Cultivating a Welcoming Campus That Families Choose

August 18, 2026

ECTAC

Orange County Public Schools

Welcome!

Mariel Milano — *Director*

Victoria Tierney — *Sr. Administrator*

Family & Community Engagement

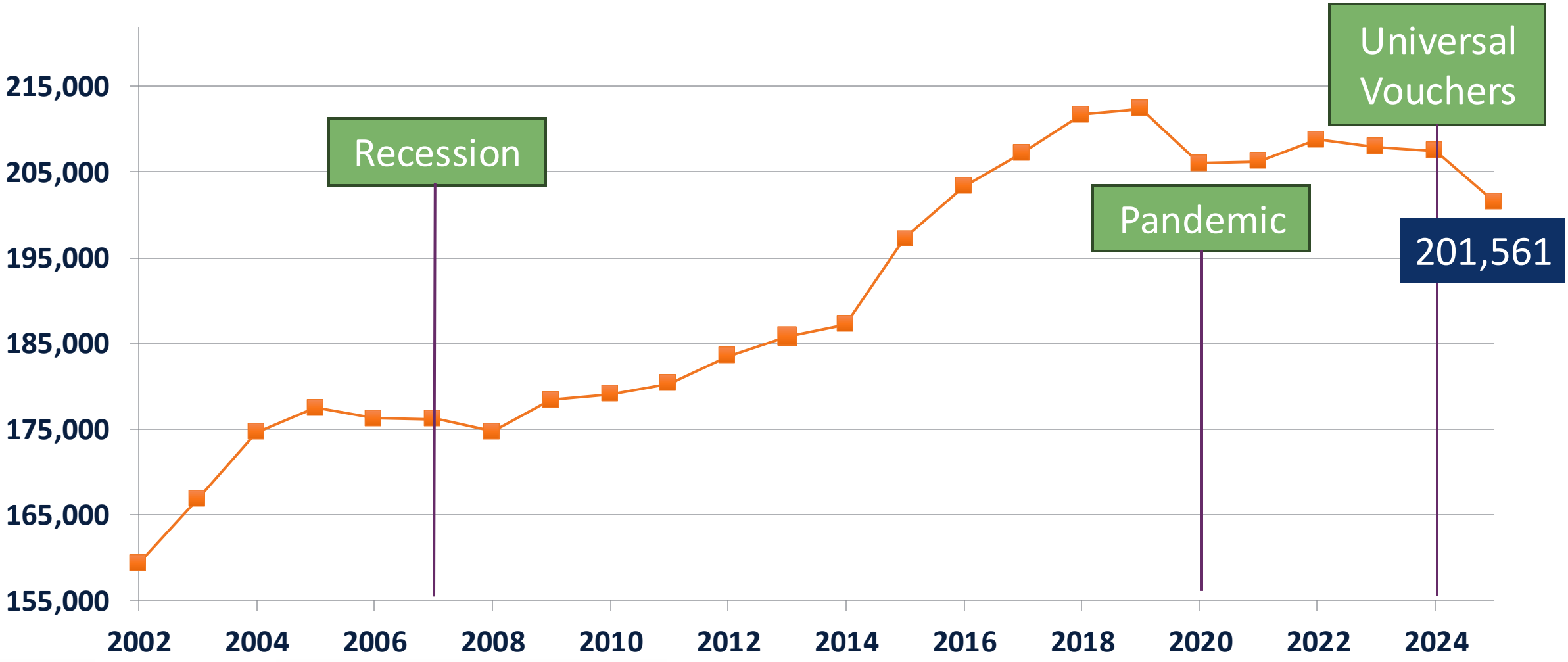
Objectives

- ***Analyze*** the strategic shift from transactional customer service to a "Fan-First" culture.
- ***Apply*** multi-dimensional tools to evaluate school-site environments across four core areas.
- ***Design*** inclusive, responsive back-to-school and onboarding experiences integrating universal welcoming practices and targeted linguistic accommodations.

Why a Welcoming Campus Matters Now

Student Enrollment

Traditional, Charter, Exceptional and Alternative Schools



Parent Feedback

According to the 2024-2025 National Parents Issues Poll*

- **40% of parents** are likely to consider switching schools next year
- **70% of parents** are likely to consider other school options
- **Among their top three concerns** "How welcoming, respectful and supportive school staff are"

** Source: CaissaK12*

"Trust and relationships go hand in hand.

It's important that our child's school works with us to gain an understanding of what we need and what our student needs to succeed."

- *Surveyed Parent*

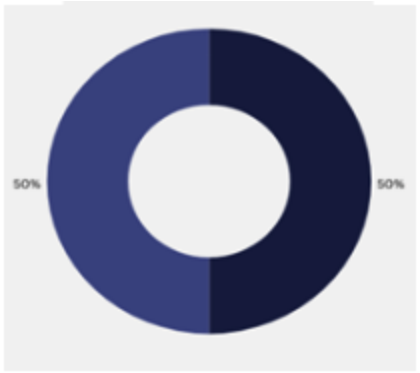
What the Data Shows

National and local enrollment data make clear what it costs a campus when a family chooses somewhere else.

The competition is real.

OCPS customer service can be a market differentiator, and our data shows opportunities for transforming the family experience.

