

Family Engagement Support Documents
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The beginning of productive family engagement is establishing effective methods of communication between the home and school, of fostering relationships built on mutual trust. Communicating early on with families in a manner that shows that educators value them not only in their roles as family members but also as equal status partners with them is invaluable in setting the foundation for meaningful interactions going forward. Traditional letters of introduction often address issues that may be irrelevant to many families particularly those who are generally do not perceive themselves as competent in participating in educational decision-making. Consideration should be given to the sharing the following information that is often missing from these communications:

What Families Want to Know:

- Who you are as a person
- Your accessibility and willingness to engage with them
- The nature of your experience
- That you are optimistic about success for their child
- That you value them and what they can contribute

The attached sample documents are examples of introductory letters to families and employers that include some critical information that family members should know if we are to establish a predisposition for trust that the school system will behave in the best interests of their children. It is assumed that educators who choose to use these documents will regard them as guides that allow them to personalize the content to ensure authentic descriptions of who they are and what their priorities are as educators. Of course, the traditional documents may be appended to this letter if desired (syllabi, schedules, rules, etc.) but the primary goal of these letters is to introduce ourselves in a manner that inspires confidence in the person who will have responsibility for their children.

The second type of letter is one that might be created by a school's administration to encourage employers to provide time off periodically to facilitate parent/family engagement in their children's education. Moreover, irrespective of the affirmative response of employers, the mere fact of providing such a letter to interested families demonstrates the school's interest in their belief in the value of having active families involvement and their willingness to facilitate it a meaningful way for those who choose to take advantage of this opportunity.

Hopefully, these samples will stimulate your creativity in developing your own letters that reflect you and your priorities. As a consultant, I would be interested in receiving creative adaptations of the content that emerge as a result of the review of these documents so that I can share promising ones with other educators with your permission.

SAMPLE INTRODUCTION LETTER
Family Engagement

Dear **Families**, (*Not parents*):

Welcome to the most awesome school year ever! I can't wait to see the enthusiastic faces that I know will greet me this year and to get to know each and every one of them, (*Express enthusiasm and anticipation*)- including your child (*Personalize where possible*).

This is my 10th year of teaching and my 5th as a teacher in third grade so I feel comfortable with the curriculum and what we need to accomplish this year (*Experience and confidence*). I did not take a vacation this summer because I wanted to continue my studies at the university to improve my skills in... and I can't wait to try out the new techniques I have learned with my class this year (*Commitment to personal growth*)!

I am a single parent of two, one in 4th grade and another in 7th grade so as you can imagine, my days are pretty full (*Personal connection*). I live 45 minutes from the school so I am unable to remain very late at school because I must get home to be with my own children. However, I have scheduled them for other activities on Thursdays so I can remain at school to meet with families or help those who may need additional support (*Availability and support*).

Hopefully, you will take the opportunity to meet with me during one of those days to share with me any questions or concerns that you might have. I believe that there is no one who knows your child as well as or in quite the same way that your family does and would appreciate learning from you about his/her strengths during this school year so that I can be the best teacher that he/she has ever had (*Invitation to meet as equal status partners; focus on families' strengths*).

As I walk into my classroom each day, I always think about my own children going into classrooms in my community and I promise you that I will always treat your child as I want mine to be treated. Thank you very much for entrusting me with your most prized possession. (*Establishing trust/connections*).

Sincerely yours,

Martha Monroe
Third Grade Teacher
(916) 555-5555 E-mail: monroem@egusd.org

Mary Montle Bacon, Ph.D.
Consultant

Family Introduction Letter Secondary

Dear **Families**, (*Not parents*):

Welcome to what promises to be an awesome school year! I look forward to the opportunity to impact the lives of over 150 young minds and to be influenced by them this year and I can't wait to experience the range of personalities, abilities, interests, etc. that I know will greet me this year as each of my classes walks into my room each day (***Establishing the reality of the scope of the work***). I anticipate the challenge of getting to know each of my classes and each of my students individually- including your child, (***Express anticipation/personalize where possible***) and hopefully to motivate them to achieve success in my class.

During my 12 years of teaching and my 5 years as a math teacher. I have taught this subject that I love to a wide range of students. I realize that my students come into the room at different levels of functioning, with different past experiences with the subject and different beliefs in their ability to do the work. As an educator, my goal is to help them believe in their ability to master the requirements of this class and with some, even to believe in themselves as budding mathematicians. (***Experience and confidence***). and will work hard to ensure that your child has a successful experience with math this year.

I too am a parent. I have one still in middle school, one in high school and my eldest in his first year of college so I have and am making a similar journey to yours. Having had one child who struggled with math and another who excelled, I had to learn on a personal level how to work with a wide range of students in this subject that is critical to their overall success in school. Despite my own personal challenges as a parent, I have set aside two days a week when I remain at school until 6PM to work with students who need assistance as well as some who want greater challenges in Math. Please free to encourage your child to use this time if needed and I appreciate visits from family members as well if you would like to conference with me on those days so I can remain late at school to be available students and family members. (***Availability and support***). Although my preference for communication is by e-mail however, given the number of students I have, you may take the opportunity to meet with me during on one of those days.

I believe, as I am sure you do, that education is the key to our children's success so I take our partnership in this journey seriously as we work together to maximize our their success. Because there is no one who knows your child as well as your family does. I would appreciate learning about his/her strengths so that I can be the best teacher that she/he has ever had. (***Invitation to meet; focus on families' strengths***). Each day, as I walk into my classrooms, I think about my own children going into classrooms in my community and promise you that I will always treat your child as I want mine to be treated. Thank you very much for entrusting me with your most prized possession (***Establishing trust/connections as equal status partners***).

Sincerely yours,

Noah Barkley
(916) 555-5555 (Period 5 (12:45-2:00PM) Message E-mail: nbarkley@egusd.com

*Mary Montle Bacon, Ph.D.
Revised September 2015*

