

Family Engagement Guidance

FOR REMOTE & HYBRID LEARNING



Supporting district and school leaders in creating, nurturing, and sustaining a culture of mutual trust and reciprocal accountability that promotes students' well-being and success.

The New Mexico Public Education Department (NMPED) believes that strong connections between school, home, and community are paramount to fostering student success. Through these relationships, children's holistic needs are met, educator morale increases, and students are increasingly well-prepared for success in school and beyond. Research indicates that deeper relationships lead to decreased educator bias and higher expectations for all students. It is our aim to foster and encourage those relationships between educators, educational leaders, community organizations, local businesses, families, and students by operationalizing our family engagement framework and providing technical and adaptive support to New Mexico's public schools. A renewed focus on family engagement, through the lens of virtual learning, serves as an opportunity to craft a model for engagement that is respectful of and responsive to our communities' cultures, languages, strengths, and needs, all in service to student success.

Our Family Engagement Vision

When implemented with fidelity and in a collaborative manner, a strong family engagement culture ensures educators and families are able to:

- Develop authentic school-home connections, rooted in mutual trust and reciprocal accountability;
- Sustain trusting relationships by sharing culturally relevant and linguistically accessible information and resources that communicate high expectations and support a shared culture of learning; and
- Foster meaningful partnerships that support student growth and equip families to monitor socio-emotional and intellectual growth and development at home.

WHY? Our Family Engagement Foundation

The research is clear: relationships matter. Studies indicate that students with "involved" parents are more likely to earn higher grades, graduate and go on to post-secondary education, have stronger social skills, and – more important now than ever – adapt well and attend school regularly. In addition, when educators practice effective family engagement, families are equipped with the information and resources needed to play research-backed critical roles in their children's education, including:

- Communicate high expectations
- Monitor their child's progress at home
- Support learning at home
- Advocate for their child's educational needs

HOW? Key Elements of Family Engagement

The PED is committed to providing support for educators seeking to bolster their family engagement practice. We acknowledge that such practices must be culturally respectful, linguistically appropriate, and inclusive of the many diverse populations of the state. Toward that end, the New Mexico Framework for Family-School Partnerships includes six focus areas:

1. [Welcoming ALL families into the school community](#)
2. [Communicating effectively](#)
3. [Supporting student success](#)
4. [Speaking up for every child](#)
5. [Sharing leadership](#)
6. [Collaborating with the community](#)



Reentry Support Guidance **Public Education Department**

But what does this look like during a time when a school is distance learning? A lot of it remains the same, actually. Building relationships, maintaining trust, and supporting student success through academic partnership can all be accomplished through phone calls, letters, emails, and online meetings or events. We recognize it's not the same as enjoying a cup of coffee on a relational home visit, but it's what we have, it's what's safe, and we can still use it to the best of our ability and in support of student engagement and success!

Developing School-Home Connections

Developing authentic relationships begins with one's self. Educators are encouraged to explore their cultural and linguistic identities and how they “show up” in the classroom. As noted in [this blog post from Teaching Tolerance](#), it is more important now than ever to check our assumptions as we engage with our students and their families. To develop authentic relationships, educators and administrators must be aware of and address implicit biases. In addition, educators must approach relationship building through an asset-based lens of equity, empathy, and inclusion.

There are two main goals for welcoming all families in to the school community:

Create a welcoming environment

Students need to feel a sense of belonging, self-efficacy, and relevance, to be successful at school. How does your virtual classroom create opportunities for relationship building? Do students have an opportunity to connect with one another—socially? Do families have an opportunity to connect with you or with each other? Is your school hosting school-wide virtual events open and accessible to all families?

Build a respectful, inclusive school community

Diversity is a strength. Inclusion is essential. Does your school staff work with families to identify and address barriers to involvement and engagement? Have you surveyed your families to determine what their needs are? Are you/your families aware of the new internet and connectivity options? Is the online atmosphere “family-friendly” and reflective/inclusive of the cultures and languages of the community? Are community businesses and partnerships explored and encouraged?



Some additional strategies for building authentic relationships include:

- ▶ Phone calls and wellness checks (see attached resource);
- ▶ Virtual, relationship-building “home visits”;
- ▶ Getting to know and engaging the whole family;
- ▶ Mentorship programs that reflect the cultural and linguistic values of the community
- ▶ Offering consistent office hours for students and parents to contact teachers and administrators
- ▶ Displaying student work—get creative! How can this happen on your zoom background?
- ▶ Making sure the principal or other school spokesperson is always accessible—Where can families turn to access information about reentry? Who can they call if they have questions?

