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| **Use two-way communication with families** | In communicating with families, strive to frame SEL as a partnership where you are counting on their support, engagement, and co-ownership. Share the fundamentals of SEL, including why it’s essential to high-quality education and the roles in which they may provide feedback and input about schoolwide and OST SEL. Two-way communication vehicles (see below) can maximize teamwork and minimize misunderstandings.   * Set a positive tone by welcoming and communicating about SEL with families at the beginning of the school year. Start off by gathering information about family preferences, talents, and availability. Engage families with welcoming letters and learn more about them by asking them to complete brief surveys about family preferences for school -OST-home communications and involvement and their perceptions of SEL (Albright, Weissberg, & Dusenbury, 2011). * Ask families to complete “talent cards” or student information sheets to get family perceptions of their children’s strengths. Inviting families to write a letter describing what they love about their child, their strengths, and the ways they like to learn can help schools and OST partners proactively begin relationship-building. Note: Referencing the information families share through these activities throughout the year is a powerful way to frame conversations about their children. * Inform families about available school and OST programs, activities, and policies that support SEL. Sharing SEL policies and practices helps families understand how the school and OST programs operate and encourages them to partner with the school and OST programs in supporting young people’s performance and SEL competence. * Communicate with families about SEL activities using regularly scheduled formal and informal communications, such as class or school newsletters, as well as OST program communications tools. * Be flexible and creative in communication about SEL. Find what works for different families particularly regarding what language is used at home. Some families may respond best to written or electronic communications, while others may respond to in-person communication.   + Use “notes-back-and forth” or a traveling journal where school and OST staff can highlight young people’s successes and growing SEL skills. Families can reply with information about their successes in promoting SEL in the home. This encourages communication not only when students are experiencing challenges.   + Use text or email communication if comfortable for family members.   + Create a social media page to communicate to parents broadly about school and OST events where SEL milestones (current focus area/content, successes, upcoming events and initiatives) are shared regularly. * Post important SEL information on the school and OST websites. Such information might be related to SEL curriculum, homework assignments, climate and culture, SEL in OST environments, and upcoming events. |
| **Engage families** | * Invite families to get involved in SEL by offering volunteer opportunities (e.g., in classes, outside of classes, extracurricular activities, OST activities or field trips) and welcoming their input. * Have a translator available for face-to-face meetings. * Encourage parents to attend events like family nights, OST celebrations, or a “family of the week” program to share occupations, interests, hobbies, culture, and stories. * Give families access to school facilities like computer labs, libraries, basketball courts and weight rooms. Offer classes and engaging experiences so families can experience the school and its OST programming as a center of community activities (Jeynes, 2011). * Consider how students/youth can facilitate adult learning with families. |
| **Increase family involvement in academic, social, and emotional learning** | * Provide families with information about children’s and young people’s social and emotional development and how they can support this development at home. * Provide families with information about homework policies and how to support student homework and OST projects. * Assign SEL activities that involve families as homework. * Listen to families’ ideas about ways their children’s SEL skills are benefiting them at school, at OST programs and at home. * Listen to families’ stories and ideas about ways they are promoting SEL at home or suggestions for experiences that can be shared. * Host informational question-and-answer sessions for families so they can better understand schoolwide SEL and any other school and OST activities. * Organize workshops to help families meet their children’s developmental needs in appropriate ways. Workshops for families with younger children can focus on school readiness, mastery of basic skills, and motivation (Tolan & Woo, 2009). For families with older children, the content can focus on such topics as facilitating transitions to the upper grades, understanding their children’s growing desire for autonomy, or addressing risky health behaviors (Reschley & Christenson, 2012). At the high school level, family-oriented programming can turn to such issues as the complexities of the high school curriculum, graduation criteria, college and career planning, including financial aid resources and support, and developing healthy relationships (Mapp et al, 2008). Consider ways to provide free childcare, a meal, and supervised student/youth activities for these events, if beneficial. * Provide informational sessions about schoolwide and OST SEL practices and standards and how they connect to learning goals for literacy, mathematics, other core content areas, and OST projects. Discuss ways families can support their children’s success in these areas. |
| **Involve families in decision-making** | * Organize parent-teacher-OST staff conferences and meetings that encourage families to be involved in decisions affecting their children’s learning. * Invite families to participate as members of decision-making committees and groups. Encourage participation on the SEL Team, OST program team, school improvement team, and district committees. * Encourage families to participate in school climate surveys and elicit feedback from families on how they think the school year is going. |
| **Bridge constraints** | * Meet with families outside of the school or during evenings or weekends. * Provide interpreters for families to accommodate speakers of various languages. If resources allow, hire a family liaison to help address language and cultural challenges by developing newsletters, assisting in conferences and meetings, planning family outreach events, and providing transportation for OST events. |
| **Increase capacity of school and OST staff to partner with families** | * Facilitate professional learning opportunities related to partnering with families and encouraging family involvement in the school and OST programs. * Focus professional learning on how to cultivate productive relationships with families, personalize connections and interactions with families, and collaborate and leverage cultural richness and diversity for effective engagement strategies. |