

Family-School-Community Partnering During COVID-19



Promising Partnership Practices During COVID-19

Schools and districts across Colorado recently identified family, school, and community partnerships (FSCP) as one of their top priorities during the current COVID-19 pandemic. The Colorado Department of Education (CDE), with assistance from the State Advisory Council for Parent Involvement in Education (SACPIE), has been working with schools and districts across the state to identify ways that staff are working to support students and families during this unprecedented time.

The purpose of this document is to provide districts and schools with ideas about how to work with families and students during our current reality. The information below will continue to evolve as CDE and SACPIE gather more information.

General Communication

- **Quick Videos:** In Platte Valley School District, several teachers and principals created videos for families over their websites and Facebook pages. These videos include “how-to” videos for the many technology challenges that the students are facing, as well as motivational and humorous messages meant to lift spirits.
- **Family Engagement Liaisons:** In addition to providing information to families, Family Engagement Liaisons (FELs) in Jeffco Public Schools are building on their existing relationships with families and having *conversations* on a regular basis through personal phone calls, texts, videos, virtual coffee chats. This gives schools an opportunity to listen to the needs of families and provide appropriate resources. Specific examples include:
 - Make personal phone calls to listen and respond to needs with appropriate resources.
 - Call to encourage families whose students aren’t ‘logging in’ or engaging in on-line platforms.
 - Launch Virtual Coffee Chats, PTA meetings, Open Family Virtual Chat Time with Principal and Staff.
 - Help families sift through all the information and help families prioritize.
 - Advocate for and support families who speak languages other than English.
 - Access multiple communication platforms including Twitter, Facebook -Facebook Live, SeeSaw, Remind, What’s App, School websites, Google and Zoom meetups, Printed and handwritten messages.
- **Student Advisory Program:** Platte Valley Middle School established a student advisory program to stay in touch with students and their families. Each teacher has 13 students on their caseload, and each teacher is responsible for checking in with each student and their family each week. There is an academic component to this, but most importantly the school wants to provide families someone to connect with and to make sure that everyone is doing ok.
- **Existing Technology:** District 11, located in Colorado Springs, is using Blackboard, Peach Jar, and the “D11 Loop” to communicate with families about academic and personal needs. The district also has family engagement liaisons who field questions about rent, food, and other basic needs.

Coffee Chats: Staying Informed and Connected

Since 2015, superintendent-appointed district FSCP contacts have been meeting monthly in “Coffee Chats” to share promising practices and common challenges about home-school collaboration.

During this time of COVID-19, Coffee Chats now occur bimonthly on a virtual platform. This is an opportunity to districts to learn from each other about how to best support families and students.

For more information about attending the Coffee Chats and other learning opportunities, go [here](#).



- **YouTube Celebrations:** Norwood School District's Positive Behavioral Interventions and supports (PBIS) team shares tips and celebrations for families and students on the district's [YouTube](#) channel to help everyone stay connected while safely social distancing.
- **Use of District Staff:** Denver Public Schools' Community Engagement, Strategy, and Advocacy Team is supporting families by connecting them to resources both within the Family and Community Engagement (FACE) Office and Denver Public Schools as a whole. FACE is also creating a process to gather feedback from families to understand their needs and challenges. The purpose of this initiative is to effectively and efficiently connect families with appropriate resources.
- **Community Social Networks:** Both Poudre School District and Norwood School District utilize social networks for students or families who may not be in regular communication with teachers. When students do not respond to teachers, both districts have called friends or neighbors of these students to ask them to respond to the teachers. After getting the request through a friend, the students then begin communicating with teachers.
- **Leverage Existing Structures:** Prior to suspending in-person instruction, Center School District had systems and structures in place to support family-school partnerships. As a result, district staff have remained in communication with families and addressing their needs through school-level liaisons.
- **Repurpose Safety Staff:** District 51, located in Grand Junction, is using its District Safety designee to work with local law enforcement to conduct wellness checks for students with whom the district cannot make contact. The district has also partnered with its local public radio station to increase their communication channels. District 51 has eight family engagement liaisons who conduct home visits for students who have not participated in online instruction.
- **Virtual Connections and Fun:** Westminster Public Schools hosted a virtual happy hour with families and students to help everyone stay connected. The district had a DJ who already had a relationships with students through working at school dances and sporting events. Over 45 participants, including teachers, administrators, students, and families danced at home while virtually connecting with their school community.
- **Quick Transitions to Online:** Once [Colorado GEAR UP](#) (CGU) partner schools began to transition to remote learning, CGU immediately transitioned to remote student services. At the start of the pandemic, each CGU advisor compiled a variety of resources for their school community and shared those resources with students and families. CGU advisors then began hosting college and career readiness workshops through Zoom, Google Hangouts, and other school approved platforms. CGU advisors are also conducting wellness check-ins and academic check-ins with students on a regular basis through telephone, email, text messaging, and video conferencing. In select CGU high schools, GEAR UP is also offering drop-in remote tutoring. During this time of change and uncertainty, it is important for CGU to continue to provide support for its students. Remote student engagement is going very well thanks to the strong rapport CGU advisors built with their students over the years.
- **Online Application Support:** Pre-collegiate grantees through the [Colorado Opportunity Scholarship Initiative \(COSI\)](#) have indicated that they are providing virtual programming, such as FAFSA and college application support via Zoom and other web platforms. They are also regularly using texting platforms and reaching out to students via phone calls and emails. Some grantees have developed web pages to highlight changes in programming delivery and community resources.

