



School Family Involvement Policy 2019-20

Last Updated 11/19/2018

Program Information for Family Involvement

Freire Charter School is fully committed to finding meaningful and mutually enriching ways for parents to participate in our school that involve improving the quality of teaching and learning for all of our students and at every level.

Freire works hard to help parents understand how we assess our students, as well as how Pennsylvania and the nation as a whole assess them to determine whether or not they are college-ready. As part of our regular academic calendar, parents and school staff discuss our curriculum, achievement, standards, assessments, and student academic growth at the following events:

- New Parent Clinic (held once a school year for parents of students new to the school, *high school only*)
- Back to School Night (held once a school year for all parents)
- Student-Parent-Teacher conferences (held three times a year for all middle school parents and once a school year for all high school parents)
- Exhibition Nights (held once a school year for all parents, *high school only*)
- Regularly held family meetings where a member of the Freire staff is often present to highlight college counseling, the Dean's office, after-school activities, the family therapy program, etc.
- Family visits for all students identified as needing additional supports, held either at the home of the new student with parent present, or at the school on an individual basis.

Each grade level has a dedicated academic advisor. This individual reaches out to the family of any student failing one or more classes at the conclusion of the first semester so that a family meeting can be scheduled and appropriate measures taken to support the student.

Freire's student report cards also offer information beyond the traditional content of grades, teacher comments, and attendance information. Our report cards provide parents with their student's progress on standardized tests, a record of their behavior, and information on their student's participation in extracurricular activities.

Course syllabi for every class are available to parents, which provide a description and explanation of the curriculum in use at the school, the forms of academic assessment used, and the standards students are expected to meet.

Parent Contact Information

It is essential that parents keep their contact information on file with the school up to date at all times. The school may need to reach parents in emergencies, to notify them of incidents involving their child at school, or for other important reasons. Parents must therefore contact the school any time there is a change to their address, phone number, or email address.

Contract for Excellence

From the students themselves to their parents/guardians, teachers, and support staff – each and every member of the school community has a critical role to play in supporting success for our learners. To make sure each individual knows their role in the process, all community members must agree to and sign the Freire Contract for Excellence which was developed jointly with parents. A copy of the contract is attached as an appendix and must be signed and returned to the school.

Materials and Training Available to Parents/Guardians

PowerSchool Training

Freire is committed to doing everything possible to help parents have the tools they need to support their students in school. To that end, Freire holds trainings and/or provides written instructions so that parents feel adept at using our student database (PowerSchool) from their homes and offices. Parents can log into PowerSchool at any time and receive up-to-date information about their individual student. From PowerSchool they can see a current reflection of their student's performance in each class, including specific information on how a student performed on every class assignment and assessment. Parents also have access to their student's daily attendance, current overall grades as well as test and quiz grades, homework performance, and in-school behavior.

Training for PowerSchool usually occurs in September as part of our Back to School Night but is also offered through individual tutorials. Parents receive a username and password in order to enter their account on PowerSchool. As part of that training, parents learn the capabilities of the program and how to tailor those capabilities to meet their individual needs and access the information they want to see about their child's progress. For any parents who miss Back to School Night and still want to learn how to access their child's progress online, our Academic Advisors are available by appointment throughout the year to help parents access this very important feature.

Academic Advisors

Each child has an Academic Advisor at Freire. The job of the academic advisor is to support students in their academic growth by following student progress on a regular basis, communicating with a student's parent/guardian in times of concern, helping to link students to the extra help and support centers Freire has available to all students, and helping to ensure that the staff at school and parents at home are doing all we can to support our students' academic success. When requested by parents, academic advisors will also facilitate regular meetings that provide parents with an opportunity to formulate suggestions and participate, as appropriate, in decisions relating to the education of their children.

Emotional Support Team

Another fundamental way that we support parents in helping their children's achievement and potential soar is through our emotional support team. Freire's emotional support team serves all students in need of therapy on a regular basis. Students meet with either our in-house certified family therapist or one of the handful of graduate school interns studying the science of emotional support and working closely at our family therapist's direction. Any and all family members of a Freire student are also welcome to participate in emotional support therapy sessions. In accordance with PA Act 147 of 2004, students who are 14 years of age or older can request counseling and are entitled to confidentiality, subject to legal restrictions (for example, counselors must report any suspicion of child abuse or neglect and may be required to report a suspicion that the student has been a victim of a crime).

21st Century CCLC Parent Programming

Lastly, thanks to the Pennsylvania Department of Education's 21st Century Community Learning Centers Grant, Freire provides parent programming throughout the year. If you are interested in being a part of Freire's 21st Century CCLC parent programming, please contact the Director of Student Activities.

Parent Concerns

When parents/guardians have a concern about something going on in a classroom or at the school, the best thing to do is first contact their child's Academic Advisor or classroom teacher to discuss the matter. After that, if the situation still has not been resolved, the parent needs to contact either the Co-Head of School for Academics (for any matters relating to teaching and learning in the school) or the Co-Head of School for Academic Supports (for any matters in the school not directly related to teaching and learning). If the concern is not resolved at the school level, or if a community member wishes to make a specific complaint to the Board, they can provide notice to the Co-Heads of School who can relay their concern to the Board and set aside time on a meeting agenda when appropriate. Parents and community members may attend any board meeting and present a statement during the public comment period, but are encouraged to share any specific concerns beforehand so that the board can be address them. The Board will review the complaint and come to a final decision as quickly as possible.

Parent Conduct

All parents must represent Freire and Freire's values at all times. While this rarely, if ever, occurs at Freire, in the case that a parent/guardian comes to the school or to a school event and is not conducting him/herself appropriately or violating our school safety policies, that parent/guardian will be asked to leave the school property, and, if necessary, law enforcement may be called. Severe instances may lead to a parent/guardian being permanently prohibited from entering school property and/or school events.

