

CAEP Family Engagement & the 7 Elements of Effective Parent-Teacher Communication

Strong communication skills are essential for building trust and fostering collaboration between educators and families. These skills are embedded throughout the CAEP Family Engagement Course, particularly in the *Communications Basics and Strategies for Family Engagement* module.

During the 2015-2016 academic year, a pilot of the CAEP Family Engagement Course was conducted with over 200 teacher candidates. The course was organized around the *7 Elements of Effective Parent-Teacher Communication* ([Walker, J. & Dotger, B., 2012, pp. 62-75](#)). The *7 Elements* provide a practical, research-based framework for structuring conversations that are productive, respectful, and focused on student success.

Faculty implementing the CAEP Family Engagement Course can use these elements as a guide for instruction, observation and feedback to help teacher candidates apply effective communication strategies. Below are the *7 Elements*, along with trends observed during the pilot and tips for faculty to integrate the *7 Elements* into coursework.

Element	Pilot Trends	Tips for Faculty
1. Warm Welcome: Establish the context for the conversation in the first few seconds to ensure a friendly and professional beginning.	Many candidates forget to introduce themselves and skip the welcome altogether, especially during their first call or meeting. This tends to improve for subsequent interactions with families.	Incorporate role-playing activities where candidates can practice conversations. Encourage candidates to script a 'welcome message' and receive feedback on its warmth and appropriateness.
2. Share Information: Clearly explain the reason for the call or the meeting, using specific examples when possible.	Almost all candidates incorporate the Share Information step. But many talk <i>at</i> the parent or caregiver, rather than <i>with</i> them to engage in a two-way exchange.	Model how to effectively share information while inviting input from families. Use sample scripts to demonstrate examples of differences between one-way and two-way communication.
3. Gather Information: Ask open-ended questions to get more information about families and caregivers and better understand their perspective.	This is an area in which most candidates require improvement. Many candidates only asked superficial or 'checklist' questions, such as "Do you have any questions?" at the end of the conversation rather than creating an open dialogue.	Provide candidates with sample, open-ended questions that can help in better understanding and gathering meaningful information from families.
4. Establish an Action Plan: End the conversation with clear, specific next steps that ideally incorporate ideas from both the teacher and the family.	Candidates are generally comfortable creating action plans. However, candidates often relied solely on their own ideas rather than co-developing solutions with families.	Pair candidates with peers acting as 'family members' to co-create action plans in a simulated family meeting.
5. Maintain Positive Expectations: Convey a calm and caring demeanor regardless of the family's tone or emotions.	Candidates experienced difficulty with this step, especially when delivering difficult news. Some candidates overcompensate with excessive positivity which detracts from the seriousness of the message.	Discuss communication preferences when sharing challenging information, including practicing sessions where candidates deliver both positive and difficult news to families.
6. Be Empathetic: Show understanding and validate the family's emotions.	Candidates demonstrate difficulty with differentiating between validating a parent or caregiver's emotions and agreeing with the content of what they are saying, which can lead to miscommunication.	Have candidates practice using empathetic statements that acknowledge feelings while maintaining boundaries.
7. Manage Flow: Keep conversations on track and within the allotted time.	Candidates vary widely in their ability to manage time, stay on topic, and maintain focus during conversations.	Provide candidates with strategies for creating clear agendas, signaling time limits politely, and summarizing key points.