



Accessible Communications

10 Points School District

Having district or school-level communications be accessible to all members of the school community and, when appropriate, the members of the community at large, promotes social equity. Accessible communications practices supports the inclusion of the full spectrum of community members in activities, events and programs, regardless of factors such as language, literacy skills, access to the internet, and access to printing. This action seeks to have school districts and/or individual schools provide communications in a variety of ways so that individuals/families can fully participate in their children's education and the school community.

To earn points for this action a school or district must submit documentation describing its community (a community profile) and its special needs with regards to ensuring communications are accessible to all. The school or district would also have to describe its efforts to provide accessible communications, and provide examples. As there are already requirements under the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (generally known as No Child Left Behind, or NCLB), regarding providing information to parents in a language that they can understand "to the extent practicable," this action is seeking to have schools expand the basic requirements to provide greater parent and student involvement by improving the "accessibility" of school communication and parent outreach approaches.

Why is it important?

Social equity is considered to be a vital component of a sustainable community. School districts and individual schools have many opportunities to incorporate social equity issues into their practices and programs and, in particular, their communications. Having communication plans, strategies, techniques and materials that are limited in their ability to reach the entire school district or school community—or, when appropriate, the community at large—disenfranchises individuals and is a social inequity. It is incumbent upon schools and school districts to ensure that barriers to effective communication pathways are rendered obsolete so that parents are provided with the opportunity to fully participate in the education of their child.

Who should lead and be involved with this action?

The school board, superintendent, school administrators, communications or school community relation staff, members of the school Green Team, parent-teacher organizations, and school staff can contribute to the development of a plan that ensures full access to school communications. In addition, members of the faith community, governmental entities, or organizations that interact with the schools and/or the children and their families may also provide valuable insight into the communication needs of the children and families in the school community.

Timeframe

A school should be able to develop a student and community profile, evaluate the strengths and weakness of the school's communications, and develop recommendations on how to improve parent access to school communication materials and resources in four to six months.

Project costs and resource needs

Staff or volunteer time will be needed to collect the community profile information and to develop and conduct a survey to determine barriers to accessible communication. Staff or volunteer time will also be needed to develop recommendations

to the school board and superintendent or the school administrator.

What to do, and how to do it ("How to")

This section provides guidance and recommendations for implementing the action. A school/district does not need to follow this guidance exactly as long as it meets the requirements for earning points for this action.

1. Create a committee, or work through the district's or school's Green Team, to guide the assessment of your school district's communication strategies and approaches. Schools should strive for members of the committee to be proportionally representative of the community in terms of race, gender, age, income, culture, educational level, and abilities. Efforts to include standing community institutions, like the faith community, community nonprofits, and advocacy groups are important because this will send a message that the school is serious about starting to address this issue.
2. Compile a community profile on the cultural, language, race, religion, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, national origin, and family structure of the students and parents in your school community. This information is also typically included in school district School Demographic Studies completed to predict student enrollment. The profile used for this assessment must have been completed in the past two and a half years. Below is a list of data sources that could be used to develop the profile:
 - a. A [U.S. Census American FactFinder](#) contains Census Bureau data sets: population and housing census, economic census, and American Community Survey that is easily searchable by zip code, location or community name.
 - b. NJ State Department of Labor and Workforce Development contains [Census data](#), American Community Survey profiles, post-2000 population estimates, building permits, business data, employment, and data.
 - c. NJ State Data Center also hosts the [2013 American Community Survey data](#) for NJ by county and municipal jurisdictions.
 - d. County Planning Departments.
3. Develop a survey instrument, interview process or parent focus group process to evaluate the effectiveness of school communication methods. The selected assessment technique should factor in potential language, technology connectivity, and educational constraints that exist in the parent population that were identified in the school community diversity profile.
4. Identify ways to address barriers to communication, if any, that were reported in the surveys. Examples include: Providing translators at key parent meetings; staff and parent organizations incorporating cultural sensitivity; making various groups feel welcome, providing critical parent materials in appropriate school community languages.
5. Prepare a summary that includes: the results of the community profile, the results of the survey, and a list of the individuals that participated in the analysis of the survey results and recommendations to improve the accessibility of school communications.
6. Present the report and recommendations to the School Board and school administrator.

What to submit to earn points for this action

In order to earn points for this action, the following documentation must be submitted as part of the online certification application in order to verify that the action requirements have been met.

1. Description of Implementation – In the text box provided on the submission page for this action provide a short narrative (about 300 words or less) of what has been accomplished and the impact it has or will have on the school community.
2. School Community Communications Accessibility Report that contains the school community profile data (compiled no more than two and a half years ago), results of the assessment tool (survey, interview, school parent focus groups), and recommendations on how to strengthen parent engagement by improving school communication approaches.
3. Relevant meeting minutes from the Board of Education or school level meeting at which the recommendations were presented.

