



Educator Discussion Protocol for the UChicago Consortium research brief:  
**Improving School-Family Communication and Engagement**

### Objectives

- Connect with the research findings in the UChicago Consortium [research brief](#), Improving School-Family Communication and Engagement;
- Reflect on past and present methods of engaging families in your school's work; and
- Explore ways to improve, deepen, and re-imagine family engagement practice going forward.

### Time

- 40-55 minutes

### Materials

- The [research brief](#): Improving School-Family Communication and Engagement: Lessons from Remote Schooling during the Pandemic, OR
- The summary handout associated with the research brief
- Additional data from your school, if desired (see below)

### Pre-Work

- Depending on the time allotted, participants may wish to review some or all of the research brief in advance.
- Teams could also choose to collect data about their practices and bring that to the table as well. This could include:
  - Qualitative data collected from listening tours or empathy interviews with teachers, students, and families.
  - Logs or other records about phone calls made to families, numbers of participants in family events, etc.
  - Information gathered from student/family town halls or focus groups.

## Process

### Step One: Take Stock (10 minutes)

- Individually, spend some time brainstorming the ways in which you communicate with parents and families. *What does that communication look like today? How did it change during the pandemic? How do you personally communicate with families? How does the broader school communicate with families? What does your school communicate about?*
- Share out your individual responses as a group. See if you can identify a few themes, trends, or main ideas as a group.
- Review the descriptions of the three different approaches to family engagement on page 14 of the research brief or the second page of the summary handout. Identify where your communication practices fall across these three categories:

Traditional Parent Involvement

School-Parent Partnership

A Family and Community Centered Approach

### Step Two: Review (5 to 10 minutes)

- Silently review the research and any data you have collected.
  - Review the main findings of the research, and also consider: the relationships your school has with parents; the intentions and goals your school has for communicating with families; and the decision-making structures in schools (i.e. who decides the content and frequency of each communication?) The three different styles of family communication are summarized on the first page of the summary handout, and explored in more depth in Chapter 1 of the research brief.

### Step Three: Make Meaning (10 minutes)

- In pairs, discuss any connections you are making between the research, any data you've reviewed, and the practices you've already identified.
  - What's resonating with you from the research?
  - What connections are you making between the research and your school's context or practice? What are the disconnects?
  - What questions do the research raise for you about classroom practice and/or school practice?
  - What opportunities exist within your current classroom or school practice to strengthen engagement with families? What are possible growth areas?
- In your pair, prepare to share out one to two of your most important ideas with the larger group about:
  - What is working about our current practice?
  - Based on the research and data you have reviewed, what do we want to improve?

### Step Four: Share Out (10 minutes)

- Each pair shares one to two ideas about what is working and what they want to improve.
- The group comes to consensus on the following:
  - As a school community, we should be proud of how we (list 1-2 strengths)
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  - As a school community, we want to get better at (list 1-2 things to improve)

### Step Five: Re-Imagining (optional, 10 minutes)

- Go back to the three styles of family engagement on page 14 of the research brief and the second page of the summary handout. As a group, discuss:
  - Which one of these styles best describes our communications style at present?
  - Which one of these styles would we most want to adopt as a school community?
  - In order to adopt the engagement style we aspire to, what elements of our practice will we need to get better at—or stop doing?

### Step Six: Committing to Action (5 minutes)

- Review your list of what's working in Step Four, and the aspirations identified in Step Five (if completed) and think about ways to celebrate that with the broader school community.
- Review your list(s) of areas to improve, and do some action planning.
  - What are some small, simple shifts in behavior that you think teachers can adopt right away?
  - What are some medium-term changes or ideas that you can implement this school year?
  - What are some longer-term projects that you can develop?
- Make a list of action steps:

Who	What	When
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- Determine when you will meet again to discuss the actions you have already taken and make more plans.

Information for this resource is drawn from the UChicago Consortium research brief which can be found here:



Orta, D., & Gutiérrez, V. (2022). [Improving school-family communication and engagement: Lessons from remote schooling during the pandemic](#). Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Consortium on School Research.