# Instructional Excellence Action List:

# Connect with Students & Families

***Establish strong relationships with students and families to cultivate a culture of learning and respect***

This section is concerned with communication routines that **enable students across lines of identity to feel respected and valued** by their teachers and classmates. Checked items are suggested actions; add your own. Items with \* are essentials to master first and practice consistently.

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| **BEFORE SCHOOL YEAR** |
| * **IMPART A COLLECTIVE VISION THAT ALL STUDENTS CAN SUCCEED**   Write and post on wall/online: your vision & goals, including belief in all students’ potential  Share your vision and goals in year’s first written and oral communications with students and families  Plan activity for students to choose class values (such as Respect, Caring, Hard Work) and discuss how to live those values   * **BUILD POSITIVE, GENUINE RELATIONSHIPS** * Proactively, positively engage with students and families\*   With input from colleagues, identify most successful ways of communicating with families in your school  Contact families (email, phone, etc.) before school or in first week; share vision and diversity values  In student and family communications, share positive information about each student first  Look students and family members in the eye, and smile, when engaging interpersonally  Provide 2+ options (survey, meeting) for families to share about students, with a translator as needed  Prepare method of keeping track of information shared about individual student identity and needs   * Respect diversity across all lines of identity   Build your knowledge of major assets, challenges, and cultural values of incoming students’ communities  Write down an affirmative statement of respect for all people, and post on wall  Share your value of respect in year’s first written and oral communications with students and families  Seek help from others to understand needs of students whose identity differs from yours   * **COMMUNICATE STUDENT LEARNING INFORMATION REGULARLY** * Initiate positive, constructive, and helpful dialogue\*   Establish schedule to communicate student progress, in behavior and academics, one-on-one with students and personally to parents/guardian, in addition to report cards/conferences   * **MOTIVATE EVERYONE TO DO THEIR BEST** * Foster trust and joy: be trustworthy and joyful   Practice making eye contact with students while smiling (without insisting that they do the same)  Practice mirroring others’ body language to convey acceptance nonverbally  Plan to share why you like teaching, and why you like learning  Remind yourself to “do as you say” to foster trust   * Celebrate achievements!   Plan/schedule daily “little joy moment” to focus class and individuals on accomplishments  Plan/schedule weekly/monthly “big joy moment” to focus on bigger accomplishments  Celebrate growth, not just achievement, for individuals and class |
| **WITHIN THE FIRST WEEK (in addition to DURING THE SCHOOL YEAR steps)** |
| * **IMPART A COLLECTIVE VISION THAT ALL STUDENTS CAN SUCCEED**   Share your vision and goals in first written and oral communications with students & families\*  Lead student activity to envision their own future success using images. For example, they make a collage of academic, work, and personal success images from magazines/online, matching gender/race.  Facilitate student collaboration to choose class values (such as Respect, Caring, Hard Work) and discuss how to live them   * **BUILD POSITIVE, GENUINE RELATIONSHIPS** * Proactively, positively engage with students and families\*   Contact families (email; phone) before school or in first week; share vision and diversity values  Send short survey for family to share student’s strengths, interests, and growth needs (in family’s language)  Survey students, too, about their own strengths, interests, growth needs, and goals for the year  Keep track of information shared with you about individual student identity and needs   * Respect diversity across all lines of identity   Share your value of respect in first written and oral communications with students and families  Seek help from others to understand needs of students whose identity differs from yours   * **COMMUNICATE STUDENT LEARNING INFORMATION REGULARLY** (see During the School Year below) * Initiate positive, constructive, and helpful dialogue\*   Share affirmations of each student in advance of need to share constructive feedback   * **MOTIVATE EVERYONE TO DO THEIR BEST** (see During the School Year below) |
| **DURING THE SCHOOL YEAR: TEACHER STEPS** |
| * **IMPART A COLLECTIVE VISION THAT ALL STUDENTS CAN SUCCEED**   Remind families of vision and goals in all communications (open house, conference, newsletter, etc.)  Routinely explain how daily learning objectives will help students achieve class’s long-term vision and goals  Remind students of vision and goals on Mondays and to redirect behavior; refer to their images and goals  Periodically remind students of class values (such as Respect, Caring, Hard Work) & behaviors to live them   * **BUILD POSITIVE, GENUINE RELATIONSHIPS** * Proactively, positively engage with students and families\*   Start each class/lesson with an affirmation of students (such as “I believe in each of you”)  Keep track of information shared with you about individual student identity and needs  Refer to initial family survey/meeting; treat families as experts on their own children by asking for insights   * Respect diversity across all lines of identity\*   Show respect in all continuing communication with students and families; ask, listen, *then* talk  Continue seeking help from others to understand needs of students whose identity differs from yours  Include students with all identities/needs (use accessible activities and culturally/gender-relevant texts)  Reduce stress triggers (limit sensory stimulation,[[1]](#footnote-1) preview changes in routines,[[2]](#footnote-2) avoid cold calling)  *See page 3 for more During the School Year actions*   * **COMMUNICATE STUDENT LEARNING INFORMATION REGULARLY** * Initiate positive, constructive, and helpful dialogue\*   Follow schedule to communicate student progress, in behavior and academics  Share affirmations of each student in advance of need to share constructive feedback  Communicate in several modes (such as newsletter in home language; online grade reporting platform)  Open all communications with positive statements about the student  Invite families into the classroom (during school day, evening programs, etc.)  Include relevant school professionals in conversations with families (such as interventionist, special education teacher, language translator, etc.  Share concerns with families sooner, rather than letting problems worsen; include your positive action steps to help student; invite parent/guardian thoughts and help   * **MOTIVATE EVERYONE TO DO THEIR BEST** * Foster trust and joy: be trustworthy and joyful   Make eye contact, with a smile, with each student, every day  Repeat affirmations and concrete next steps after students have setbacks (such as “I still believe you are capable; here are the next steps for you.”)  Share your interests  Share why you like teaching; and why you like learning  Share a learning struggle you had and how you overcame it[[3]](#footnote-3)  “Do as you say” to foster trust; keep promises you have made (or explain if circumstances change)  Refer to student survey about their own strengths, interests, growth needs, and goals for the year   * Celebrate achievements!   Use a daily “little joy moment” to focus class and individuals on accomplishments  Use weekly “big joy moment” at end of week to focus on a bigger accomplishment |

1. CAST. (n.d.), Universal Design for Learning (UDL) Guidelines. Retrieved from http://udlguidelines.cast.org/engagement/recruiting-interest/threats-distractions [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. CAST. (n.d.), Universal Design for Learning (UDL) Guidelines. Retrieved from http://udlguidelines.cast.org/engagement/recruiting-interest/threats-distractions [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Match Minis. (n.d.). *A Leader They Can Trust.* Retrieved from <https://www.matchminis.org/videos/for-teachers/30/a-leader-they-can-trust/> [↑](#footnote-ref-3)