OCPS Secret Shopper Survey



50%

Portrayed an engaging and inviting approach with parent

Student Enrollment and the Fandom Shift

Families have choices…

- Charters, magnets, vouchers, and open enrollment all compete for the same students, and enrollment drives the budget.
- Customer service and marketing are NOT about selling they are about trust.
- The thing a principal can control is how the campus feels to a family the first time they walk in or call.
- This session sets one expectation- Principals set the tone for the welcoming environment on their campus, and they monitor it the same way they monitor safety and instruction.

A Customer vs A Fan

A Customer

- Takes the service and moves on
- Expects you to be competent
- Leaves when something better shows up
- Puts up with problems quietly

A Fan

- Feels valued, heard and connected
- Becomes an advocate and partner
- Gives you grace when things go wrong
- Already trusts you before a crisis hits

Big idea: When families feel like fans, trust shows up before you ever need it.

Create that "Fan" Feeling

How can you create that “fan” feeling on your campus?

- ***Create*** an unforgettable experience
- ***Personalize*** the relationship
- ***Empower*** your team to solve problems
- ***Involve*** the entire team

Auditing the Campus Experience

4 Campus Areas + 1 Fan-First Leader=

Activity: Walking in a Stranger's Shoes

Rate each item 1-5

- Can I immediately tell where to go?
- Would I feel welcomed?
- Is the space clean and comfortable?
- Are signs helpful or mostly rules?
- Do I see evidence that families belong here?
- Could I navigate if I didn't speak English?
- Would my child feel safe here?
- Would I want to come back here?

Reveal Your Identity

- How did your persona change what you noticed?

- What did only certain personas notice?

Families don't need perfection...

- They need to feel **expected.**
- They need to feel **respected.**
- They need to feel like **they belong.**

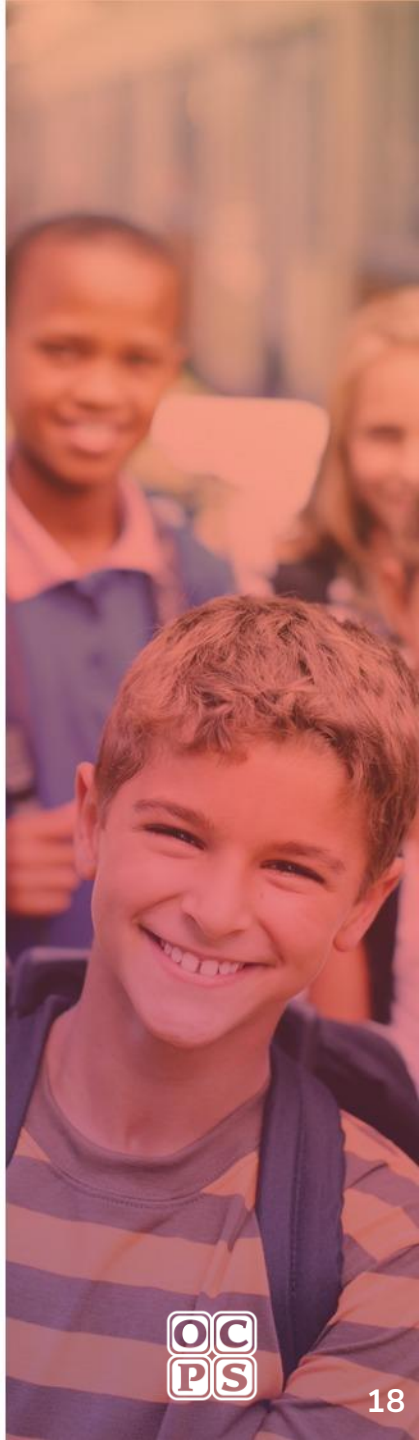
OCCPTA/FEDAC Feedback

Physical Environment

- Clean, well lit, good pest control
- Nice décor, landscaping, signage
- Feel safe (e.g. play area, parking)
- Updated furniture
- Motivational messages
- Sunshades, hydration stations, fans

Digital, Print, and Written Communication

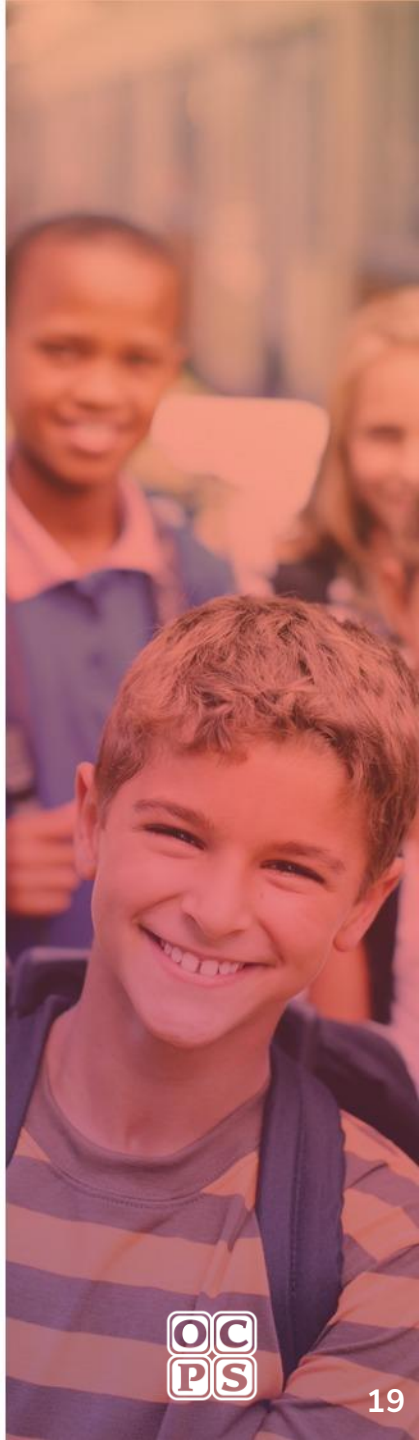
- Pictures of happy children and staff
- Available in multiple languages
- Clear, concise, and to the point
- Standards of communication-solid platform
- Further develop features of ParentSquare
- Television and radio promotions of school activities



