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**Build Trust with Families Through the Reading Improvement and Monitoring Plan (RIMP) Letter**

Every elementary school in Ohio sends letters home to families every year. One such letter received by thousands of families lets a family know their child’s reading skills have been assessed and the child’s skills are not on track for their grade level. It is a letter about a Reading Improvement and Monitoring Plan (RIMP). The letter describes the school’s plan to provide the instruction and supports the child will need to improve their reading skills. This letter, mandated in Ohio’s education policy Ohio Revised Code Section 3313.608(B)(2)(a), presents an opportunity to schools for setting a foundation for a partnership with families.

*While there are mandated points that the school must communicate in the letter, schools may communicate this information to families in a way that opens the door to a partnership and a trusting relationship between home and school.*

There are only three key points that schools must communicate in writing to families according to the Revised Code:

1. Notification that the student has been identified as having a substantial deficiency in reading;
2. A description of the current services that are provided to the student; and
3. A description of the proposed supplemental instructional services and supports that will be provided to the student that are designed to remediate the identified areas of reading deficiency.

While these three ingredients are required, using the exact wording from the Revised Code is not. It is not hard to imagine the fear, confusion, hurt, and/or anger a family may experience receiving a letter that uses terms such as “substantial deficiency” and “remediation.” The same school’s letter may also include technical literacy terms and assessment scores that are difficult for anyone except a literacy specialist to understand.

Schools can improve the RIMP letter to families and make it a more effective, student-focused, family engagement tool. This can be done by using ordinary terms and language that is accessible to the family. The words of the letter can help families understand, feel supported, have a sense of hope and certainty that the school is committed to their child. It is an opportunity to build trust between home and school.

# **The Role of Trust in Family Engagement**

Schools, families, and the community all play unique and interconnected roles in partnership to support a child’s learning. Essential to this partnership is trust. What builds trust between the home and the school? Beliefs, actions, and feelings all contribute to trust. First, when schools and families collaborate in support of a child, when they are actively engaged in this partnership, and when they direct their efforts to support the child’s academic outcomes, collective trust grows. When families and school personnel both feel valued for their expertise, when the focus is on solutions and when efforts seem to lead to results, collective trust grows. When families feel included, positive, and committed, collective trust grows. As a result of strong collective trust, families and school personnel each feel more effective in their separate roles - they each feel more confident in setting a high expectation for their children and students, they are resilient when they encounter difficulties, and seek and use feedback. In this way, trust is a keystone for partnerships between the school and the home, and ultimately the fuel that launches student success.

# **Communicating to Build Trust**

Use the tool below to reflect on how well your current RIMP letters to families contribute to building trust with families. For each trust-building trait, reflect on the words of the current RIMP letter and determine if it is a strength or an area for improvement. When you are finished, revise your current RIMP letters to align with the policy requirements outlined above and to also serve as a powerful opportunity for building trust with families.

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| **Trust-building traits** | **Keepers:**  What does the letter do well? | **Polishers:**  What could be improved? |
| Is the **tone** collaborative, professional, and engaged? |  |  |
| Is the **focus** oriented to academics? |  |  |
| Does it **value families**’ expertise? |  |  |
| Is the **message** proactive, solutions-focused, and strategic? |  |  |
| Is the **mood** inclusive, positive, and committed? |  |  |