

# About CAEP Family Engagement

## 7 Elements of Effective Parent-Teacher Communication: Candidates' Strengths & Weaknesses | **Tips for Faculty**

The CAEP Family Engagement Course is a free online course consisting of three modules that teach candidates about 1) the importance of family engagement; 2) parent phone calls, including practice making a live phone call; and 3) parent-teacher conferences.

The course is available at [caepfamilyengagement.org](http://caepfamilyengagement.org) and the companion faculty website is available at [caepnet.org/AboutFamilyEngagement](http://caepnet.org/AboutFamilyEngagement).

The course is organized around the 7 Elements of Effective Parent Teacher Communication.<sup>1</sup> During the 2015-2016 pilot, the following trends emerged as areas of strengths and weaknesses for candidates around the 7 Elements. Faculty implementing the [CAEP Family Engagement Course](#) should watch for these trends in their candidates.

### 7 ELEMENTS OF EFFECTIVE PARENT TEACHER COMMUNICATION:

1. *Warm Welcome: Establish the context for the conversation in the first few seconds of the conversation.* | Many candidates forget to introduce themselves and skip the *Warm Welcome* altogether, especially during their first call. This tends to improve for subsequent calls.
2. *Share Information: Use examples to describe the reason for the call.* | Almost all candidates incorporate the *Share Information* step. But many talk *at* the parent, rather than *with* them.
3. *Gather Information: Ask open-ended questions to get more information.* | **This is an area in which most candidates require improvement.** Many candidates do not *Gather Information*—or do not do so in a meaningful way. They may ask a few perfunctory questions at the end of the conversation, but gathering information should create an open dialogue between parent and teacher.

#### Candidates need practice

- Navigating unfamiliar situations
- Asking open-ended questions that seek the family's perspective
- Distinguishing empathy from agreement

<sup>1</sup> Walker, J. & Dotger, B. (2012). Because wisdom can't be told: Using comparison of simulated parent-teacher conferences to assess teacher candidates' readiness for family-school partnerships. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 63(1), 62-75.

4. *Establish an Action Plan: End with an action plan that is ideally a combination of both the teacher’s and parent’s ideas.* | Along with *Share Information*, this is the step most candidates incorporate and with which they seem the most at ease; however, many candidates do not incorporate the parent’s ideas into their plan.
  
5. *Maintain Positive Expectations: Convey a caring and calm demeanor regardless of the parent’s tone.* | Demonstrate specific knowledge of students as individuals.
  - Most candidates need to work on this step, especially when it comes to delivering bad news (for more details, see breakdown of call #2, module #2).
  - When delivering bad news, some candidates become overly effusive, which detracts from the seriousness of the call.
  - Other candidates revert to the compliment sandwich; however, research shows that while this method makes delivering bad news easier on the news-giver, it makes it harder on the news-recipient.<sup>2</sup> Those learning bad news prefer to hear the information in a direct manner (see the *Delivering Good and Bad News* section of the *Parent Phone Calls* module on effectively delivering bad news).
  
6. *Be Empathetic: Express empathy for parents’ emotions. Validate a parent’s concerns and express understanding if a parent becomes emotional.* | Candidates demonstrate difficulty differentiating between validating a parent’s emotions and agreeing with the content of what parents are saying.
  
7. *Manage Flow: Keep conversations on track and within the allotted time.* | Candidates vary considerably on how well they stay on track.

### Takeaways

- Candidates want to focus on *delivering* news, rather than on *gathering* information by asking open-ended questions and establishing a dialogue.
- Candidates will default to giving “good” news—even when the situation requires delivering bad news.
- Practice and skills in delivering bad news can help candidates have effective conversations.

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<sup>2</sup> Legg, A. & Sweeny, K. (2013). Do you want the good news or bad news first? The nature and consequences of news order preference. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 40(3), 279-288.; Marshall, L. & Kidd, R. (1981). Good news or bad news first? *Social behavior and personality*, 9(2), 223-226.