OCCPTA/FEDAC Feedback

Practices and Procedures

- Welcoming environment in the front office
- Posters in the front office highlighting positive programs and awards
- Having PTA visible in front office
- Welcoming drop off and pick up procedures
- Always have a non-digital option
- Consistent communication standards across all schools
- Parents should be informed by the teacher or the school about grades and classes without the parent having to search for it.
- Administrators are well informed of policies and procedures
- Standard, universal forms for all schools
- Safety procedures detailed

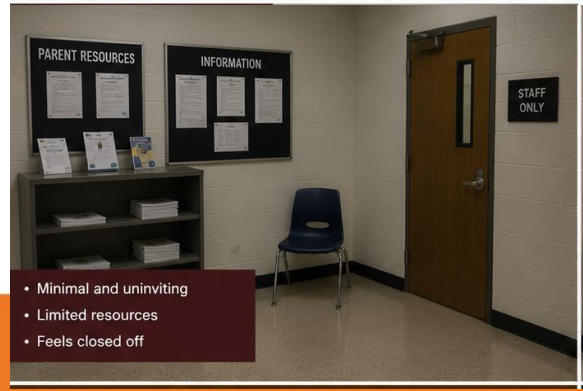


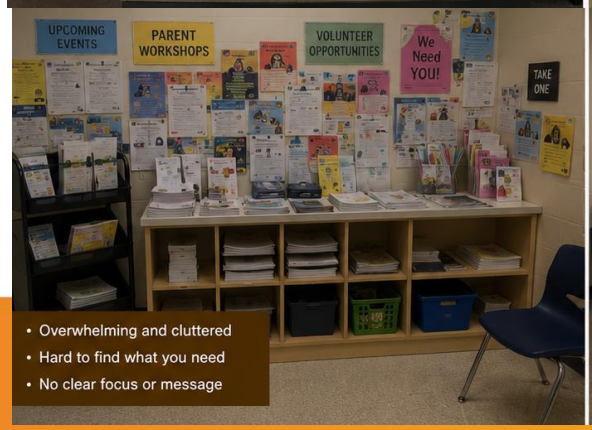
Families don't experience our intention.

They experience our environment.

Welcome Bucks

- Each table team gets $ 500 to welcome and engage families in the front office. $250 is Title I/ $250 is General or External Funding
- Select improvements that give the community the biggest return on investment.
- Write in one other idea for an allowable federal expense.





Reflection Prompts

- How would a stranger feel if they walked into one of the schools I serve today?

- Which families at our schools most need to feel seen? What is one step we take can take toward that through Federal Programs

The front office is often the schools' "first classroom" for families.

Activating the Base:
A Welcome for Every Family

Universal Welcome Practices

Back-to School Pulse Check Poll

- Use ParentSquare Poll
- *What's one change you'd like to see at our school?*
- *What do you love most about our school?*

Welcome Center

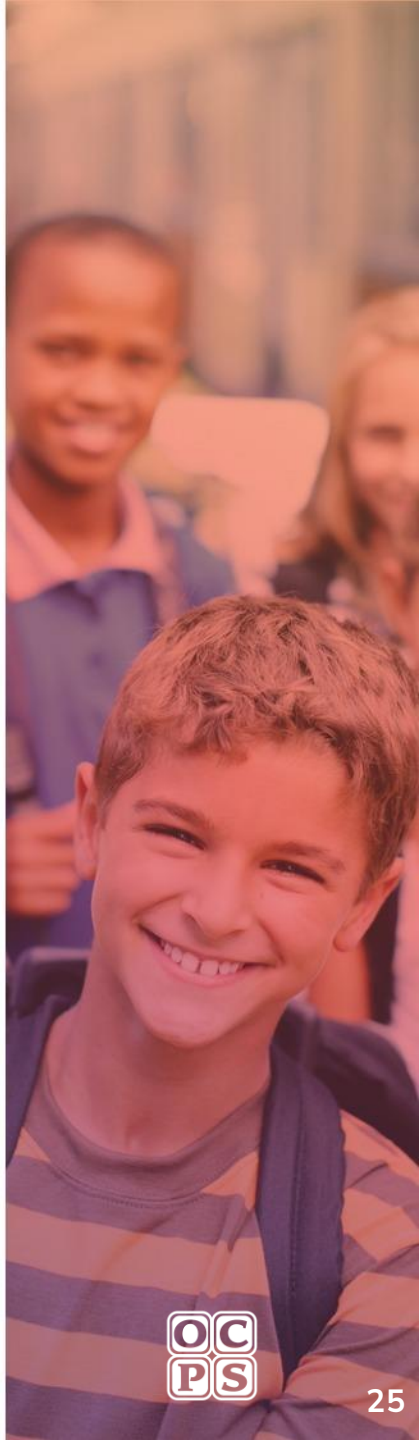
- Turn the main office into a welcome and resource center
- Welcome packets with a community services directory, calendars, list of local business partners and PEL.

