

### 3A.06.006 Communication

#### Definitions:

##### Board Policy:

*Communication Pathway:* A clear defined pathway needs to be communicated to parents, students and staff members to address feedback or concerns related to Excelsior Academy. The pathway should move up the chain of management, generally beginning with the teacher and up through administration to the board.

*Newsletter:* A weekly newsletter from the Director Administration will be emailed to Excelsior Academy families throughout the school year and also will be sent home to families who do not have email access or who prefer a paper copy. A minimum of one newsletter will be sent over the summer. The newsletters will contain notification of important dates and events, as well as pertinent school news and information.

*Parent Survey:* A Parent survey will be distributed twice a year to each Excelsior Academy family. The One survey will be conducted by Utah State University an independent third party, with scientifically reliable survey tools and analytics. The other survey will be conducted by Excelsior Academy, and solicit parents' views on Excelsior's programs and staff members. Survey results will be available at the school office. Procedure will be developed by the administration to maximize parent participation. to achieve as close to 100% response as is reasonably possible.

#### References:

##### Policy Review Schedule (Reviewer):

Summer (Board)

##### Policy Monitoring Schedule (Monitor):

Term-end/Summer (Advocate)

##### Document History:

Date Adopted: April 28, 2010

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Board Chair

#### School Policy:

##### Staff Handbook Excerpt

- ~~Excelsior Academy's communication policy:~~ If a teacher (or parent, student, staff member) has feedback, a concern or a problem related to Excelsior Academy he/she

should take it to the person most capable, in his/her estimation, of responding to the feedback or addressing the concern ***and to no one else***. If they are unsure who that person would be, they are to ask one of the School Secretaries. This is the first line of communication and we believe, is the most effective way of addressing concerns or providing feedback in the most expeditious and successful manner. Professionalism demands that this model be followed so that teachers and staff may enjoy a positive, motivating environment in which to work that is free from harassment, pressure or negativity.

2. **3 Step Communication:** If a staff member is involved in a communication with any member of the community wherein there is evidence of frustration, anger or other intense emotion, the following steps should be followed:
  - a. Listen carefully to the person's grievance. If the conversation is occurring in a public area where others may be disturbed, or where the individual's privacy is difficult to maintain, invite the person into an office with another staff member to listen to the grievance.
  - b. After listening, repeat what you believe the grievance is. Then ask the person for time so that you can look into the problem/gather more information, and then get back to them.
  - c. Follow up with the person and anyone else that needs to be in the communication loop.
3. **Information and Emotion:** It is often helpful, whether you are the one communicating or the one listening, to separate in your mind the "emotion" from the "information" in a communication. Sometimes it is necessary to acknowledge the emotion before moving on to solving a problem. Other times it is important to get good information, which can be difficult when there is a lot of emotion involved. Prefacing your communication with "I am going to share some emotion or how I feel" often helps the listener know what is expected of them. Likewise, "I am going to give you some information, and then I'm going to tell you how I feel about it" may help you express yourself clearly.
4. **Communication Logs**—a black spiral notebook is supplied to all staff members. They are to record in this spiral all telephone communications they have with regard to school. Incoming calls and messages must be recorded in the communication log. Follow up should be written in a different color ink for clarity. Non-telephone communications may also be recorded in this log. It is recommended that important communications are recorded.
5. **Professional Tone**—Staff should refrain from using a raised voice at any time, except in the possible case of matters of student safety, which would be rare. ***"Use your feet, not your voice" should be a familiar staff communication motto.***
6. **Confidentiality**—Ensure that when you send an email that has information about any student that you put "confidential, please do not forward" in the subject line. This helps those receiving emails to be cautious about sharing the information in order to ensure confidentiality for our students.

7. **Verification**—A vital step in the communication process when there is an issue or conflict is verification. Be sure that you ALWAYS verify information BEFORE taking any action, making any statements or drawing any conclusions. This will require that you follow the 3-step communication process wherein you listen, ask for time, and follow up (see #2 in this section).

### 1.2.2 Staff/Outside Communication

1. **Third-Party Communication**—Teachers are not to communicate with outside parties regarding student progress or any other information relating to a student without the written permission of the School Director or his/her designee. This includes surveys from medical doctors or other outside professionals. Teachers may fill out surveys at the request of parents, however, the survey must be given to the School Director or his/her designee for approval before being sent to the third party.
2. **Personal Communication**—Staff members should generally refrain from the use of cell phones during class times. Text messaging or talking on the phone during class is considered unprofessional conduct. It is understood that at times it will be less distracting for a teacher to communicate on the phone or via text message quickly rather than leaving the classroom to take care of personal business that is pressing. However, this should be rare and reserved for times when students will be least impacted, such as during independent work time. Generally, however, cell phone usage should not occur during class hours.

