

Center for Active Family Engagement (Café)
Family Friendly Walk Through



Urbana High School

Family Friendly Walk Through Report

August 2012

Introduction

What is a Family Friendly Walk Through?

The purpose of the Family Friendly Walk Through (FFWT) is to assess how welcome families are in your school and how welcome families are in the learning process. CAFÉ staff members completed a FFWT of your school on May 8th, 2012. The FFWT included: (1) a physical walk through; (2) a review of printed material; (3) a review of the school’s web site; (4) a “shopper call;” (5) an interview the building administrator; (6) a survey of school staff; and (7) a survey of parents.

This FFWT report is designed to help your school have a richer conversation about how welcome families are in your school and how welcome families are in the learning process. The report includes ratings, commendations, and recommendations for 4 different goal areas—Communication, Information, Participation, and Welcoming.

Goal 1—Welcoming

The **Welcoming** Goal helps you know if your parents feel they belong on the school campus. Here are the indicators for this goal area along with the number of items used to determine the rating for each indicator.

Indicators	Definition	# of Items
Parent Visits	Procedures are in place to accommodate parent visits to the school	5
Making Parents Comfortable	School personnel help parents to feel comfortable	7
Respect	Parents’ culture and language are respected	3
Appearance	The school is physically attractive	2

Goal 2—Communication

The **Communication** Goal helps you know if you have systems in place for home-family communication that are inviting, useful and set up for two-way communication. The following table lists the indicators for this goal area along with the number of items used to determine the rating for each indicator.

Indicators	Definition	# of Items
Nature of the Contact	Contact between schools and families is frequent, comfortable, and two-way	11
Ease of Use	Written and oral communication is clear and comprehensible	4
Opportunities	Meetings and events are scheduled regularly, widely advertised, and well attended	2
Documents & Website	Print information is available, attractive, useful, and family/culturally friendly	4

Goal 3—Information

The **Information** Goal helps you know if your families receive the information they need in order to function as an integral part of their child’s school. Here are the indicators for this goal area along with the number of items used to determine the rating for each indicator.

Indicators	Definition	# of Items
School Resources	The school provides resources and materials to help families learn about school goals, policies, and procedures	8
Programs and Procedures	The school has programs and procedures to inform families about their child’s classroom and activities	7
Student Performance	Families are kept current on their child’s school performance	4
Involving Parents with Achievement	The school has programs and procedures to involve parents with their child’s academic achievement	6
Connecting Parents with Community Services	The school has programs and procedures to inform families about available community assistance	3

Goal 4—Participation

The **Participation** Goal helps you know if your family participation programs invite involvement, value parents as key resources, and engage the entire school community. The following table lists the indicators for this goal area along with the number of items used to determine the rating for each indicator.

Indicators	Definition	# of Items
Supporting Parent Ideas	Individuals and existing documents support parent input and ideas	5
Working Together	Parents and teachers meet and work together	7
Learning & Volunteering Opportunities	Schools provide parents with education and volunteering options	2
Valuing Parent Knowledge	Parents are valued as an education community resource	7

Rating System

Each indicator received a rating of High Quality, Emerging or Low Quality based on the average score of the items associated with each indicator.

Rating	Range
High	2.75 to 3.00
Emerging	2.00 to 2.74
Low	1.00-1.99

Contact Information

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Summary

Your Scores

Goal	Score	Rating
Welcoming	1.97	Low
Communication	2.40	Emerging
Information	2.29	Emerging
Participation	1.58	Low
Overall Score	2.06	Emerging

Survey Information

- 27 **staff** completed the online survey
- 62 **families** completed the parent survey

School Visit Highlights

- The High School campus is well maintained. Feedback from both parents and teachers indicates that the High School is successful at providing parents with information and social and celebratory experiences.