High-Impact Back-to-School Events

- Run relaxed, welcoming events
- Have teachers make positive contact with families before day one

Communication Template Toolkit

- Use the back-to-school communication template toolkit (School Leaders | Classroom Teachers) to ensure consistent, warm outreach



Basic Elements in a FRC

School colors!

Pictures

Headings

Essential Information to Include:

- School Event Calendar
- Contact Information
- School Specific Resources & Services
- How to Sign Up

Family-Friendly Resources

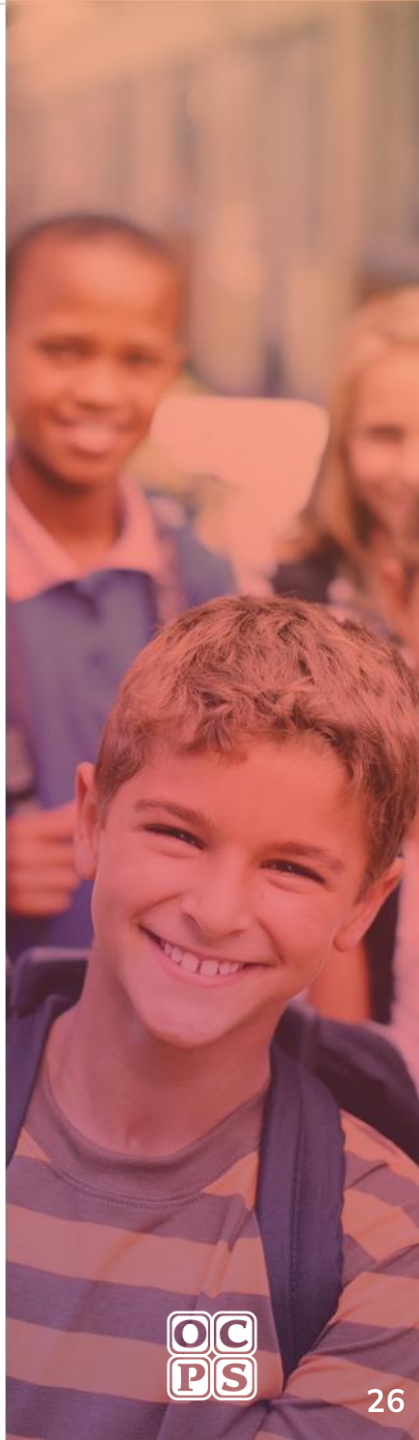
- Community Resources
- QR Codes/ Links
- Wellness & Safety Tips

Celebrations/ Highlights

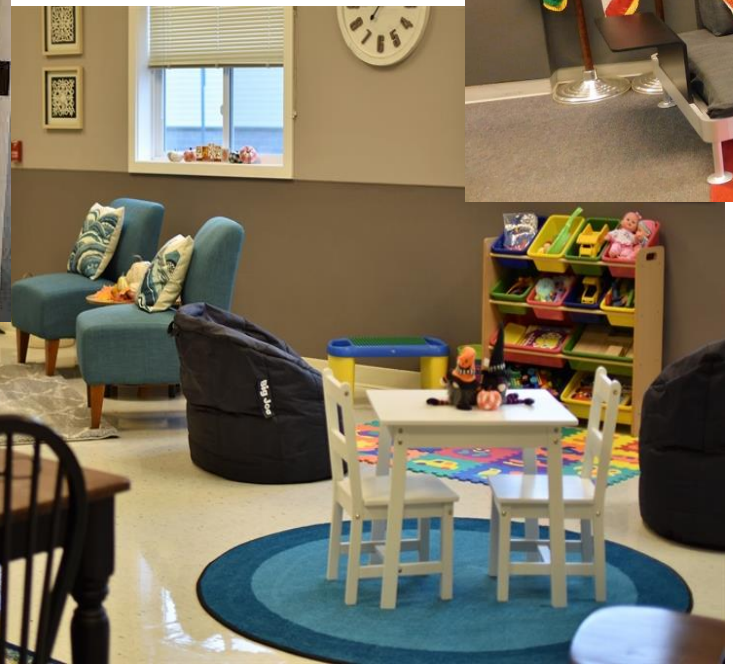
- Family Spotlight
- Photo Wall
- Student & Family Success Stories

Interactive Elements

- Family Feedback Corner
- "Did you know" section
- Gratitude board

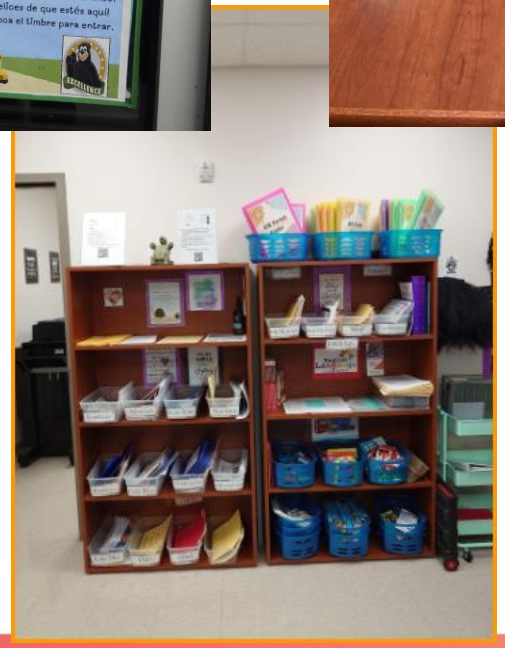


Welcome Center Examples



Welcome Packet Tool Kit

Welcome Center & FRC Examples



[Family Resource Center (FRC) Starter Kit]

A Welcome for Diverse Families

Visible Heritage

Remove Barriers

Multilingual Access

Leadership Move: Name the person responsible for the welcome center, and front office language access .

