

Chapter 15: Advocacy and Community Engagement

Powerful Partnerships: Working with Families to Support Students

Lesson Overview	Key 21 st Century Skills
In this lesson, students will discover the importance of building trust and communication with families and communities. Students will examine how to effectively advocate for student needs and foster positive relationships with parents and local stakeholders. The lesson includes strategies for supporting students, improving communication, and encouraging family involvement in student success.	• collaboration • communication • critical thinking

Standard(s):

4.3: Students will evaluate and implement strategies that promote a respectful and inclusive learning environment where all individuals feel valued and empowered to succeed.

10.2: Students will advocate for themselves, their students, and the teaching profession.

10.3: Students will articulate the importance of community involvement and develop strategies for building strong school-community relationships.

Objective(s):

- Students will identify effective strategies for building trust and communication with families and communities.
- Students will analyze how positive relationships with families support student success.
- Students will evaluate how teachers can advocate for students' needs within the school and local community.

Essential Question(s):

- Why is it essential for teachers to build positive relationships with families and communities?
- How can teachers effectively communicate with families and local stakeholders?
- In what ways can teachers advocate for students' needs at the classroom, school, and community levels?

Time:

30 minutes (plus time outside of class to prepare plans and time in class for students to present plans)

Instructor Note(s):

Note that you may need to connect with your school/district's IT department, prior to the lesson, to ensure access to digital sites and platforms is not blocked.

Activities:

1. Write the word *connection* on the board. After allowing a moment for students to ponder the word, ask them to respond to the following questions:
 - What does it mean to build a connection with someone?

- What might *connection* mean to someone in leadership?
 - What bridges/connections do you see in our school, district, and/or community to support students' success?
2. Following the discussion, give each student one sticky note or index card to write one word or phrase that represents a strong connection (e.g., trust, communication, empathy). When all students are finished, allow a few minutes for them to arrange their responses on the board in a bridge formation.
 3. Next, divide the class into small groups to brainstorm a minimum of five strategies for improving communication between school and families and communities.

Guiding questions:

- How can teachers make parents feel welcomed and valued?
- What are some communication barriers teachers and families may experience?
- How can teachers adapt communication styles and modes for diverse families?
- What opportunities are provided for families to engage with our teachers?
- How do we communicate with families in ways that are meaningful and two-way?

Allow time for each group to share their list of strategies.

4. Lastly, distribute the handout, *Case Study: Successful Advocacy for Student Needs*. Allow time for students to read the case study independently and make notes on the reflection questions. Then, lead a class discussion exploring student responses.

Materials:

- Projector or Smart Board/Promethean Panel
- Chart paper or whiteboard
- Markers
- Sticky notes or index cards
- Handout: *Case Study: Successful Advocacy for Student Needs*

Assessment(s):

- In small groups, have students identify one communication gap between families and the school or classroom (e.g., lack of parent involvement, language barriers, or inconsistent communication).

Each group will develop an improvement plan with the goal of bridging the family-school communication gap. Plans must include:

- The communication gap to be addressed
- Improvement plan stakeholders
- A thorough explanation of the necessary steps to create a welcoming and collaborative environment

Allow time to present their plans to the class, focusing on how their approach will strengthen communication and build trust between families and the school.