Recommended Next Steps

To take your family engagement practice from involving parents in the school to engaging parents in student learning, CAFÉ recommends the following:

- Structured professional development for all staff (certified and non-certified) that helps staff members understand:
 - **Why** family engagement matters and how family engagement efforts can positively influence student learning;
 - **What** specific practices affect student academic progress; and
 - **How** the High School can create a school-wide culture which promotes a range of family engagement practices and strategies that are student-centered and designed to improve learning.
- Provide a school-wide definition of parental involvement with input from administration, staff and families. This facilitates an awareness, which often translates into action to merge student learning with parent involvement. Promote this definition to staff and families at every opportunity much like you would a mission statement, (i.e., school-to-home communications, newsletters, staff meetings, website, etc.)
- Adopt multiple practices that help all parents feel **welcome** to participate in their child's learning as a member of the education team.
- Create explicit, positive school assumptions about the importance of parent contributions to student success, and **communicate** that all parents, regardless of education level, can support student success.

- Give parents specific **information** on their child's academic performance and teach how to interpret this data in the context of overall classroom performance, school benchmarks, and state standards.
- Establish a parent involvement action team comprised of parents, staff, and administrators to implement ongoing strategies for the purpose of motivating parents to **participate** in student learning.

Welcoming

Your Score

Definition	Score	Rating
Procedures are in place to accommodate parent visits to the school	1.80	Low
School personnel help parents to feel comfortable	1.99	Low
Parents' culture and language are respected	2.60	Emerging
The school is physically attractive	1.50	Low
Overall Score	1.97	Low

Commendations

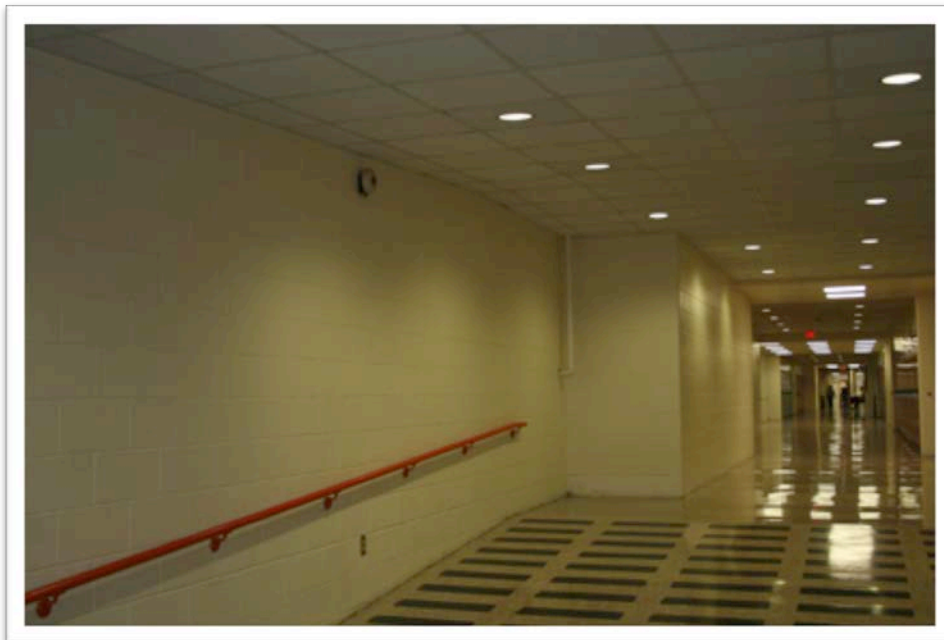
- The high school uses signage throughout the building in English and in Spanish.

Recommendations

- Display a campus map and have handouts of the map readily available for families and visitors.
- The school parking lot is often a visitor's first impression of the school's climate. Provide directional signs for entrance/exit and flow of traffic within the parking area and designate a few parking spots as "Family/Visitor" parking to reinforce the message that the school welcomes and has a place for visitors. The sign in the parking lot photo does not let parents know they are welcome to park there. Make sure to post directional signage indicating the school entrance.



- Customer service is an integral component of creating a climate that welcomes all families. Provide yearly staff development opportunities in this area and regularly communicate specific “customer service expectations” to ensure that front line staff have the knowledge and resources to provide quality service at all times.
- A significant percentage of families did not feel comfortable communicating with their child’s teacher. Provide informal opportunities for families and teachers to greet and converse. Provide communication tips in newsletters and on website for both teachers and parents. You may also consider offering a communication workshops for educators and parents. Encourage educators to take the first step in communicating with parents and make the initial contact a positive experience.
- To connect and include families in student achievement we suggest displaying more evidence of learning throughout the campus. It is critical to make the connection between what you’ve displayed and student learning. When displaying evidence of learning, be intentional and explicit. This means labeling all work (what it is) and connecting the work back to school learning goals, content standards or a specific assessment. This is the difference between displaying student work and showcasing evidence of learning. There was almost no evidence of student work displayed throughout the high school.