IMPORTANT NOTES:

There is a limit of six uploaded documents per action and individual files must not exceed 20 MB. Excerpts of relevant information from large documents are recommended.

All action documentation is available for public viewing after an action is approved. Action submissions should not include any information or documents that are not intended for public viewing.

Spotlight: What New Jersey schools are doing

The **City of Camden Public School District** Parent Center houses the Office of Bilingual District Parent Council and District Parent Advisory Council. The Center provides workshops, parenting classes, computer classes, Spanish classes, parent volunteers, and parent referrals. The district also provides a translation option via google on its website, allowing for all the pages on its site to be readable in numerous languages. For more information about Camden's Public School District, visit their [website](#).

Blairstown Elementary School, Blairstown Township School District

A subcommittee of the Green Team, including overall representation of the community, met to discuss how they communicate information with parents and the community. To view how Blairstown Elementary School met the requirements for this action click [here](#).

Chester School District

The Chester School District provides accessible communications to all of the students and parents to ensure greater parent and student involvement in the Chester School District. The accessible communications are provided in many ways; through educational classes, website, mobile applications, interpreters, collaborating with community organizations and more. To view how Chester School District met the requirements for this action click [here](#).

Thomas Edison EnergySmart Charter School, Somerset, New Jersey

Thomas Edison EnergySmart Charter School has been working to make their school communication more accessible to families and the community. To view how Thomas Edison EnergySmart Charter School met the requirements for this action click [here](#).

Community Middle School, West Windsor Plainsboro School District

At WW-P, accessible communication is a top priority to ensure social equity. Technology and face-to-face communication is used to help navigate community wide and in school communication. To view how Community Middle School met the requirements for this action click [here](#).

Resources

Harvard Family Research Project, Effective Home-School Communications: What kind of family-school communication makes a difference? Research is clear about the kinds of parental involvement that lead to student learning. Henderson and Mapp (2002) analyzed eighty studies of parental involvement in K-12 schools and their key findings provide clear guidelines for effective communication.

www.hfrp.org/family-involvement/publications-resources/effective-home-school-communication

National PTA The National Standards Implementation Guide provides explanations and school-based examples to help teachers, administrators, and parents incorporate the PTA National Standards into family engagement efforts.

https://www.pta.org/docs/default-source/files/programs/national-standards-for-family-school-partnerships/assessment_guide_standard_2.pdf

- National PTA Standard 2, Communicating Effectively: this assessment rubric identifies indicators and identifies levels of success. https://www.pta.org/docs/default-source/files/programs/national-standards-for-family-school-partnerships/assessment_guide_standard_2.pdf
- National PTA The Power of Partnerships Family Survey: An assessment tool for PTAs to measure the success of

partnership programs. <https://www.pta.org/docs/default-source/files/programs/national-standards-for-family-school-partnerships/the-power-of-partnerships.pdf>

- National PTA The Power of Partnerships Family Survey: Spanish-language version <https://www.pta.org/docs/default-source/files/programs/national-standards-for-family-school-partnerships/the-power-of-partnerships.pdf>

National School Board Association and The College Board Education Counsel LLC, Achieving Educational Excellence for All: A Guide to Diversity-Related Policy Strategies for School Districts
http://diversitycollaborative.collegeboard.org/sites/default/files/document-library/educexcellenceforall_printfriendly.pdf

New Jersey Education Association Survey tool: Factors that Inhibit Parent Involvement
<https://www.njea.org/community/family-involvement/>

Southwest Educational Development Laboratory, Reaching Out to Diverse Populations: What Can Schools Do to Foster Family-School Connections? This strategy brief includes strategies schools can use to promote involvement of families from diverse cultural backgrounds.

<http://www.sedl.org/connections/resources/rb/rb5-diverse.pdf> and
available in Spanish. <http://www.sedl.org/connections/resources/rb/rb5-diverse-spanish.pdf>

DATA RESOURCES

U.S. Census American Fact Finder contains Census Bureau data sets including the population and housing census, economic census, and American Community Survey that is easily searchable by zip code, location or community name.
<http://factfinder2.census.gov>

NJ State Data Center also hosts the 2013 American Community Survey data for NJ by county and municipal jurisdictions.
http://lwd.dol.state.nj.us/labor/lpa/acs/acs_index.html

NJ State Department of Labor and Workforce Development contains Census data, American Community Survey profiles, post-2000 population estimates, building permits, business data, employment, and data projections.
http://lwd.dol.state.nj.us/labor/lpa/census/Census_index.html