

Sample Letter to Families - Elementary

This is an example of a letter an elementary school might send home at the start of the 2015 school year. It uses the Value of *Future Preparation* to explain why the changes in teaching and learning that will result from Common Core State Standards implementation are necessary. It also uses the Explanatory Metaphor *Cooking with Information* to establish a more productive view of the learning process and give some concrete examples of how students might experience the instructional shifts required by CCSS.

Dear Proctor Elementary School Community,

Welcome to the first day of school! We're thrilled to have the opportunity to help your students reach their full potential this year.

This summer our staff spent time thinking through the question: When our kindergarteners graduate in 2027, or when our upper elementary students are just about to enter their careers, in what knowledge and skills will they need to be ready for the next step in their lives? California's adoption of the Common Core State Standards inspired this inquiry because these updated learning goals are guiding schools toward preparing all students to be ready to move on to college or into a satisfying career when they graduate.

The answer we came to, after many discussions involving teachers, support staff, administrators, and families, is that Common Core is inviting us to remodel the way we teach, and that's a good thing.

We live in a constantly changing world, saturated with information and new ideas. In order for our students to become adults who can successfully navigate this world, they have to learn how to use information like cooks use ingredients. This means learning the qualities of good information, where it comes from, what it can be used for, and how to use it in multiple contexts. It means learning to combine information and use thinking tools such as research, writing, and problem solving to create new information. That kind of learning, like learning to cook, comes from hands-on experiences, opportunities to experiment and make mistakes, and opportunities to refine and try new approaches.

That's what learning at Proctor is going to look like this year - students working with ideas in more involved ways. So, you can and should expect your students to come home eager to talk about what they've learned, to connect it to the world around them, and to experiment with new ideas. Expect fewer worksheets with questions that only have one right answer, and more projects that require students to really think and apply what they know. Expect teachers to act more like mentor chefs, setting new challenges and introducing new techniques as learners are ready for them.

You, like our teachers, are students' mentor chefs, too. You have a critical role to play in providing our students with opportunities to learn and explore, giving them feedback on what's working and what's not, and encouraging their persistence both when they succeed and when they make mistakes. Ask your children questions. Ask their teachers questions. Look for ways to keep engaging their curiosity beyond the school walls.

Any remodeling job is a team effort – and we need you in this process. We look forward to another year of working together to build a bright future for Proctor students – and for all in our community.

Signed –

[Principal] [Teacher Leader] [PTA Leader]

Sample Letter to Families - Middle/Secondary

This is an example of a letter a junior high or high school might send home at the start of the 2015 school year. It uses the Value of *Future Preparation* to explain why the changes in teaching and learning that will result from Common Core State Standards implementation are necessary. It also uses the Explanatory Metaphor *Information Drivers* to establish a more productive view of the learning process and give some concrete examples of how students might experience the instructional shifts required by CCSS.

Dear Proctor High Community,

Welcome to the first day of school! We're thrilled to have the opportunity to help your students reach their full potential this year.

This summer our staff spent time thinking through the question: As our students work their way ever closer toward high school completion, what knowledge and skills will they need to be ready for the next step in their lives? California's adoption of the Common Core State Standards inspired this inquiry because these updated learning goals are guiding schools toward preparing all students to be ready to move on to college or into a satisfying career when they graduate.

The answer we came to, after many discussions involving teachers, support staff, administrators, and families, is that Common Core is inviting us to rethink the way we teach, and that's a good thing.

We live in a constantly changing world, saturated with information and new ideas. Today's students are on an information journey - and they need the kinds of experiences that let them "get their hands on the wheel." Just as new drivers can only learn so much from the passenger seat, students grappling with ideas in the literature, math, science, history, and other subjects need direct experience and plenty of time to practice making use of concepts. That kind of learning, like learning to drive in a parking lot, involves opportunities to experiment and make mistakes in the safety of the classroom, with supportive and experienced teachers by their side, setting new challenges as learners are ready for them.

That's what learning at Proctor is going to look like this year - students working with ideas in more involved ways - finding, accessing, evaluating, and creating knowledge. Our students are familiar with this kind of relevant, applied teaching, and in the past we have seen them thrive when they've had a chance to drive their own learning. We are excited to do this kind of teaching more often, especially in English language arts and math courses. The signs of students getting their hands on the wheel of learning might be math problems that involve more than one way to get to the answer, or ask students to explain the mental map they used to arrive. Or, you might notice that when students are reading a novel, they might also read non-fiction text that explains the historical period of the setting. These are just two examples of how students will be asked to think more deeply and make connections between academic content and the world beyond the school walls.

You, like our teachers, are students' "driving instructors," too. You have a critical role to play in providing our students with opportunities to learn and explore, giving them feedback on what's working and what's not, and encouraging their persistence both when they succeed and when they make mistakes. Making sure that our young people can handle their role in the "driver's seat" of learning is a team effort – and we need you in this process. We look forward to another year of working together to build a bright future for Proctor students – and for all in our community.

Signed –

[Principal] [Teacher Leader] [PTA Leader]