

# Breaking Down the Classroom Wall: Making Learning Visible to Families



# THE INVISIBLE CLASSROOM PROBLEM

## The Problem: When Learning Stays Behind Closed Doors

Every day, powerful learning happens in classrooms. Students discover, create, analyze, and grow. But when they go home, families often hear:

- "What did you learn today?" → "Nothing."
- "What are you working on?" → "Stuff."
- "How can I help?" → "I don't need any."

The result? Families feel disconnected from their children's education, and students miss out on the support and reinforcement that comes from family understanding and engagement. They also would like to support the learning by providing resources to engage with and help the child build on the work but don't have enough information to be able to connect.

## Why Traditional Communication Doesn't Work

Most schools try to solve this with:

- Lengthy curriculum documents filled with topics, standards, and expectations
- Weekly newsletters that share fun activities or provide reminders about upcoming assessments but do not clarify connections to the learning goals
- Parent-teacher conferences focused on grades rather than growth
- Back-to-school nights that overview policies, not learning journeys
- Quick overviews that do not provide the big picture.

These approaches keep learning invisible because they focus on what teachers are doing rather than what students are experiencing and why it matters.



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## THE INVISIBLE CLASSROOM PROBLEM

### The Solution: Making Learning Transparent

What if families could see into the classroom not through a window, but through a story?

Suppose it was a story of what their child is learning — one that narrates what is really important about what their child is learning? The story would be told so that it could be shared with their child. The parent could talk with their child and ask more specific questions rather than “what did you learn today?” — rather, “what did you learn today about XXX?”

What if they understood not just what their child is studying, but why it matters and how they can support the learning at home?

This guide shows you how to break down the classroom wall using curriculum storyboards – visual learning narratives that make education transparent, engaging, and accessible to families.



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# WHAT FAMILIES REALLY WANT TO KNOW

## Beyond "How Was School Today?"

Traditional communication (grades, activity lists, behavior reports) doesn't answer these deeper questions that families care about. When families ask about school, they're really asking how to:

### *See How Their Child Is Growing:*

- What is my child discovering about themselves as a learner?
- What is my child realizing that they can do that they were not able to do just a short time ago?
- How does your child celebrate successes?
- In what ways does your child show that they are aware of their growth and improvement as learners?

### *Show Relevance of Learning:*

- How does this connect to their life and future?
- What does this learning look like in the workplaces outside of school?
- How might I provide outside of school experiences to stimulate possible futures for my child?
- Who might be some audiences for my child to share their learning experiences?

### *Support Effective Learning Behaviors:*

- What are some ways of showing interest in what they are learning?
- How can I help them become more self-directed?
- What are some ways that I can support my child persisting even when I see that they are struggling?
- How can I make it safe for my child to talk about what is not working in school?
- What resources or materials might help at home?
- What might I be noticing or celebrating at home?



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# THE CURRICULUM STORYBOARD SOLUTION

## Using the Curriculum Storyboard to Stimulate Conversations About Learning

Curriculum storyboards can transform how families understand and connect with their child's education. Instead of academic jargon and dense documents, storyboards tell the story of learning in accessible, engaging ways.

### What Makes Storyboards Family-Friendly:

- **Visual Communication:** Images and clear layout make complex learning immediately understandable, regardless of families' educational background or primary language.
- **Student-Centered Language:** Written from the student perspective ("I can..." statements, "We will explore...") so families see learning through their child's eyes.
- **Purpose and Relevance:** Essential questions and real-world connections help families understand why the learning matters and how it connects to life beyond school.
- **Learning Journey Preview:** Families can see where learning is headed, what to expect, and how to recognize growth and progress along the way.
- **Conversation Starters:** Built-in essential questions and focus statements give families specific, meaningful ways to engage with their child about learning.



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# STORYBOARD FAMILY ENGAGEMENT STRATEGIES

## How to Use Curriculum Storyboards for Family Connection

These strategies are designed to inspire possibilities for your classroom or school. Experiment with them and see which approaches resonate most with your families. Any of the strategies can be adjusted to connect more meaningfully with your community. See pages 7-10 for examples.



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# STORYBOARD FAMILY ENGAGEMENT STRATEGIES

## Strategy 1: Back to School Communication

Share the storyboard with families and describe how it is intended to be used. The following could be a script to clarify the value of curriculum storyboards.

"This curriculum storyboard is your family's visual roadmap for your child's learning journey ahead. As you explore it together, you'll find key information to help support your child's success at home.

