

TEACHERS to TEACHERS

Advice for Family Engagement During Distance Learning

Flamboyant asked teachers at our partner schools what advice they would give to other teachers to sustain their family engagement practice during the COVID-19 pandemic. While teachers gave this advice during distance learning in the first half of 2020, their guidance transcends the unique challenges the pandemic presents.

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.

Be an empathetic listener.



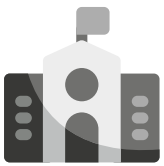
Keep a positive stance in your communication and listen to the ongoing needs of students and families. Sometimes what students and families need is beyond academics, so listen for their physical and emotional wellbeing. Focus on what they need, and you will build the trust to later support the academic 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.”

Teachers in Flamboyant partner schools focused on REAL Family Engagement by building and sustaining trusting relationships, supporting effective two-way communication, and partnering with families on well-being and student learning. We hope hearing how they found success will support, validate, and inspire you!

As the year progresses, continue to look to Flamboyant Foundation to support you in your REAL Family Engagement efforts.

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Questions? Reach us at Communications@FlamboyantFoundation.org