

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



Washington Early Childhood

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 9th, 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	2.30	Emerging
Communication	2.31	Emerging
Information	2.58	Emerging
Participation	2.62	Emerging
Overall Score	2.45	Emerging

Survey Information

- 9 **staff** completed the online survey
- 4 **families** completed the parent survey

School Visit Highlights

- Feedback from both parents and teachers indicates that Washington is successful at providing parents with information and social and celebratory experiences. Washington is very successful at involving parents in the school.

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** Washington Early Childhood 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.
- Move from a compliance-driven family engagement model, to an outcomes-focused parent driven model.

Welcoming

Your Score

Definition	Score	Rating
Procedures are in place to accommodate parent visits to the school	2.00	Emerging
School personnel help parents to feel comfortable	2.63	Emerging
Parents' culture and language are respected	2.58	Emerging
The school is physically attractive	2.00	Emerging
Overall Score	2.30	Emerging

Commendations

- Office staff is courteous, attentive, extremely knowledgeable and welcome families and visitors immediately upon entering the campus.
- Families overwhelmingly feel good about Washington Early Childhood Center. They feel extremely comfortable communicating with their child's teacher, feel that school personnel are friendly when they visit the campus and also feel that their culture, ethnicity and religion are respected.
- The school balances the need for safety with an open-door policy and consistent check-in procedures for visitors upon entering the campus.
- As illustrated in the photo here, all of Washington's classrooms welcome families!



Recommendations

- Display a campus map and have handouts of the map readily available for families and visitors.
- Don't forget to greet visitors to the school by displaying welcome signs at the school entrance. Signage in the parking lot can help direct parents to the main entrance of the school.
- To maintain the high quality of customer service that parents indicated on the surveys, administration should regularly communicate specific "customer service expectations" to ensure that front line staff have the knowledge and resources to provide quality service at all times.
- Make campus beautification a school-wide effort. Involve staff, students and families in this effort. To start, we suggest removing unnecessary items that frequent the hallways and corridors of the campus.

- The school parking lot is often a families’/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 pictured on the right sends the wrong message to families visiting the campus. Parent visitation to the school should never have a time limit.
- The photo below shows that Washington successfully displays evidence of student work. When looking at the photo, 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.



Communication

Your Score

Definition	Score	Rating
Contact between schools and families is frequent, comfortable, and two-way	2.23	Emerging
Written and oral communication is clear and comprehensible	2.40	Emerging
Meetings and events are scheduled regularly, widely advertised, and well attended	2.50	Emerging
Print information is available, attractive, useful, and family/culturally friendly	2.11	Emerging
Overall Score	2.31	Emerging

Commendations

- Parents overwhelmingly praise Washington Elementary 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.
- Educators consistently reach out to parents clearly and in their own language.

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 this organization, recruit new members and update families on recent activity. Make sure to label the board as a "PTO/PTA 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.

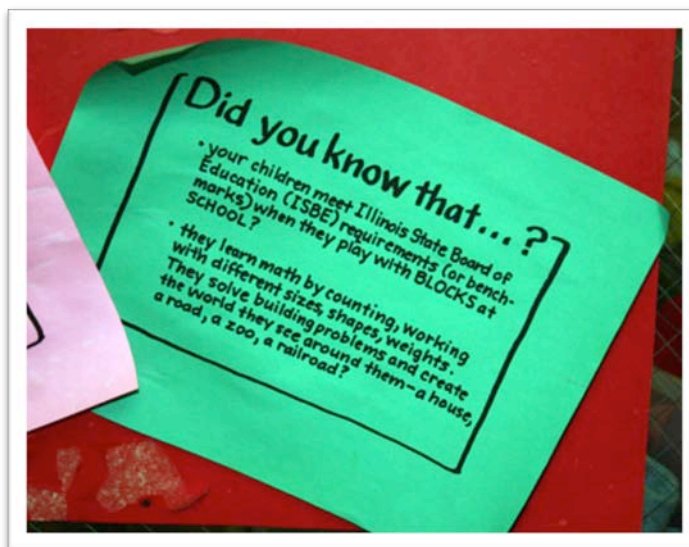
Information

Your Score

Definition	Score	Rating
The school provides resources and materials to help families learn about school goals, policies, and procedures	2.11	Emerging
The school has programs and procedures to inform families about their child’s classroom and activities	2.48	Emerging
Families are kept current on their child’s school performance	2.67	Emerging
The school has programs and procedures to involve parents with their child’s academic achievement	2.80	High
The school has programs and procedures to inform families about available community assistance	2.82	High
Overall Score	2.58	Emerging

Commendations

- Teachers elicit information from families about their child’s strengths, talents, interests and needs.
- New families are provided with a welcome packet that provides information on school policies, procedures and introduces families to administration and school staff.
- Washington Elementary prominently displays the district’s mission statement in several locations of the campus.
- In several places in the school, Washington posted information that connects school activities to learning standards. The photo on the right illustrates an example of this.



Recommendations

- To keep parents connected with student learning, consider enhancing or including the following content on your website:
 - Parent Resource section including information on upcoming events/parent workshops, resources for families (educational and community) and strategies to connect families to student learning
 - 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.
 - Curriculum Information
 - On-line grade review

- School Key Term Guide
- School or district newsletter
- 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
- In order to assist parents in understanding child assessment data and academic standards, consider providing tip sheets or definition guides (to explain technical terms and acronyms) during parent meetings and conferences. Additional options for your consideration: tutorials and tips on the website, newsletters, mini-workshops and on-going communication regarding report card procedures/academic standards.
- Various educators responded that they do not send home student work for parent review and comment. Encouraging a practice in which educators consistently communicate with families regarding the status of a student's performance will strengthen communication channels and establish effective partnerships with parents that support student learning. We recommend that educators send to families' weekly samples of student work indicating progress on each document and provide an opportunity for parents to comment and question.
- Ensure newsletters and flyers are written in a format and language that all families can understand.

Participation

Your Score

Definition	Score	Rating
Individuals and existing documents support parent input and ideas	2.53	Emerging
Parents and teachers meet and work together	2.96	High
Schools provide parents with education and volunteering options	2.00	Emerging
Parents are valued as an education community resource	3.00	High
Overall Score	2.62	Emerging

Commendations

- Parents feel included in the school and feel that the school is open to their suggestions.
- Teachers elicit information from parents about their child’s strengths, talents, interests and needs.
- Washington Elementary has a parent resource center where families can access materials, services or attend a workshop.

Recommendations

- 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 the grade level teachers, establish an ongoing partnership, 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, 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, community mapping and transition.
- 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.
- Ensure parents have access to the school Parent Involvement Policy. Post this information on the school website, in the Welcome Folder and in the student handbook. It is important that these documents are readily available for families and utilized to reinforce the Washington Elementary commitment to engaging families in student learning.
- 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 organization and institutes of higher learning can assist with accomplishing this.