Communication

Your Score

Definition	Score	Rating
Contact between schools and families is frequent, comfortable, and two-way	2.30	Emerging
Written and oral communication is clear and comprehensible	2.80	High Quality
Meetings and events are scheduled regularly, widely advertised, and well attended	2.00	Emerging
Print information is available, attractive, useful, and family/culturally friendly	2.50	Emerging
Overall Score	2.40	Emerging

Commendations

- Parents generally report that school personnel are available and respond to their concerns in a timely manner. Parents also indicated there are front office personnel who are fluent in their preferred language and that they understand the information the school provides.

Recommendations

- Consider incorporating the use of a suggestion box or other informal method to solicit family input on procedures, policies, concerns, and/or school achievement progress. In order to promote the importance of parent feedback, pair the use of a suggestion box with an explanation of the school's interest in obtaining parent feedback and provide information to parents on the topics for which the school would like their feedback. Posing specific questions or issues for response in the school newsletter, on the school website or during a parent meeting may serve to encourage parent participation.
- To promote your school's parent/teacher organization, consider creating a bulletin board in the front of the school and on your website to visibly promote the organization, recruit new members and update families on recent activity. Make sure to label the board as a "PTO Bulletin Board" so that families know where in the school and on the website to locate information. Suggested content for the board may include the following; meeting minutes, upcoming events, membership and contact information. Ensure that material and content is updated on a regular basis.
- Provide a prominent area in the school where parent organizations and school staff may post announcements and upcoming events.
- Administration should consistently provide formal and informal opportunities to meet with families so they are included in, and aware of school-wide issues.
- Revise the layout of the school website for easier navigation. There is an abundance of information contained on the school website, however it requires that the user scroll down to find what they are looking for. Having defined sections or tabs would be more user friendly. To keep families informed on student learning, school events and procedures, website information should be current and updated regularly.

Information

Your Score

Definition	Score	Rating
The school provides resources and materials to help families learn about school goals, policies, and procedures	1.95	Low
The school has programs and procedures to inform families about their child’s classroom and activities	2.35	Emerging
Families are kept current on their child’s school performance	2.38	Emerging
The school has programs and procedures to involve parents with their child’s academic achievement	1.83	Low
The school has programs and procedures to inform families about available community assistance	2.92	High
Overall Score	2.29	Emerging

Commendations

- Families feel informed about policies and procedures.

Recommendations

- Consider enhancing the content of your current welcome folder to include a welcome letter from the principal, student handbook, information about instructional programs, information about parent organizations and volunteer opportunities, staff contact information, and specific school highlights such as awards, athletics, community partnerships and school academic performance information. The focus of the packet should be on families and their role in the school and in supporting learning.
- Consider providing a prominent area of the school where families can access information on school policies and procedures, instructional practices, curriculum information, tutoring assistance, volunteer opportunities and community resources. To inform parents of the availability and location of this information area, identify the area with signage such as “Parent Information Board” and promote it in school newsletters, on website, and school events. For families that do not frequent the campus, ensure this information is easily found on the school website and individual teacher web pages. When updating families about new procedures or policies, consider sending those documents home on bright colored paper or utilize social networking options such as Facebook, Twitter or text messaging.
- Many educators indicate that they do not provide newsletters/class bulletins to families. Encourage all educators to do so on a monthly or quarterly basis, with information on class assignments, upcoming events, etc. Utilize technology and social media to make them available on the web and easily communicate with families on a regular basis.
- Encourage educators to discuss social behavior and discipline policies with parents at the beginning of the school year. As a reminder and reference, this information can also be included in the welcome folder, on the school website and in newsletters

