

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

Supporting Families with Distance Learning



Developed in Partnership with
Parent Institute for Quality Education

The Challenge: While family engagement has always been an important component for supporting student learning in school, the abrupt switch to distance learning in March has dramatically changed the role of parents and other at-home care-providers to that of teacher, tutor, counselor, and technology coach. The transition to distance learning has been particularly challenging for families with limited access to and experience with online learning tools, students gaining English proficiency, and students with disabilities. In an [Education Trust-West survey](#)¹ (conducted March 26 – April 1), nearly all (92%) parents responded that it would be helpful for their school to provide resources to help them teach their child at home. In contrast, only one in three (31%) reported that their school had provided these resources. A quarter (25%) of non-English speakers responded that their child's school had not provided materials in other languages. Distance learning presents a challenge for many families. Still, it also offers an opportunity for schools and families to be more mutually supportive of each other and student learning and wellness. This reality requires new ideas and a renewed commitment to supporting families as true partners. As schools plan for the 2020-21 school year, engaging and supporting families in distance learning must be a priority for state and school leaders.



The Education Trust-West

Opportunities for Improving Support for Families with Distance Learning

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

1. **The California Department of Education should partner with parent support organizations** such as [Parent Institute for Quality Education](#), [California State Parent Teacher Association](#), and [Families in Schools](#), to provide free, vetted, and curated multi-lingual instructional resources for families, clearly labeled and accessible on the CDE website.
2. **The Governor should direct federal stimulus funding to school districts and community-based organizations to provide outside-of-school enrichment and homework support** for students who do not have an adult at home to supervise and support distance learning. To bolster the workforce of support providers, California's leaders can create a [tutoring corps of college students as the Governor of Tennessee did](#)², and leaders can [urge Congress to expand AmeriCorps](#)³ with a focus on serving California's communities hardest hit by the COVID-19 crisis.

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

1. **Survey via phone, text, online, and hold listening sessions in multiple languages with parents and students** to understand their family's experience with distance learning to help inform school or districts' 2020-21 Plans. Include questions about the type of materials accessed, the quality of instructional methods used, content taught, and instructional supports, their level frequency of connection to their teachers and peers, and challenges and promising practices encountered. For a sample Learning Recovery Survey for parents and students, see the [Equitable Learning Recovery Toolkit](#)⁴ by Pivot Learning and UnboundEd.
2. **Streamline the delivery of information and resources for families** by creating one place for all assignments, schedules, and learning resources – including resources for English learners and students with disabilities. Include a multi-lingual step-by-step guide on how to access and use online learning tools and curriculum, using various formats including video and easily understandable terms and include screenshots and screen-casting tutorials. San Francisco Unified created a YouTube Channel with [Family Technology Tutorials](#)⁵ with multi-lingual videos instructing families how to access a variety of the district's technology programs and learning apps.
3. **Develop Individual Learning Plans for English learners** and students who have been recently reclassified as English proficient. Engage parents in meetings to develop the plan, providing opportunities for input on course placement, goal-setting, home language development, social emotional wellness supports, and resources to support instructional and enrichment goals at home.



To support family engagement, schools can partner with organizations such as PIQE (Parent Institute for Quality Education) to hold virtual parent engagement sessions for families and schools to share information and support each other. At Maywood Academy in Los Angeles Unified School District, the school's parent liaison (who is also a PIQE graduate), attends weekly PIQE virtual parent meetings to listen and share feedback with school leaders to answer concerns and mitigate barriers that other parents in the school may be facing.

¹ The Education Trust-West, "Educational Equity in Crisis. Listening to Parents: The Results of our Statewide Survey of Public School Parents," April 2020, <https://west.edtrust.org/ca-parent-poll-covid-19-and-school-closures/>.

² Evie Blad, "Former Governor Recruits Stuck-at-home College Students to Combat K-12's 'COVID Slide,'" *Education Week's K-12 Politics Blog*, May 12, 2020, <https://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/campaign-k-12/2020/05/Haslam-college-tutors-covid-slide.html>.

³ Emma Vadehra, "The Road to COVID-19 Recovery Is Long—But AmeriCorps Can Help," The Century Foundation, April 16, 2020, <https://tcf.org/content/commentary/road-covid-19-recovery-long-ameri-corps-can-help/?agreed=1>.

⁴ Pivot Learning, "Learning Recovery Toolkit," <https://www.pivotlearning.org/learning-recovery-toolkit-download/>.

⁵ San Francisco Unified School District, "Family Technology Tutorials," YouTube, <https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLzdPtbV7hJLL9sd4Bi8qk7F5sbyjFYTIX>.

