

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



Middle 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	2.31	Emerging
Communication	2.62	Emerging
Information	2.38	Emerging
Participation	1.84	Low
Overall Score	2.28	Emerging

Survey Information

- 36 **staff** completed the online survey
- 32 **families** completed the parent survey

School Visit Highlights

- The Middle School campus is extremely well maintained. It is clear that Middle School staff and administration take great pride in the physical appearance of the building and grounds. Feedback from both parents and teachers indicates that the Middle School is successful at providing parents with information and social and celebratory experiences. The Middle School is very successful at involving parents in the school. The Middle School is moving toward a higher level of parent engagement as evidenced by (1) the creation of a voluntary staff team to address parent engagement; (2) use of family-friendly signage inside and outside of the building; (3) teacher displays of evidence of student learning; and (4) administrative support for the concept of family engagement.

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 Middle 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	2.40	Emerging
School personnel help parents to feel comfortable	2.02	Emerging
Parents' culture and language are respected	2.33	Emerging
The school is physically attractive	2.50	Emerging
Overall Score	2.31	Emerging

Commendations

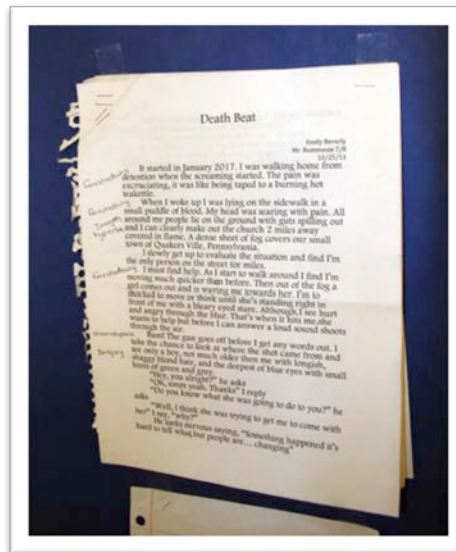
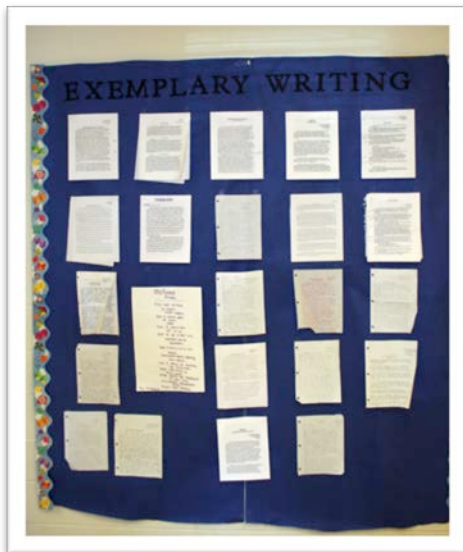
- Handouts of campus map are readily available to visitors.
- Campus is well maintained and there is an adhered to visitor policy upon entering the campus. Excellent welcoming signage inside and outside the building.
- Families feel comfortable communicating with their child's teacher



Recommendations

- The Middle does an outstanding job of providing visitor parking and welcoming signage. Consider displaying welcome in language(s) representative of the school population.
- While maintaining a safe campus is paramount, ensure that families always feel that the campus door is open to a family partnership. To ensure the safety of all students, front line staff should enforce visitor check-in procedures on a consistent basis.
- Provide a school-wide definition of parental involvement with input from administration and staff. This serves to create an awareness, which often develops into merging 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.).

- To maintain quality customer service, administration should regularly communicate specific “customer service expectations” to staff and encourage staff development opportunities in this area.
- The photos here show that the Middle School successfully displays evidence of student work. When looking at the science photo (photo 1), however, it’s not clear what the students were working on, how it is connected to the curriculum, which standard it is aligned with, or how parents can talk with their child about the learning that took place. To connect and include families in student achievement, we suggest displaying more direct evidence of learning throughout the campus. This is the difference between displaying student work and showcasing evidence of learning. The “exemplary writing” photos (in the bottom row) do a better job of conveying specific information about student learning.



