



PARENT ENGAGEMENT AND SUPPORT DURING REMOTE INSTRUCTION

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INTRODUCTION

Remote learning in response to the COVID-19 pandemic further highlights the important role of parent engagement in student learning. As instruction shifts to at-home learning, parents are being asked to step into an even more active role in students' day-to-day learning, activities, and lessons that would typically take place in the school building. This report extends on the body of research linking parent and family engagement to improved student achievement by adding more recent information and recommendations for parent engagement during remote learning due to the COVID-19 pandemic.¹ In addition to secondary literature and reports from K-12 education organizations, Hanover Research also interviewed educators at national non-profits and school districts across the United States to glean additional insights into their successes and challenges related to parent engagement since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. This information is shown throughout the report in the form of direct quotes, spotlights, and profiles.²

Parent engagement is multifaceted and relevant to a wide range of program areas and aspects of student learning and development. This report focuses on parent engagement with the goal of supporting student academic learning and growth and the conditions and strategies that support this goal. There are also many confounding aspects of parent engagement specific to COVID-19 and remote learning, such as varying levels of access to devices and the Internet, which fall outside of the scope of this report. However, Hanover offers additional reports and resources on technology access and other topics relevant to supporting student and school success during the COVID-19 pandemic in the [HR Digital](#) client portal (login required).

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on our findings, Hanover Research recommends that school district leaders consider the following actions:



Offer professional development to educators on strategies for supporting parent engagement, with a specific focus on relationship-building, communication strategies, and parent efficacy.



Ensure that school and district leaders value and prioritize an empathetic and asset-based approach to parent engagement and educator-parent relationships. This can be accomplished through messaging to staff, modeling, and professional development.



Develop resources and guides to educate parents and families about both the technological aspects of remote learning as well as specific strategies for supporting their child's learning. Relevant topics may include: login directions for commonly used devices and learning platforms, information on setting up an at-home learning space, school and district contact information, consolidated lists of parent-focused resources, and basic content area information.

¹ For example, see: [1] Thompson, K.M. et al. "Effective Strategies for Engaging Parents in Students' Learning to Support Achievement." Maine Education Policy Research Institute, University of Maine, March 2014. p. ii. https://usm.maine.edu/sites/default/files/cepare/Effective_Strategies_for_Engaging_Parents_in_students_Learning_to_Support_Achievement.pdf [2] Sheldon, S.B. and J.L. Epstein. "Involvement Counts: Family and Community Partnerships and Mathematics Achievement." *The Journal of Educational Research; Bloomington*, 98:4, April 2005. Accessed via ProQuest. [3] Harris, A. and J. Goodall. "Do Parents Know They Matter? Engaging All Parents in Learning." *Educational Research*, 50:3, 2008. pp. 278; 286. <https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/4fb5/3fd589e16396ae99527cae03b272f7f325a5.pdf> [4] Altschul, I. "Parental Involvement and the Academic Achievement of Mexican American Youths: What Kinds of Involvement in Youths' Education Matter Most?" *Social Work Research*, 35:3, September 2011. Accessed via ProQuest.

² See Appendix for a complete list of interview participants.

KEY FINDINGS



Parent engagement in all learning environments is grounded in authentic and trusting relationships between parents and educators. Strong relationships with parents establish the foundation for future partnerships and lines of communication that enable parent engagement. Parent engagement is perhaps even more important during remote learning, as families play a more immediate role in students' abilities to successfully participate in and engage with learning. Relationships that are built on a foundation of trust and care can be leveraged to establish connections and build understanding of a student's home life. Teachers and other school staff can develop such relationships through personal, individual outreach (e.g., one-on-one phone calls or meetings).



The development of strong parent relationships requires empathy for both educators (self) and for families. Educators should seek to understand family context, especially for families who may have been historically unresponsive to or underrepresented in educator or school outreach, and consider how this context could impact engagement. Knowledge of these contexts promotes greater empathy towards a family's needs outside of academics and provides opportunities to offer wrap-around supports. An empathetic mindset also facilitates an asset-based approach to identifying opportunities for parents to support student learning at home.



Effective two-way communication facilitates relationship building and subsequent parent engagement. When communicating with parents, educators should use multiple communication methods (e.g., phone calls, text messages, emails, letters, video calls, and virtual check-ins) and promote flexibility and consistency. Teachers can also encourage collaboration through a two-way communications system in which teachers regularly solicit feedback and input from families in addition to providing information to families.



The effectiveness of parent engagement relates to parent efficacy, or the ability of parents to impact their child's educational outcomes by increasing the transfer of knowledge. The most effective strategies for family engagement help parents to understand how they can participate in supporting their child's learning. High-impact strategies include modeling of learning support strategies and providing opportunities for parents to help on learning projects. Additional strategies, described below, include providing parents with access to student data and discussing student learning goals.



Parents can engage with and positively impact student learning through shared expectation- and goal-setting. Educators can encourage parents to set high expectations for their children by informing parents of the positive impact of high expectations and providing parent training on how to set and convey expectations that support student learning. Educators should also consider if and how they can gather feedback from families on their own goals and expectations for remote learning specifically. This can be accomplished by providing opportunities for two-way communication about goal- and expectation-setting that accounts for individual family situations, assets, and contributions.



To facilitate both goal-setting and engagement, educators can communicate with families about both what students are learning and how they are progressing. Parents are more likely to be engaged when they know what students are learning. With this context, parents can ask students relevant questions to better engage with their child about what they are currently learning (e.g., using "tell me," "show me," and "teach me" questions to probe conversations). One method for communicating classroom happenings with parents is through a short, weekly online classroom newsletter or a "cheat sheet" for parents with key concepts that will be covered. Educators can also establish routines around speaking with families about their child's progress and their shared hopes and goals for future learning.



Engaging parents with a meaningful review of student data is an essential component of communicating student learning. Potentially relevant data to share include information about students' academic outcomes, achievements, strengths, challenges, areas for improvement, interests, and learning styles and should include a mixture of assessment results and work products that show progress and competencies. Effectively engaging parents through student data review requires both providing data access as well as ensuring that parents have the training and understanding to use and act on the data.



Interactive homework that requires student-parent collaboration and interaction is effective in improving both parent engagement and student learning outcomes. Effective interactive homework assignments connect with classroom learning, have a clear purpose, promote opportunities for students to communicate with parents about their learning, and inform parents about what students are learning. Interactive homework should also be flexible to account for varying family schedules, home languages, and experiences that they can bring to the assignment.

SECTION I: CONDITIONS FOR SUCCESSFUL PARENT ENGAGEMENT

The following section discusses the conditions that enable successful parent engagement, including educator-parent relationships, two-way communication, and shared responsibility for student learning.

EDUCATOR-PARENT RELATIONSHIPS

Establishing and maintaining trusting, authentic relationships with students' families is essential to engaging parents during remote learning.³ Effective distance learning should be “rooted in an ethos of partnership with families, communities, and students,”⁴ and relationships between educators and parents establish the foundation for a strong partnership that enables parent engagement.⁵ Relationships between teachers and parents establish both a channel for communicating about student progress, goals, and needs, but also provide educators with a greater understanding of students' home learning environments.⁶ As Adie Simmons, the Executive Director for the organization Washington Family Engagement, explains:



I tell school districts to build relationships. It's not too late. It's not too difficult. But to really, really focus on communicating with parents. [...] Whatever new thing happens during this school year, the parents are students' base of support. So build those relationships online. Make contact with parents. Making it accessible. Creating processes in which parents can call somebody. Talk to somebody in person. And hosting focus groups. Whatever it takes to ensure that they are visible. They are approachable. And they have empathy. A lot of empathy for parents.⁷

Strong educator-parent relationships are built on a foundation of trust and care.⁹ Teachers can develop trust with parents by being authentic and demonstrating caring. Both teaching and parent involvement in student learning looks different during remote instruction than during typical, in-school learning. As such, teachers should be open and authentic about this adjustment, and can share with parents how they are adjusting to the new normal, what their goals are for continued learning, and challenges. Sharing ones experiences can encourage parents to share theirs, and helps enable the development of trust. Teachers can leverage relationships with students to establish connections with parents and family members. These connections can be used to understand whether the student has reliable internet

Heather Weiss, Founder and Director of the Global Family Research Project, recommends engaging every family through phone calls from a student's teacher or the district's family engagement specialist to start to build relationships. She adds, “it's the personalization and relationship building which we've talked a lot about in family engagement in the past that are really coming to the forefront in what people are telling us.”⁸