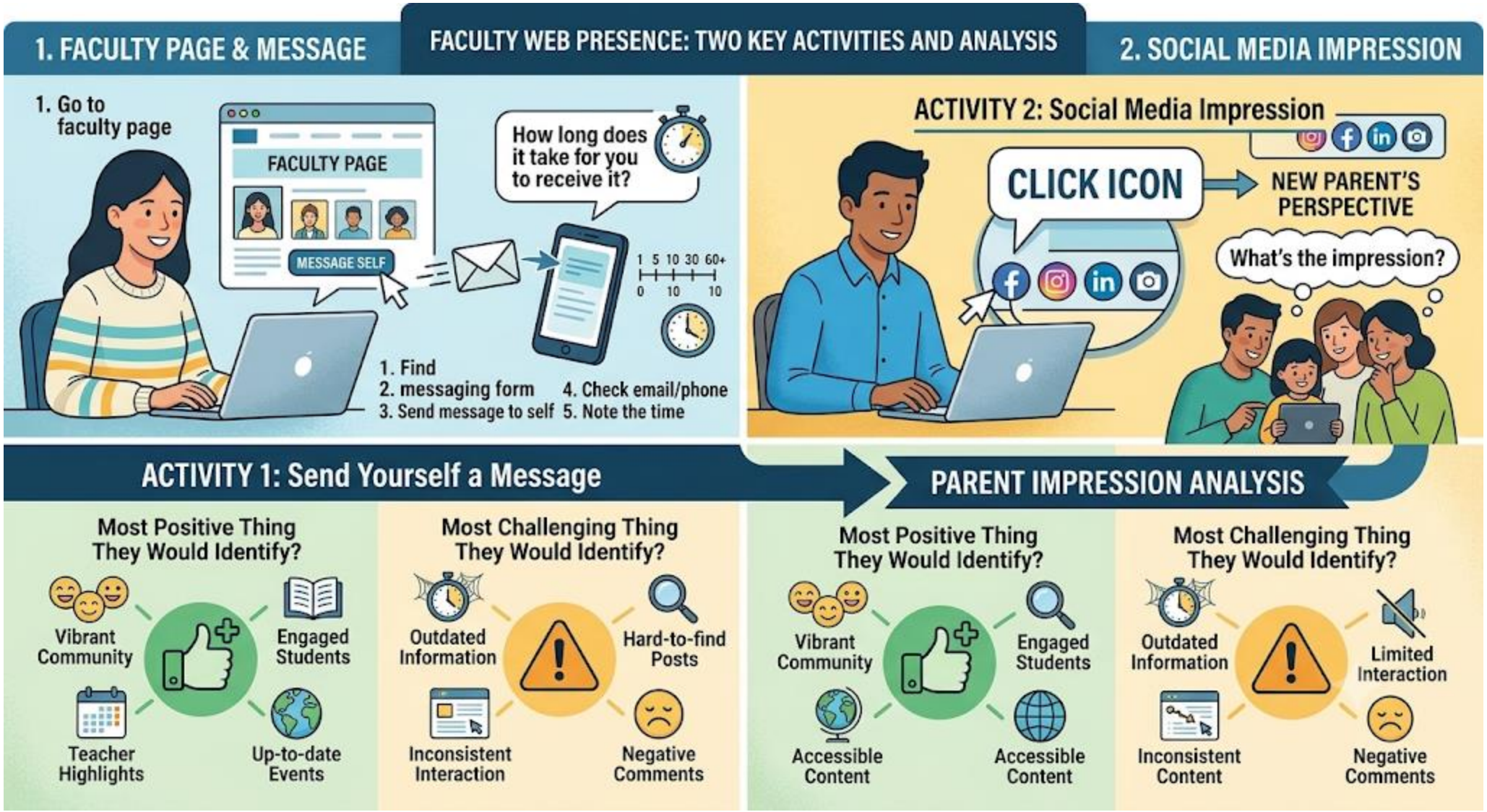
The Invisible Fanbase: Off-Site & Digital

