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## Fact Sheet #12 - Performance Standard 10: Communication

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### COMMUNICATION

*The teacher communicates effectively with students, parents or guardians, district and school personnel, and other stakeholders in ways that enhance student learning.*

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The ability to communicate and collaborate is one of the essential requisites for teacher effectiveness.<sup>1</sup> In fact, at the very core of effective teaching is effective communication. Extant research provides evidence that students taught by teachers with a high level of clarity learn more than those taught by teachers with lower clarity.<sup>2</sup> Teachers with high clarity are perceived to be more capable of conveying ideas effectively and communicating with students in a compelling manner. Closely connected to this notion is the concept of "instructional communication competence" which has been studied widely in educational research. Instructional communication competence was defined by Cornett-DeVito and Worley as:

The teacher-instructor's motivation, knowledge, and skill to select, enact and evaluate effective and appropriate, verbal and nonverbal, interpersonal and instructional messages filtered by student-learners' perceptions, resulting in cognitive, affective and behavioral student-learner development and reciprocal feedback.<sup>3</sup>

One research team identified, interviewed, and observed 11 award-winning teachers to develop a better understanding of their instructional communication practices.<sup>4</sup> Their findings included the following themes related to communication practices in the classroom:

- *Understand the ebb and flow of the classroom*  
The teachers used instructional objectives to plan classroom activities effectively, but they were not constrained by predefined plans. They adapted to the flow of the class and allowed for spontaneity. Additionally, they used effective communication to orient students to learning and help them integrate

new information with previously learned information.

- *Use a wide repertoire of communication skills*  
The teachers used a variety of communication behaviors, such as immediacy, humor, and clarity to sustain a positive and interactive environment.
- *Create relationships with students*  
The teachers communicated with students about shared experiences to establish interpersonal rapport, and they communicated in an approachable manner through proxemics, kinetics, knowing first names, etc. They also encouraged an open, warm, and communicative environment that invited students' comments, questions, and responses.

The communication skills of a teacher also play an important role in the collaboration with colleagues and other personnel in schools, and in the partnerships with parents and other community members. After all, teaching is communicating and, to a large extent, advocating for learners. Educating a child cannot be one person's work. Certainly, teachers must be responsible and accountable for what is under their control – the academic and nonacademic interactions with their students. Beyond this traditional responsibility, however, good teachers know they must reach beyond the walls of the classroom to solicit collaboration and support from school colleagues on behalf of their students. Furthermore, they understand the need to reach beyond the schoolhouse door to communicate and gain cooperation with families and others in a larger community.<sup>5</sup>

Effective collaboration empowers teachers to re-conceptualize themselves as change agents and advocates for their students. Some defining characteristics associated with the important roles of collaborator and advocate are:

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- Being an advocate of better strategies for meeting students' learning needs, by being an active learner who seeks, applies, and communicates professional knowledge of curriculum, instruction, assessment, and student development.
- Being an advocate of teaching as a profession by appreciating and practicing principles, ethics, and legal responsibilities.
- Being an advocate for the well-being of the whole educational organization by initiating, valuing, and maintaining collaboration and partnerships with various stakeholders.<sup>6</sup>

Effective teachers not only communicate competently with their students, but also they communicate actively with their professional peers to share best practice, seek advice and suggestions, and conduct collaborative inquires. Change is the constant theme in today's education, and teachers are increasingly challenged to keep abreast of innovations and new developments. They need to communicate with colleagues or others who possess needed information.<sup>7</sup>

Teachers who have a democratic vision about their profession act collaboratively and cooperatively with colleagues and other educational stakeholders. They no longer confine their responsibility to the particular classroom in which they teach; rather, they are committed to making a contribution to the students taught by other teachers, in the school, the district, and the community by and large.<sup>8</sup> Michael Fullan corroborated this vision by proposing that teacher preparation programs should enable each teacher to initiate, value, and practice collaboration and partnerships with students, colleagues, parents, community, government, and social and business agencies.<sup>9</sup> Additionally, teachers of democratic professionalism serve as advocates for the well-being of the educational cause. They act individually and collectively to effect social justice and equity in teaching and learning. They are engaged in purposeful and

critical reflection and dialogues with others on issues that have immediate impact on day-to-day classroom teaching, as well as larger issues and contexts that have indirect influence on social equity in education.<sup>10</sup>

Research findings show that teachers who effectively collaborate often:

- Possess strong communication skills.<sup>11</sup>
- Offer clear explanations and directions.<sup>12</sup>
- Recognize the levels of involvement ranging from networking to collaboration.<sup>13</sup>
- Use multiple forms of communication between school and home.<sup>14</sup>
- Use informal contacts at school events, the grocery store, and at other community places to keep the lines of communication open.<sup>15</sup>