- ³ [1] “Engaging Families in Reopening Our Schools.” Oklahoma State Department of Education, June 2020. p. 4. <https://sde.ok.gov/sites/default/files/documents/files/Engaging-Families-in-Reopening-Our-Schools%20%282%29.pdf> [2] “Engaging with Families during COVID-19 Distance Learning.” Minnesota Department of Education, 2020. p. 1. https://education.mn.gov/mdeprod/idcplg?IdcService=GET_FILE&dDocName=MDE032484&RevisionSelectionMethod=latestReleased&Rendition=primary [3] “Distance Learning for All: Leveraging Family Engagement.” Oregon Department of Education, 2020. p. 1. <https://www.oregon.gov/ode/students-and-family/healthsafety/Documents/Family%20Engagement%20during%20Distance%20Learning%20For%20All.pdf>
- ⁴ “Distance Learning for All: Leveraging Family Engagement,” Op. cit., p. 1.
- ⁵ “Engaging with Families during COVID-19 Distance Learning,” Op. cit., p. 1.
- ⁶ “Distance Learning for All: Leveraging Family Engagement,” Op. cit., p. 1.
- ⁷ Interview with Adie Simmons. Conducted October 19, 2020.
- ⁸ Interview with Heather Weiss. Conducted October 19, 2020.
- ⁹ [1] “Engaging with Families during COVID-19 Distance Learning,” Op. cit., pp. 1, 4–6. [2] “Getting Started with REAL Family Engagement During Distance Learning.” Flamboyant Foundation, 2020. p. 2. <https://s28742.pcdn.co/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/REAL-Family-Engagement-During-Distance-Learning-Flamboyant-Foundation.pdf>

access, a quiet learning space, additional responsibilities during the school day, and an adult available to help during the day.¹⁰ Relationships built on trust also require ongoing follow-up, as educators should continue to check in with families over time to see what they need. Accordingly, “Demonstrating that you care about them will build relational trust and make it easier for them to reconnect with you the next time they have an important concern.”¹¹ Additional actions that help establish trust include:¹²

- Connect with families to ensure they are physically healthy and emotionally well before assigning academic directives. Consider using a Wellness Check In to do so.
- Schedule conversations with families in advance, at a time that is convenient for the family. When you reach out to families, ask “Is now a good time to talk?”
- Ask families what is most important to them and their child.

Authentic, equitable relationship-development also requires challenging any assumptions or biases about families. Educators should seek to understand family context, especially for those who may have been historically unresponsive to or underrepresented in educator or school outreach, and consider how this context could be impacting engagement. Additionally, recognize that many students and families are experiencing ongoing trauma and challenges related to the COVID-19 pandemic.¹³ Similarly, educators should challenge assumptions about parents’ technology access and abilities, English language proficiency, or willingness to discuss their child’s schoolwork.¹⁴ Educators can consider the following reflection and discussion questions to challenge assumptions about families and reflect on engagement that is empathetic and authentic.

Figure 1.1: Self-Reflection Questions for Meaningful, Empathetic Family Engagement

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Evaluate your relationship with the student and family before the crisis. What might be impacting them the same or differently now? ■ Are you interacting with the family and students in the language they prefer? ■ Have you reviewed any existing IEP or 504 plan to ensure you are leveraging the strengths and meeting the needs of the students in the way the school and family teams have previously agreed? ■ How can you respectfully inquire about resilience and changes the family is coping with during this time? ■ What might be going on in other areas of families’ lives that could be putting pressure on them, or making it difficult to engage with you as the teacher? ■ What assumptions could you be making about families, particularly families who are not communicative and students who are not submitting assignments? ■ How have systemic racism and historical inequities impacted your and the family’s ability to engage?
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Source: Oregon Department of Education¹⁵ and Flamboyant Foundation¹⁶

Heather Weiss also highlights the importance of taking a strengths-based approach to engaging parents, noting that school staff must “start shifting from devaluing and doing to and for families to valuing and co-creating with them. And I think that challenge stands now doing to and for versus co-creating. And I think it is really imperative that we do listen to families and work with them to figure out what’s going to meet their needs.”¹⁷

¹⁰ “Engaging with Families during COVID-19 Distance Learning,” Op. cit., pp. 5–6.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Bullet points quoted verbatim from: “Getting Started with REAL Family Engagement During Distance Learning,” Op. cit., p. 2.

¹³ [1] Ibid., p. 3. [2] “Distance Learning for All: Leveraging Family Engagement,” Op. cit., p. 1.

¹⁴ “Engaging with Families during COVID-19 Distance Learning,” Op. cit., p. 4.

¹⁵ Bullet points quoted verbatim from: “Distance Learning for All: Leveraging Family Engagement,” Op. cit., pp. 2–3.

¹⁶ Bullet points quoted verbatim from: “Getting Started with REAL Family Engagement During Distance Learning,” Op. cit., p. 3.

¹⁷ Interview with Heather Weiss. Conducted October 19, 2020.



Teachers can access [this toolkit](#) from the Flamboyant Foundation for additional strategies for building relationships with families, especially at the beginning of the school year.

Educators should approach parent engagement with empathy and understanding for both families and themselves. In interviews, family engagement experts and district staff highlight that parents feel stressed and overwhelmed, but want to know how to best support their children. As such, teachers and other school staff must view families and efforts to engage, communicate, and build relationships with families with empathy and understanding.¹⁸



“Be patient with yourselves and with your families. This is not an easy time for anyone. And so I think coming at [family engagement] with the idea that we're all trying our hardest is going to go a long way.”

– Sara Walkup, Director of Family Engagement, Miami-Dade County Public Schools¹⁹

“The advice I would give [...] to support parents, right now, [is] to remember that parents are doing their best, and [you] need to have empathy.” – Anonymous²⁰

“Overcommunicate and then just really, really sympathize with the parents [with] what they're going through right now, trying to balance their lives at home with supporting their children and also at work.”

– Allan Miller, Assistant Superintendent of Student Learning and Support Services, Snowline Joint Unified School District²¹

Similar recommendations arose when the Flamboyant Foundation asked teachers at partner schools about what advice they would offer other teachers “to sustain their family engagement practice during the COVID-19 pandemic.” The advice, presented in Figure 1.2 below, prioritizes having patience, empathy, flexibility, and taking advantage of opportunities for professional learning and communication.

Figure 1.2: Advice from Teachers to Teachers on Engaging Families During the COVID-19 Pandemic

RECOMMENDATION	DESCRIPTION
Be patient with your families and yourself.	Teachers shared that patience with themselves and others helped keep them grounded in their relationships with families. One teacher urged, “Have generosity of spirit and assume best intent. Don’t take it personally.” Some teachers tied patience with mental health, stating, “Remember we are all going through a collective trauma, and right now, nothing is more important than our mental health.” Others emphasized patience as part of relationship building, “It takes time to form a relationship with families. It will not happen overnight.”
Be a learner.	Make sure you know how to use the technology, and take advantage of professional development for teachers on making distance learning effective, supporting students and families, and addressing bias. Administrators should create systems and structures for educators to share and receive best practices, examples, and tools. As one teacher said, “Constantly reflect on your practice, your perspective, and your biases.” From another teacher: “We need training from proven effective approaches.”
Be open and honest.	As one teacher said, “Always share honest communication with families. They may not like the message but can only respect your candor.” Also, “show genuine interests in the wellbeing of the family.” Being open and honest will support building and sustaining trusting relationships with families.

¹⁸ [1] Interview with Sara Walkup. Conducted October 21, 2020. [2] Interview with anonymous participant. Conducted October 20, 2020. [3] Interview with Heather Weiss. Conducted October 19, 2020.

¹⁹ Interview with Sara Walkup. Conducted October 21, 2020.

²⁰ Interview with anonymous participant. Conducted October 20, 2020.

²¹ Interview with Allan Miller. Conducted October 23, 2020.

RECOMMENDATION	DESCRIPTION
Be an empathetic listener.	Keep a positive stance in your communication and listen to the ongoing needs of students and families. Sometimes what students and families need is beyond academics, so listen for their physical and emotional wellbeing. Focus on what they need, and you will build the trust to later support the academic partnership. One teacher shared, "ALL people are experiencing trauma at this time, be relentlessly positive in communications." Another advised, "Listen and be a guide, not a judge."
Be consistent and flexible.	Consistently communicate with families and keep trying even if you do not receive responses. Your kind persistence will support your relationships with families and build trust. To quote one teacher, "Never give up on reaching out. Some families need to see that level of persistence in order to decide to establish ongoing lines of communication with you, despite everything they may be facing." Curate your communication to avoid overwhelming families. Several teachers recommended quick daily messages; others emphasized phone calls weekly. Teachers advised personalizing communication to family preferred methods by directly asking what works best for each family. "Just keep trying new things. What may work for some families might not work for all."
Be a community builder.	You are a resource for your students and families, and you can connect them to be resources for each other. Create opportunities for your community of students and families to gather virtually through class meetings and social hours. Also, be a community builder among your school staff. Communicate with other relevant teachers and administrators about your contacts with families, and share responsibilities for family communication with your colleagues.
Be an academic partner.	Families are always key partners in students' academic success. During distance learning, families are physically there with students as they learn. One teacher shared, "It has helped me to see the correlation between family engagement and student success. Families are more likely to be engaged when teachers take the first steps towards engaging with them."