The Invisible Fan Mindset

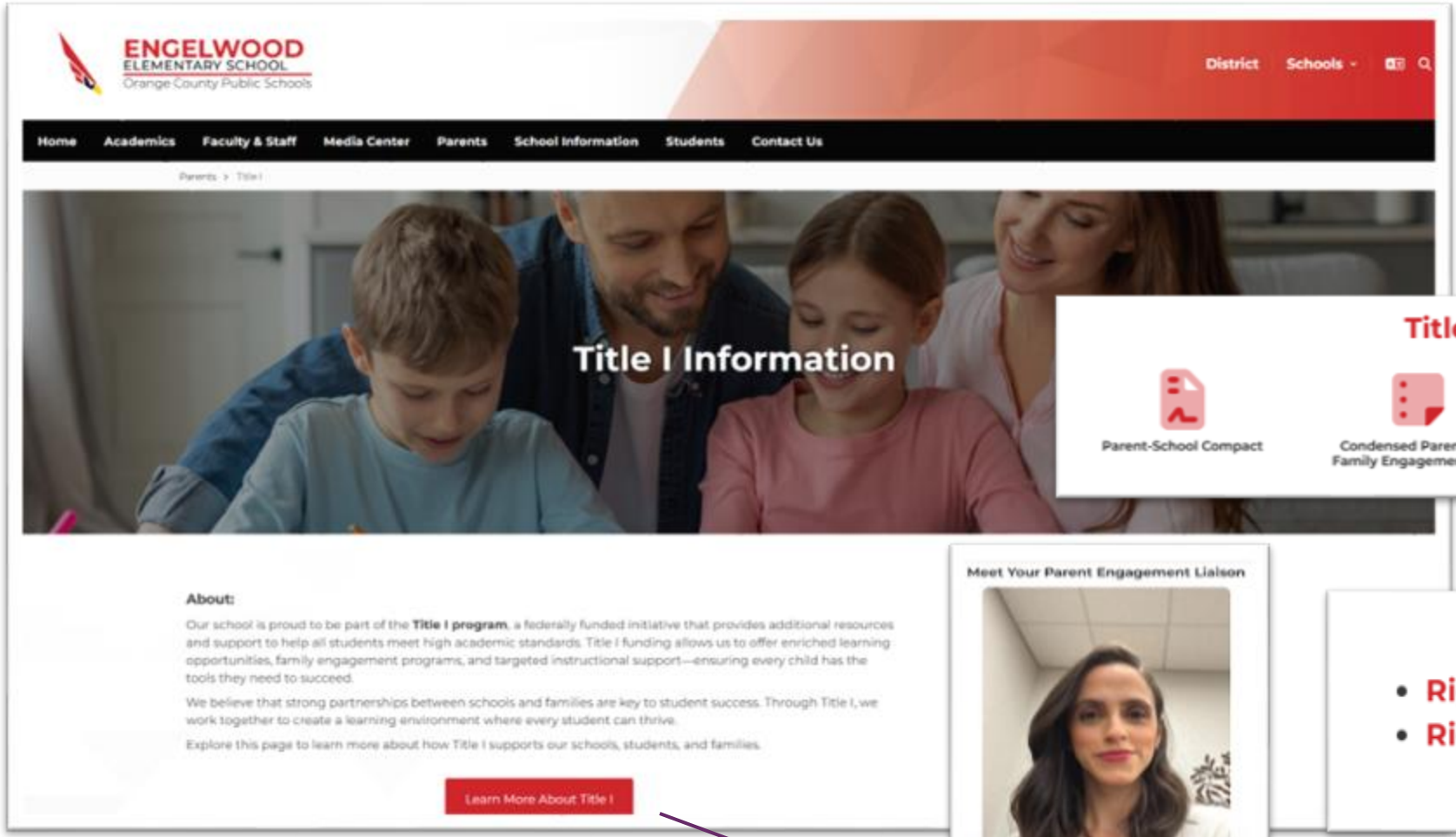
A parent who can't come in because of work, transportation, or a shift schedule still cares about and wants the best for their child.

The campus must come to them.