In addition, involvement of families and community can help students become more focused on academic learning. A growing body of research suggested that creating more connections and greater cooperation among the school, family, and community contexts could improve student behavior and discipline, enhance students' academic success, and reinforce stronger self-regulatory skills and work orientation.<sup>16</sup> Epstein asserted that students are influenced by three spheres of influence: family, school, and community contexts in which the students develop.<sup>17</sup> The extent to which these three contexts overlap is contingent upon the nature and degree of communication and collaboration among school educators, parents, and community members. A meaningful and purposeful overlap is conducive to better student learning. School teachers play an important role in ameliorating such overlap. Research indicates that among various factors (such as resources, parents' sense of efficacy, etc.) parents' perceptions of teacher invitation have the most significant influence on their decision to be more involved with their children's education.<sup>18</sup> Teachers can increase family and community

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involvement through the following collaborative activities:<sup>19</sup>

- Helping families establish home environments to support children as students.
- Designing effective forms of school-to-home and home-to-school communication.
- Recruiting and organizing families to help the school and support students.
- Providing families with information and ideas to support students with homework.
- Including parents in decision-making and developing parent leaders.
- Identifying and integrating resources and services from the community to strengthen schools, students, and families.

LePage also suggested some effective ways to improve teacher-parent communication.<sup>20</sup> They include home visits, frequent positive calls home (not centering on students' academic problems, misbehavior, or negative attitudes), on-line connections for homework and information sharing, parent-teacher-student conferences, exhibitions of student work, and parent participation in school activities.

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**Sample performance indicators for the professional knowledge of teachers**

- 10.1 Uses verbal and non-verbal communication techniques to foster positive interactions and promote learning in the classroom and school environment.
- 10.2 Engages in ongoing communication and shares instructional goals, expectations, and student progress with families in a timely and constructive manner.
- 10.3 Collaborates and networks with colleagues and community to reach educational decisions that enhance and promote student learning.
- 10.4 Uses precise language, correct vocabulary and grammar, and appropriate forms of oral and written communication.

- 10.5 Explains directions, concepts, and lesson content to students in a logical, sequential, and age-appropriate manner.
- 10.6 Adheres to school and district policies regarding communication of student information.
- 10.7 Creates a climate of accessibility for parents and students by demonstrating a collaborative and approachable style.
- 10.8 Listens and responds with cultural awareness, empathy, and understanding to the voice and opinions of stakeholders (parents, community, students, and colleagues).
- 10.9 Uses modes of communication that are appropriate for a given situation.

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**Sample student evidence that the teacher has met the criteria for proficiency**

- Observe that both school and home share common expectations for their progress and well-being.
- Give examples of how the teacher involves their families in classroom activities on a regular basis.
- Report that the teacher initiates contacts with their families regularly for both positive and feedback and concerns.
- Are comfortable having the family members visit the classroom.

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**Sample conference prompts:**

- How did you involve family members and community partners in your classroom?
- What do you find is the most effective way to contact family members of your students? Why do you think this is the most effective method?

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- <sup>6</sup>Fullan, M. G. (1993).
- <sup>7</sup>Catt, S., Miller, D., & Schallenkamp, K. (2007). You are the key: Communicate for learning effectiveness. *Education, 127*(3), 369-377.
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<b>Teacher Self-Assessment Checklist</b>					
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<b>Quality</b>		<b>Exemplary</b>	<b>Proficient</b>	<b>Needs Development</b>	<b>Ineffective</b>
<b>Communication Skills</b>	Explain content with a high level of clarity in classroom.				
	Explain rules, expectations, and concepts in a logical, sequential, and age-appropriate manner.				
	Use a wide repertoire of communication behaviors (such as immediacy, humor) to sustain a positive and interactive learning environment.				
	Encourage an open, warm, communicative climate in classroom that invites students' comments, questions, and responses.				
	Exhibit active listening.				
<b>Parental Involvement</b>	Display interest and concern about the students' lives outside school.				
	Keep a log of parent communication.				
	Provide a description of record-keeping system and how it is used to inform parents, students, and administrators.				
	Create a climate of accessibility for parents and students.				
	Share instructional goals, expectations, and student progress with families in a timely and constructive manner.				
	Use a variety of strategies to encourage parent-teacher communication and connections, such as home visits, frequent positive calls home, parent-teacher-student conferences, exhibitions of student work, and parent participation in school activities.				
	Outreach parents who have social, economic, racial, and/or language barriers to get involved in their children's education.				
<b>Collaboration</b>	Participate in collegial activities.				
	Reduce isolation and develop a more consistent curriculum through collaboration with peers from the same grade level and subject level.				
	Share knowledge and engage in collaborative problem-solving.				
	Interact with and solicit feedback from colleagues, parents, and students.				
	Collaborate and network with colleagues to reach educational decisions.				
	Collaborate with the community to identify and integrate resources and services that can support student learning.				