecting learning in the home and learning in school, and boost existing engagement strategies.

- Maintaining websites and email contact requires both personnel and resources.
- Sustaining effective communication over time needs to be planned in advance.
- Exclusive emphasis on technology can detract from more personal approaches.
- Some families have little Internet access; it is tricky to connect with them this way.

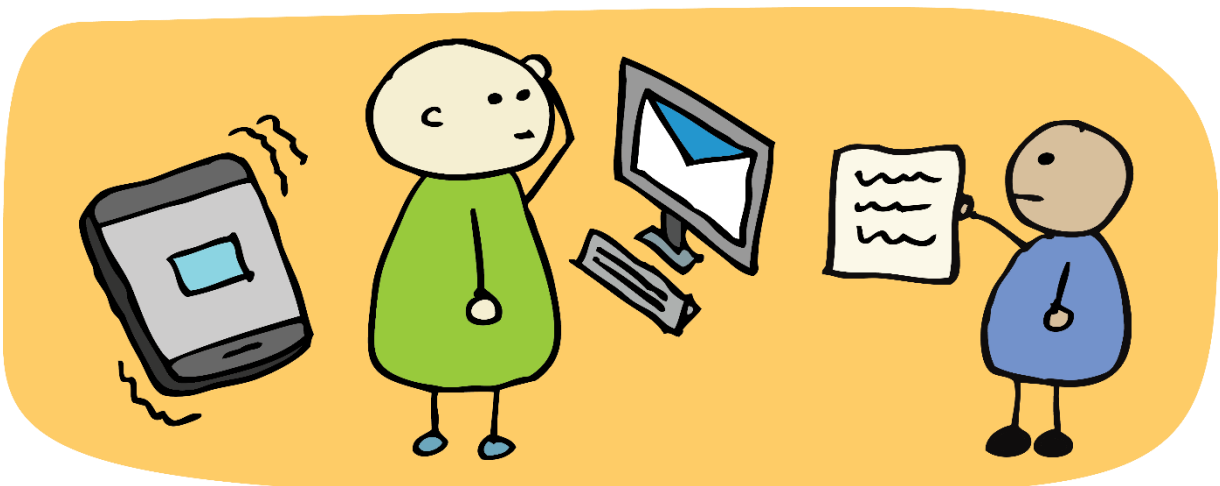
Dwelling internet connection	Tasmania	%	2011	%	Australia	%
Internet not accessed from dwelling	38,482	19.5	50,540	26.2	1,172,415	14.1
Internet accessed from dwelling	154,061	78.0	135,855	70.5	6,892,165	83.2
Not stated	5,032	2.5	6,423	3.3	221,494	2.7


In Tasmania, 78.0% of households had at least one person access the internet from the dwelling. This could have been through a desktop/laptop computer, mobile or smart phone, tablet, music or video player, gaming console, smart TV or any other device.

<sup>iii</sup>

## Quick tips and effective practices<sup>iv</sup>

<p><b><i>The goal to share information and build trusting relationships between schools, families, and communities is reflected in the practices listed.</i></b></p>
<p><b>Be clear.</b> Ensure that all materials sent home are clear, user-friendly, and understandable. Communicate in language that is jargon-free. Use translations as necessary.</p>
<p><b>Be transparent.</b> Put a chart of the school's organisational structure in the handbook. Explain how parents can contact the principal, teachers, counsellors, and other staff.</p>
<p><b>Be caring.</b> Support teachers to communicate often and well with parents about students' goals, curriculum plans, and homework, and about how they can support student learning.</p>
<p><b>Be sensitive.</b> Learn about, consider, and act on communication protocols and taboos in your school and its sub-cultures and varied communities.</p>
<p><b>Be positive.</b> Teachers often communicate with parents when students go astray. Parents want to know when their child is doing well and are responsive when that is shared too.</p>
<p><b>Be practical.</b> Help parents understand the curriculum and they will be better able to support their child's learning at school and home. Suggest how they can build their child's strengths.</p>
<p><b>Be personal.</b> Relationships grow stronger when teachers communicate with parents about something specific, detailed, and personal about their child.</p>
<p><b>Be accessible:</b> When appropriate to do so, meeting families outside school settings helps educators reach out to them and acknowledge them as partners not just clients.</p>
<p><b>Be innovative.</b> Use many methods to reach families such as print, email, telephone, social media, television, radio, newspaper. Host meet and greet events and other occasions.</p>
<p><b>Be trustworthy.</b> Work to build parents' trust and confidence. Let them know step by step how to resolve an issue or concern. Follow up on commitments made. Follow through.</p>



Parent Bulletin Boards	Jargon-free end of year reports	Thank you notes ...
Positive phone calls	Notes home with the child	Twitter
School Website	Regular newsletters	Other?
Postcards		Other?
Social media 	Home visits	Other?
Parent/Teacher interviews	Meet and greet sessions	Other?
Emails	Letter of introduction	
Parent blog	Apps such as SeeSaw	

<sup>i</sup> Bouffard, S.M. (2008). *Tapping into Technology: The Role of the Internet in Family-School Communication*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Family Research Project.

Hohfeld, T., Ritzhaupt, A. & Barron, A. (2010). Connecting schools, community, and family with ICT: Four-year trends related to school level and SES of public schools in Florida. *Computers & Education*, 55(1), 391–405.

<sup>ii</sup> Emerson, L., Fear, J., Fox, S. & Sanders, E. (2012). *Parental engagement in learning and schooling: Lessons from research. A report by the Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth (ARACY)*. Canberra: Family-School and Community Partnerships Bureau. Department of Education, Training and Employment Queensland (2015). Parent and Community Engagement Framework—Working Together to Maximise Student Learning. <https://goo.gl/w9r72Z>

See also Lewin, C. & Luckin, R. (2010). Technology to support parental engagement in elementary education: Lessons learned from the UK. *Computers & Education*, 54(3), 749–58.

<sup>iii</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics (2016) Census QuickStats Tasmania. <https://goo.gl/7tQuwF>.

<sup>iv</sup> Adapted from Working together: school, family and community partnerships. A toolkit for New Mexico school communities, <https://goo.gl/TDeJ4L>.