



Family Learning  
**NETWORK**

# Engaging Families During Virtual Learning

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# Meet Your Presenter

- Becky Goetzinger, PhD
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- Based at headquarters in Louisville, Kentucky
- Background: 24 years in schools
  - Elementary classroom teacher
  - Middle school reading interventionist
  - High school instructional coach



# Housekeeping



- All participants will be muted throughout the webinar.
- Use Q&A for questions.
- Use Chat for comments or technology support.
- This webinar is being recorded.
- Registered participants will receive a follow-up email with the recording link, slides, and free resources.

# Goals

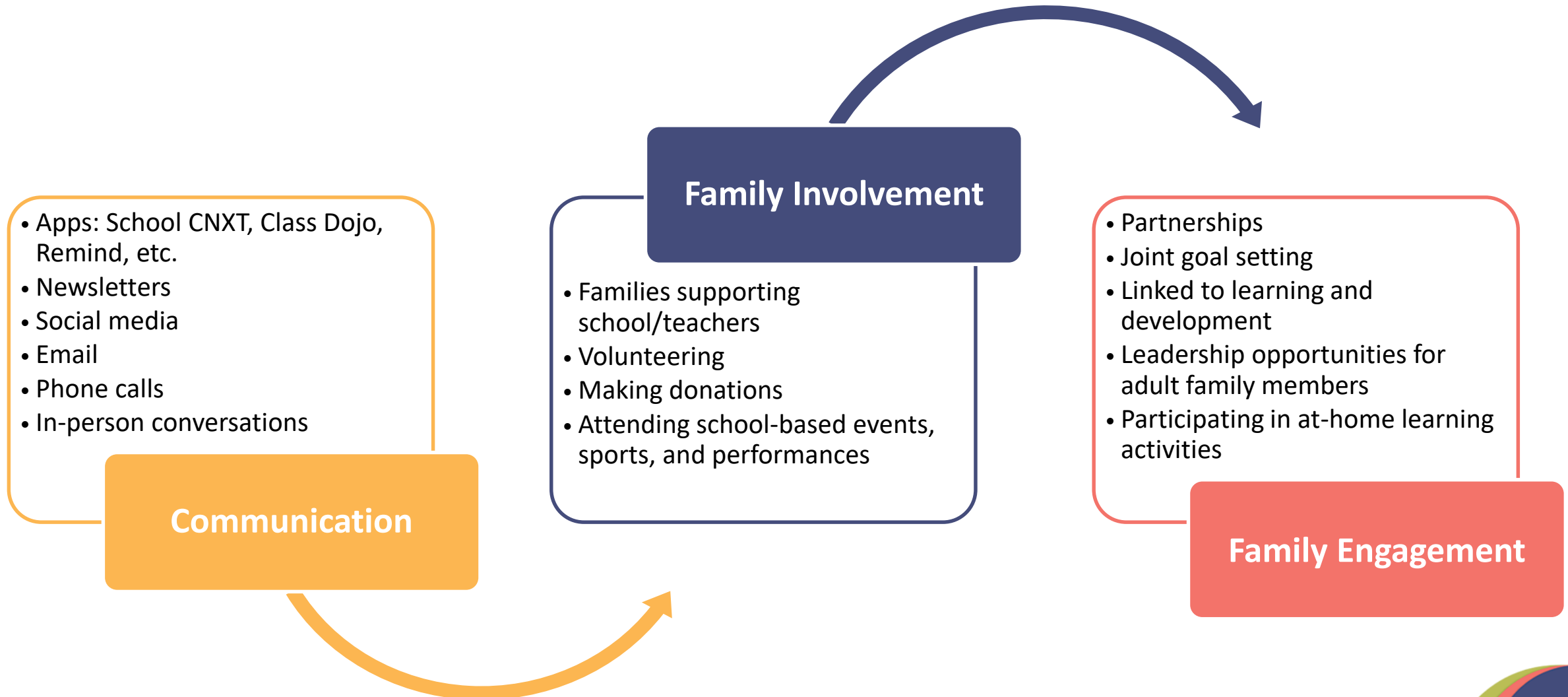


Through this session, participants will:

- Review family engagement and its impacts.
- Identify strategies for building effective partnerships with families virtually.
- Prepare to engage families throughout the year.