Source: Flamboyant Foundation²²

Recognizing the critical importance of relationships on student outcomes, Miami-Dade County Public Schools provides educators with professional learning for engaging with families. Sara Walkup, the district's Director of Family Engagement explains, "the biggest resource that we can provide the schools right now is professional development and really opening up those conversations on how do you engage with families. Because we can have as much software, we can have as much technology as we want. If families don't feel like they have a trusted ally at the school, they're not going to engage."²³



TWO-WAY COMMUNICATION

Strong parent relationships go hand-in-hand with effective two-way communication. Developing relationships with parents requires meaningful interactions and ongoing communication, while strong relationships similarly enable more effective two-way communication.²⁴ When communicating with parents, educators should use multiple communication methods (e.g., phone calls, text messages, emails, letters, video calls, and virtual check-ins) and promote flexibility and consistency.²⁵ Emphasizing the importance of two-

²² Figure contents quoted verbatim from: "Teacher to Teachers: Advice for Family Engagement During Distance Learning." Flamboyant Foundation, 2020. <https://s28742.pcdn.co/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/Teachers-to-Teachers.pdf>

²³ Interview with Sara Walkup. Conducted October 21, 2020.

²⁴ [1] "Engaging with Families during COVID-19 Distance Learning," Op. cit., p. 1. [2] "Getting Started with REAL Family Engagement During Distance Learning," Op. cit., p. 2. [3] "Family Engagement: Reset and Restart." Ohio Department of Education, 2020. <http://education.ohio.gov/Topics/Reset-and-Restart/Family-Engagement>

²⁵ "Engaging with Families during COVID-19 Distance Learning," Op. cit., p. 2.

way communication with families, an administrator at a school district in the Southeastern U.S. noted that her district's "target was to [reach] 100% of the families to do a parent-teacher conference this week."²⁶



"Something that we really advocate for always is two-way communication. So we want to make sure that school districts, whether that's the teacher or the principal, are not just communicating to parents **but really talking with parents and family members**. So we find the schools and districts that are most successful are ones that really have **open lines of communication** and are hearing...the struggles families and students are facing, and how can we work as a team to help address them?"

- Anonymous²⁷

Teachers can encourage collaboration through a two-way communications system in which teachers regularly solicit feedback and input from families in addition to providing information to families.²⁸ Over time, engaging in two-way communication builds trust and enables parents and teachers to participate in a collaborative dialogue about students' needs.²⁹ Two-way communication is particularly effective in improving the equity of family engagement.³⁰ Teachers can promote two-way communication using the strategies listed below.

Figure 1.3 : Strategies to Facilitate Two-Way Communication



Source: Waterford.org³¹

Especially within the context of COVID-19 and remote learning, both educators and school and district leaders should be proactive about asking parents and families about what they need. Focus groups, online if needed, is one strategy for engaging in two-way communication with families; however, less formal communication and "listening sessions" are also valuable for initiating two-way communication to gain a better understanding of family needs.³³

Family engagement experts note that rural school districts encounter additional challenges when engaging parents. For instance, rural areas may lack reliable access to WIFI and the internet, making it challenging to engage students or parents.³⁴ However, districts can find creative ways to engage hard-to-reach rural parents. For example, Heather Weiss explains that schools can call parents to



"Ask questions of the families in your community, **what would be helpful to them?** How can they help support because you have to understand that in different communities that looks different--what they need looks different."

- Anonymous³²

²⁶ Interview with anonymous participant. Conducted October 22, 2020.

²⁷ Interview with anonymous participant. Conducted October 20, 2020.

²⁸ "How Two-Way Communication Can Boost Parent Engagement." Waterford.Org, November 8, 2018. <https://www.waterford.org/education/two-way-communication-parent-engagement/>

²⁹ Graham-Clay, S. "Communicating with Parents: Strategies for Teachers." *School Community Journal*, 15:1, 2005. p. 120. <http://www.adi.org/journal/ss05/Graham-Clay.pdf>

³⁰ "Expanding Schools' Capacity for Effective Two-Way School/Home Communication." Madison Metropolitan School District, January 23, 2015. p. 3. <https://communications.madison.k12.wi.us/files/pubinfo/webform/buildingschoolscapacity2waycomm1.23.15.pdf>

³¹ Figure contents adapted from: "How Two-Way Communication Can Boost Parent Engagement," Op. cit.

³² Interview with anonymous participant. Conducted October 20, 2020.

³³ Theme noted by multiple interview participants: [1] Interview with Heather Weiss. Conducted October 19, 2020. [2] Interview with anonymous participant. Conducted October 20, 2020. [3] Interview with Sara Walkup. Conducted October 21, 2020.

³⁴ Interview with Adie Simmons. Conducted October 19, 2020.

“find out how they can help them participate [...] it's as much about the outreach and actively soliciting families' information about what they need and what they can do and what the barriers are [to] their engagement.”³⁵ Furthermore, districts can partner with food banks to distribute printed educational resources and materials to families.³⁶

Educators can begin improving communication outreach by reflecting on their current use of two-way communication and considering parent needs. Considerations for communicating with parents include:³⁷

- What communication modes will best engage family members (which may include parents, grandparents, extended family members, caregivers, or other responsible individuals) in planning for reopening?
- What tools could you put in place to listen to families' hopes and concerns for their children's learning as they return to school? What channels for communication are most accessible to your families?
- Are there ample opportunities for teachers and school leaders to “receive” communication as much as they “give” communication? Reciprocal communication is essential to building mutual trust with families.

Two-way communication should also be cross-cultural, meaning that communication strategies recognize and address language or cultural differences to ensure that families can easily communicate with educators regardless of their home language or culture.³⁸

Figure 1.4 : Cross Cultural Communication Strategies

- Translate materials to the home language.
- Use bilingual staff members to help provide a direct link between parents and school community.
- Begin the conversation on a personal level rather than starting with a formal progress report.
- Allow the personal to be mixed with the discussion of academics.
- Have respect for the whole family, instead of only paying attention to the child who is the focus of the conference.
- Use indirect questions or observations rather than questions that ask for information about the child at home (e.g., “Some parents prefer to have an older child help with homework...” rather than, “Do you or someone else help the child with her homework?”).
- Discuss the student's achievements in the context of all of the students in the classroom, suggesting how the child contributes to the well-being of all.
- Explain the goals and expectations of the school and help parents find ways in which they are comfortable supporting their children's learning.
- Create a sense of common purpose and caring through the use of the pronoun “we” rather than “you” and “I.”

Source: Regional Educational Laboratory Pacific³⁹

³⁵ Interview with Heather Weiss. Conducted October 19, 2020.

³⁶ Interview with Heather Weiss. Conducted October 19, 2020.

³⁷ Bullet points quoted verbatim from: “Engaging Families in Reopening Our Schools,” Op. cit., p. 4.

³⁸ Figure bullets quoted verbatim from: “Toolkit of Resources for Engaging Parents and Community as Partners in Education - Part 3: Building Trusting Relationships with Families and Community Through Effective Communication.” Regional Educational Laboratory (REL) Pacific, 2015. pp. 5–14. http://relpacific.mcrel.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/Part-3_Jan2015.pdf

³⁹ Figure bullets quoted verbatim from: Ibid.



Spotlight: Boston Public Schools

Boston Public Schools' teacher evaluation system includes the following standards for exemplary two-way communication:⁴⁰

- ✓ Teacher consistently engages in dialogue with families to exchange relevant information about students and positively impact student behavior, performance, and growth.
- ✓ Teacher documentation of communication with students' families provides evidence that communication is proactive, responsive, equitable, and focused on specific student outcomes.
- ✓ Teacher uses a wide range of communication methods that serve the needs of families, and adapts communication strategies for individual families, such as in-person communication, personal phone calls, email, and text message.
- ✓ Teacher regularly responds to families within 24 hours.

STRATEGIES FOR PARENTS

Parents share responsibility with teachers for fostering positive relationships and supporting constructive engagement.⁴¹ By engaging with the school and teachers positively and in a supportive manner, parents reinforce students' social-emotional skills and the importance of learning.⁴² The Early Learning Network at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln identifies three core elements of family engagement with teachers, summarized in Figure 1.5, below.

