



Communicating with Parents of other Languages

During Distance Learning

Focus on building relationships

Our role in education relies critically on the importance of personal connections. Research shows the importance of building strong partnerships with families and this means forming a meaningful relationship between teachers and parents. However, in a recent survey of our own Bremerton ELL parents, we scored lowest on parents feeling that they had regular communication with their child's teacher(s). The beginning of the year is the time to create that first connection and establish a positive rapport with parents. Parents, especially those from different cultures, hold education and teachers in high regard. Our families feel so much more connected when they know that the teachers reach out to them directly, introduce themselves, and share what they can expect (and what is expected of their students) for the school year.

Strengthening Partnerships

Parents are working, possibly now extra to continue providing for their families, and have to oversee and support their children at home during the day. This is a lot of stress for all of us, and while all of our parents want to support their children's education, they may not be able to spend as much time as they'd like.

- **Be Positive:** Recognize and support the work that parents are doing. Encourage them to do what they can, and try to be positive in talking about their student, understanding each family's unique situation.
- **Action Items:** Remember, they are parents, not teachers. They likely don't have the time to fulfill a laundry list of to-do items with their students (especially if they have more than one at home). Instead, keep your communication to accessible and actionable items.
- **Consider Self Efficacy:** Research has found that parents' sense of self-efficacy, or their belief in how they can help their child be successful academically, is a major factor in determining how much they become involved in supporting their child's academic work. This is a push for educators and school staff to reinforce the tremendous positive impact parents are having on their children by being role models and providing for them, *and* this may help parents feel more able to feel confident in supporting their children with school work.

Accessible and Consistent

- **Language Choice:** It is necessary for educational staff to be aware of their use of language and word choice when speaking with parents, even when working with an interpreter. Many of our parents may not have an academic/educational background and have varying levels of literacy. It is important to be cognizant of the level of academic language being used and to be clear and concise with your message.
- **Cultural Relevance:** Just as we need to consider our use of academic language, there are many terms that are common in education that may not directly translate, may not exist in different cultures, or may be exclusionary to those with different backgrounds. For example, “Office Hours” may not be understood by individuals who have not attended college or postgraduate education in the U.S. If used, these terms should be explained and taught explicitly to students and families.
- **Communicate Consistently:** Just as we are dealing with multiple factors every day, parents are getting pulled in many directions. It is important to have a consistent “drop” schedule, or time when you release information. While we may be tempted to share information or a resource whenever we think of it, this can become overwhelming, create a convoluted feed, and does not create a culture of consistency. Instead, write down those spur-of-the-moment resources and information, and compile them into your weekly communication to families.

Equitable, not equal

We have to differentiate in the classroom, and we may need to differentiate in our communication habits and strategies. What works for most of your parents may not work for all. Communicating with parents is a necessary role of the teacher, and we need to be equitable so *all* have access to information. You may send out a weekly email, but many of our parents with a different language background do not access email. This calls on us to find alternate ways to communicate with them (and grow our partnership). Most of our parents can access text messaging, which through the Remind App, is an easy way to send reminders and keep the connection (more information below). Many of our parents also appreciate phone calls, and the use of our over-the-phone interpreting service, Linguistica, will keep your personal phone number private.

Resources available

- **Remind:** Through this program, teachers and staff can send text messages that parents receive either as a text or through the app- *and* parents do *not* have to download the app for them to receive messages! With their permission, teachers can directly enter parents' phone numbers into the program to easily send them texts. Parents can even respond to the message, all while keeping your personal information private. Remind also has a Translate feature that allows the messages to be translated into different languages before it is sent. [Remind Overview for Teachers](#)
- **Linguistica:** This is an over-the-phone interpreting service available for any Bremerton SD staff. It is incredibly easy, just call and give them our account code (10706)- they will call the parent for you, and can even make multiple calls if you need it. [Linguistica Account Information & Languages](#)
- **Google Translate:** When sending parents quick notes or reminders, Google Translate is an excellent, easy to use resource that can be used. If in-person, there is also a speaking feature that allows both parties to speak directly into the device (mobile or Chromebook) and have it translated into the other language in real time. However, this does work better when both parties have some literacy in their own language. [Translate.google.com](https://translate.google.com)
- The [Fostering Connections Tool](#), from OSPI, provides a framework for building relationships and followed Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. The tool was designed to support staff to start conversations in a way that would build trust and learn about the needs of the student and family. If families need support in connecting with community resources, your building interventionists can help in making those connections.
- [Communicating with ELL Families During COVID-19: 9 Strategies for Schools](#), article from the EL education support website, Colorín Colorado.
- [Best Practices for Working with an Interpreter](#)