

From Crisis to Opportunity: Recovering California's Commitment to Equity



Family and Educator Engagement

The Challenge: While engaging stakeholders is vital to students thriving, because of the rapid nature of the response to COVID-19, teachers, students, parents, and families were often not consulted as leaders made decisions while transitioning to distance learning. In statewide educator listening sessions The Education Trust–West conducted, participants reported they were often not included when schools and districts made decisions that had a direct impact on their ability to engage students in learning during this challenging time. In a [needs assessment](#) conducted by the [Partnership for the Future of Learning](#)¹, 600 students and parents from over 20 community-based organizations reported not being a part of school and district decision making and a significant lack of access to resources necessary to engage, like information, training opportunities, and language translation and interpretation.



Developed in Partnership with
Parent Institute for Quality Education



The Education Trust–West

Opportunities for Increasing Stakeholder Engagement

For the Governor, State Leaders, and California Department of Education:

1. The **legislature could implement clear engagement requirements** for school districts as they develop their budget for next year and decide how to spend state and federal COVID-19 emergency funding. The **legislature could also invite teacher-, family-, and student-focused advocacy organizations** like TeachPLUS, Parent Institute for Quality Education (PIQE), Families in Schools (FIS), and Californians for Justice (CFJ) to testify to elevate educator, family, and student needs when the state revises the education budget in August.
2. **Professional organizations**, like the Association of California School Administrators and the California County Superintendents Educational Services Association, could **guide members on engaging stakeholders remotely** in various ways, like through surveys, social media platforms, videoconferencing, phone calls, text messages, email, and traditional mail if need be.
3. The **California Department of Education (CDE)** and the **California Collaborative for Educational Excellence (CCEE)** could **provide workshops, training, and coaching** on how district and school leaders can best engage stakeholders while adhering to social distancing requirements, including how to engage remotely and online. These trainings can include best practices for using the [Continuity of Learning Playbooks](#)² developed by the CCEE.
4. The **CDE can hold teacher, student, and parent forums** to discuss issues surfacing as a result of the COVID-19 crisis, as well as student and parent advisory bodies. It is essential for state leaders to be especially intentional about listening directly to the diverse experiences and perspectives of teachers, students, and parents in addressing pandemic-related issues.

For School, District, and County Office of Education Leaders:

1. **Establish regular check-ins with students and parents to include their perspectives in decision-making.** It is important to increase efforts to build meaningful connections given that the remote nature of interactions with families can lend themselves to students and families becoming disconnected. Schools and districts should establish regular and multi-lingual check-ins with families to assess their needs, ensure they are informed about recent school and district developments, and to gather family input and perspectives on critical school and district decisions. If that is not possible, staff can use translation platforms like [Talking Points](#)³ to facilitate staff-family connection. [Phoenix Union High School District](#) has established a system in which staff conducts check-ins with every student each day to foster student and family connectedness and to ensure schools and the district are meeting student needs.⁴ These efforts should happen on top of using and supporting existing structures, such as school English Learner Advisory Councils (ELACs) and district English learner Advisory Councils (DELACs), in order to receive input from and communicate with families.
2. **Ensure communication with families is in accessible language.** School and district leaders must make sure all communication – whether written or verbal – is translated and interpreted into the languages spoken in students’ homes. [Pajaro Valley Unified School District](#) provides a strong example of language accessibility by sending all communications in English, Spanish, and Mixteco bajo. Schools and districts should consider providing a multi-lingual page on their websites to centralize all translated materials for easy access and engagement. Further, establish systems and tools such as phone apps and staffing supports that help families communicate with schools in their home languages.⁵
3. **Use parent liaisons to connect to families.** Parent liaisons can be particularly helpful when leaders use data, like engagement in online learning, to target students and families most in need of outreach. Parent liaisons are most effective when they can communicate in a language and manner that is familiar and understandable to families. Other staff can also serve this role (e.g., attendance clerks, teacher’s aides, librarians, etc.), provided they have the experience, skills, and training to build authentic connections with students and families.
4. **Partner with community-based organizations to engage school stakeholders in decision-making.** [PIQE](#) and [FIS](#) have been working with parents – specifically in marginalized communities – for decades and have doubled their efforts to connect with families to understand their educational needs during the pandemic. Schools and districts should partner with these organizations and organizations like them to both build their capacity to engage with students and families and connect directly with the families affiliated with such organizations.

¹ Partnership for the Future of Learning, California, Every School. Every Community. Beyond Covid-19., <https://futureforlearning.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Community-Needs-Assessment-CA-Partnership-for-the-Future-of-Learning-April.pdf>

² California Collaborative for Educational Excellence, Continuity of Learning Playbooks, <https://k12playbook.ccee-ca.org/>.

³ TalkingPoints, see <https://talkingpts.org/>.

⁴ Chad Gestson, “Gestson: My Arizona School District Contacts Every Student, Every Day, to Check on Families’ Physical, Mental & Emotional Health. Yours Can, Too,” The 74 Million, <https://www.the74million.org/article/gestson-my-arizona-school-district-contacts-every-student-every-day-to-check-on-families-physical-mental-emotional-health-yours-can-too/>.

⁵ Priyanka Kaura and Hannah Melnicoe, “COVID-19 Crisis Response in Pajaro Valley Started with Listening to Families,” Policy Analysis for California Education (PACE), <https://edpolicyinca.org/publications/covid-19-crisis-response-pajaro-valley-started-listening-families>.

