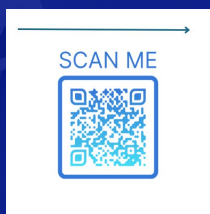


Family Version

of the

Nebraska School, Family, and Community Engagement Framework



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Purpose

Student success relies on positive partnerships between families, schools, and communities. In order to support families in their efforts to engage with schools, this version of the Nebraska School, Family, and Community Engagement Framework is intended to provide guidance in 4 vital areas: communicating with schools, navigating the school system, advocating for your student, and becoming more involved.

Sections

P.3 - Navigating the School System

- » How to Access Information, Resources, & Support

P.5 - Communicating with Schools

- » How to Reach Out & Possible Barriers

P.6 - Advocating for Your Student

- » Speaking Up for Positive Change

P.7 - Becoming More Involved

- » Partnering in Multiple Ways

Each section of the document is meant to support the others. However, each section is also intended to stand alone, if needed, as a 1-page document.

Navigating the School System

How to Access Information, Resources, & Support

Each school and district is different from each other. Learning how to navigate school systems can be overwhelming. In order to better help your student(s) succeed, it's important to know how to access resources and information from the school.

Tips & Practices

Know Your School - each school is unique even though many provide similar services. Because of this, take the time to learn your school's policies and procedures.

- Introduce yourself to your student's teachers, office staff, and administrators.
- Take time to talk to office staff, teachers, and administrators to understand different school processes.
 - » Ex. Check-in/check-out system for students and visitors.
- Learn how to use the school's enrollment system, apps, and digital platforms.
- Update your information as things change.
- Review the school websites and handbooks for requirements and policies.
 - » Ex. attendance, immunizations, medication, participation in sports, etc.
- Find the school and activities calendar(s) that provide information about important dates and events.
- Attend orientation sessions, open houses, and parent-teacher conferences to stay informed about your child's school environment, expectations, and academic progress.
- Learn about existing opportunities to get involved.

Understand Educational Terms

- Ask for clarification when an unfamiliar term or acronym is used.
- Commonly Used Terms
 - » IEP/504 Plan - Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) and 504 plans, are documents that explain the support and accommodations a student with disabilities will receive to help them succeed in school.
 - » Standards - Educational standards are guidelines that explain what students should know and be able to do in each grade level to help them build skills and knowledge as they move through school.
 - » Assessment
 - ♦ **Formal assessments** are structured tests or activities, like quizzes or standardized exams, that measure how well students are learning based on specific standards or goals.
 - ♦ **Informal assessments** are more casual checks, like class discussions or observing students while they work, to see how they're doing and what they need help with.
 - » Differentiated Instruction - Changing lessons or activities to fit each student's needs and help them learn in the way that works best for them.

Ask for Help When Needed

- Where to find contact information
 - » School website or mobile app
 - » Main office
 - » School handbook
- Some people you could ask for help might be:
 - » Office Staff
 - » School Counselor
 - » Parent Liaisons/Advocates - PTI Nebraska

- » Translators/Interpreters
- » Behavioral Health Point of Contact
- » Another parent at the school
- Possible resources and services schools often provide/have access to:
 - » Mental Health
 - » Access/Information for food, clothing, hygienic supplies, etc. if needed
 - » Community School Resources
 - » Support Services
 - » Before and after school care and activities
 - » Transportation

School Emergencies/Safety/Weather

- Nebraska is a local control state, meaning school safety procedures are a local decision. However, NDE makes every effort to instill approaches that should be consistently used across the state of Nebraska:
 - » **Standard Response Protocol (SRP):** A set of 5 responses (HOLD, SECURE, LOCKDOWN, SHELTER, EVACUATE) that schools, law enforcement, and emergency personnel use to respond to threats. These protocols apply in schools and the community.
 - » **Standard Reunification Method (SRM):** A process for reuniting students with their families after a threat or incident, practiced by schools annually.
 - » **Anti-Bullying Program:** Schools must have anti-bullying policies, and families should follow the chain of command for concerns. Serious issues are handled by local law enforcement.
 - » **Safety Drills:** Schools are required to conduct 14 drills, including fire, bus evacuation, and tornado drills. Many also practice HOLD, LOCKDOWN, and SECURE drills to ensure preparedness.
 - » **Resources:** Nebraska's Department of Education offers resources focusing on Prevention, Preparedness, Response, and Recovery for both schools and communities. For more details, visit [Nebraska Safety Resources](#).

Sample Questions for Families to Ask School Staff

*Feel free to adapt these questions to better fit your family's needs

- Where can I find information about school processes?
- How can I expect to receive information?
- How do I request an interpreter?
- Could you explain what _____ means?
- Could you explain how _____ works?
- Could you connect me with another family that has a similar situation to ours?
- I don't have a lot of time, how can I still be engaged with the school?
- What steps are needed to create a Parent-Teacher Association or Organization if the school doesn't already have one?
- I think my child might need an IEP or 504 Plan. Could I meet with the Special Education Coordinator?