Sustaining Trusting Relationships

What do we mean by a “shared culture of learning?” A culture of learning is one in which all adults are aligned to support children's growth and development, and wherein children are excited about and intrigued by the learning opportunities presented to them. It facilitates academic partnership opportunities that equip families with the information and resources needed to monitor children's progress and development from home, as well as advocate for their children's needs.

While developing relationships with parents is a crucial first step, just like any relationship, trust must be sustained through ongoing, two-way communication and additional opportunities to engage. Personalized, two-way communication is key to deepening the school-home relationship and ensuring families are equipped to play the roles in their child's education. Take the opportunity to poll your families and your students so they can provide you helpful information and also so they know that their suggestions matter.



Our framework encourages the following practices to deepen school-home relationships:

- Showing respect at all times and asking parents for their advice (and taking it!). Families are the primary “experts” on their children. True partnership means honoring a parent or caregiver’s insight into their child’s learning style, communication modalities, character strengths and more;
- Creating structures for including parents in major decisions about school (e.g. avenues for access, plans for reentry, etc.);
- Recognizing families’ contributions and thanking them for their help;
- Acknowledging and responding to individual family circumstances (e.g. offer interpretation, flexibility in scheduling, childcare resources, tech support, etc.);
- Sharing leadership and setting ground rules together (e.g. procedures for virtual classroom observations/visits, accountability for student homework, cameras on vs. cameras off during virtual class, etc.); and/or
- Identifying student strengths and co-creating solutions to address challenges or areas of growth.

Communicating effectively also means establishing and honoring clear boundaries. Families and educators should clarify their preferred mode of communication and times during which they will make themselves available. Translation and interpretation services should be offered, when appropriate and the line of communication should be two-way. Listening to understand (rather than to respond) is critical when nurturing trust in a relationship. Communication should always be student-centered and differentiated to meet individual family needs.

Fostering Meaningful Partnerships

Linking families to student learning and sustaining these essential relationships should be an intentional and integral part of a school’s culture. Some adjustments will of course need to be made for the virtual learning environment. The goals of supporting student success and speaking up for every child include:

1. Sharing information about student progress:

- a. Educators regularly provide families with timely and specific information about their child’s socio-emotional and academic development;
- b. Information is provided in a culturally responsive and linguistically accessible manner; and
- c. Conferences are held at mutually convenient times and with consideration for family access, technology, and childcare needs.

2. Support learning at home:

- a. Family activities (e.g. discussion prompts, homework, etc.) should be joyous and an opportunity for students to demonstrate their strengths;
- b. Family structures and routines are taken into consideration. You don’t know if you don’t ask! Reach out to better understand what a “day in the life of…” looks like for your students and their caregivers.
- c. Families and educators co-create learning goals and use a shared language to communicate high expectations for every child; and
- d. Materials for learning promote literacy as an essential skill, while honoring the child’s home language.

3. Equipping and empowering families to play an active role in their child's education:

- a. Classroom teachers celebrate student work and send graded assignments (specific and timely feedback) directly to parents/caregivers so families can monitor their child's success;
- b. School staff establish a family resource center that is accessible from a distance, while also providing information and materials for the home (e.g. printables, brochures, etc.);
- c. Administrators inform families of their rights and responsibilities and provide them with a clear avenue for advocacy;
- d. School policies are transparent and accessible, specifically with respect to reentry procedures and processes;
- e. School staff model effective advocacy practices on behalf of students and families (#AllTogetherNM); and
- f. Educators equip families with information on how to monitor their child's academic progress (e.g. lists of developmental indicators, behavioral norms, information on how to access online platforms like PowerSchool or Google Classroom, etc.)

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- For more detailed, academic insight into Family Engagement practices, check out [NMPED's Statewide Literacy Framework](#)
- As you move forward with your equity work, please refer to our [guidance for equity councils](#) during hybrid or remote learning;
- Check out our general [guidance for virtual classrooms](#) to review some FAQs and additional links;
- Feedback is critical! Please review our relationship-driven [guidance on grading](#) student work during hybrid and remote learning;
- Keep an eye toward children and families experiencing housing instability. Review our [homeless student check-in form](#) and additional [guidance for supporting homeless students](#) during school reentry;
- Our partners at CYFD have developed guidance for [reporting abuse](#) during the pandemic.