

## Building a Strong School-Family Partnership

Family engagement is a key strategy of The Bellingham Promise. Research is clear; your involvement in your child's education matters! Students whose families are engaged in their school lives attend class more regularly, achieve at higher levels, and generally have better behavior both at home and at school.

Our elementary school family engagement model includes a wide variety of ways for teachers, parents and the school to communicate with one another about student learning. Some examples include:

- » Curriculum nights and open houses
- » School and class newsletters and web pages
- » Student work and classroom communication
- » Phone calls, emails, notes home
- » Skyward Family Access
  - *Elementary gradebook anticipated in January 2014*
- » Parent, teacher and student conferences
- » Progress reports from classroom teachers
  - *Sent home periodically*
- » Assessment Reports
  - *Sent home after district and state assessments*
- » Report Cards
  - *Sent home February and June*



## Innovation and Flexibility

As you know, last year Bellingham Public Schools changed its approach with elementary conferences. The past practice of having early dismissals in November to provide each family a parent-teacher conference was changed to a model to improve ongoing communication with families. While some schools will continue this fall with a traditional model of conferencing, not all learners throughout the district will automatically be scheduled for a parent-teacher conference. This change is designed to provide more flexibility on when and how schools engage families while also reducing the disruption and lost instructional time caused by a week of early dismissals.

Each elementary school is crafting a plan that allows for effective and efficient family engagement using multiple strategies. On the backside of this flyer, you will see one example. Our schools want to be flexible and provide an appropriate level of communication for each family. For some children, quick check-ins through email or phone calls with parents is appropriate. For others, a more formal meeting will meet their needs. Our schools want to be partners with families to provide our students a great educational experience. Parents should always feel welcome to request a meeting with their child's teacher.

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# An Example of One School's Family Engagement Model

## For all learners:

- Provide ongoing communication to families (both informational and educational: newsletters, notes, postcards, email, phone calls, face-to-face conversations, texts and blogs)
- Use a standards-based reporting system (assessing progress according to common standards)
- Provide opportunities for families to participate in their child's learning (volunteering in the classroom, field trips, curriculum nights, meet and greets, science fairs)

## For some learners:

- Scheduled parent-teacher conferences
- More frequent monitoring and reporting of student progress
- Coordinated school and community intervention and support

## For few learners:

- School staff work in partnership with families to monitor specialized needs (special education, health plans, etc.)
- Regular teacher/parent check-ins about child's individual plans/progress

## New Report Card

A new elementary report card has been developed to communicate your child's performance in relation to state standards. The new elementary report card will be sent home at the end of each semester, in February and June. As part of the family engagement model, the new report card serves as one communication tool. Drafts of the new report card will be online at <http://bellinghamschools.org/reportingstudentprogress> in the coming months.

## Best Practices for Family Engagement

According to Dr. Joyce Epstein, director of the National Network for Partnership Schools at Johns Hopkins University, engagement can be categorized into Six Types of Involvement:

1. **Parenting** – Families help create a home environment that supports children in their learning.
2. **Home-School Communication** – Effective two-way communication (from home to school and school to home) about school progress and the child's progress on all levels (academic, social and emotional).
3. **Volunteering** – Finding ways to help out at school, in the district or at home.
4. **Support Learning at Home** – Schools and families work together to find ways in which families can help with homework and other school-related activities at home.
5. **Decision-making** – Families and schools/district collaborate in school decisions; families are given the opportunity to have input into policies and decisions that affect their child's education.
6. **Collaborating with the Community** – Developing partnerships with the community to strengthen school programs, family practices and student learning.