Digital Front Door Activity

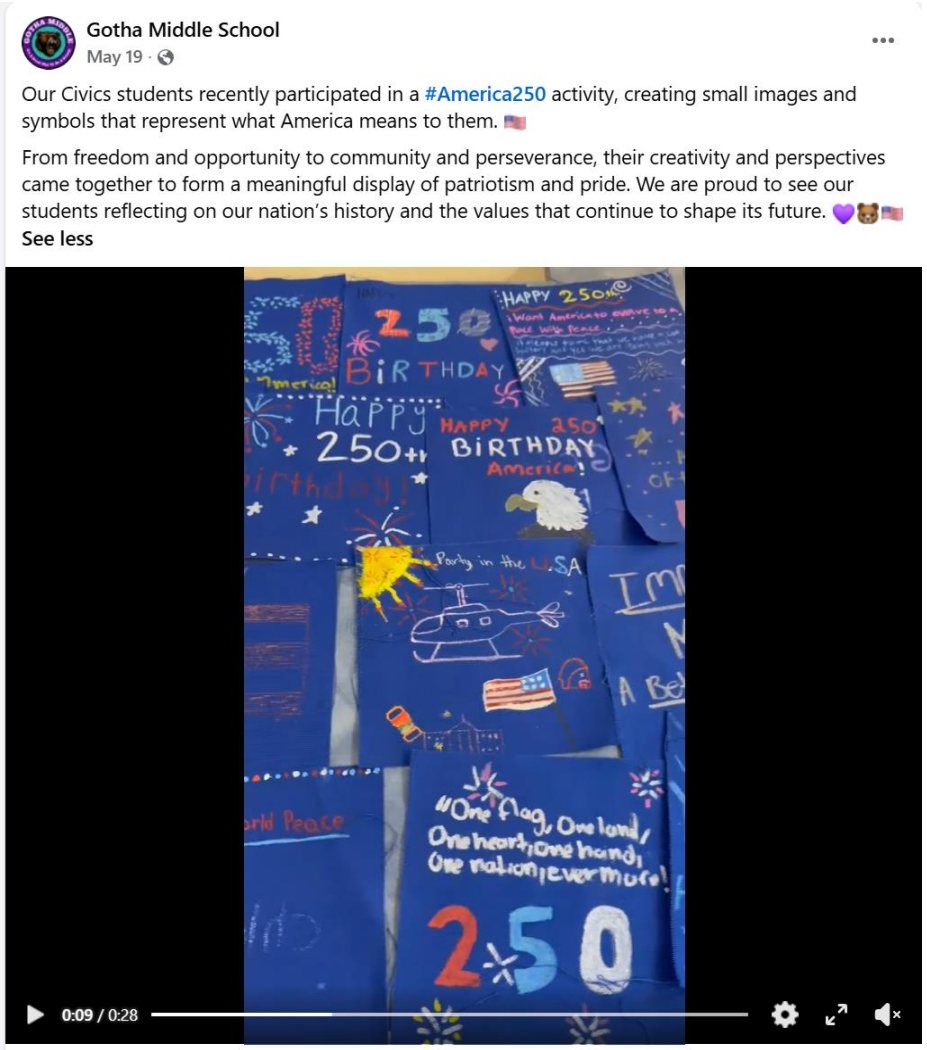


Title I School Resource Pages



- Right to Know Letter – English
- Right to Know Letter – Spanish

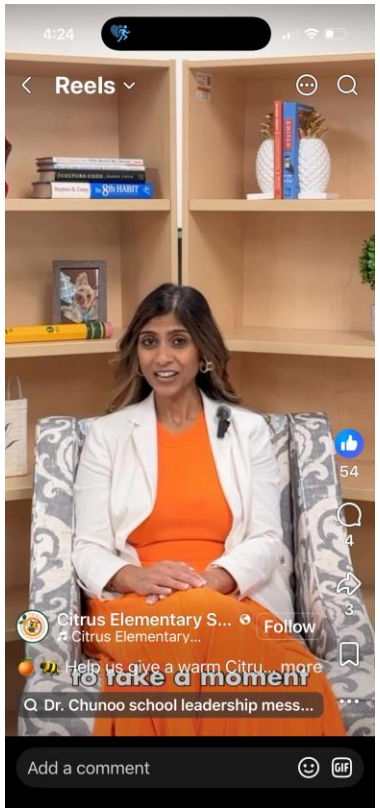
Invisible Fan Base Strategies

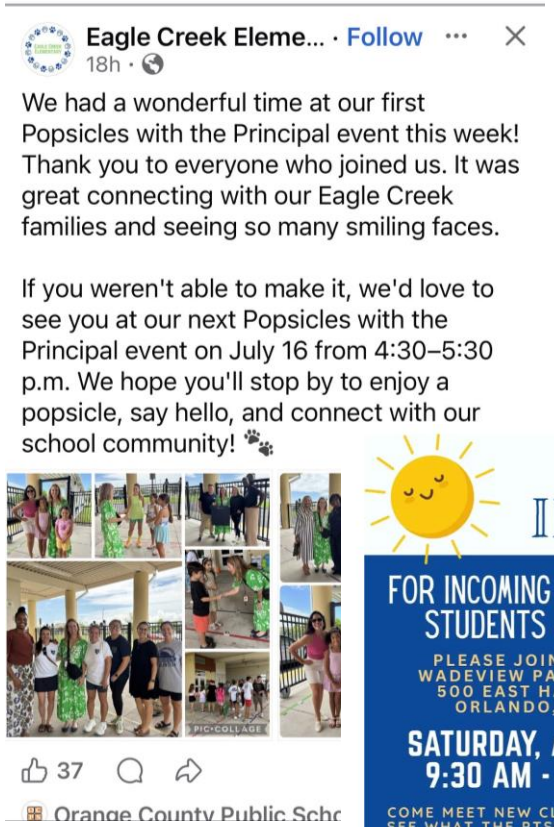


Share videos or images of student work

Share celebrations, traditions, and performances

Ways to Reach the Invisible Fan

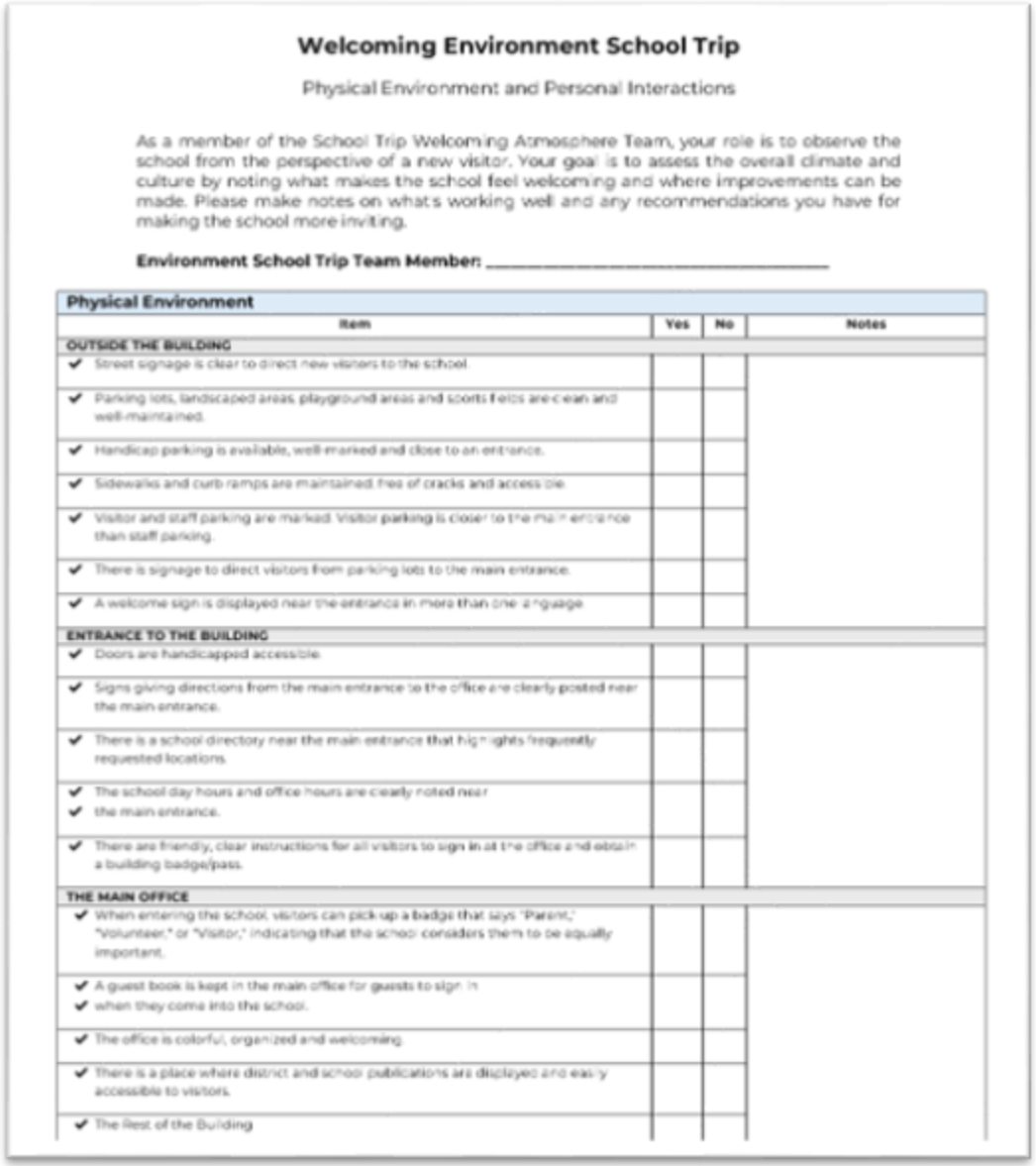




How is your school district planning to engage Title I families who didn't attend on-campus back-to-school events?

Build Your Monitoring Habit

Welcoming Environment Tool



Welcoming Environment School Trip

Physical Environment and Personal Interactions

As a member of the School Trip Welcoming Atmosphere Team, your role is to observe the school from the perspective of a new visitor. Your goal is to assess the overall climate and culture by noting what makes the school feel welcoming and where improvements can be made. Please make notes on what's working well and any recommendations you have for making the school more inviting.

Environment School Trip Team Member: _____

Physical Environment

Item	Yes	No	Notes
OUTSIDE THE BUILDING			
✔ Street signage is clear to direct new visitors to the school.			
✔ Parking lots, landscaped areas, playground areas and sports fields are clean and well-maintained.			
✔ Handicap parking is available, well-marked and close to an entrance.			
✔ Sidewalks and curb ramps are maintained, free of cracks and accessible.			
✔ Visitor and staff parking are marked. Visitor parking is closer to the main entrance than staff parking.			
✔ There is signage to direct visitors from parking lots to the main entrance.			
