

# Shepherd Public Schools



**WE**

**Family Engagement Plan**

**ARE**

**2023-2024**

**SHEPHERD**

# Family Engagement

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## Engaging with families to help their students be successful!

Shepherd Schools will establish consistent opportunities for family engagement through events at all schools, get annual feedback from families and implement common communication methods and ensure family-friendly access to all district processes, procedures, and forms. Providing families with the opportunities to engage with Shepherd Schools as key stakeholders is important to us. The following components are part of our family engagement strategies to enhance its relevance and effectiveness.

## Goals and Objectives

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*Shepherd Schools has created goals and objectives as to what we are trying to achieve by involving families more actively in our schools.*

Our Mission, Vision, and Commitments define our objectives as a school and what we hope to achieve. We have done a good job of sharing this with the students, but now we need to work on this with our K-12 families.

We will communicate with our families and make sure we are quick to keep them informed when things are happening at the school.

It is important that we make sure that we are sharing our Mission and Vision with our families and community. Parents and community members need to understand why we are making students follow rules and expectations and become better educated and productive members of our community. Accountability for our students is essential moving forward.

## Parent/Guardian Feedback

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*Shepherd Schools will assess the needs and preferences of families and the community we are serving. This can be done through surveys, focus groups and board meetings.*

Surveys are the easiest. If you ask the right questions, we can get a lot of information from the surveys that can lead to making our schools a better educational experience.

We have the following surveys in place in order to gain input from our staff/students/families:

1 - Staff Surveys - These are sent out in February in order to gain input from them on various aspects of the school district.

2 - Student Surveys - These are sent out in March in order to gain input from them on various aspects of the school district from the views of a student.

3 - Parent/Guardian Surveys - These are sent out in April in order to gain input from them on various aspects of the school district.

The past has shown that we get very little input if we try to have in-person gatherings. Thus, we believe the best way to gather input from our families is to do surveys where they can give input at a time that is convenient to them.

We will continue to ask for feedback at events such as Open House, Student-Led Conferences while we have parents in our buildings.

We need to be reaching out to families and listening to them as parents/guardians should have a say in their students' education.

## **Communication Strategies**

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*Shepherd Schools will use effective communication strategies to reach out to families. This may include newsletters, emails, phone calls, and social media.*

Elementary classrooms use multiple ways to communicate with families. These include, newsletters, classroom Dojo, Remind, email and phone calls. Messages needing to go out to all elementary families are sent through an online district system called Blackboard.

Shepherd Middle and High Schools use our district-wide system, Blackboard, to pinpoint specific classes or groups for communications that involve only that group of students and staff. Both Middle School and High School teachers use Google classrooms to communicate what is happening in the classroom with parents. They also use newsletters, emails, phone calls, Remind and some communications are done by being present at different events making staff available for conversations.

## **Family-Friendly Environments**

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*Shepherd Schools are committed to creating inviting and welcoming environments for families. We try to design spaces, websites, and materials with families in mind.*

Each year, each of our schools have an open house before school starts. This is a time to see the classrooms and meet the teachers.

Parents are welcome to join students for lunch at any time. Our lunchroom hosts a Hero's Lunch each year. This lunch is for veterans, EMTs, firefighters, and law enforcement. We also host a

Senior's Lunch for our senior citizens in the community every spring. Several of our students have their grandparents join them for a free lunch.

The elementary school holds an annual school carnival with food and games each spring. This fundraiser is attended by a large portion of our families and students where families are welcomed into our schools to spend time with their children in a fun-filled event.

## **Student-Led Conferences**

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*Shepherd Schools will schedule regular student-led parent-teacher conferences to discuss a child's progress, strengths, and areas for improvement. We will make sure these meetings are convenient for parents by allowing them to choose a night and time.*

Parent/student/teacher conferences are held twice a year. The student-led conference process empowers the student to direct and report on his/her progress at school. We believe that the student-led conference process holds the student accountable for the work and progress done in class. Shepherd Schools has found it is in the best interest of the student to involve them in their student-parent-teacher conference at least once a year for them to take ownership in their learning, while getting their parents' undivided attention to focus on their progress, concerns and goals.

We are pleased with the learning that is happening at Shepherd Schools and know that the students are eager to present their progress to their parents.

Parents are sent a link from PTCFast.com which allows parents to choose the time they are able to attend conferences. Parents who don't have access to the internet are called to schedule their times.

During the conference process students will report on academic progress and assessments, articulate goals, and share examples of their work. Some of these items will be sent home to share and some will be shared by the teacher from the school.

In middle school, students have a portfolio that they put together and they go over it with their parents. Parent/student/teacher conferences are scheduled in 20 minute blocks on two different evenings allowing parents to choose what works best for them. Our middle school averages about a 95% turnout for participation in student-led conferences.

Along with the other buildings, Student-Led Conferences are completed at the high school level. Routinely participation at the High School level is about 85% on the two nights available to parents. For a high school to achieve this kind of percentage when most high schools do not do conferences any longer, we believe is an outstanding achievement in family involvement. The high school uses a digital portfolio for students to access information to share with parents. The

high school also utilizes a teacher comment spreadsheet where each teacher comments on how the student is performing in his/her class to share with parents.

Student-Led Conferences are a very good tool to communicate with parents and build relationships with families by getting them to the school on behalf of their students.

