Supporting Families with Distance Learning

**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](https://www.edtrustwest.org) (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.
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 did2, and leaders can urge Congress to expand AmeriCorps3 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 Toolkit4 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 Tutorials5 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.

---