Education for Our Educators about the Importance of Parents in Student Success

Every Freire staff member participates in at least two trainings per school year on effectively partnering with parents to maximize student achievement. One of these trainings is held during our start of the year staff orientation, and the second at one of our regularly scheduled staff professional development sessions. Issues about differences in culture, expectation, communication styles, etc. are addressed.

Additionally, administrative personnel and school leaders participate in ongoing informal conversations regarding how to support parents and their students most effectively. One of the primary roles of our Academic Advisors is to serve as a liaison to and for parents with the school and to make sure to give voice to parent concerns, feedback, and positive experiences.

Understandable Communication

Freire has an accurate perception of the number of our parents for whom English is not their first language as a result of input provided on a Home Language Survey that parents are required to complete when a student first enrolls in the school. As a result, we are able to support these parents directly with a variety of resources including a free ESL course taught at the school in the summer, and telephonic translation services provided by LanguageLine. Additionally, as part of a quarterly phone call held with parents of any ESL student the school, Freire is able to regularly check in with these parents to ensure that they fully understand communications from the school and provide additional support as needed. The school also maintains a relationship with a company called LanguageLine. This company provides translation services in approximately 170 languages and the school utilizes them when appropriate to ensure that the content of essential school communications can be understood by all parents.

Title I

Freire invites parents to attend an annual Title I informational meeting, held in conjunction with a regular parent association meeting. At this meeting, we explain the purpose and requirements of Title I programs, describe how Freire participates in the program, and detail how the school is spending its Title I funding in the current school year. School representatives review parents' right to be involved, provide the complaint procedure, and identify Freire's federal programs coordinator. At this time, we solicit feedback from parents on topics including how Freire is spending Title I funds, the quality of the school-parent compact, and this Family Involvement Policy. School administrators consider any feedback received when seeking to make improvements at the next relevant annual opportunity (e.g. policy updates, budgeting, program planning, etc.).

As the school creates, improves, and implements its Title I Schoolwide Program, the planning team takes into account parent feedback received at the annual Title I informational meeting, comments from regular monthly parent association meetings, survey results, and relevant informal suggestions made by parents.

School events that provide opportunities for parent involvement throughout the year are held at a variety of times, both during the school day and in the evening. Student-Parent-Teacher Conferences are held with both morning and afternoon times at the middle school and afternoon and evening times at the high school.

Title I funds may be used to pay reasonable and necessary expenses associated with parent involvement activities, including transportation, childcare, or home visit expenses to enable parents to participate in school-related meetings and training sessions.

Parent Rights Under Title I

Under Title I, Part A, Freire parents have the right to:

- Be involved in our Title I, Part A programs – Freire, with the help of its parents, will develop and implement a Title I Family Involvement Policy and a School-Parent Compact
- Request regular meetings – Requests for meetings to discuss Title I programs should be put in writing and submitted to the Federal Programs Coordinator.
- Know teacher and paraprofessional qualifications – Parents may request, and Freire then will provide, certain information on the professional qualifications of the student's classroom teachers and paraprofessionals providing services to their child. Requests should be put in writing and submitted to the Federal Programs Coordinator.

Title I Complaint Procedures for Parents

A parent who feels that the school is not meeting its Title I or other responsibilities as outlined in this policy, should first discuss the problem with the school Federal Programs Coordinator. Examples of violations would be such things as:

- An annual meeting was not convened to explain Title I offerings to parents
- Parents were refused information on the professional qualifications of their child's classroom teacher

If the concern was not resolved at the school level, a parent should begin a formal Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE) complaint procedure as outlined below. A complaint is defined by Freire Charter School as a written, signed statement. It must include the following:

- a. A statement that PDE or Freire has violated a requirement of federal statute or regulations which apply to programs under the Every Student Succeeds Act
- b. The facts on which the statement is based

- c. Information on any discussions, meetings or correspondence with PDE or Freire regarding the complaint

Federal Programs Coordinator Contact Information

Freire Charter School's Federal Programs Coordinator is:

Max Matthews, Director of Operations, Build the Future Education Collaborative (Freire central office)

1617 JFK Blvd Ste 1260

Philadelphia PA 19103

(267) 583-4456

max.matthews@buildthefuture.org

Other Important Parent Involvement Information

At Freire, we are always working to form stronger, better partnerships with parents. Some of the ways in which we further this goal that have not been mentioned specifically above are:

- One parent from the Middle School and one from the High School each serve on the school's Board of Directors.
- Parents are surveyed yearly for input on the quality of their children's teachers and staff of the school.
- Parents receive a weekly email newsletter updating them on school activities, events, issues, etc.
- Parents receive mailings frequently through the regular mail.
- Parents serve on Freire's ESL Committee.
- Freire contracts with the SchoolMessenger service, which allows us to communicate information to parents via automated phone calls, text messages, and emails.
- Freire teachers are required to respond to every communication from a student's parents within a reasonable period of time.
- Freire teachers take the time to write comments on report cards thereby giving parents more specific information than just a grade.
- The interview process for hiring staff includes parent input when possible, and in particular when hiring senior administrative staff members.
- Parents are consulted by phone to evaluate teachers for contract renewal.

Parent Association

Freire High School's parent association, Paulo's Parents, holds monthly meetings. The parents and family members in attendance collectively set goals for their work, which have included aims such as teacher appreciation, fundraising, and partnership building for school-community culture. Meeting dates and times are announced in our email newsletters. Parents should contact the Co-Head of School for Academics for more information.