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# ONcall

ready-to-use NEWS

## Communicate, communicate!

It's an understatement to say the start of the 2020 school year has been confusing.

Early in the summer, many districts were hopeful they could welcome students back to regular classrooms. A month or two later, they did an abrupt shift to prepare online lessons and contemplate how to reach students who may not have technology at home, including internet access.

School administrators said it felt like whiplash as metrics continued to change and then change again. For parents, one thing has remained steady: a sense of confusion. So, how to remedy that?

### **Communicate. Communicate even when you don't have a lot to communicate.**

When things are uncertain, parents clamor for information. When they don't get it, they not only feel frustrated, but sometimes angry. Misinformation is often circulated because parents don't have the facts at hand.

That's why solid, steady communication is critical. Give parents all the details you can and let them know you will keep them updated regularly on any information you don't have. Send out updates at least weekly. It's OK to send an update saying that you still don't have the answers, but you will continue to seek information and share it when you get it.

There are a lot of areas of confusion in schools this fall. In some cases, the confusion stems from implementing new programs without having sufficient time to work out all the kinks. Many districts scrambled to provide online options for their students, and sometimes the ink had barely dried on the contract before teachers were preparing their first lessons.

Confusion lingers around COVID-19 and the safety protocols to try to keep students and staff safe. In the midst of all the confusion, one thing is certain: Parents want to hear from their schools and their child's teachers on a regular basis. While good news is always appreciated, they want to hear about the rocky spots, too, so they can better understand the situation. And if they understand it, they most likely will cut you some slack as you work through it.

### **Don't be afraid to over-communicate.**

Below are some tips from Lanschool, a virtual classroom management system, to help you keep parents well informed and as clear as possible about what's happening with their children's education:

For subscription information, contact WSSDA at (800) 562-8927 or (360) 493-9231.

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### **1. Explain your strategy.**

Be clear about your expectations and how parents can help keep students engaged and progressing toward their goals. Let them know when they should expect to hear from you and how they can contact you.

### **2. Conduct check-in surveys.**

Check in with parents to understand their needs and concerns. Use this feedback to develop strategies to help, such as partnering students for virtual study groups or making sure they have resources they need, such as a laptop and internet access. Some questions you might ask are:

- How many hours per day does the student have access to a digital device and the internet?
- Are multiple family members sharing that device, and if so is this causing challenges?
- I am most comfortable helping my children with homework or lessons for [list subjects].
- I am less comfortable helping them with [list subjects or areas of concern].
- Is there anything specific that I can do to help support your child during this time?

### **3. Send Monday Motivation emails.**

Help parents start the week on a good note by sending motivational emails at the beginning of each week. These “Monday Motivation” emails can share your goals for the week, along with inspiring quotes, resources and tips. The small amount of time spent preparing these will go a long way toward building positive relationships with parents.

### **4. Schedule Q&A times.**

Parents likely will have a lot of questions for teachers during this time of change and uncertainty. Let them know the best way and time to reach out to you.

- Email — Parents can email questions that are highly specific to their children and only require a short response. Teachers should provide parents with an expected response time for these types of questions (e.g. within 24 hours).
- Weekly office hours — Parents can schedule virtual one-on-one time to ask questions that are highly specific to their children.
- Virtual Q&A forum — Multiple parents can join a group chat to ask questions that may be relevant for the entire class, keeping you from answering the same question over and over and allowing parents to learn from other’s experiences. You may want to schedule these on a weekly or bi-weekly basis.

Don’t feel pressured to answer tough questions on the spot. If you need more time to come up with a thoughtful answer, simply let the parent know you will have to get back to them after you’ve had time to research or think about their question.

### **5. Include parents in progress reports and one-on-one student meetings.**

Since you’ll be delivering student progress reports remotely anyway, it may make sense to include parents in these meetings or emails. Schedule time as needed to discuss how students are progressing, any concerns they have and how parents can help.

It’s particularly important to allow students some grace right now, as all of the changes they are experiencing can take a toll. Schools and parents know their students and how to strike the right balance between pushing them to challenge themselves and encouraging them to practice self-care and acceptance.