### 1.2.3 Staff/Student Communication

1. Communication between staff and students should be positive, affirming and respectful.
2. If a student's behavior is in question, it is best to pull the student aside and speak in tones that will allow confidentiality, always with the aim of respecting student dignity.
3. Staff should refrain from using a raised voice at any time, except in the possible case of matters of student safety, which would be rare. "Use your feet, not your voice" should be a familiar staff communication motto.
4. When dealing with students involved in a conflict, the following steps should be followed:
  - a. Separate—students from each other, or from site of disturbance
  - b. Question—allow the student to explain what is happening or has happened
  - c. Counsel—seek to assist the student in appropriate self-direction
5. If a student is not apparently where they should be, and/or engaged in the appropriate activity, the staff member should ask the student "may I help you?" in a kind manner. "Where are you supposed to be?" or "What are you doing?" are not appropriate ways to communicate with students. A gentle redirection by asking if you can assist the student to get where they need to be is most effective as it allows the student to remain in control of themselves avoiding the false "control" implied by staff demanding answers and giving orders. *Appropriate student self-direction is the goal at Excelsior Academy.*

6. If a student is in need of redirection, it is helpful to remember the adage “be tough on the problem but soft on the person”. Following this advice allows staff to set clear expectations and maintain the high standards of conduct we espouse at Excelsior Academy while building positive relationships with our students.
7. Staff members may not inquire of students, parents or guardians regarding their immigration status.
8. Electronic Communication—Staff members may use school computers and school email accounts to communicate with students via direct email and/or on school website blogs set up and managed by the teacher. Email correspondence from students to staff members that is not strictly regarding an academic issue must be admin on the reply. Staff members should not communicate with students on social networking sites or using their personal email addresses during school hours OR outside school hours. It is not appropriate for staff members to communicate with students on social networking sites. With permission of the administrator, Jr. High teachers may set up a blog for students to communicate regarding school and subject-area issues and topics. With regard to texting, staff should limit text communications to one-way communications, on topics specific to subject-area or school activity information that is best communicated through texting. No social-focused communication (non-academic communication) or dialogues should be initiated, responded to, or maintained by a teacher via texting or emailing.

#### **1.2.4 Staff/Parent Communication**

An important goal at Excelsior Academy is achieving a high parental satisfaction rate. It is our aim to deliver a high “level of service” (LOS) for our clients, who are the parents of our students.

It is school policy when emailing a group of parents, to address the email to yourself and then place all of the email addresses in the “bcc” area of the email, ensuring that email addresses are not disclosed. This is an important privacy practice. If a staff member is unaware of how to do this, the school secretary or any administrator can train them.

Parents choose to bring their children to our school, and in making that choice, become our clients. Parent satisfaction impacts the quality of our programs in many ways; in particular, satisfied parents support our school, its curriculum, its programs, and its staff to a degree that unsatisfied parents do not. Therefore, it is imperative that we achieve a high level of parental satisfaction so that our parents help us in the achievement of our School Mission. The school climate is highly impacted by parental satisfaction. Teachers are direct recipients of the benefits of parental satisfaction as parents work to support the teachers at school and also at home in encouraging their children to participate fully in the Excelsior Academy program.

Teachers and other staff members are on the “front line” of parental interaction. Therefore, it is important that each staff member views our parents as clients and seeks to provide a high level of service to each and every parent. This can be accomplished in many ways. Some guidelines follow:

1. Answer phone and email messages speedily—within 24 hours or on the next school day

2. Follow up on important phone conversations with an email to put conversations in writing and reiterate your interest and concern
3. Make 2 positive phone calls and/or send 2 positive emails every school day—keep a log of which students you did this for and make sure you get to all parents on a rotating basis
4. Keep a careful communication log (see 1.2.1 #4). Record the important aspects of parental conversations, so that you can be accurate about what you say and can follow up appropriately. Parents will be impressed by how much you remember about their concerns and ideas.
5. Use your communication log to write down important conversations you have about students with parents in person. Then, mark the conversations with regard to what follow up is needed. Review your communication log DAILY and always follow up in a timely manner.
6. “Satisfaction Plus”—after you have resolved an issue with a parent, mark the communication so that several days or a week or so later you can touch base with the parent and **confirm their satisfaction**. You may also send a note of appreciation for them bringing the concern to you, or working with you to resolve an issue, etc.
7. We recommend that teachers do their own parent survey after first quarter. Take the information and feedback you receive and make improvements and changes in your practice.
8. ALWAYS, ALWAYS, use **sandwich** communication—a positive FIRST, the concern, issue or suggestion next, and END ON A POSITIVE! This is SO important that even if a parent has started talking to you about their student and a problem, the first thing YOU say is still something positive. For example, a parent says “I am really concerned about Jessie, she is just not following through on her assignments and I am so frustrated.” The teacher response must begin with something positive about Jessie, such as “Let me just first say that Jessie is such a positive contributor in class—she always has a relevant comment and shows interest in what we are studying. I really appreciate that about her.” Then address the parent’s concern and brainstorm solutions. End by saying something positive about Jessie again, and reiterating that **you enjoy teaching her**.
9. Make it your goal that EVERY parent hears you say “I really enjoy teaching (*student name*)”. Hearing the teacher say this early in the year is very important. Parents bring all different perspectives to the school, and some get the mistaken idea that a teacher “doesn’t like” their student. This happens for different reasons, but can be quite simply overcome by a parent hearing the teacher say “I really enjoy teaching \_\_\_\_\_”. Sometimes students misinterpret something a teacher has said or done and goes home saying “Mrs. \_\_\_\_\_ doesn’t like me.” If the parent has heard the teacher say exactly the opposite, the parent can then say to the student, “Oh, I know that isn’t true. She told me specifically how much she enjoys teaching you.” This proactive approach can create a very positive chain of events and improve the teacher/student and teacher/parent relationship.
10. Take it upon yourself to teach your parents the communication model at EXCELSIOR ACADEMY. If a parent comes to you and you feel you have addressed their concerns, but you hear “through the grapevine” they are still unsatisfied, PLEASE conference with them immediately. Be straight with them—“I