✔ A welcome sign is displayed near the entrance in more than one language.			
ENTRANCE TO THE BUILDING			
✔ Doors are handicapped accessible.			
✔ Signs giving directions from the main entrance to the office are clearly posted near the main entrance.			
✔ There is a school directory near the main entrance that highlights frequently requested locations.			
✔ The school day hours and office hours are clearly noted near ✔ the main entrance.			
✔ There are friendly, clear instructions for all visitors to sign in at the office and obtain a building badge/pass.			
THE MAIN OFFICE			
✔ When entering the school, visitors can pick up a badge that says "Parent," "Volunteer," or "Visitor," indicating that the school considers them to be equally important.			
✔ A guest book is kept in the main office for guests to sign in ✔ when they come into the school.			
✔ The office is colorful, organized and welcoming.			
✔ There is a place where district and school publications are displayed and easily accessible to visitors.			
✔ The Rest of the Building			

Create a Monitoring Habit

The Cadence

- 2-3 times per year
  - Back-to-School (July/Aug)
  - Winter Break Return (Dec/Jan)
  - Enrollment (March/April)
- Walk your campus
- Complete look-fors checklist
- Make adjustments

Walk It With a Team

- Administrator,
- Custodian,
- SAC/PTA Member
- Community Member
- A mixed team can give a different read than going alone

Every message and every interaction is a promise to a family.

Contact Us!

Contact Us

Mariel Milano

Director

Victoria Tierney

Sr. Administrator

407-317-3200

PREPARE | INSPIRE | EMPOWER

PREPARE | INSPIRE | EMPOWER

PREPARE | INSPIRE | EMPOWER

Orange County Public Schools