**Family Engagement**

# What is Family Engagement?



# Definition of Family Engagement



“By family engagement, we mean the **beliefs, attitudes, and activities of families to support their children’s learning whether at home, at school, or in the community.** This definition reflects the fact that **families play significant roles** in ensuring their children’s learning, in guiding their children successfully through a complex school system, and in **advocating for their children** and for effective schools . . . . Family engagement has **multiple dimensions, including parental aspirations, parenting behaviors, and school relationships.**”

(Weiss, Kreider, Lopez, & Chatman-Nelson, 2010, p. xix).

# Impacts of Family Engagement



## Child

- Improved attendance
- Reduced drop-out rates and higher graduation rates
- Increased student achievement
- Smoother transitions
- Social-emotional gains
- Fewer conduct problems

## Family

- Changes in families' perceptions about their role in education
- Improved relationships with their child and school staff
- Development of home, school, and community connections
- Sense of having a voice

## School

- Improved teacher morale
- Changes in teachers' perceptions of families
- Inclusion of parent voice in the improvement process
- Improved trust in schools
- Increased cultural competence



# Five Essential Roles

When schools and educators practice family engagement, families are able to take on these five roles in their children's education.

- Communicate High Expectations
- Monitor Performance
- Support Learning at Home
- Guide Their Path
- Advocate for Their Needs

These are especially important during distance learning.

(Flamboyant, 2020)



**Starting the Year**

# Building Trust and Relationships



- Make welcome phone calls.
- Do virtual home visits.
- Mail back-to-school letters or surveys.
- Host virtual family orientations.
- Focus on getting to know the child and family.

# Welcome Phone Calls

- Try to call within the first three weeks of school.
- Set the tone for ongoing partnership.
- Create a script with key points.
- Focus on the positive.
- Get insight from adult family members about the child.



# Virtual Home Visits

- Plan ahead.
  - Work with colleagues.
  - Give families choices.
- Include the child if possible.
- Ask open-ended questions.
- Focus on listening.
- Learn about the child and family.
- Take notes.



# Back-to-School Surveys

- Format
  - Paper mailing with QR code
  - Google form
  - Interview
- Ask about families' preferences:
  - Contact person
  - Communication method
  - Time of day and day of the week
- Include open-ended questions
  - Tell me about your child's family.
  - What are your concerns as we start the new school year?





# Virtual Family Orientation

- Schedule small groups if possible.
- Focus on the immediate.
- Share information about:
  - Routines,
  - Expectations, and
  - Platforms.
- Be specific.
- Allow time for questions.



**Plan for the Year**



# Create a Communication Plan

- Make a plan: How and when will you regularly communicate with families?
  - Formats
  - Schedule
  - Types of information
- Communicate your plan to families.
- Be consistent across your school if possible.
- Focus on positive communication.
- Include opportunities for two-way communication.
- Keep a communication log for whole class and individual communication.



# Effective Written Communication

## Skimmable

- Headings
- Bullets
- Bold Type

## Readable

- Plain speak
- Repetitive language
- No jargon
- Helpful graphics

## Inclusive

- *Families*
- Dominant languages

Make written communication family-friendly.

# Seek Feedback



- Ask both students and families:
  - What is going well?
  - What difficulties are they having?
  - How might you do \_\_ differently?
- Seek feedback regularly.
- Use feedback forms, surveys, and exit slips.
- Make changes based on the feedback that you receive.

# Virtual Family Conferences



- Use Family Conferences to be more inclusive.
- Be flexible with times.
- Provide an interpreter if needed.
- Focus on two to three main points.
- Make it a conversation.
- Encourage questions.
- Plan next steps together.

# Goal Setting

- Work with families when you are setting goals for your students.
- Include a specific goal that families can impact.
  - Specific Skill
  - Time or Completion
  - Attendance or Participation
  - Project-Based
- Communicate progress toward goals regularly.



# Differentiate for Families



It's important to acknowledge families' diversity and honor them through our actions.

How can you differentiate engagement to more effectively partner with families?

Communication

Opportunities

Scheduling

Resources



# Find Partners and Make Commitments

- Write down your plan for engaging families.
- Share it with colleagues.
- Ask them to join you in making a family engagement commitment.
- For example, commit to making two positive phone calls to students' families each week throughout the year.
- Discuss your commitment at regular meetings.



**Wrap-Up**



# Free Resources



Each registered participant will receive these free resources in their follow-up email next week.

- Virtual Home Visit Protocol
- Tips for Writing for Families
- Tips for Virtual and Phone Conferences

# Questions



What questions might you have?

# Thank You For Joining Us!

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