Figure 1.5: Core Elements of Parent-Teacher Partnerships

Communication	Consistency	Collaboration
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Frequent, two-way communication is important to stay apprised of what is happening at school, and to let teachers know important things about your child 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creating routines and providing consistent opportunities to enhance your child's learning at home reinforces the notion that you and the teacher are working together to support them 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A collaborative, cooperative partnership involves planning and problem-solving to develop specific, positive strategies to help children achieve to their highest potential

Source: University of Nebraska-Lincoln Early Learning Network⁴³

Although positive parent-teacher relationships support students, interactions can sometimes be difficult or lead to conflict. Parents should refrain from providing suggestions or feedback to teachers during lessons, as teachers need to address the needs of all students in their class, and may make instructional decisions for reasons that are not visible to parents.⁴⁴ A 2017 column in *The Washington Post*, written by a classroom teacher, recommends that parents use the strategies in Figure 1.6 on the following page to engage with teachers and ensure that any disagreements are resolved appropriately.

⁴⁰ Chart contents taken verbatim from: "Two-Way Communication." Boston Public Schools Office of Human Capital. <http://3A%2F%2Fwww.bostonpublicschools.org%2Fsite%2Fdefault.aspx%3FPageID%3D383>

⁴¹ "The Family Engagement for High School Success Toolkit: Planning and Implementing an Initiative to Support the Pathway to Graduation for At-Risk Students." October 9, 2020. p. 3. <https://jsri.msu.edu/upload/resources/FEHS.pdf>

⁴² Fredericks, L. et al. "Schools, Families, and Social and Emotional Learning: Ideas and Tools for Working with Parents and Families." Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning. <https://casel.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/schools-families-and-social-and-emotional-learning.pdf>

⁴³ Sheridan, S.M. "Establishing Healthy Parent-Teacher Relationships for Early Learning Success." University of Nebraska-Lincoln Early Learning Network, August 29, 2018. <http://earlylearningnetwork.unl.edu/2018/08/29/parent-teacher-relationships/>

⁴⁴ Braff, D. "The New Helicopter Parents Are on Zoom." *The New York Times*, September 28, 2020. <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/09/28/parenting/helicopter-parent-remote-learning.html>

Figure 1.6: Strategies to Support Positive Engagement with Teachers Around Classroom Challenges

Reach out before concerns arise by participating in parent conferences and volunteering.	Acknowledge teachers' efforts and positive influences.	Consider whether classroom issues are serious problems or simply differences in style or preferences. Focus on serious issues rather than minor concerns or irritations.
Approach the teacher with any concerns or problems before approaching administrators, and avoid discussing concerns with other parents.	Frame concerns as questions rather than demands or objections, and give teachers time to respond to any concerns.	Respect formal school and classroom policies.

Source: The Washington Post⁴⁵

Parents can address issues constructively by taking a problem-solving approach when challenges arise.⁴⁶ A checklist for problem-solving parent-teacher challenges below illustrates potential strategies and approaches.

Figure 1.7: Problem-Solving Checklist for Parents and Teachers

✓	Identify the problem Be clear and specific about what the problem is – for example, what's happening, how often, who's involved, and who's affected. It can help to use a question.
✓	Identify wants, needs, and concerns Allow everyone to identify their needs, wants, and concerns.
✓	Come up with possible solutions Work with the teacher to come up with as many possible solutions to the problem as you can. Your child's teacher has a lot of experience dealing with problems. The teacher also has strategies that have worked in the past. It's very important not to judge ideas at this point. This increases the chances of finding the right solution to your problem.
✓	Evaluate the solutions Once you and the teacher have listed as many ideas as possible, think about the advantages, disadvantages and consequences of each solution. If a solution has more disadvantages or negative consequences than advantages, cross it off your list. Keep doing this until only useful and possible solutions remain.
✓	Choose one and give it a try Pick the best idea, or a combination of ideas, to try out. Write down what you and the teacher have agreed on, who will do what, and when. Decide when you'll meet again to look at how the solution is working. Give the solution 1-2 weeks to work before you talk about it again.
✓	Assess how it went Consider everyone's opinions and acknowledge everyone's efforts when you look at how well the solution has worked: What has worked well?, What hasn't worked as well?, What could we do differently to help the solution work better?

Source: Raising Children Network⁴⁷

⁴⁵ Chart contents adapted from: Bell, B. "Seven Ways to Build an Alliance with Your Child's Teacher." *The Washington Post*, November 30, 2017. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/parenting/wp/2017/11/30/a-teachers-perspective-how-to-build-an-alliance-with-your-childs-teacher/>

⁴⁶ "Problem-Solving Strategies for Parents and Teachers." Raising Children Network, October 7, 2020. <https://raisingchildren.net.au/school-age/school-learning/working-with-schools-teachers/problem-solving-for-parents-teachers>

⁴⁷ Figure contents quoted verbatim from: Ibid.

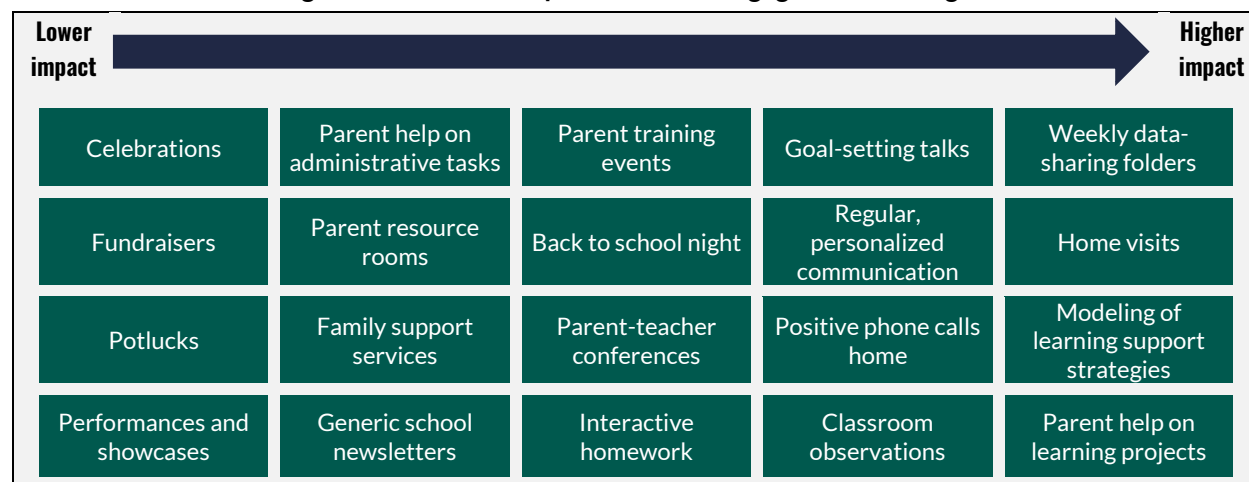
SECTION II: ENGAGING PARENTS IN STUDENT ACADEMIC DEVELOPMENT

BUILDING PARENT EFFICACY

Districts and schools can effectively engage parents in their child’s academic learning by building parent efficacy and promoting high-impact engagement strategies.⁴⁸ Parent efficacy refers to the concept that parents help impact their child’s positive educational outcomes by increasing the transfer of knowledge. Thus, most impact engagement strategies build parents’ capacity for increasing knowledge transfer between content students are learning in school and student outcomes.⁴⁹ Improving parent efficacy can also help engage traditionally disengaged or hard to reach families. Effective practices for building parent efficacy help parents “learn by doing,” meet parent needs, consider and reduce barriers to parent engagement, and are grounded in data on student achievement and parent needs.⁵⁰

The most effective strategies for family engagement help parents understand how they can participate in supporting their child’s learning. For example, discussing educational goals, participating in interactive homework, and discussing with their child what they are learning are strategies that directly involve parents in their child’s academic learning and development. When schools return to in-person instruction, subject-themed evenings when parents gather and visit the school (e.g., math nights or reading nights) further engage parents in understanding what their child is learning and how they can participate.⁵¹ Figure 2.1 below shows the relative impact of various parent engagement strategies, with higher-impact strategies that include parent participation in student learning on the right.

Figure 2.1: Relative Impact of Parent Engagement Strategies



Source: Flamboyant Foundation⁵²

⁴⁸ [1] “Relative Impact of Family Engagement Strategies on Student Learning.” Flamboyant Foundation. https://www.cde.state.co.us/uip/tips_interactive_homework [2] “Distance Learning for All: Leveraging Family Engagement,” Op. cit., pp. 2–3.