English Language Learner-Specific Communications and Supports

- **Repurpose Councils:** Englewood School District continues its Language Development Council (LDC) for CLDE/EL families via Zoom. This is to make sure families that may have language barriers are still engaged with what is

happening around remote learning in the district, as well as getting these families the community resources they may need. The district makes sure to have an interpreter that works in the district and the school's respective CLDE/EL teachers join the Zoom meeting too. Continuing to have the LDC meeting virtually is a great way for families to hear what others are asking and wondering that may be in the same boat and have the same barriers without feeling intimidated.

- **Bilingual Help Line:** Denver Public Schools' Family Constituency Services Team has been in contact with just under 3,000 families since the start of the DPS Extended Spring Break via the Family and Community Helpline. The team utilizes the bilingual English/Spanish staff and an interpretation line to support families and provide any available updated information and resources.
- **Connection to Resources and Communities:** Denver Public Schools' Family Empowerment Team has a series of supports for Vietnamese families, including:
 - Reaching out to families individually to see what supports they need.
 - Informing both families and communities about where meals are provided and food deliverable services.
 - Checking in with students on their remote learning experience and to make sure their devices and Wi-Fi are working, also guide them to the correct department if they have any issues.
 - Communicating through social media with a Vietnamese Community Spokesman regarding the current events and keeping the community connected and informed.
- **Diverse Community Navigators:** Rise Colorado works primarily with schools in Aurora. The organization recently collected over 100 needs assessments covering the impacts of approximately 400 individual family members. As a result of these needs assessments and check-ins, Rise is hiring part-time Tigrayan, Burmese, Karen, Karenni, and Bhutanese/Nepali Community Navigators to work with families. Rise will share needs assessment results with Aurora Public Schools, the City of Aurora, and funders to work together as a community.

Basic Needs

- **Direct Reach-Out:** Educators in the Roaring Fork School District have successfully contacted every student to check in with them. Teachers had conversations with families to ensure they had what they needed. A district or school mental health professional spoke with every family to check in and make sure their basic needs were being met. The district plans on continuous connections to families and students.
- **Food Trucks:** Every day, the Platte Valley School District sends food trucks to 3 locations in the community where families can pick up lunch for their children. The meals are free (regardless of whether the family qualifies for free/reduced lunch) if the child is with them.
- **Community Connections:** Englewood School District is partnering with the local Chamber of Commerce to spread the word about donations needed for families (i.e. we needed more nonperishable food items for weekend food bags since we are now limited from the Food Bank of the Rockies). Members have agreed to advertise this need on their business social media pages. The district is also working with a local restaurant to help organize a donation drop off site for these nonperishable food items. In addition to grab-and-go lunches that the schools provide Monday through Friday, this same restaurant provides free grab-and-go lunch boxes on Saturdays.
- **Leverage Lunch Time for More:** Englewood School District is also working with the Arapahoe Early Childhood Council (ACECC) to provide essential baby supplies donated by FEMA right to the district so that staff can get these items into the hands of families that need them the most. This will take place likely during the grab-and-go meal times at the schools. Staff have used that time to also distribute school supplies, toiletries, and weekend food bags.



