

4 Essentials for Family Engagement

There is no precedent for blended or remote learning at this scale. Therefore, building positive relationships between families and caregivers is critical for students' success. The manner in which educators communicate and interact with families affects the extent and quality of parents' home involvement with their children's learning¹. Supporting family engagement and building parents' knowledge and skills in ways that honor their strengths creates authentic connection and long-lasting partnerships. This document highlights key areas for high-quality, equitable family engagement for Delaware leaders, including a sample communication for families. Through research and evidence, the following themes emerge for family engagement:

- 1 Be a First Responder
- 2 Communicate Effectively and Often
- 3 Families as Assets to Learning
- 4 Encouraging Family Agency and Attendance

Get Connected for Learning Tips

- ☐ Schedule virtual home visits with every family to build community
- ☐ Create virtual drop-in hours with multilingual staff
- ☐ Establish an ongoing feedback loop

1 Be a First Responder

Supporting families now by addressing food insecurity, essential health, and mental health needs builds bridges that will last for many years. Opening lines of authentic communication builds trust and partnership needed to be successful during this challenging time (i.e., asking How are you doing? What does your family need? Identify resources for food, housing, health, daycare and immigration).

2 Communicate Effectively and Often

Communicating effectively with all families includes a balance of one-way and two-way communication². Communication with Multilingual families requires translation -it is also the law³. Coordinate communication across offices to synthesize messaging for families and minimize multiple instructions and expectations. When communicating expectations keep these points in mind:

- ☐ **Personalize outreach**
- ☐ **Leverage and articulate multilingual channels** Ensure language resources are in place at the district level. Utilize translations for all communication and confirm multilingual families can communicate with educators
- ☐ **Communicate with purpose** Messages home should be short, to the point, deliberately timed, and purposeful⁴
- ☐ **Categorize information** People skim, write using headings and bullets so it is easily understood
- ☐ **Share actionable information** Establish frequency and routine to share actionable and relevant information early and often
- ☐ **Auto enroll** Automatically enroll families in communications with the option for them to opt out
- ☐ **Write for Access** Make all communication accessible and brief – research suggests a 4th grade level

Family Communication Strategies Checklist:

- ☐ Contact every family and establish the communication systems for the year
- ☐ Be hypervigilant toward cultural diversity and communicate in a respectful and responsive tone
- ☐ Fund linguistically and culturally appropriate materials
- ☐ Empower families and caregivers to be co-designers of learning
- ☐ Utilize parent liaisons instead of robocalls and directing families to a district website

¹ American Federation of Teachers, (2007). *Building Parent-Teacher Relationships*. Washington, D.C.: American Federation of Teachers.

² Two-way communication occurs when there are interactions between families and teachers that go both ways. One-way communication occurs when the school informs the family of something.

³³ <https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/docs/dcl-factsheet-lep-parents-201501.pdf>

⁴ Rogers, T. (2020). Why no one is reading your coronavirus emails. Retrieved from <https://www.cnn.com/2020/03/13/opinions/coronavirus-emails-effective-messaging-rogers/index.html>

3 Families as Assets to Learning

Now, more than ever, we need strong school and family partnerships. Families have a unique perspective and understanding of their own children and how they learn at home. Additionally, many families learned new ways to support their children with remote instruction. Taking an assets-based approach to family and caregiver engagement emphasizes the connection to daily activities, routines, interests, talents, capabilities, and strengths of children, families and other caregivers⁵.

Encourage all educators to build genuine and respectful relationships with families and to learn about their funds of knowledge, or the essential cultural practices and information that households use to survive, get ahead, and thrive⁶. This assets-based and culturally relevant approach values everyday language and daily routines which are foundational to making connections, learning new information, and knowledge. Research also shows that students are more successful and have higher attendance when learning is culturally relevant. Valuing families and caregivers as partners requires educators to truly engage in the process together by⁷:

- **Leveraging and recognizing** the ongoing broader dialogue around racial inequities
- **Encouraging all educators** to examine their own biases, both at individual and institutional levels
- **Auditing and interrupting** exclusionary practices that deny many families⁸
- **Getting to know your families**, and their language and cultural backgrounds
- **Increasing virtual conferencing** around self-management, self-regulation, self-direction to form habits of success and social-self awareness

Get Connected for Learning Tips

- Synthesize routines, schedules, and school attendance expectations
- Publish multilingual “how to” guides for technology use and learning platforms
- Establish strategic groups and networks for support

4 Encouraging Family Agency and Attendance

Build connections to build academic collaboration. Clearly communicate expectations, roles and responsibilities with an open feedback loop. In order to encourage family agency and increase student and family attendance, consider the following guidelines:

- **Empowering families** Provide tools and at-home supports for academic and social-emotional health
- **Effectively communicate the importance of attendance** Prevent chronic absenteeism now- families and caregivers are a key partner in this effort
- **Be persistent and mindful of scheduling** Offer flexible times to connect and communicate 1:1
- **Focus on building trust** Establish an open dialogue by asking families about their goals for their children and insights about their students and the way they learn
- **Collaborate with families** Support remote and hybrid (blended learning) learning with families as they help to facilitate learning at home. Be transparent and clear about what their students are learning. Respect families’ questions, challenges, and implement feedback on the remote learning process⁹
- **Be consistent** Schedule regular communication through multiple languages and channels

Get Connected for Learning Tips

- Deploy teams with PPE to support families and ensure connectivity in their home languages
- Host in-person and socially distanced meet-greets or welcome locations in public places where families frequent
- Collaborate with community-based and faith-based organizations to share materials and expectations

⁵ Wilson, L., Mott, D., W., & Batman, D. (2004). The asset-based context matrix: A tool for assessing children’s opportunities and participating in natural environments. *Topics in Early Childhood Special Education*, 24(2), 110-120.

⁶ Moll, L. C., Amanti, C., Neff, D., & Gonzalez, N. (1992). Funds of Knowledge for teaching: Using a qualitative approach to connect homes and classrooms. *Theory into Practice*, 31(2), 132-141.

⁷ <https://www.dualcapacity.org/>

⁸ Mapp, K., & Rogers, T. (2020, July 16). Making Family-School Partnerships More Effective This Fall. EveryDay Labs. <http://www.everydaylabs.com/setting-the-stage>.

⁹ Mapp, K., & Rogers, T. (2020, July 16). Making Family-School Partnerships More Effective This Fall. EveryDay Labs. <http://www.everydaylabs.com/setting-the-stage>