Communication

Your Score

Definition	Score	Rating
Contact between schools and families is frequent, comfortable, and two-way	2.18	Emerging
Written and oral communication is clear and comprehensible	2.83	High
Meetings and events are scheduled regularly, widely advertised, and well attended	2.50	Emerging
Print information is available, attractive, useful, and family/culturally friendly	3.00	High
Overall Score	2.62	Emerging

Commendations

- Parents overwhelmingly praise the Middle School for their communication practices. Parents indicated on survey responses that they receive positive comments from teachers, can easily reach school personnel when needed and that school personnel respond to parent concerns in a timely manner.

Recommendations

- Parent surveys indicate that teachers do not engage in frequent or positive communication with families. Encourage this practice as an effective means to strengthen communication channels and establish partnerships with parents to support student learning. This can be done by phone, email or personal contact.
- To facilitate effective two-way communication, provide contact information for teachers and staff in student handbook, newsletters and on website.
- 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.
- Administration should consistently provide formal and informal opportunities to meet with families so they are included in, and aware of school-wide issues.

Information

Your Score

Definition	Score	Rating
The school provides resources and materials to help families learn about school goals, policies, and procedures	2.15	Emerging
The school has programs and procedures to inform families about their child’s classroom and activities	2.67	High
Families are kept current on their child’s school performance	2.39	Emerging
The school has programs and procedures to involve parents with their child’s academic achievement	2.25	Emerging
The school has programs and procedures to inform families about available community assistance	2.48	Emerging
Overall Score	2.38	Emerging

Commendations

- Families feel informed about policies and procedures.
- Website contains individual classroom or team/grade-level information, curriculum information and a school calendar with events/information posted.

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.
- Display school mission statement in a prominent area where families and visitors frequent. This helps to communicate the school’s goals and fundamental purpose. Incorporate the mission statement in school correspondence and meetings to remind staff, students and families of this commitment.
- Educators indicated on survey responses that they do not discuss social behavior and discipline policies with families. Consider incorporating this information at registration and including the information in a welcome packet.
- 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 teachers to post individual classroom information on the website and provide a curriculum outline on a quarterly basis to keep parents informed on what students are learning in class. 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 on the school website and 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. 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.
- Various educators responded that they do not believe families understand the academic standards and report card procedures. While Middle School educators responded that they keep parent informed about student’s progress, it is the difference between communicating by sending home a document and really explaining to parents what the scores mean and how they can support their child’s learning at home. While the Middle School communicates often with families, it doesn’t appear that they take the next step and help families understand what the data means and how to utilize this information to engage with their child to support student learning.
- To keep parents connected with student learning, consider enhancing or including the following content on your website:
 - Parent Resource section to include information on upcoming events/parent workshops, resources for families (educational and community) and strategies to connect families to student learning. Utilize this section to introduce families to your parent liaison, available services, upcoming workshops/classes and weekly schedule.
 - Individual classroom or subject area information - To establish consistency among teacher web pages ensure that all teachers, at minimum, post a short bio, include information on yearly student learning objectives, homework assignments, ways for parents to be active participants in their child’s education and current newsletters. For accountability, review these pages on a consistent basis.
 - School Key Term Guide
 - School or district newsletter
 - School location and link to mapping program
- Educators responded that they do not provide linkages to other services that families may need. To direct families to needed resources, encourage teachers to have a list of important community numbers (tutoring and homework assistance, counseling services and social and financial assistance) readily available for parents.

Participation

Your Score

Definition	Score	Rating
Individuals and existing documents support parent input and ideas	1.99	Low
Parents and teachers meet and work together	2.09	Emerging
Schools provide parents with education and volunteering options	1.50	Low
Parents are valued as an education community resource	1.78	Low
Overall Score	1.84	Low

Commendations

- Parents attend conferences and other family events.