⁴⁹ Constantino, S.M. “Building Successful Relationships with Every Family: 10 Practical Applications for Classroom Teachers.” 2016. pp. 9–10. <https://drsteveconstantino.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/10-PRACTICAL-APPLICATIONS-FOR-CLASSROOM-TEACHERS.pdf>

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Figure reproduced verbatim from: “Relative Impact of Family Engagement Strategies on Student Learning,” Op. cit.

SHARED GOALS AND EXPECTATIONS

Districts can also promote family engagement in student learning by encouraging parents to (1) set high expectations for their child's academic learning and achievement and (2) encourage their child to develop their own high self-expectations.⁵³ Research indicates that the extent to which a family can “communicate high, yet reasonable, expectations for their children's achievement and future careers” is one of the most accurate predictors of student achievement.⁵⁴ Similarly, multiple empirical studies suggest that parent and student expectations for student achievement positively impact student performance.⁵⁵ Districts can encourage parents to set high expectations for their children by informing parents of the positive impact of high expectations and providing parent training on how to set and convey expectations that support student learning.⁵⁶ For example, a college-readiness initiative in Ohio consists of a series of workshops for middle school parents and students from underserved populations. During the workshops, students participate in activities with college students and staff that enforce the importance of college. At the same time, parents receive information about financial aid, prerequisite high school classes, and the college application process. To encourage participation, the program provides free bus passes, dinner, and child supervision.⁵⁷

District and school administrators as well as teachers can use the following questions to reflect on their strategies for engaging families. For instance, the questions encourage educators to consider how they can incorporate parent feedback, create collaborative learning experiences, ensure families are aware of what their children are learning, and can access materials and tools.⁵⁸

Figure 2.2: Reflection Questions for Engaging Parents in Student Learning

- | | |
|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ How will you give families an active role in learning? What will this look like?▪ How will you use feedback collected from families about their experience with distance learning to inform planning for potential short-term disruptions in instruction?▪ How will you use this opportunity to be responsive to student and family questions or concerns about learning? How will you celebrate and validate the contributions of families?▪ What opportunities will you give students to share how they want teachers and families to continue to support their learning?▪ Will activities with families be aligned with district goals for student outcomes?▪ Have you considered the capacity of families to use your materials to help students participate? | <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ How will you build learning opportunities that are meaningful and relevant to students and families, inclusive of different cultures, traditions, and learning needs?▪ How will you connect families and students to their peers to create interactive, collaborative learning communities or to provide continuous support, encouragement, and resources?▪ Have you provided students and families with the tools they need to access the learning without you being able to be with them in person?▪ Have you explained your teaching strategy regarding the rest of the year using vocabulary that is understandable for non-educators?▪ Do families have the “Why” behind what you are teaching? Have you explained which learning standards you will focus on during Distance Learning for All? |
|--|--|

Source: Oklahoma State Department of Education and Oregon Department of Education⁵⁹

⁵³ [1] Thompson et al., Op. cit., p. iv. [2] Lotkina, V. “5 Ways To Get Parents Involved in Student Learning Beyond Homework.” Getting Smart, August 7, 2016. <http://www.gettingsmart.com/2016/08/5-ways-teachers-can-get-parents-involved-beyond-homework/>

⁵⁴ “Collaborating For Success’ Parent Engagement Toolkit.” Michigan Department of Education, 2011. pp. 5–6. http://www.michigan.gov/documents/mde/4a._Final_Toolkit_without_bookmarks_370151_7.pdf

⁵⁵ Thompson et al., Op. cit., p. 7.

⁵⁶ Ibid., pp. 6–7.

⁵⁷ Fleming, N. “Middle Schoolers Getting Prepped for College - Education Week.” *Education Week*, November 29, 2011. http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2011/11/29/13middle_ep.h31.html

⁵⁸ [1] “Distance Learning for All: Leveraging Family Engagement,” Op. cit., pp. 2–3. [2] “Engaging Families in Reopening Our Schools,” Op. cit., p. 6.

⁵⁹ Bullet points quoted verbatim from: [1] “Engaging Families in Reopening Our Schools,” Op. cit., p. 6. [2] “Distance Learning for All: Leveraging Family Engagement,” Op. cit., pp. 2–3.

COMMUNICATING ABOUT STUDENT LEARNING AND PROGRESS

Educators should proactively reach out to parents to communicate students' progress in school, what students are learning, and to set student goals. Research finds that proactive communication with parents and students about learning increases student engagement as measured by homework completion and class behavior.⁶⁰ Notably, when communicating about current assignments, educators should avoid jargon and share how assignments contribute to learning goals.⁶¹

Providing parents with information on what students are currently learning and the types of learning activities they engage in can further enable parent engagement and make remote learning more relevant and meaningful. By providing context and content, parents can ask students relevant questions and better engage with their child about what they are currently learning.⁶² Parents are more likely to be engaged when they know what students are learning. Teachers should communicate information to parents that enables them to ask their child the following questions:⁶³

- Tell me about (i.e., the order of operations, the book report draft that is due tomorrow, etc.)
- Show me (i.e., the story you have to read tonight, the book chapter that you are going to be tested on this Friday, etc.)
- Teach me (i.e., multiplication tables, Spanish, etc.)

One method for communicating classroom happenings with parents is through a short, weekly online classroom newsletter. Parents are more likely to read a weekly classroom newsletter with content relevant to their child's learning than a monthly newsletter from the school or district. Educators can use the newsletter to share the standards that week's lesson addresses, subject areas, sample class activities, and activities that parents can do at home to reinforce learning. Educators can also include space for parents to share the results of the activity and send the newsletter back.⁶⁶

Educators should also establish opportunities to talk with families about their child's progress and their hopes and desires for their child's learning. As teachers and parents share the desire for their child to succeed, teachers can use this commonality to create plans and set learning goals for students. Working together to set learning goals supports student achievement, engages parents in supporting their child to reach their goals, and communicates to parents that the teacher cares about the student's outcomes.⁶⁷ National expert on family engagement Steven Constantino recommends: "To enhance the traditional parent conference, take some time to understand the hopes and dreams of families. Listen to their concerns



A school district in the Southeastern U.S. provides parents with "resource guides" to

accompany remote learning materials, which act like a glossary or cheat sheet of school concepts and acronyms, so that when a teacher's directions reference a certain acronym, parents know what they mean.⁶⁴

The resource guides show [t]hat when the teacher says this, this is what it looks like. When they talk about a graphic organizer, that's just a visual representation of information. [...] You show [parents] pictures of what [assignments] could look like. And then you put the names [underneath the pictures].⁶⁵

⁶⁰ Kraft, M. and S. Dougherty. "The Effect of Teacher–Family Communication on Student Engagement: Evidence From a Randomized Field Experiment." *Journal of Research on Educational Effectiveness*, 6:3, July 2013. p. 199.
<http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=eue&AN=88291079&site=ehost-live>

⁶¹ "Getting Started with REAL Family Engagement During Distance Learning," Op. cit., p. 4.

⁶² Constantino, Op. cit., p. 2.

⁶³ Bullet points quoted verbatim from: Ibid.

⁶⁴ Interview with anonymous participant. Conducted October 22, 2020.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Constantino, Op. cit., p. 5.

⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 4.

and fears about their children.”⁶⁸ Figure 2.3 includes sample questions that educators can ask parents. Additionally, after setting goals, educators and parents should continue to work together and communicate about student progress towards their goals. Parents can monitor student progress based on samples of student work or by reviewing student data.⁶⁹

Figure 2.3: Sample Questions To Engage Parents About Student Goals and Progress

?	?	?	?
What have you noticed about your student's academic and socio-emotional progress at home?	Where do you see them growing?	Where are they struggling?	How is the workload for you? For your student?

Source: Flamboyant Foundation⁷⁰

Through communication about student goals and progress, educators should aim to be able to answer the following questions about each student and family:⁷¹

- I know what matters to this family;
- I have up-to-date contact information for this student's family and I know their communication preference;
- I have shared socio-emotional and academic goals/benchmarks/strengths about this student with their family and tips for how to make progress at home;
- I have proactively provided information, tools, and resources so the student's family can support learning at home; and
- I am confident this family can access the tools and resources available.

Furthermore, parents can also reach out to teachers to collaborate around supports for students during online learning.⁷² Parents possess expertise about their child's strengths and learning needs, while teachers can provide parents with recommendations for support based on their expertise in curriculum and instruction. Combining these areas of expertise results in stronger relationships and outcomes for students.⁷³ Teachers recommend that parents use the strategies listed on the following page to communicate with teachers to support online learning.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ “Getting Started with REAL Family Engagement During Distance Learning,” Op. cit., p. 4.

