

FAMILY ENGAGEMENT LESSONS OF COVID-19: BUILDING ON WHAT WE'VE LEARNED



The effects of the COVID-19 pandemic began for schools in early 2020. At times, this period has been frightening, sad, and anxiety-provoking. We will be dealing with the aftermath of the pandemic well into the future.

At the same time, however, we have actually learned quite a bit about how schools and families can work together in order to help children be more successful learners. In an effort to help carry these lessons with us as we move forward, the Virginia Department of Education's (VDOE's) Family Engagement Network (FEN) created this document to help catalog what we have learned throughout the past two years.

WHAT HAVE WE LEARNED ABOUT FAMILY ENGAGEMENT DURING THE PANDEMIC AND HOW CAN THESE LESSONS HELP US AS WE MOVE FORWARD?

- New methods of communication.
- Virtual engagement works for many families and can open doors to both participation and leadership opportunities.
- Deeper understanding of student's strengths, skills, and preferences.
- Empowering families to know their role and impact on their child's education, thereby increasing their belief in their own abilities.
- How to virtually connect with families, lending more flexibility to meetings and learning sessions.
- Families have had direct opportunities to observe instructional strategies, leading to a deeper understanding of the implementation of special education and related services.
- Staff have relied on families to provide data on student responses and progress, increasing true collaboration and partnership.
- New technology is breaking down language barriers and increasing accessibility to meetings and learning sessions (e.g., tools such as Microsoft Translator, YouTube captioning, PowerPoint Live).

CONNECT WITH US!

Connect with family engagement staff in the Department of Special Education and Students Services (SESS) at the VDOE by visiting the [Information for Families webpage](#) regularly for updates. You can also follow SESS on Twitter (@VDOE_SESS and #FamilyEngagementFriday).

Additionally, please subscribe to receive [email updates](#) from the VDOE. For information designed specifically for parents, look for the heading 'News and Updates' and check the box marked "Information for Parents and Families."

For more information, contact Tracy Lee, Coordinator of Family Engagement, via email at Tracy.Lee@doe.virginia.gov, or via phone at (804) 225-3492.

WHAT DO STUDENTS, FAMILIES, AND EDUCATORS HAVE TO SAY ABOUT THEIR EXPERIENCES?

RESPONDING TO THE FOLLOWING QUESTION:
What is one educational practice that worked for you, your family, or your school during the pandemic that you will continue to use in the future?

FROM STUDENTS

- I had support from a teacher over Zoom. The IA or teacher would Zoom with me and help me complete assignments. Google Classroom and Google Calendar helped me stay organized and get assignments completed on time.
- It allowed me to get more familiar with technology and adapt to challenging situations.
- Online asynchronous classes, because they allowed more time to get everything done and sometimes you could just do the work and be done with the whole class early.

FROM EDUCATORS

- Comprehensive, "all hands on deck/whatever it takes/ outside of the box strategies" approach to student success
- Virtual meetings when parents cannot attend
- Our school will now provide 1:1 devices for all students
- Offering lunches outside as an option

FROM FAMILIES

- I am much more aware of curriculum and know better how to supplement at home.
- I have a much better understanding of what happens at school.
- Being able to see what my son's day is like and the curriculum has helped me become a better advocate. It's been enlightening to see my children learning and what is working and what is not. It's been wonderful to see how these teachers and specialists work with our children. We've been so impressed and have learned so much from them!
- It's been great to be able to watch my daughter learn. I understand her better now and what her capabilities are.

