

## REAL Leadership

### *How Leaders Can Support Educators to Engage Families During Distance Learning*

During Spring and Summer 2020, Flamboyan asked educators, *“What do you need from your administrators to build and strengthen partnerships with families during distance learning?”* Their responses highlighted a diversity of experience alongside a shared desire for intentional support during these uncertain times.

#### **TEACHERS NEED ... to be listened to and encouraged by school leaders.**

Many teachers shared positive feedback for the support received at their school. These appreciations emerged as a primary theme from teachers. Teachers highlighted examples of support such as administrators holding weekly virtual staff meetings, effectively communicating essential and changing information, and simply having personal check-in conversations with each team member.

#### **TEACHERS NEED ... collaborative communication between leaders, teachers, and families.**

Educators elevated the request that leaders ensure teachers have early, shared access to information communicated to and from families. Teachers suggested that principals set up standing office hours in addition to holding regular schoolwide meetings and teacher-led office hours, with one teacher simply saying, “Continue to reach out and keep us all on the same page!”

#### **TEACHERS NEED ... a plan and support for infrequently reached families.**

Teachers expressed the need for complete, updated phone numbers, email addresses, and mailing addresses for families. Some expressed concerns about the lack of systems for regularly maintaining these data, and called for urgency to address it during a time when families are more transient and contact information may change more frequently. Teachers want administrators to invest resources in the technical maintenance of contact information because missing or inaccurate information creates a barrier to consistent family engagement. Several teachers suggested engaging non-classroom educators to support ongoing communication with families because the volume of weekly calls was “daunting” and often occurred well outside of the traditional school day.

## TEACHERS NEED ... **leaders to set school-wide expectations and provide support for families.**

Leaders play a vital role in setting clear and consistent expectations with and for families. In instances where school leadership has not done this, educators expressed frustration with having to set expectations at the classroom level. While teachers are the frontline communicators with families, widely varying expectations for families during distance learning can cause confusion and unnecessary tension. One teacher said, "Parents need technology training and guidance on parental expectations throughout [distance learning], but not just from teachers but also from school administration." Teachers suggested setting school-wide online learning expectations by sending a video from the school or holding tutorials for online learning platforms.

## TEACHERS NEED ... **the social and emotional wellbeing of students, families, and teachers prioritized.**

Many teachers shifted their focus to student and family wellbeing. Some teachers spoke of school-based wellness teams that supported their work with families. Teachers urged administrators to keep this focus: "Compassion. Please don't require us to push these parents during this time. We are all figuring this out together." Also, teachers are experiencing this pandemic with their own families. One teacher asked for empathy: "To understand that we are going through this pandemic as well, we are not robots. We have families. Right now I am focusing on the wellbeing of my family, as well as teaching, but family comes first."

Leaders play an essential role in creating conditions for **REAL Family Engagement** in schools, school systems, and communities. Teachers elevate their needs. Leaders have an opportunity to support teachers and shape meaningful family engagement. As the year progresses, continue to look to Flamboyant Foundation to support you in your REAL Family Engagement efforts.

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