# 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)
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| **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)