heard from Mrs. X that you are still unhappy with X". Listen to their feedback. THEN, be sure and teach them the model—"I am happy to continue to work with you on this, but if you feel you are unable to get what you need from me, you are welcome to take your concern to the next level, which would be "X" (show them the Parent-Student Handbook). Be sure and emphasize that they are to take it to someone who can address it (one of those people) AND NO ONE ELSE. [This is what they signed they would do on the Acceptance of Policy]. If they choose to go to friends and neighbors and "stir things up" PLEASE contact the Parent Advocate member of the Governing Board, [advocate@excelsior-academy.org](mailto:advocate@excelsior-academy.org), and she will address it with the parent.

11. Confidentiality—remember when you are speaking with parents that you may not talk about other students. This comes up sometimes in meetings where teachers and parents are brainstorming ideas and a teacher may slip and say "you know, we had a similar situation with X, and we tried X, and it worked" or something similar. It is important to refrain from using names of other students in these cases and to maintain the confidentiality of all students.

#### **1.2.5. Staff/Administrative Communication**

——— The administration will utilize email and the staff mailboxes for staff memos. It is important that staff members check their mailboxes daily and respond to staff email memos in the time specified on the memo, when a response is requested.

——— Likewise, staff members may place non-urgent written communication in administrators' mailboxes or send an email and can expect a response within a reasonable time period.

#### **1.2.6 Student/Parent Communication**

——— *Students are generally not allowed to use the school telephones to call home during the day.* In cases of illness or injury, the school secretary will call the parent. Students should not be sent to the office to call home. If teachers instruct a student to call home to report missing work, etc., the teacher must supervise the phone call (which should be made from the teacher's room) and the student MUST leave a message on the home phone if no one answers the phone. If this protocol isn't followed, parents arrive home, see that Excelsior Academy has called, and they call the school asking why. The secretaries don't know where the call originated and cannot help the parents. This happens daily at Excelsior Academy and our goal is to eliminate those calls completely.

Wick Gubler 4/9/10 9:29 AM

Comment [1]: This is not in acceptance policy.

# Parent-Student Handbook

## School-Wide Communication

Communication at Excelsior Academy, as outlined in our school vision, will be positively framed and undertaken in good faith by all parties. **Anyone with a question or concern is to take it to the person most able to address it and to no one else.** This allows for all members of the community to feel safe and valued, and to have confidence that all concerns will be addressed to the point of satisfaction. Feedback from all stakeholders is essential for the school to be continually engaged in a process of improvement, and feedback is more likely to be shared freely when stakeholders are confident their feedback will be carefully heard and addressed.

Members of the Excelsior Academy community who have a question, concern, feedback or a need for information will identify the person best able to answer their question or concern or most logically to hear their feedback and will approach that person in a positive manner. If a member of the community does not know who the best person is to answer their question or concern or hear their feedback, they will ask a member of the administrative staff, beginning with one of the school secretaries.

If a parent has a question related to instruction or that relates to the classroom in any way, the classroom teacher should be the first person to whom the parent would go seeking information or resolution. If the parent does not feel their concern has been resolved by the teacher, they should ask the teacher for a meeting with an Administrator. If the parent desires, they may ask the school secretary for an appointment with the Director directly if they feel their concern would best be addressed at that level and they have already tried to address it with the teacher and are uncomfortable asking the teacher for an administrative conference. If the parent feels the Director has not sufficiently resolved their concern, they may bring their concern to the parent advocate member of the Governing Board. This may be done by emailing [advocate@excelsior-academy.org](mailto:advocate@excelsior-academy.org).