- To keep family members informed and connected to student progress, consider updating your current quarterly progress report to include information on how family members can support student learning at home, based on individual student data. These “Data Tracker” guide reports should be updated with individual student progress, provided to families on a quarterly basis and paired with a curriculum outline to keep family members informed on what students are learning in class.
- Various educators responded that they do not believe families understand the academic standards and report card procedures. While High School educators may communicate with families, it doesn’t appear that they take the next step and help families understand when the data means and how they utilize this information to engage with their child to support to support learning at home. To help educators work more effectively with families, consider providing professional development to faculty and staff focused on effective strategies for engaging all families.
- To keep parents connected with student learning, consider enhancing or including the following content on your website:
 - On-line grade review
 - School Key Term Guide
 - School location and link to mapping program
 - Frequently Asked Question section on:
 - School office hours and student hours
 - Volunteer opportunities
 - Who to contact in the office
 - What to do if a child will be late or absent
 - Bus information
 - Homework expectations
 - School dress code
 - Behavior expectations/what not to bring to school
 - Enrollment requirements
- Look at creative ways to designate space on your campus for a Parent Resource Center or area in the school where parents are able to get information on helping their child learn, academic tips, DVD’s, access to a computer, or other materials that support student learning. We understand that designating space on campus for a center may be difficult. Consider designating a corner of your media center or front office space to house parent materials and a computer for family or visitor use.
- Parent surveys indicate a need to provide more information to families regarding student learning and how to provide support for learning at home. To foster parent partnerships and facilitate two-way conversation regarding student achievement, provide on-site and online opportunities that explain to families how to support learning at home. Encourage educators to outline strategies for promoting learning at home on their classroom web page, in school-home correspondences, and during parent-teacher conferences. To assist with learning at home strategies, encourage educators to discuss the individual learning style of students with parents, and send home student work for parent review and comment.
- To facilitate school transitions ensure families are provided opportunities to participate in meetings, activities, and orientations. Have your parent teacher organization work with staff and school administration to organize transition meetings for families that explain school policies and procedures, academic standards, report cards, and specific ways that families can assist with student learning.

Participation

Your Score

Definition	Score	Rating
Individuals and existing documents support parent input and ideas	1.94	Low
Parents and teachers meet and work together	1.95	Low
Schools provide parents with education and volunteering options	1.00	Low
Parents are valued as an education community resource	1.42	Low
Overall Score	1.58	Low

Commendations

- Parents attend conferences and other family events.

Recommendations

- Look for creative ways to provide educational resources and education to families on school campus in order to increase family participation (i.e. language, computer, parenting classes, workshops). Establishing partnerships with community organizations and Institutes of Higher Education can assist with accomplishing this.
- Provide various opportunities and different levels of engagement for parents who are at different stages of parent involvement. To ensure a variety of parents are involved in school decision-making committees, consider adopting a 1-2 year term limit on school committees/boards. Invite parent representatives from each grade level to participate and/or serve as “parent leaders” to help support and recruit other parents.
- Educators reported that the majority of parents do not attend meetings or regularly scheduled school events. However, the majority of parents surveyed responded that they attend school events, meetings, conferences, etc. To facilitate partnership and address the disconnect, encourage ALL staff to participate in afterschool and evening activities to demonstrate a sincere interest in school-family partnerships, provide opportunities for teachers and parents to interact in smaller groups, and encourage processes for direct and positive contact. Additional recommendations to encourage family attendance at meetings and events are: utilize parent event punch cards, host lunch and learns, extend personal and print invitations and hold events outside of school.
- To promote successful family and community engagement practices in your school and district, we recommend adding a family engagement professional development track to your current offerings that will include training on how to communicate with families, asset building, cultural competency and community mapping.
- Have a plan in place to monitor school/parent initiatives for the purpose of improving school and parent partnerships, including evaluations and/or surveys at parent workshops, events, and meetings.
- Consider forming a Family Involvement Action Team comprised of parents, staff, administrators, and community members to assess, plan, and implement on-going strategies for the purpose of increasing parent involvement.
- Survey families, mentors, and community members on their talents and skills and provide various opportunities for volunteering that match their interests and different levels of engagement. This “survey” can be done the traditional route, be posted on your website, or be conducted in an informal way every time a family member is on campus or when teachers call home. When possible, invite parents, mentors and community members into the classroom to share their expertise and experience (cultural or technical background) with students.

- To maximize parent participation, involve parents in recruiting others. To cultivate a positive “word of mouth campaign”, create positive relationships with every family member you connect with as they will be sure to spread the news about the wonderful opportunities available at the school.