

GETTING STARTED WITH **REAL FAMILY** **ENGAGEMENT** DURING DISTANCE LEARNING

A REAL Family Engagement Resource



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OVERVIEW

From families to school districts to lawmakers, across the nation we are navigating how to operate virtually with students learning at home. During these unprecedented times, educators and families must be true allies in education to ensure all students succeed and all families feel supported. At Flamboyant we believe that practicing **REAL Family Engagement** has never been more important.

REAL FAMILY ENGAGEMENT HAPPENS WHEN STUDENTS AND FAMILIES HAVE:

- » **Relationships** with teachers built on trust, ongoing communications, and shared power;
- » **Experiences** where educators challenge their own biases and promote racial equity;
- » **Academic partnerships** that include student performance and social-emotional development; and
- » **Leadership** in schools, school systems, and communities who create the conditions for meaningful engagement. and students, as appropriate.

When schools and educators practice REAL Family Engagement, families are able to play **five essential roles** in their children's education.



COMMUNICATE
HIGH EXPECTATIONS



MONITOR
PERFORMANCE



SUPPORT
LEARNING AT HOME



GUIDE
THEIR PATH



ADVOCATE
FOR THEIR NEEDS

For teachers and leaders, this guide offers best practices and ideas for getting REAL Family Engagement off the ground during distance learning.



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RELATIONSHIPS

WITH TEACHERS BUILT ON TRUST, ONGOING COMMUNICATIONS, AND SHARED POWER.

Now and always, **relationships** are at the heart of family engagement. For relationships to be REAL, educators and leaders must establish trust with families first, and sustain that trust through consistent, meaningful communication and a sharing of power. Consider the following actions to ensure that, even in uncertain times, families feel confident they have a school partner they can count on.

- » **Connect** with families to ensure they are physically healthy and emotionally well before assigning academic directives. Consider using our [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.
- » **Encourage** staff members who have existing relationships with the family to be a bridge and continue their relationship.
- » **Practice two-way communication** with families and meet their needs! **Learn** each of your families’ communication preferences. For example, do you know:
 - What is their preferred method? Text, email, phone call, FaceTime, Facebook message, etc.
 - How often do they want to be contacted? Daily, weekly, bi-weekly, etc.
 - What they would like to get out of each engagement? Does the family want ideas and resources, a thought partner, or something else?

“ TRUE, INTENTIONAL FAMILY ENGAGEMENT HAPPENS AT THE INTERSECTION OF RESPECT AND UNDERSTANDING. FAMILIES ARE THE MOST INFLUENCING FACTOR IN A CHILD’S LIFE.

Flamboyan Family Engagement Fellow

EXPERIENCES

WHERE EDUCATORS CHALLENGE THEIR OWN BIASES AND PROMOTE RACIAL EQUITY.

Distance learning can be stressful for both families and educators. Stress can manifest as negative assumptions about families, especially families who have historically not been responsive to school outreach. It is important to challenge our biases and assumptions so that outreach is authentic, equitable, and grounded in empathy.

- » **Identify** stressors in your life and take steps to remove and mitigate them to free up your mental and emotional capacity.
- » **Practice** the Golden Rule: treat others how you want to be treated.
- » **Reflect** on the following prompts:
 - 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?
- » **Review** our [Strategies to Engage Unreached Families During COVID-19](#) for innovative ideas to connect with ALL families.
- » **Assume** the best and implement the [Wellness Check In](#).

“ ONCE YOU HAVE ENGAGED A CHILD’S FAMILY, THEY TAKE THAT EXPERIENCE WHEREVER THEY GO. THEY MAY LEAVE YOUR SCHOOL, BUT AT THE NEXT SCHOOL THEY GO TO , THEY BRING THE EXPECTATION OF COMMUNICATIONS AND CONNECTION.

Flamboyant Family Engagement Partnership First Grade Teacher

ACADEMIC PARTNERSHIPS

THAT INCLUDE STUDENT PERFORMANCE AND SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT.

Never before has there been a greater need for strong partnership between school and home. Students will be best able to succeed in distance learning if educators are working in continued collaboration with families, which includes supporting students' social-emotional development and mental health.

- » **Collaborate** with families to create goals and monitor progress.
- » Be able to **answer** these questions for each student/family:
 - *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.*
 - *I am confident this family can access the tools and resources available.*
- » **Communicate** clearly and proactively the school or district's approach to grading and promotions during distance learning.
- » **Be clear** about the purpose of any virtual assignments and how assignments are working toward academic benchmarks and goals. Avoid education jargon! For example, instead saying that a student should work on "decoding words," tell the family member that the student should work on "sounding out the word by saying each letter's sound then blending those sounds together."
- » **Ask** families:
 - *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?*

“EVERY KID DESERVES TO HAVE THEIR TEACHER AND FAMILY AS ONE TEAM IN THEIR DEVELOPMENT ... WHEN THAT CAN HAPPEN, ANYTHING IS POSSIBLE.

Flamboyant Family Engagement Fellow

LEADERSHIP

IN SCHOOLS, SCHOOL SYSTEMS, AND COMMUNITIES WHO CREATE THE CONDITIONS FOR MEANINGFUL ENGAGEMENT.

While the previous three sections provide best practices for educators' engagement with families, this section offers concrete actions for leaders to take to ensure REAL Family Engagement is implemented equitably across the school.

- » **Define** a vision for learning at home and communicate that vision to all teachers and families.
- » **Communicate** expectations and guidance for meaningful two-way communication with all families, being mindful of both frequency and substance of communication.
- » **Document** every student's engagement in distance learning and support those who do not have access to devices, internet, or necessary apps to get them.
- » **Create** a process for staff to identify unreached families. Be creative to ensure all families and students are reached using our [Strategies to Engage Unreached Families During COVID-19](#).
- » **Consider** how many times families have heard directly from the school leader. What messages do you want families to receive from leadership?
- » **Collect** feedback from families about the effectiveness of distance learning, including the impact of student's mental health and the workload for families. Use the feedback to guide your staff to make necessary adjustments.

“ENGAGEMENT IS THE EFFORTS THE SCHOOL DOES TO CREATE A COMMUNITY. NOT JUST TO TELL YOU WHAT'S GOING ON, BUT TO THE EXTENT THAT WE'RE TRYING TO BUILD A COMMUNITY WHERE THERE IS ALL LEVELS OF PARTICIPATION AND WAYS THEY COMMUNICATE ... THAT ARE BEST FOR YOU AS A PARENT.

Elementary School Parent