\*Concerns must be brought by a parent about their own students or their own concerns. Parents may not represent a group in bringing concerns to the Excelsior Academy Administration or Governing Board, as each parent's concern must be addressed individually and confidentially. In order to preserve the confidentiality of our students, group concerns will not be addressed.

We acknowledge there are familial relations at Excelsior Academy. Our school was founded by a group of individuals, including family members and friends. Some of our employees have children who attend the school, and some of the employees are related to other employees. The advantage to having family included in our school structure is an elevated commitment level which is the result of serving our own children. Thus, the school is not just someone's "job", but a reflection of a family legacy and a commitment to something above and beyond the ordinary. This philosophy then extends to all the families that have joined in and brought their children, relatives and friends to invest their energies and become part of what we call the "Excelsior Academy Family".

We realize that this environment, under certain circumstances, may make some individuals hesitant to voice concerns. We assure you that we are dedicated to managing familial relationship professionally and addressing all concerns brought to us. For this reason, we have established a clear communication channel through which we invite you to bring any concerns or questions you may have. The persons listed are in order of whom you should address your concern to first, next, etc.:

### Academic, Behavioral, or other Concern — Elementary & Middle School

1. Child's Classroom Teacher (even for groups issues) — [teacher's first initial lastname@excelsior-academy.org](mailto:teacher's first initial lastname@excelsior-academy.org)
2. Administrative Director — Cindy Barrs — [cbarrs@excelsior-academy.org](mailto:cbarrs@excelsior-academy.org)
3. School Director — Deb Lloyd — [dlloyd@excelsior-academy.org](mailto:dlloyd@excelsior-academy.org)
4. Parent Advocate — Shelly Taylor — [advocate@excelsior-academy.org](mailto:advocate@excelsior-academy.org)

#### **Academic, Behavioral, or other Concern—Middle School**

1. Child's Teacher—Classroom Teacher—teacher's first initial\_lastname@excelsior-academy.org
2. Administrative Director—Cindy Barrs—cbarrs@excelsior-academy.org
3. School Director—Deb Lloyd—dlloyd@excelsior-academy.org
4. Parent Advocate—Shelly Taylor—advocate@excelsior-academy.org

Wick Gubler 4/9/10 9:06 AM

Comment [2]: Delete.

#### **Special Education Concern**

1. Child's Classroom Teacher—teacher's first initial\_lastname@excelsior-academy.org
2. Administrative Director—Cindy Barrs—cbarrs@excelsior-academy.org
3. School Director—Deb Lloyd—dlloyd@excelsior-academy.org
4. Special Ed Director—Eva Wayman—ewayman@excelsior-academy.org
5. Parent Advocate—Shelly Taylor—advocate@excelsior-academy.org

**Anonymous written communication, outside of the annual school survey, will be discarded without being acknowledged.**

#### **Communication with Students**

In addition to the school-wide communication policy, additional guidance is given regarding communication with our students. Communication with students by all adults in our community shall be undertaken with our school vision in mind:

1. To provide a safe, fun, nurturing learning environment that is safe physically and emotionally.
2. Positive communication will be used by all staff, at all times. Corrections, when necessary, shall be undertaken within the context of encouragement.
3. Positive communication will be taught in a concrete manner to students.
4. Positive communication will be modeled by staff for families and students.
5. Positive communication will be addressed through regular, written communication from the school administration.
6. Because we believe that achievement is most effectively achieved through properly reinforced effort, staff members will watch for opportunities to notice and acknowledge effort in a positive manner.
7. If a student needs to be corrected, it is best done in close proximity to the student using a normal voice tone and calm manner.
8. If a group of students is involved in a negative situation, staff members shall separate the students and counsel with them individually.
9. Communication with students will reinforce Excelsior Academy's culture of inclusiveness, kindness and teamwork.
10. Communication with students will characterize our belief in the unlimited value of each individual student to our school community.

#### **Administrative Communication**

A weekly newsletter from the Director will be emailed to Excelsior Academy families and also will be sent home to families who do not have email access or who prefer a paper copy. The newsletter will go out on Thursdays or Fridays. The newsletter will contain notification of important dates and events, as well as pertinent school news and information.

#### **Parent Survey**

Each February and May, a parent survey will be distributed to each Excelsior Academy family. The February survey is conducted by Utah State University and is a short, general survey. The May survey is specific to Excelsior Academy, and solicits our parents' views on our programs and staff members. Families will have the opportunity to express their level of satisfaction with all aspects of Excelsior Academy's program. Survey results will be available at the school office, and major points from the survey will be communicated to the parent community via the school newsletter. It is the goal of Excelsior Academy to have 100% parent participation in the parent surveys.