



**Indicator:** The school's key documents explain the value of cognitive competency and how it is enhanced through specific roles and relationships. (C5)

**Explanation:** The evidence suggests that families need and want to be involved in their children's school experiences but often are not sure how. By strategically sharing information about the Cognitive Competency with families, the school can have a significant impact on how families understand their students' progress, the standards they are learning, and how they can help at home. Embedding the Cognitive Competency into the school's key documents and then sharing those in meaningful ways can help families and the school community understand the priorities and values of the school.

**Questions:** Which of the school's documents currently focus on priorities and values? Which documents could be updated to include information about the Cognitive Competency? In what ways are teachers, other staff, and the School Community Council supplementing these documents with conversations about expectations, standards, and student progress to families?

*What is the Cognitive Competency?*

The Cognitive Competency refers to what teachers and families "need to know" to best help their students learn; this can include the standards, curricula, and the basics of both child and brain development that will help them encourage student mastery of the content that they are learning (Educator Competencies, 2015). This competency aims to connect what students are learning to their prior knowledge and previously mastered material to foster and assist in new learning. Vocabulary and writing tasks play a key role in the cognitive competency, as tools for connecting pieces of knowledge across content areas and domains (Redding, 2016).

In the era of the Common Core State Standards and comparable sets of state-level standards, expectations for what and how students will learn have risen. Focusing more on conceptual understanding than on rote learning and memorization, these sets of standards represent a different way of learning than many parents were exposed to during their own school experiences. This era of learning standards emphasizes interdisciplinary learning and demonstrating proficiency in context, across multiple content areas, such as teaching and assessing writing in a social studies course (Ryerse, Schneider, & Vander Ark, 2014). This shift in standards nicely fits into the cognitive competency, which emphasizes making connections between content, skills, and knowledge (Redding, 2016).

*Why is it important to focus on Cognitive Competency in key documents and conversations?*

Survey data shows that parents want to be involved in and informed about their children's education and school experiences, but unfortunately, many are not, often for reasons of insecurity or a lack of knowledge. Only 22 percent of respondents to the Parent Involvement Survey could identify a learning milestone appropriate to their child's grade level (Public Agenda, 2012; Kraft & Rogers, 2014). Cogan, Schmidt, and Houang (2013) suggest that parents may be

interested in helping their students but may not have the tools or knowledge to do so. Ryerse, Schneider, and Vander Ark (2014) put it this way, “Ironically, in this information age, there is also an information gap,” stating that the information that parents and students need is often not shared coherently or in meaningful and usable ways (p. 33).

One way to improve parents’ lack of information about the Cognitive Competency is to embed it into key communications and documents from the school. These documents include “the school’s mission statement, compact with parents, staff employment manuals, and student handbook” (Redding, 2014, p. 24). Information about school programs, the school improvement plan, curriculum guides, and the list of policies and procedures are also important places to highlight the Cognitive Competency (Redding, 2006; Redding, 2016). In these documents, the school can emphasize its focus on the Cognitive Competency, explaining what it is and how it is addressed throughout the school day and year.

When shared publicly, through the school website or at events such as Back to School Night and parent-teacher conferences, families can be better informed about the priorities and values of the school and how they can reinforce them at home (Redding, 2014). Schools must also provide guidance and strategies for parents to use in helping their children in these areas of growth at home (Kraft & Dougherty, 2013). Redding (2006) emphasizes that these constructive conversations around the Cognitive Competency help to “build a sense of community around the purposes of the school,” making it clear what each person’s role is in that child’s educational experience (p. 162).

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