⁷⁰ Figure contents quoted verbatim from: Ibid.

⁷¹ Bullet points quoted verbatim from: Ibid.

⁷² Cusumano, K. “How to Forge a Solid Parent-Teacher Relationship.” *The New York Times*, August 29, 2020.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/08/29/at-home/how-to-forge-a-solid-parent-teacher-relationship.html>

⁷³ Armas, C. “During Remote Learning, Parents Became My Co-Teachers. Now, I Want to Keep That Partnership Going.”

Chalkbeat, July 6, 2020. <https://ny.chalkbeat.org/2020/7/6/21301538/parent-partnership-corona-queens-coronavirus>

Figure 2.4: Recommendations for Parent Outreach During Remote Learning



Source: The New York Times⁷⁴

USING STUDENT DATA TO SUPPORT ENGAGEMENT

Engaging parents in understanding student data is an essential component of communicating student learning. Sharing student data with families can help parents understand student performance and progress, where their child may be struggling, and appropriate actions to support achievement.⁷⁵ Potentially relevant data to share include information about students' academic outcomes, achievements, strengths, challenges, areas for improvement, interests, and learning styles. As such, while data can refer to traditional achievement measures such as student grades and test scores, they can also highlight additional competencies that contribute to student success, such as critical thinking skills, preparedness, and problem-solving abilities.⁷⁶ However, simply providing families with student data to review is ineffective for improving student outcomes. Effectively engaging parents through student data review requires both providing data access as well as ensuring that parents have the training and understanding to make the data actionable. Figure 2.5 below summarizes some of the requirements for actionable engagement about student data.

Figure 2.5: Principles of Effective Data-Sharing with Families

Access	Understanding	Action
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Ensure all families have access to technology either at home, at the school, or at community centers. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Explain what student data will be shared with families, how it will be used by the school, and how it should be used and interpreted by parents. Accordingly, use understandable language that avoids jargon, and provide translations into parents' native languages. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Provide families with resources related to the data so that families can effectively monitor student progress and facilitate change in student behavior and achievement.

Source: Harvard Family Research Project (now the Global Family Research Project) and *Educational Leadership*⁷⁷

Engaging parents with student data first requires that parents have easy access to the data. Methods for sharing data with parents include district student information systems (SIS) and other online data systems, as

⁷⁴ Chart contents adapted from: Cusumano, Op. cit.

⁷⁵ Baldwin, M. and S.M. Wade. "Improving Family and Community Engagement Through Sharing Data." SEDL, 2012. pp. 1, 3. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED573507.pdf>

⁷⁶ "Tips for Administrators, Teachers, and Families: How to Share Data Effectively." Harvard Family Research Project, 2013. p. 1. [https://globalfrp.org/content/download/102/695/file/7-DataSharingTipSheets-HarvardFamilyResearchProject%20\(2\).pdf](https://globalfrp.org/content/download/102/695/file/7-DataSharingTipSheets-HarvardFamilyResearchProject%20(2).pdf)

⁷⁷ [1] "Tips for Administrators, Teachers, and Families: How to Share Data Effectively," Op. cit. [2] McWilliams, L. and C. Patton. "How to Share Data with Families." *Educational Leadership*, 2015. <https://www.region10.org/r10website/assets/File/How%20to%20Share%20Data%20with%20Families.pdf>

well as through communication from the teacher via emails, phone calls, and text messages.⁷⁸ However, simply having data available on an SIS does not ensure that parents can access and understand the data, so teachers should communicate with parents about how to log-on, how to navigate and access student data, what types of data they can view, and what the data mean.⁷⁹ Similarly, teachers should consistently update online data and communicate with parents about when they can expect to see new data available.⁸⁰ When possible, educators should share data in a variety of ways and also provide access to multiple types of data, such as student test scores as well as observations of student performance and effort.⁸¹ Figure 2.6 below shares additional strategies for sharing data with families. Furthermore, districts can promote equity in parent data access by ensuring parents can access student data and explanations about what the data mean in their home language, and providing alternative computer access for parents with limited device or internet access at home.⁸²

Figure 2.6: Strategies for Sharing Data with Families

- **Approach sharing data with families in the context of the whole child.** Be prepared to reassure parents that their child's progress is more than the sum of test scores or attendance records by supplementing this information with daily classroom observations. These might include the child's social and problem solving skills and contributions to class discussions.
- **Maintain accurate and timely data on student progress, and ensure that this information is accessible to families.** Provide parents with a brief definition or explanation of data that have been sent home or posted on an online parent portal. Doing so will help clarify what that information really says about their child's progress.
- **Talk with other teachers to determine the best ways to share different types of data with families.** Determine which data are best discussed in a personal meeting, which data can be shared during a phone conversation, and which data can simply be posted online.
- **Review the data directly with students,** if it is developmentally appropriate to do so, and tell them that you plan to share the information with their family. This approach gives students an opportunity to talk to their parents about the data—such as a test score or a disciplinary citation—before their parents see them on a portal or in a progress note, and allows students to develop a greater sense of responsibility for their school progress.
- **Avoid as much education jargon as possible,** including acronyms or terms such as “stanine” and “formative.” Keep in mind that people not directly involved in an education setting are often unfamiliar with many of these terms. Create a glossary of the most commonly used words and phrases to help families understand those “edu-speak” terms related to assessment and performance that they are likely to see in print and online.
- **Focus conversations on the potential for growth and improvement.** Use the student's progress data to co-develop an action plan for growth, and discuss the specific roles that you, the parent, and the student will play in achieving goals.
- **Ask families if the student progress notes or school-wide data reports that they receive are easy to understand.** Find out what information parents find valuable, and ask if there are other types of data that they would like to receive in these reports. To gather more feedback about their ideas and needs, consider holding a parent focus group or conducting a parent survey.

Source: Harvard Family Research Project⁸³

Beyond having access to student data, school and community stakeholders also require training on how to interpret and use student data in order to effectively support student progress.⁸⁴ Districts and teachers should not assume that families are familiar with how the data are collected, what the data mean, or how to use it at school or at home. Educators should provide training and support to help parents understand what the data suggest about the student's learning, including overall performance, progress made, or challenges

⁷⁸ [1] “Tips for Administrators, Teachers, and Families: How to Share Data Effectively,” Op. cit., p. 2. [2] McWilliams and Patton, Op. cit., p. 3.

⁷⁹ McWilliams and Patton, Op. cit., p. 3.

⁸⁰ “Tips for Administrators, Teachers, and Families: How to Share Data Effectively,” Op. cit., p. 2.

⁸¹ Ibid., p. 6.

⁸² Ibid., p. 3.

⁸³ Figure contents quoted verbatim from: Ibid., pp. 4–6.

⁸⁴ McWilliams and Patton, Op. cit., p. 2.

that require intervention or action to address.⁸⁵ Similarly, researchers at the Harvard Family Research Project (now the Global Family Research Project) suggest that educators:⁸⁶



Help families understand how teachers and others in the school use student data and why this information is valuable. For instance, explain to families that teachers use data to adapt teaching strategies to students' needs as well as to help students work toward specific learning goals. Knowing how teachers use data helps reassure families that the data are used in meaningful ways and that their child is not seen as just a set of numbers.

Sharing student data electronically can raise data privacy concerns, as data can contain sensitive information about the student. All parties involved must use appropriate discretion when sharing and reviewing student data. Accordingly, an *Educational Leadership* article notes that “Everybody accessing and sharing data has a responsibility to handle the data appropriately and guard against misuse.”⁸⁷ When sharing data or uploading data online, educators should take steps to protect student privacy. Furthermore, educators and parents should use a secure system to share or discuss student data.⁸⁸

Districts who share data digitally with families may also see improved student outcomes. For example, after Washoe County School District in Nevada implemented the Infinite Campus Parent Portal, they saw improved credit-earning among at-risk Grade 9 students. To train families on how to effectively access and use student achievement and attendance data, the district offers ongoing training sessions and workshops for families. The year following initial implementation, 601 students on the Risk Index earned three or more credits needed to graduate.⁸⁹

INTERACTIVE HOMEWORK ASSIGNMENTS

Educators can also increase parent involvement by providing opportunities for interactive homework.⁹⁰ In a literature review on parent engagement, researchers at the University of Maine’s Maine Education Policy Research Institute note that “research has consistently found collaborative, subject-specific homework that requires student-parent interaction to be a particularly effective approach for improving student academic achievement.”⁹¹ To support at-home family engagement, districts and schools should consider offering professional development in designing collaborative homework assignments for teachers, especially those of younger students.⁹²

The Teachers Involve Parents in Schoolwork (TIPS) process offers a research-based framework for developing, assigning, and involving parents in interactive homework assignments to promote family-teacher partnerships and engage parents in their child’s learning activities.⁹³ While the responsibility for completing the homework assignment remains with the student, TIPS assignments require students to discuss their learning, progress, or ideas with a parent or family member.⁹⁴ As such, while regular homework is “designed for students to do on their own” to promote independence and study skills, TIPS homework enables purposeful student-parent interaction.⁹⁵ Overall, TIPS aims to improve student homework completion and attitudes towards homework, improve two-way communications between teachers and parents about students’ schoolwork and homework, and facilitate purposeful interactions between students and parents

⁸⁵ “Tips for Administrators, Teachers, and Families: How to Share Data Effectively,” Op. cit., p. 6.