- **All District Programs Connect in Community:** Greeley-Evans District 6 had liaisons for each program (migrant, McKinney Vento, foster, Title I, etc.) call their families and check-in with them personally. District staff had their Family Center phone number copied to an iPhone so that families can still reach Family Center staff who are now working from home. Prior to COVID-19, the Family Center staff were offering sewing classes for D6 families. The sewing instructor made lots of masks and they were distributed around the community last week.
- **Legislative Advocacy:** The Colorado Parent Teacher Association (PTA) has been actively working to provide schools with resources for families and students to access for meals, learning devices and supports, mental health supports, nicotine cessation, domestic abuse, and suicide prevention, to name a few. The Colorado PTA continues to advocate at the state and national level for school meals, SNAP, non-profits, expanded broadband, and mental health supports. Finally local PTAs have been providing food, devices, teacher appreciation and communication links between families and schools/districts.
- **Repurpose Bus Lines:** Thompson School District is currently creating a bus route to bring meals and supplies to families in their home neighborhoods to eliminate the transportation barrier. District staff deliver materials every Friday.
- **Connect to Funders:** Rise Colorado disseminated 200 \$100 Visa gift cards to Aurora family leaders in need to pay for food, rent, medicine, etc. A generous funder provided the gift cards.
- **Grab and Go Meals:** Cooking Matters is helping families access emergency funding to provide healthy food while schools are closed and children/youth are missing out on breakfast, lunch, and afternoon snacks and meals. Through Cooking Matters assistance, Garfield No. Re-2 School District is bringing healthy breakfast and lunch to kids at seven free meals sites across three towns within their district. Englewood nonprofit Kaizen Food Rescue is distributing 270,000 pounds of grab-and-go food boxes over 30 days to families in need. Re-1 Valley School District in Sterling has a free grab-and-go meals site for the many kids in their area who rely on school meals.

Technology

- **Leverage Community Partnerships:** Internet access is an issue in rural areas, especially when there is no cell service and hot spots are not an option. In Dolores County School District RE 2, Farmers, an internet service provider, built-out a connection to a teacher's house so she could teach from her home. Farmers carried the installation cost, with support from a community organization called Community Voice. Farmers has purchased additional equipment so they can provide internet for the rest of the Dove Creek Community. Families pay the monthly service fee, but they have increased serviceability. Community Voice has offered to cover the monthly fee for those families in need.
- **Liaisons and YouTube Tutorials:** A family engagement liaison in Aurora Public Schools created a YouTube video in both English and Spanish to teach families how to use their cellphones as an internet hotspot. Other districts within Colorado are now making their own YouTube tutorials after APS shared this idea.
- **Leverage Service Providers:** Carbondale Middle School worked with Comcast to ensure families have internet access. Initially, 350 families in the district struggled to have reliable internet connections. Currently, 98% of families have some form of internet. Internet access allows families to participate in School Accountability Committee and Family Advisory Council meetings, which continue with the same regularity.
- **Liaisons Supporting Technology:** In Jeffco Public Schools, staying connected to the school community and specifically to learning is critical. In many cases, a family engagement liaisons (FEL) serve as a tether between school and home. They are working in a variety of ways at the direction of their principals, to support teachers with outreach to students and families that have 'disconnected'. Internet access is just one concrete way.

Overwhelmed families also need encouragement that they are capable 'learning partners' and acknowledgment of their strengths. Examples of how FELs support families through technology include:

- Help troubleshoot technology, internet, device issues.
 - Respond to family needs with differentiated learning materials from teachers (printed packets for example).
 - Help families feel connected to their school community and participate in family fun 'school spirit' type activities such as creating a flip-grid to celebrate teachers and staff.
 - Collaborate with teachers to help families connect with learning.
- **Repurpose District Resources:** Poudre School District initially set-up two district-owned vans as internet hotspots for families who were out of range for Comcast's free internet coverage. In order to make this practice more sustainable, the district is now partnering with Fort Collins' City Hall to continue this support.
 - **Survey:** East Grand School District estimates that only about 1% of its student population does not have access to the internet. East Grand has this information because district staff communicated with every family at the beginning of the pandemic to learn about their technology needs.
 - **Liaisons for Tracking and Managing Technology:** District 49, located in Colorado Springs, has distribute over 3,700 Chromebooks to families. The district's school-level family engagement liaisons have been at the frontline in creating tracking systems, contacting families, and ordering school supplies. The liaisons also meet with families to distribute the Chromebooks.
 - **Develop Community Technology Plan:** After using a structured interview protocol, Roaring Fork School District discovered that approximately 315 of the district's 6,000 students did not have internet. The district then took the following steps to increase internet access:
 - Sent a letter to students' households without internet access with information about free and inexpensive internet options (referenced on their website).
 - Worked with a group of community volunteers to "case manage" each of those students to help them navigate various options (e.g., getting access to free mobile hotspots or installing free Comcast internet).
 - Mapped out addresses of students who lack access to look for areas where group efforts might make sense (e.g., Can one wireless access point be installed to serve several families?).
 - Expanded wireless access to high density neighborhoods such as mobile home parks by working with corporate and municipal partners.
 - Purchased some limited wireless broadcasting to high density neighborhoods.

WHERE CAN I LEARN MORE?

For more examples of Promising Partnership Practices, go [here](#).

For other questions, contact [Darcy Hutchins](#), Director of Family, School, and Community Partnerships.