Recommendations

- Many educators responded that they do not ask parents about their child’s strengths, talents, interests, or needs. In order to maximize instruction and learning, encourage educators to discuss this with parents.
- 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.
- Several parents indicated they do not always feel the school is open to parent suggestions. Provide opportunities for frequent 2-way communication, such as morning coffees or other activities to demonstrate partnership. Ensure that when parents do provide suggestions they are informed how or when the recommendation has been addressed. Follow-up and follow-through with families are vital components to the process of acknowledgement and value to families.
- 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.
- Look for creative ways to provide educational resources and education to families on school campus (i.e. language, computer, parenting classes, workshops). Establishing partnerships with community organizations and Institutes of Higher Education can assist with accomplishing this.
- Urbana Middle School has an area designated as a Parent Resource Center. To ensure families are aware of this space, provide adequate signage and be sure to advertise often the availability of materials and services. Consider stocking the room with information that will assist families with helping their child learn, academic tips, DVD’s, access to a computer, or other materials that support student learning.
- To maximize parent participation ensure accommodations for family involvement such as transportation, childcare and translation are always provided. Advertise the availability of these services when promoting events to families.

Parent Liaison Recommendations

Communication

Communication	Score	Rating
Contact between parent liaison, schools and families is frequent, comfortable and two-way.	3.00	High
There is a shared understanding among administration, staff, families and parent liaison of position goals and responsibilities.	1.00	Low
Families and educators are aware of the services offered by the parent liaison	1.93	Low
Overall Score	1.98	Low

- Educators indicated on surveys that they do not connect families to the services offered by the parent liaison. To establish a relationship between UMS's parent liaison and educators, schedule time at a staff meeting for the parent liaison to present priorities and goals for the position, services and materials available, upcoming events and contact information. Build in time at the meeting for a facilitated discussion on how the liaison and educators can work together to increase student achievement at UMS. To ensure the staff is regularly updated on the services offered by the liaison, include this information in weekly staff bulletins, monthly newsletters and staff meetings. Incorporating these methods will assist the parent liaison in fulfilling the responsibility of assisting teachers, staff and families to develop strong partnerships and enhance two-way communication.

Linked to Learning

Linked-to-Learning	Score	Rating
The parent liaison is trained to inform families about academic standards, accountability, and state/federal legislation.	1.83	Low
The parent liaison is supported in developing programs and materials to involve parents with their child's academic achievement.	1.66	Low
Overall Score	1.75	Low

- To ensure your parent liaison has the necessary guidance, support and training to be effective, provide staff development opportunities at the onset of hiring and throughout their tenure at UMS. CAFE offers a variety of training opportunities for newly hired parent liaisons.
- In order for the Parent Liaison to be an effective parent coach, they need ongoing training, like educators, on interpreting data, understanding state and federal legislation, standards and school/district assessments. Ensure your parent liaison is included in team meetings, staff meetings, school site professional development and district-wide professional development.
- The majority of educators responded that they do not collaborate with and provide information to the parent liaison regarding ways for families to support learning at home. Encourage collaboration opportunities between educators and the parent liaison by communicating the importance and purpose of the parent liaison position and modeling for the staff ways in which collaboration can occur to increase student achievement and promote partnership among families.

Participation

Participation	Score	Rating
The parent liaison position is a valued member of the educational team at the school.	2.25	Emerging
Collaboration exists between parent liaison and staff at the school	2.00	Emerging
Parent liaison is included in key meetings at the school.	1.33	Low
Families take advantage of opportunities presented by the parent liaison.	1.34	Low
Overall Score	1.73	Low

- To document the importance and value of the parent liaison position, it is recommended that the parent liaison keep a service log that includes information on parent contacts, facilitated events or training, professional development attended, networking opportunities, accomplishments and a section for questions and needs that will be shared with administration on a weekly or monthly basis. It is also recommended that this information be shared with key stakeholders to underscore the message that the parent liaison is a critical resource at UMS.
- So that families at UMS utilize the parent liaison position to its full potential, it is recommended that the liaison begin to publicize the position among administration, faculty and the community. Creating a brochure with information about the position, services, materials, upcoming events, etc. is an excellent way to market services. Include the brochure in the welcome packet and place in a predominant area of the school. Encourage staff and faculty to distribute the brochure to families and community members. Another suggestion is to devote a section of the website to parent resources. Included in the section would be an introduction to the liaison, contact information, upcoming classes and services available. Lastly, encourage the liaison to be visible at the beginning of the day, end of the day and at other times when families frequent the campus. This will provide an informal opportunity to build relationships with families and help to publicize the parent liaison position at the school.