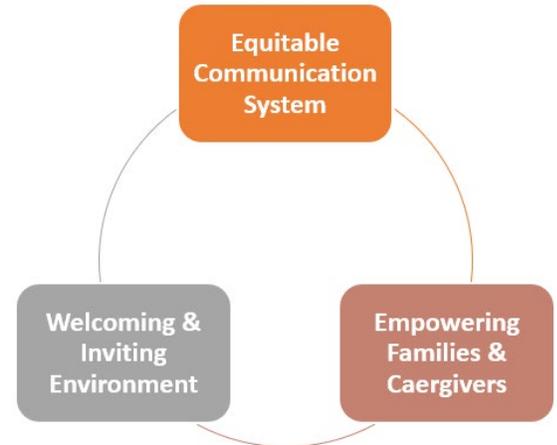


## Guidance for Leaders: Equitable Engagement for Families and Caregivers

Family engagement and learning are inextricably linked. With no precedent set for remote learning at this scale, building relationships between families and caregivers is crucial for academic success. Supporting family engagement and building parents' knowledge and skills, in ways that honor their strengths, creates authentic connection and long-lasting partnerships. Key areas for high-quality, equitable family engagement remain- strengthening equitable communication systems, empowering families, and caregivers to be co-designers of learning, and reinforcing a welcoming and inviting atmosphere.



### Strengthening equitable communication systems

Communicating equitably with all families requires strengthening translation services and systems.

Translating messages for families in home languages creates a welcoming atmosphere- and it is also the law.<sup>1</sup>

In order to manage communication effectively and streamline services- coordinate across offices to synthesize messaging for families and minimize multiple instructions and expectations. When communicating expectations use this checklist to encourage equitable communication:

- Personalize your outreach** When possible, merge messages with the information database (e.g., mail merge, excel, personalized text message and email software). Personalized messages increase engagement.
- Leverage multilingual resources** Utilize translations for all communication and confirm multilingual families can communicate effortlessly with educators.
- Communicate with purpose** Messages home should be short, to the point, deliberately timed, and purposeful<sup>2</sup>.
- Categorize information** People skim, write using headings and bullets so it is easily understood
- Share actionable information** Establish frequency and routine to share actionable and relevant information early and often.
- Auto enroll** Automatically enroll families in communications with the option for them to opt out.
- Write for Access** Make all communication accessible and brief (research suggests writing to a 4<sup>th</sup> grade reading level).

### Empowering families and caregivers to be co-designers of learning

<sup>11</sup> <https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/docs/dcl-factsheet-lep-parents-201501.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> Rogers, T. (2020). Why no one is reading your coronavirus emails. Retrieved from <https://www.cnn.com/2020/03/13/opinions/coronavirus-emails-effective-messaging-rogers/index.html>

Now, more than ever, we need strong school and family/caregiver partnerships. Families and caregivers have a unique perspective and understanding of their own children and how they learn at home. Additionally, many families learned new ways to support their children with remote instruction. Supporting families to be a part of designing routines as well ongoing feedback sessions increases communication needed to adjust for student success. Valuing families and caregivers as partners requires educators to truly engage in the process together by<sup>3</sup>:

- Leveraging and recognizing** the ongoing broader dialogue around racial inequities and how these discussions are managed within the system.
- Encouraging all educators** to examine their own biases, both at individual and institutional levels.
- Auditing and interrupting** exclusionary practices that deny many families the ongoing communication they need to stay informed and engaged.
- Get to know your families**, their language, and cultural backgrounds.

## Reinforcing a welcoming and inviting atmosphere

Build connections to build academic collaboration -if families are expected to engage in the learning process, there must be strengthening of welcoming and inviting systems of communication. This is partially done by clearly communicating expectations, roles, and responsibilities with an open feedback loop. Establish a balance of 1-way and 2-way communication. This means including opportunities to both send information out- but also schedule time to interact with families through on-going sessions and personalized outreach. In order to encourage family agency and increase student and family attendance, consider the following guidelines:

- Schedule virtual home visits** with every family to build connection and community.
- Monitor contacts and non-contacts**, follow-up with families who are unresponsive.
- Be hypervigilant** toward cultural diversity and communicate in a respectful and responsive tone
- Create virtual drop-in hours** include times to leverage multilingual staff
- Provide tools and at-home supports** for academic and social-emotional health.
- Effectively communicate the importance of attendance** Prevent chronic absenteeism now- families and caregivers are a key partner in this effort and need to know the impact of absenteeism on learning.
- Be persistent and mindful of scheduling** Offer flexible times to connect and communicate, taking work schedules and family size into account.
- Focus on building trust** Establish an open dialogue by asking families about their aspirations for their children and insights about their students and the way they learn.
- Collaborate with families** Support remote and hybrid learning with families as they help to facilitate learning at home. Be transparent and clear about what their students are learning. Respect families' questions, challenges, and implement feedback on the remote learning process<sup>4</sup>
- Be consistent** Schedule regular communication through multiple languages and channels.

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.dualcapacity.org/>

<sup>4</sup> Family-School Partnerships. (2020). from <https://casel.org/family-school-partnerships/>