⁸⁶ Ibid., p. 4.

⁸⁷ McWilliams and Patton, Op. cit., p. 2.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ “Helping Families Use Data to Support High School Students: Infinite Campus Parent Portal, Ninth Grade Outreach Program, Washoe County School District.” National Education Association.

⁹⁰ Thompson et al., Op. cit., p. ii.

⁹¹ Ibid., p. 4.

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Epstein, J.L. “TIPS: Teachers Involve Parents in Schoolwork.” Center on School, Family, and Community Partnerships Johns Hopkins University, 2016. p. S.1. https://www.cde.state.co.us/uip/tips_literacy_k_3_final_manual_for_teachers_cde

⁹⁴ Ibid., p. 2.

⁹⁵ Ibid., p. 13.

about the student's homework and schoolwork.⁹⁶ Figure 2.7 below presents additional TIP interactive homework goals for students, parents, and teachers, as well as all partners.

Figure 2.7: TIPS Goals for Students, Parents, and Teachers

Goals for Students	Goals for Parents	Goals for Teachers
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase students' ability and willingness to talk about schoolwork at home. • Increase students' knowledge of how school skills are used in the real world. • Improve students' homework completion, skills, and test scores. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase parents' awareness of what their children are learning in class. • Increase parents' confidence in talking with their children about homework. • Increase parents' involvement with their children on learning activities at home. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enable teachers to design homework that guides students to share their ideas and work with a parent or other family partner. • Improve the quality of homework to help students master skills in specific subjects and see the application of schoolwork in everyday life. • Increase teachers' positive attitudes about families' interest in their children's schoolwork.
Goals for all Partners		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase positive attitudes about homework. • Increase opportunities to celebrate progress in learning. • Increase everyone's awareness of parents' and other family members' "funds of knowledge." 		

Source: Center on School, Family, and Community Partnerships, Johns Hopkins University⁹⁷

Research shows that the TIPS process is an effective strategy for improving parent involvement in student learning as well as student achievement. Specifically, research suggests that TIPS supports the following outcomes:⁹⁸

- The implementation of TIPS Interactive Homework resources increased familial engagement with students' school work regardless of family background or students' initial skill set;
- The use of TIPS resources enhanced positive feelings around homework and homework time for both students and family members; and
- The consistent utilization of TIPS resources facilitated student improvement in study skills, report card grades, and in test-score achievement in the content area related to the TIPS resources.

Effective interactive homework assignments connect with classroom learning, have a clear purpose (e.g., "practicing, creating, developing, and communicating skills and ideas"), promote opportunities for students to communicate with parents about their learning, and inform parents about what students are learning.⁹⁹ Educators should introduce both students and parents to interactive homework assignments. In class, teachers should explain the assignment to students, describe how students should involve a parent or family member in the assignment, and specify the type of information to discuss with their parent or family

⁹⁶ Ibid., p. 11.

⁹⁷ Figure contents quoted verbatim from: Ibid., p. 3.

⁹⁸ Bullet points quoted verbatim from: "TIPS Interactive Homework." Colorado Department of Education.
https://www.cde.state.co.us/uip/tips_interactive_homework

⁹⁹ Epstein, Op. cit., p. 12.

member.¹⁰⁰ Figure 2.8 presents seven steps for implementing TIPS interactive homework. Notably, assigning interactive homework over two to three days or a weekend provides time for parents to participate.¹⁰¹

Figure 2.8: Steps for Implementing TIPS Interactive Homework

STEP	DESCRIPTION
Select the subject(s) for TIPS interactive homework.	The faculty should discuss the subjects and grade levels for which the TIPS process will be used. A team of teachers should be identified for each TIPS subject and grade level.
Select one skill for each week for the TIPS assignments.	The team of TPS teachers should examine the sequence of skills that are taught in each unit throughout the school year. Teachers should identify one skill or learning objective each week that will promote enjoyable and useful student-parent interactions. These will be the topics for the TIPS interactive homework assignments.
Adapt and develop TIPS activities to match the curriculum.	Teachers should work together during the summer months to examine existing TIPS manuals and prototype activities. Teachers must decide which of the available TIPS assignments will be useful for the skills they teach. Or they must design new interactive homework to match the learning objectives in their curricula.
Orient students and families to the TIPS interactive homework process.	Teachers must explain the TIPS process and purposes to students and to their parents or other family partners. This may be done in letters to the home, discussions with students in class, presentations at parent meetings, and in other ways. Special attention is needed to inform and involve parents with limited reading proficiency or who speak languages other than English at home. Students need to know that on TIPS assignments they are expected to show, share, and talk about their work with a family partner.
Assign TIPS on a regular, family-friendly schedule.	Teachers assign TIPS activities to students weekly or every other week on a regular schedule. Teachers may give students a few days or a weekend to complete each assignment to allow time for students to work with a family partner.
Evaluate student work and respond to family questions.	Teachers grade and comment on TIPS activities just as they would any other homework assignment. Teachers also respond to questions families write in the Home-to-School Communication section to encourage open channels of communication about students' work and progress.
Revise and improve activities as needed.	Teachers note any problems with particular sections of assignments throughout the year and revise activities or develop new activities as needed.

Source: National Network of Partnership Schools, Johns Hopkins University School of Education¹⁰²

Educators can assign interactive homework during both traditional and remote learning. Interactive homework also works for families whose primary language is not English. While students should complete their homework in English, they should be encouraged to speak with their parents about the assignment, such as questions to discuss or reading a writing assignment, in their home language. “Parents do not have to read or write English to talk with their children or to listen to their children talk about schoolwork.”¹⁰³ TIPS’ flexibility for enabling involvement from all parents aims to address the following difficulties of traditional homework:¹⁰⁴

- TIPS helps all parents to become involved, not just the few who are comfortable with school subjects.
- TIPS does not ask parents to “teach” subjects or skills that they are not prepared to teach. In the younger grades parents are guided to conduct activities and positive conversations with their

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., p. 4.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., p. 13.

¹⁰² Figure contents quoted verbatim from: “TIPS: Teachers Involve Parents in Schoolwork.” National Network of Partnership Schools, Johns Hopkins University School of Education, 2014. <http://nnps.jhu.edu/tips/>

¹⁰³ Epstein, Op. cit., p. 14.

¹⁰⁴ Bullet points quoted verbatim from: Ibid., p. 2.

children. Starting in Grade 2, students are guided to conduct activities and positive conversations with a parent or family partner.

- TIPS asks students to share their work, ideas, and progress with their families.
- TIPS enables parents to comment on their interactions with their children and ask questions of teachers in a section for home-to-school communications. With TIPS, homework becomes a three-way partnership of students, teachers, and parents or other family partners.

In addition to providing opportunities for collaborative homework, research shows that educating parents on the importance of working on homework with their child increases student achievement more than collaborative homework alone.¹⁰⁵ Districts can share the following strategies for homework help with parents to encourage involvement in students' at-home learning:

Figure 2.9: Homework Help Strategies for Parents

- Set up a regular time and a quiet place for your child to work. Try to place it away from TVs, radios, or other loud noise.
- Have your child get all of the materials needed for the work—pens, pencils, erasers, calculator, paper, books, and highlighters—all in one spot instead of searching for things.
- Make a homework calendar. During the school day, have your child fill in all homework by the date that it is due. Many teachers have their classes do this anyway, and you can help your child plan assigned homework time.
- If your child is having trouble with homework, talk to each teacher about the homework—it may be too hard, or there may be other problems in the classroom. The school may be able to offer tutoring or extra help.
- Ask your child for any teacher comments on homework assignments.
- If your child misses school, have a friend or classmate get homework assignments.
- Remember, neatness does count. Don't let your child eat or drink while doing homework.
- Suggest that your child do homework, then take a short break (e.g., snack, play outside, or watch some TV), then go back and recheck the work. It's easier to catch simple mistakes with fresh eyes.
- Parents with low literacy: talk to teachers or school staff when you have questions. Also, talk to them about getting English classes for yourself.