## **Family Trainings and Resources**

*Shepherd Schools is committed to offer families training sessions for parents/guardians on topics relevant to their child's development, both mentally and educationally. We will provide families with information and resources related to child development, health, and education.*

Shepherd Elementary: Each trimester parents receive an At-Home Reading Report. The report explains their child's reading level as well as simple ways they can help at home. This will help parents understand the progress made in their child's reading.

We offer parents/community members to attend night presentations by speakers that we may have had to speak to our students during the school day. Examples of these family engagement nights are to hear the local DEA agent speak on the local issues with drugs and youth in our area or a presentation on the Effects of Social Media on student's mental health. We have had instances where our female students were instructed in self-defense during the day, and then the same opportunity was offered in the evening to the mothers/daughters. Seniors and their parents are encouraged to attend FAFSA and Scholarship nights, sponsored by Reach Higher Montana.

Our school counselors and special education staff share community resources with families. A one-page handout is given during an IEP meeting so share resources that may be helpful to families.

All three school counselors have a list of community resources shared with families as needed. This list includes local agencies and therapists.

We hold an annual Title 1 meeting to share information with families about our Title services in our District. A Title 1 brochure is given out at our Open House or Title 1 meeting annually.

Our school website shares information on various trainings and events that are open to families to attend. We also share resources sent out through social media to reach a larger group than just our own families and parents.

## **Volunteer Opportunities**

*Shepherd promotes parents to become involved in the school or various programs as volunteers. We include volunteers to help in classrooms, participate in school events, or serve on parent-teacher organizations and Booster Clubs.*

Shepherd Elementary allows parents/guardians/ grandparents to volunteer in our classrooms. The Elementary includes a volunteer sheet in their handbook. Parents/guardians/grandparents fill out the form sharing what their interests are for volunteering. All parents/guardians/grandparents that volunteer get a background check through our administration offices. Those who are approved help in the classrooms with academics, parties, and projects.

Parents also help with school events such as picture days. The elementary school has a Parent Teacher Organization. All parents are encouraged to join the PTO and are invited to attend once a month PTO meetings held at the school.

In the Middle School, volunteers come in the form of other students. The middle school has some HS softball members who come into MS classes and help during our What I Need (WIN) time. The middle school has many volunteers for various MS sport activities.

At the high school level volunteers often volunteer for extra-curricular activities in capacities such as coaches, scorekeepers, judges for Speech, Drama and Debate, etc.

## **Community Partnerships and Celebrations**

*Collaboration with our local community organizations and agencies help us provide additional support and resources for Shepherd families. Shepherd Schools also recognizes and celebrates the contributions of families to our school.*

We have therapists on campus from the Yellowstone Boys and Girls Ranch (YBGR) to give services to some students on campus. YBGR puts families in touch with home case managers if needed. This program is a Comprehensive School and Community Treatment (CSCT) program that provides mental health services to our local school district. A CSCT team provides youth services at the school, the home, or in the community. Our youth work on various mental health areas that are focused on improving the youth's life skills and development by facilitating the development of skills related to appropriate behaviors in the school, home, and community settings.

Shepherd Schools also have a program called Cole's Pantry. This program provides food to families every Friday for weekends and holidays. This is to help those in need and focus on the needs of our students by providing them food for the times they can not get school breakfasts and lunches.

A couple of high school organizations will also do fundraising for specific needs in our community. During Halloween, our National Honors Society goes Trick-Or-Treating for food to donate to our local food pantry.

The district holds appreciation lunches for senior citizens and community heroes which include fire personnel, EMTs, veterans, law enforcement.

Awards are given by our athletic department for our most dedicated fans. These are awarded to those who spend many hours supporting our athletes on and off the court/field/mat.

We hold annual Homecoming events which include our community. There is a community parade where anyone can enter to partake in the parade. Students, parents, children of all ages join the parade to show school spirit and community support. This also includes a community Chili Cook-off where many families provide chili and the community can join to eat and vote on the best chili!

We have a number of Relay for Life events at Shepherd Schools which include our community. We are one of the largest financial supporters of Relay for Life in Yellowstone County. We have various activities throughout the year that focus on community.

Our athletic teams are required to have community service as a part of their community plan. Our football team requires athletes to have 6+ hours of community service in order to obtain a football letter. Many of these athletes are out in our community helping the senior citizens. In return for the service, our local senior citizen group cooks dinner for our football team once a year.

## **Conclusion**

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Shepherd Schools' Family Engagement Plan is a vital roadmap that shows our commitment to fostering a collaborative and supportive partnership between the school, families, and the community. As we strive for educational excellence, we recognize the involvement of families as an integral to the academic success of our students.

Through this plan, we have outlined areas of concentration, established transparent communication channels, and designed meaningful family involvement activities. By emphasizing the importance of two-way communication, we aim to create an inclusive and welcoming environment where every family feels valued and supported in their child's educational journey.

We are committed to providing resources and educational opportunities for parents while actively seeking and nurturing partnerships with the broader community. By doing so, we believe

that we can create a powerful network of support for our students both within and beyond our school walls.

Our ongoing commitment to evaluation and feedback mechanisms will enable us to continuously refine and improve our family engagement efforts. We understand that building and sustaining a strong school-family-community partnership is a dynamic process that requires flexibility and responsiveness to the needs of our stakeholders. A successful family engagement plan is an ongoing process that requires commitment, communication, and flexibility. We will adapt to the changing needs and circumstances of the families and the community you serve.

As we embark on this journey together, we are confident that the Family Engagement Plan will promote positive change and enrich the educational experience for every child. By working collaboratively, we can create an environment where every family feels empowered and every student can thrive.