

Communication
Communicating in a democratic environment

The most important element of communication in a democratic context is transparency, particularly in formal communication. Modern democracy requires both accountability and transparency. Thus, communication processes that permanently exclude certain members or groups of the school community are simply undemocratic.

Whether you are preparing for a school board meeting, writing a press release about a school event, asking for an opportunity to speak with parents about a concern or trying to get some clarifications about newly adopted legislation, there are always multiple ways of communicating with a variety of audiences related to your school. As principal, you determine how much transparency in your institutional communication is adequate and whether it supports a participatory approach in your school, or whether it strengthens the power of a few.

In this section you will be informed about some basic ways to approach the skills of communicating with the school community, always keeping in mind that your school is a micro society.

The importance of communication with the school community and stakeholders


By communication, in this context, we refer to the need of sending messages and information to specific audiences. Therefore, as a school principal you need to carefully consider both the solid “construction” of your messages as well as the specific target audiences and the channels of communication you are going to use. It is important to realize that there are different kinds of messages, addressing different kinds of audiences through different kinds of communication channels.

If you have an oral conversation with your staff about an everyday issue, for example, you will re-arrange the classroom to send a non-verbal signal that a special event will take place, whereas you would write a press release to announce an important achievement of the students to the public.

Thus, verbal, non-verbal and written communication is used to get messages across. However the need to formulate a clear and coherent message which all audiences can understand and decode should always be your top priority.

Developing communication skills is critically important in education. Principals, educators and administrators communicate constantly with students, parents, co-workers, institutions, unions, associations, community leaders, and other stakeholders. While it is vital to focus on everyday administrative problems or curriculum development, assessments, or student safety, schools could also benefit from focusing on how well their principals and educators communicate.

Communication is a complicated process with no single, nor simple answers. Thus, as you strive to establish more effective communication processes within the school environment, you can be confident that your actions and statements are not just heard by few, but also fully understood by the people or institutions with whom you are communicating effectively.