Source: Michigan Department of Education¹⁰⁶

PARENT RESOURCES FOR SUPPORTING REMOTE LEARNING

Many parents face new challenges related to supporting their children during the transition to online learning due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Students, especially in the elementary grades, need help using technology to access synchronous or asynchronous virtual instruction.¹⁰⁷ Parents also need to provide students with structure and content-area support while children are at home for extended periods.¹⁰⁸ This subsection offers ideas and strategies for both individual educators and school and district leaders to use to increase the ability of parents and families to support their children during remote learning.

Parents need resources to help them understand their role in remote learning and how they can best support their child. This relates to the importance of parent efficacy and parents' capacity and confidence to effectively facilitate remote learning for their child. Several organizations and districts offer guides and resources specifically to support parents and families during remote learning. These resources often include tips ranging from how to set up a quiet learning environment at home to instructions related to using specific

¹⁰⁵ Thompson et al., Op. cit., p. 4.

¹⁰⁶ Bullet points quoted verbatim from: "Collaborating For Success' Parent Engagement Toolkit," Op. cit., p. 31.

¹⁰⁷ "How Parents Can Support Their K-12 Student in Online Learning." University of South Florida, October 9, 2020. <https://www.usf.edu/education/about-us/news/2020/parents-support-k-12-student-online-learning.aspx>

¹⁰⁸ "School's Out: A Parents' Guide for Meeting the Challenge During the COVID-19 Pandemic." NYU Langone Medical Center, October 9, 2020. <https://nyulangone.org/news/schools-out-parents-guide-meeting-challenge-during-covid-19-pandemic>

online learning platforms. In developing resources to increase parents' capacity to support remote learning, schools and districts must also ensure that access and use is equitable. Heather Weiss of the Global Family Research Project notes that while many organizations are providing remote learning resources directed to parents, districts must ensure that they are distributed across multiple channels to reach all parents. One strategy is to print and distribute resources for parents to send along with any curriculum or course material packets to students.¹⁰⁹ In a similar effort to ensure all parents and students have the resources they need, a school district in the Southeastern U.S. sends staff from the district's truancy department to students' homes to provide students and parents with the technology resources (e.g., hotspots, Chromebook) and educational materials they need.¹¹⁰



"It's harder to get [resources] out to folks that either don't have the technology necessary to access them or the time....[At one local rural district they] are hand delivering course materials with tips for parents on how to support the child's learning."

– Heather Weiss¹¹¹

Parents may be overwhelmed with the volume of resources related to remote learning. Schools and districts can help parents to focus in on the most important and useful resources for their particular child or context by providing curated lists of resources for parents. Additionally, parents may benefit from training and guides on how to evaluate and select high-quality resources themselves. This is a skill that one anonymous organization is working to develop among parents.¹¹² Common Sense Media offers several resources that review online learning platforms and resources from the educator and parent perspectives, such as its resource on the [Best Tools for Virtual and Distance Learning](#).



"I think something that we have been hearing, early on, is that parents were overwhelmed with the amount of resources and links and lists of things they could use. And instead of a list of 100 resources, they needed to know the two or three that really would help them."

– Anonymous¹¹³

Parents may benefit from resources and skills training in both technology and practical strategies to support their child during remote learning. For instance, two districts with whom Hanover spoke offer technology staff to help parents address technology-related needs.¹¹⁴ Additionally, Figure 2.10 (on the following page) summarizes key themes and topic areas that are either commonly found in parent resources as well as areas highlighted by interviewees. Schools and districts should develop easy-to-use and accessible resources, "cheat sheets," and guides for parents around these areas.

¹⁰⁹ Interview with Heather Weiss. Conducted on October 19, 2020.

¹¹⁰ Interview with anonymous participant. Conducted October 22, 2020.

¹¹¹ Interview with Heather Weiss. Conducted October 19, 2020.

¹¹² Interview with anonymous participant. Conducted on October 20, 2020.

¹¹³ Interview with anonymous participant. Conducted October 20, 2020.

¹¹⁴ [1] Interview with anonymous participant. Conducted October 22, 2020. [2] Interview with Allan Miller. Conducted October 23, 2020.



"We have an instructional technology teacher on special assignment [...who] work[s] with parents so that they become a little more adept in technology support at home for their child. She's done some Google Meet meetings with parents to kind of help get them up to speed. And she's available at different times to support parents and to get them involved in the remote learning at home."

– Allan Miller¹¹⁵

"[T]o make sure that parents feel comfortable, we've got tech coaches that are reaching out to [parents.]... We're publicizing their names. If you've got tech problems, here's who you call."

– Anonymous¹¹⁶

Figure 2.10: Topics for Parent Resources and Training

Technology	Home Learning Environment	Subject Area Knowledge	Communication Channels	Navigating and Finding Information
• Commonly used devices and learning platforms	• Setting up for learning at home, routines	• Basic background on key concepts to be covered	• List of contact information organized by purpose	• Consolidated list of available resources and tools

Source: Multiple¹¹⁷



An additional strategy for providing parent training and support is through educational how-to videos for parents. For example, a school district in the Southeastern U.S. encouraged teachers to offer orientation sessions for parents and developed a variety of video "how to" resources for parents on topics such as how to use a screencast device and how to determine what their children are supposed to be doing.¹¹⁸ Similarly, Adie Simmons described how her organization,

Washington Family Engagement, is creating short "how to" videos for school districts to post on their websites on how parents can support their children. Sample video topics include understanding how to access and use the new technology, how to check their child's grades and assignments, how to become more engaged in their child's education, and how to help ensure their child graduates high school.¹¹⁹

Guides for parents and families should focus on support for the technical aspects of online learning while ensuring that they also enable students to develop independence. Parents can help students practice using technology resources before school to access these resources independently during instruction.¹²⁰ The figure on the following page presents recommendations for parents to support students during online learning developed by the Michigan Virtual Learning Research Institute (MVLRI), a state-funded initiative to support online learning in Michigan.

¹¹⁵ Interview with Allan Miller. Conducted October 23, 2020.

¹¹⁶ Interview with anonymous participant. Conducted October 22, 2020.

¹¹⁷ Figure contents draw from multiple interview participants.

¹¹⁸ Interview with anonymous participant. Conducted on October 22, 2020.

¹¹⁹ Interview with Adie Simmons. Conducted October 19, 2020.

¹²⁰ Braff, Op. cit.

Figure 2.11: Recommendations for Parents to Support Students in Online Learning

Set up a study space, including the technology required, and be prepared to resolve technical issues that may come up.

Follow the school day and have your child commit to dedicated work time.

Help your child establish and maintain a regular schedule for working on their virtual course daily.

On the first day, help your child log in, see what the rules in the class are, open tabs, access the discussion board, and submit assignments—these are things they may not have done before.

Don't wait to see if your child needs assistance—whether it's tutoring or another support service. Help your child contact the teacher if they need more help.

Maintain a policy that you must be able to see the child's screen when he/she is taking a test.

Establish communication guidelines with your child at the start of the course.

Review the course schedule, plan, or syllabus with your child and discuss expectations.

Help your child set goals to stay on pace. Review the course schedule or syllabus, pacing guide, or assignment calendar with your child often to help keep them on track.

Be aware of, and note important course dates.

Reinforce that online courses are just as important as face-to-face courses.

Monitor your child's progress weekly and refer to the pacing guide for the course to ensure they remain on track.

Provide motivation, encouragement, and support—this goes a long way.

Source: Michigan Virtual Learning Research Institute¹²¹

¹²¹ Chart contents taken verbatim from: "Parent Guide to Online Learning." Michigan Virtual Learning Research Institute, 2017. https://michiganvirtual.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/parentguide.pdf#_ga=2.44289892.1727705814.1584546002-1459747571.1581971323

APPENDIX

Figure A.1: Interview Participants

NAME	TITLE	ORGANIZATION/DISTRICT	INTERVIEW DATE
Adie Simmons	Executive Director	Washington Family Engagement	October 19, 2020
Heather Weiss	Founder and Director	Global Family Research Project	October 19, 2020
Anonymous	Anonymous	Anonymous	October 20, 2020
Sara Walkup	Director, Family Engagement	Miami-Dade County Public Schools	October 21, 2020
Anonymous	Anonymous	Anonymous	October 22, 2020
Allan Miller	Asst. Superintendent of Student Learning and Support Services	Snowline Joint Unified School District	October 23, 2020

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