Teacher Quality Standard II

Teachers establish a safe, inclusive and respectful learning environment for a diverse population of students.

The most important action an effective teacher takes at the beginning of the year is creating a climate for learning.
—Mary Beth Blegan, former U.S. Department of Education teacher-in-residence

A positive classroom environment enhances the academic achievement of all students, promotes appropriate classroom behavior, and is welcoming to families and adults. A respect for diversity and the uniqueness of each individual is valued. A sense of community is created in which members encourage and promote the learning of each other through collaboration, communication, and mutual respect as they work to achieve individual and common goals.

Element E

Teachers provide proactive, clear and constructive feedback to families about student progress and work collaboratively with the families and significant adults in the lives of their students.

Parents are the essential link to improving American education, and schools have to do a better job of reaching out to them. Sending home a report card is not enough. Parents want to help their children succeed in school, and often need guidance on how to be most effective.
—Richard Riley Secretary, U.S. Office of Education 1999

Professional practices referenced under each element of the Rubric for Evaluating Colorado Teachers are cumulative. Therefore, for teachers to be proficient in providing constructive feedback to families on student progress and working collaboratively with families, they must first establish a classroom environment that is inviting to families. They must also use a variety of methods to initiate communication that result in respectful relationships with students, their families and significant adults.

PARTIALLY PROFICIENT RATING LEVEL
PROFESSIONAL PRACTICES: THE TEACHER:

○ ***Maintains respectful relationships with students, their families, and/or significant adults.***

   … the right kinds of school-family connections – those built on relationships, listening, welcoming, and shared decision making – can produce multiple benefits for students, including higher grade point averages and test scores, better attendance, enrollment in more challenging courses, better social skills, and improved behavior at school. (Ferlazzo, 2011, p. 10)

Respectful relationships are maintained when the teacher values the background, family structure, and culture of each student and family. The teacher refrains from placing blame or judging, but works as a partner with families to support each student's educational success.

Resources for connecting with families and significant adults:
- Boys and Girls Clubs of America—http://www.bgca.org/
- Coalition for Community Schools—http://www.communityschools.org/
- Communities in Schools—http://www.communitiesinschools.org/
- National Network of Partnership Schools—http://www.csos.jhu.edu/p2000/
- YMCA/YWCA Programs—http://www.ymca.net/, http: //www.ywca.org/

☐   Uses a variety of methods to initiate communication with families and significant adults.

Effective and open communication with families and significant adults is the cornerstone for building positive, respectful relationships between the classroom and a student's home. It impacts the degree to which families become engaged in supporting a student's academic and social growth at school and their sense of partnership with the school.

> School life has changed. Many classrooms are profoundly different from those in which parents sat 30 years ago. The adult is no longer the single authority figure imparting wisdom to the uninitiated. Students often command authority with their knowledge. There is a focus on talk as students share and learn from each other…teachers are challenged to help students learn how to convey the world of school to those who are not participating in it and may not even be familiar with it. (Costa & Kallick, 1995)

Tips for communicating effectively with families and significant adults:
- Communicate with families early in the school year as a means of introduction. This may include expectations for the classroom and opportunities for family involvement. Also provide contact information so families feel free to communicate with the teacher when they have concerns or questions.
- Communication should be timely and consistent. Families should be notified of concerns as soon as they arise. Waiting to contact families can create frustration and distrust. Families should never be "surprised" to hear of the teacher's concerns because of lack of communication.
- Communicate positive news about student performance more often than negative news. When families only receive negative communication about a student, it can discourage them from becoming involved as they may begin to feel they are unable to effectively support the student.
- Share ideas and resources families may use at home to support a student. Helping families to use the same language at home for student expectations at school can create a strong partnership between the school and a student's home that promotes consistency and structure.
- Involve families in creating strategies for use in supporting students. Asking families what they have used at home can communicate the importance of family partnerships and the importance a teacher places on their involvement.
- Use language that is clear and understandable to families and significant adults. The teacher should avoid using educational terms or acronyms that may be unfamiliar to families. This can cause them to feel inadequate to support the student and reluctant to become engaged in the educational process.

Refer to this external resource for additional information:
- Student Observation Form for Parents
  http://printables.scholastic.com/content/collateral_resources/pdf/00/COL00_002.pdf
  > Document is an example for how teachers may involve families in identifying a student's strengths and areas of needs.