- **A glimpse of what's coming:** Just like a movie trailer gets you excited for the full film, this storyboard gives you and your child exciting previews of upcoming activities, projects, and learning experiences. Whether you're looking at the whole school year or specific units, you'll both be able to see how everything connects and discover the story of your child's learning adventure.
- **Shows you "Why this matters":** When you can see the purpose behind what your child is learning, it becomes easier to get excited about it at home. You'll discover how the curriculum connects to your child's interests, future goals, and real-world applications that matter to your family.
- **Shows you "How they'll learn":** The storyboard visually shows you the different ways your child will learn – through collaboration with classmates, hands-on experiments, creative projects, and meaningful discussions.
- **Creates excitement for learning:** The colors, images, and overall design are chosen to spark enthusiasm and create a sense of community. Both you and your child are welcomed and eager to dive into this learning journey together.
- **Gets you wondering "What's next?":** Great storyboards hint at exciting challenges and discoveries ahead, leaving you and your child curious and looking forward to what you'll explore next.
- **Shows your child as the hero of their story:** Throughout this journey, your child won't just be sitting and listening – they'll become explorers, problem-solvers, and creators as they dive deep into their learning."



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# STORYBOARD FAMILY ENGAGEMENT STRATEGIES

## Strategy 2: Learning Launch Communications

Before each unit begins, share the storyboard with families.

- Email Template #1:
  - "We're about to begin an exciting learning journey: [Unit Title]. I'm sharing our curriculum storyboard so you can see what [Student Name] will be discovering and why it matters. Notice the essential questions – these are perfect conversation starters for home!"
- Email Template #2:
  - "We're about to begin an exciting learning journey: [Unit Title]. I'm sharing our curriculum storyboard so you can see what [Student Name] will be discovering and why it matters. Notice the visuals on the storyboard – these are perfect conversation starters for home!"
- Email Template #3:
  - "We're about to begin an exciting learning journey: [Unit Title]. I'm sharing our curriculum storyboard so you can see what [Student Name] will be discovering and why it matters. Read or interact with your child on the focus of the story. What do they already know about the topic? What are they interested in learning more about?"



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# STORYBOARD FAMILY ENGAGEMENT STRATEGIES

## Strategy 3: Home Learning Connections

*Help families extend learning.*

### Connection Ideas:

- "This week, ask your child about [essential question]. Listen for how their thinking develops!"
- "You might notice [skill/concept] when you find a [real-world example]. Point it out!"
- "If your child mentions [topic], ask them to teach you what they've learned."
- "These are some prompts to ask your child about [topic]...."

## Strategy 4: Progress Celebrations

*Use of "I can" statements to help families recognize growth.*

### Progress Updates:

- "This week [Student Name] achieved: [specific 'I can' statement]. You might see this when [home example]."
- "Ask your child to show you [specific skill]. They're proud of this new ability!"
- "Ask to see your child's learning goals tracker and listen to what they describe as strengths, areas of improvement, and next steps. That's showing persistence and growth!"



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# STORYBOARD FAMILY ENGAGEMENT STRATEGIES

## Strategy 5: Learning Conferences

*Use storyboards to guide meaningful conversations..*

### Conference Framework:

- Start with the storyboard: "Here's the learning story we've been living..."
- Reference essential questions: "Notice how [Student Name]'s thinking has grown..."
- Connect to home: "Here's what you might see at home..."
- Plan together: "Here's some ways you might support the next part of our journey..."



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## SIGNS OF SUCCESS

How do you know if family-visible learning is making an impact? Design feedback moments such as focus groups, surveys, 1:1 conversations.

### Indicators of Success:

- **Families showing enthusiasm** — they express excitement about upcoming units and share positive reactions to the storyboard.
- **Students bringing learning home** by sharing stories, teaching family members, or continuing discussions sparked in class.
- **Parents referencing storyboards** in conferences, emails, or casual check-ins, showing they see the value of the tool.
- **Family engagement growing in quality and depth**, moving from general interest (“How’s school?”) to meaningful learning-focused dialogue.
- **Stories of home-school connection are emerging**, which demonstrates that the storyboard is bringing classroom learning into family life.
- **Feedback leading to refinement** — families share what helps, what sparks curiosity, and where they want more, and you adjust communications accordingly.



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## BEYOND INDIVIDUAL CLASSROOMS

While individual teachers can begin making learning visible to families, comprehensive transformation requires school-wide implementation of curriculum storyboard methodology.

### The Bigger Picture

When entire schools adopt curriculum storyboard methodology for family engagement:

- Families develop shared understanding of learning expectations
- Students experience consistent transparency across all subjects
- Teachers collaborate on effective family communication strategies
- School culture shifts toward true learning partnerships
- Community engagement and support increase measurably

### Ready for School-Wide Impact?

If this approach resonates with your vision for family engagement, explore how comprehensive curriculum storyboard methodology can transform your entire school's approach to learning transparency and family connection.

#### Contact us to learn about:

- Professional development in storyboard-based family engagement
- School-wide implementation strategies
- Advanced communication protocols and training
- Measuring and sustaining family engagement improvements



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