

Actions for Impact

A Family's Guide to Equity and Excellence for Your Child During COVID-19

The COVID Moment: Education Turned Upside Down

The economic, social, and learning challenges brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic have highlighted and heightened the health, racial justice, and economic inequities that families across the country are facing. Given the systemic racism and privilege built into policies, practices, and cultures, these simultaneous crises are hitting some students particularly hard: students with disabilities, students from low-income families, students of color, and students whose home language is not English. That's also the reality that schools, districts, and states must contend with in the 2020–21 school year. It's critical that schools know and make central the assets and strengths of children, their families, and their communities in order to support each student's social, emotional, and academic development.

This guide is designed to provide practical tips and suggestions for working with your child's school and staff during and beyond the COVID-19 pandemic. Together, you can help your child continue to learn and thrive.

First, ask yourself these key questions about your child's education:

1. Do my child's teachers and principal know my child's identities (see sidebar)? Do they know my child's strengths and needs? Do they understand how we're experiencing life and learning during the pandemic?
2. What have I learned through observation and in conversation with my child about how they're experiencing school and life right now? How would I like my child's teachers and school to use that information to support my child and family?
3. Is my family receiving timely, accessible communication from my child's school and school district during the pandemic?
4. What's happening during at-home learning that works — or doesn't work — for my child?



Understanding and Addressing Intersectional Needs

Every young person has multiple identities. For example, one young person may be a daughter, a scholar, a person with ADHD, a tennis player, a Black girl, and an English language learner. Educators need to know and understand their students. The pathway to learning and thriving is enabled when all facets of a young person's identity are affirmed and their needs are met (e.g., occupational therapy provided for a student with a disability, translation provided for a student learning English, culturally relevant curriculum provided for a student of color, etc.).

When working with your child's school and district, here are some key actions you can take to support your child:

1. Help educators at your child's school know your child's intersectional identities, including their personal and educational strengths and needs.

- Request a meeting with your child's teacher, principal, advisor, or IEP team (and a culturally responsive translator, if necessary) to have a discussion about how COVID-19 has impacted you and your child. Use this time to explain anything you've observed or to share the experiences your child has had over the last several months. You can discuss with the school what's going well and what isn't. Together, you can come up with a plan for improvement and support for your child.
- **Key questions to ask your school:**
 - ✓ How can we collaborate to make sure my child is engaged in learning each day?
 - ✓ What are the best ways to make sure my child receives the instruction, supports, and services they're entitled to?
 - ✓ What are you doing differently this year to make sure students feel welcome and supported? How do you give students a sense of belonging? How can I help?
 - ✓ How can my family access culturally responsive translation and interpretation services?
 - ✓ How can social-emotional learning and whole-child approaches be used to complement services and supports my child is receiving through special education?

2. Engage with your child's school in meaningful ways and request timely and accessible communication and support from your child's school.

- When your school or your child's teachers reach out (e.g., via a survey, a phone call, or email), respond as quickly as possible and let them know how you and your child are doing so that they can provide the support (technical or otherwise) you or your child may need. You may even connect them with local community organizations (e.g., a church, a team, or an afterschool program) that have been a source of support and joy for your child (or others in the community) and ask how they can collaborate to meet your child's needs.
- In addition, you can reach out to your school and your child's teachers whenever you need to share information, ask questions, or request interpretation services. You and your child are entitled to timely resources that are easy to understand and in your home language so you have the information you need during the pandemic.
- **Key questions to ask your school:**
 - ✓ How can families give input and feedback on school plans?
 - ✓ What connections are you making, or can I help you make, with community-based organizations that serve families like mine?
 - ✓ How can I get resources in my home language?



Ask Your School Principal:

Have you developed plans to ensure that students with disabilities and other marginalized students will have full access to social, emotional, and academic instruction and related supports, including accessible technology and IEP-mandated support?

As a family member of a student with disabilities, you should expect:

1. Regular contact from your school and the teachers and adults responsible for your child's IEP.
2. A clear description of how the school will meet your child's social, emotional, and academic needs through distance learning.
3. Instructions on how you can raise any concerns about your child's learning and development.

3. Encourage a school culture that cultivates a sense of belonging and wellness for your child.

- Ask your child if they're building strong relationships with the teachers and other school staff. Find out whether the school is creating enough opportunities for your child to interact positively with peers. If they are not, contact your school and your child's teachers and ask what they can do to improve these relationships and the support your child is receiving.

- **Key questions to ask your school:**

- ✓ How are you measuring and supporting my child's engagement? How are you making sure my child has a greater voice and feeling of belonging in the learning environment?
- ✓ What opportunities will students have to engage with each other and their teachers when enrolled in virtual learning programs?
- ✓ How are you planning to address the social and emotional needs of students this year?
- ✓ In what ways are you building anti-racism into your teaching strategies and curriculum?



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