Links to More Information

- [Family Guide to Special Education in Nebraska](#)

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Communicating with Schools

How to Reach Out & Possible Barriers

Strong, effective communication with schools is responsive and goes both ways to make sure families can understand and have the ability to contribute effectively in their student's education. Schools often send newsletters and/or emails with general information. Families should feel empowered to initiate contact early and often in a variety of ways.

Tips & Practices

Family Input Matters

- Feel free to share ideas with school staff.
- Consistent, two-way communication is the best way to overcome barriers to implement change in your school.
- Proactive communication with the school can help address issues before they become serious.
- Remember, schools, like any organization, have requirements they need to follow. This means they can't always implement every idea.

Ways to Communicate

- Explore a variety of ways to communicate with schools, and find what works best.
 - » School Visits - formal/informal meetings
 - » School Family Nights - more informal
 - » Parent/Teacher Conferences
 - » IEP/504 Meetings
 - » PTO/PTA/Similar Organizations
 - » Emails
 - » Phone Calls
 - » Social Media - Depending on the school

Common Communication Barriers

- School staff are busy teaching and helping students during the school day and generally need extra time to respond.
- Sometimes, messages can be incorrectly labeled as junk/spam and staff don't see them. Add the school's email to your contacts to prevent this.
- If you don't hear back in a few days, follow up with school staff using a different method, such as a phone call, or with a different staff member.
- You are allowed to request information in your primary language if necessary.

Sample Questions for Families to Ask School Staff

*Feel free to adapt these questions to better fit your family's needs

- How will you contact me if there is an update or problem?
- How can I contact you if I have a question or concern?
- Can you provide more information about my student's progress?
- Where do I find information about school activities, schedules, and procedures?
- What resources are available to support my student at home?

Advocating for Your Student

Speaking Up for Positive Change

You are the expert on your student and may recognize strengths and needs the school hasn't yet identified. Helping the school understand your student can help the school better support them. Despite best efforts, sometimes there are challenges within your student's educational experience. It's important to positively advocate for your student when concerns arise.

Tips & Practices

Identify Strengths and Needs of Your Student

- You know your student best.
- Make a list of your student's strengths, interests, areas of growth, and any concerns regarding their educational experience to share with school staff. Remember to be specific.

Share Different Perspectives

- Sharing information from all aspects of that student's life can help school staff understand your student as a whole person instead of just as a student in certain situations.
- Sharing different perspectives can help school staff provide more tailored support.

Be Diplomatic

- Maintain a calm demeanor and tone of voice.
- Take time to carefully consider feedback from school personnel.
- Remember, schools can't always implement every idea.
- If you don't feel comfortable speaking in situations like this, find a 3rd party advocate to speak with you. For example: a friend, family member, or non-profit organization.

Sample Questions for Families to Ask School Staff

*Feel free to adapt these questions to better fit your family's needs

- What kinds of accommodations/alternative options are available to support my student's learning?
 - » How can I initiate changes to my student's IEP/504?
- When can I come visit my student's classroom/school?
- I feel like my student is being treated/graded unfairly. What is your classroom/school policy with behavior/grading? Who is the best person to talk with about this?

Links to More Information

- [PTI Nebraska](#) - Statewide resource for parents
- [Family Guide to Special Education in Nebraska](#)

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Becoming More Involved

Partnering in Multiple Ways

If you would like to become more involved in your school, there are a variety of options. There are 6 main types of family engagement and all have a valuable place in education: parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision making, and collaborating with the community.¹ Even though there may be barriers to overcome, remember: your voice matters and is needed!

Tips & Practices

Come as a Partner

- In a positive partnership the family and school both benefit.
- Good partners each have a valuable voice, strengths, & want students to succeed.

Establish Strong Relationships

- What relationships do you already have at the school?
(ex. your student's teacher, another family at the school, or a caregiver)
- Build trust in relationships through consistent communication.
- Look for opportunities to strengthen existing relationships and create new ones.

Share Your Skills

- What skills do you have that you're willing to share?
- How could your skills benefit the school and students?
- Discuss these ideas with someone at your school & find a beneficial way to partner.

Examples of How Parents Are Involved

- PTA/PTO
- Afterschool program
- Classroom volunteers
- Parent to Parent Liaison

Sample Questions for Families to Ask the School

*Feel free to adapt these questions to better fit your family's needs

- What are some current needs at the school?
- How have families partnered with the school in the past?
- Who should I talk to if I would like to help with _____?
- Is there a Parent-Teacher Organization (PTO) at this school? When do they normally meet?
- How can I get updates about volunteer opportunities?

Links to More Information

- [1Joyce Epstein's 6 types of Family Engagement](#)

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