



Survey: Family Engagement During the COVID-19 Pandemic
Summary of Key Findings
July 23, 2020

Introduction

Between May 25, 2020 and July 20, 2020, NAFSCE fielded “Family Engagement During COVID-19,” a survey of family engagement professionals, educators, administrators, parent leaders, and others in the family engagement field to better understand their experiences in engaging families during the COVID-19 pandemic. The nationwide sample of 1,552 respondents from the family engagement field included the following:

- Age of children served: 63% early childhood; 62% elementary; 47% secondary
- Type of Community Served: 36% urban; 24% suburban; 22% rural; 39% mixed
- Geographic location: 28% southern U.S.; 27% northeast U.S.; 18% Midwest; 16% west
- 1,382 respondents to English version of the survey; 170 respondents to Spanish version

Key Findings

- **While there is a groundswell of support for family and community engagement, respondents feel that current policies and practices have failed to keep pace.**
 - 93% of respondents believe that families should be partners in the school reopening planning process, yet only 64% felt that the leaders of their school system valued the role that families play in their children’s success.
 - Just 16% of parents and parent leaders surveyed “strongly agreed” with the statement, “the leaders of their school system valued the role that families play in their children’s success.”
 - *“The ‘blame game’ allows (state and federal leaders) to push decision making onto individual districts with little or no resources. Support schools to support families.” – Parent.*
- **The pandemic has highlighted the importance of family, school, and community engagement, but respondents are not confident that this new awareness will continue, nor do they feel that their role in family engagement is well recognized.**
 - 94% of respondents agreed with the statement, “The role families play in their children’s success is now more important than ever.”
 - 74% of respondents agreed with the statement, “The COVID-19 crisis has helped me better appreciate the important role families play in at-home learning.”
 - Yet only 53% of respondents agreed with the statement, “I feel that my job is valued more now than it was before the COVID-19 pandemic” and 57% expressed concern that “the role families play in their children’s success will not be properly emphasized or valued when the crisis is over.

- **The COVID-19 crisis is shining a light on many inequities in our educational system, including the digital divide or “homework gap” – the gap between students who have home broadband access and those who do not.**
 - When respondents were asked about families’ needs for services during the pandemic, technology and connectivity topped the list, with 88% indicating families have a greater need for technology including laptops, computers, and printers; 89% indicating a greater need for high-speed internet access; and 88% indicating a greater need for remote learning opportunities.
 - *“The lack of funding makes it difficult to reach the hardest to reach families that still may not have access to WiFi, laptops, food, housing, (those who) were already in dire situations and it leaves us heartbroken and powerless to help in real ways.” – Parent Leader*
 - Lack of technology and internet access were also noted as the two greatest barriers to engaging families during the pandemic, with 73% of respondents saying “families limited access to technology” and 69% saying “families limited access to the internet” were their greatest barriers.
 - *“I feel I’m unable to keep a connection with the families because many don’t have an active email or access to technology. Sometimes, (I’m) unsure of the phone or actual location/residence.” -- Parent Coordinator.*
 - Special education students were also on the minds of respondents, with 64% noting a much greater need for special education resources since the beginning of the pandemic.
- **While lack of technology is one of the greatest barriers to engaging families, technology is also considered a vital tool in bridging cultural and linguistic barriers to engaging families.**
 - When asked to name “resources or relationships” that have worked best in reaching families who speak other languages, online services such as Google Classroom and Google Translate, Class Dojo, training webinars, and other virtual programs were frequently mentioned. Use of translation services of varying kinds were also important.
- **Community-based partnerships play an important role in serving and engaging with families during the pandemic.**
 - 87% of respondents reported taking advantage of existing or new partnerships with community-based organizations during the pandemic.
 - *“All of our existing relationships were critical during the pandemic. Partners help us design the plans on how to work with families/students. The child welfare agency developed a training specific for us on how to recognize childhood abuse and neglect in a virtual environment, and more.” – K-12 educator.*

Summary of Survey Key Findings, continued

- Despite being closed to visitors during the pandemic, libraries were cited by 59% of respondents as being a partner.
 - *"Our partnership with local literacy sources - the library and other federally funded book distributors - have been some of the most helpful during this time. We've banded together to distribute upward of 10,000 children's books during this pandemic." – Non-profit staff member.*
- Local business and the funding community/foundations were also cited as partners (61% and 58%, respectively).
 - *"(We have a) relationship with Walmart, who gave us a deal for new Chromebooks at \$189 for our students. The Knight Foundation gave us \$20,000 to purchase the laptops for our families. These were new relationships for us." – Non-profit staff member.*
- **Educators do not feel they were adequately trained to engage families.**
 - Only 43% of early-childhood and K-12 educators who responded to the survey agreed with the statement, "I was properly prepared and trained to engage families in their children's learning during my training and preparation program."
 - 64% of those respondents agreed with the statement, "My school/organization provides me professional development opportunities to improve the way I work with families."

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About NAFSCE

The National Association for Family, School, and Community Engagement (NAFSCE) was founded in 2014 as the first membership association focused solely on advancing family, school, and community engagement. Its mission is to advance high-impact policies and practices for family, school, and community engagement to promote child development and improve student achievement. NAFSCE is based in Alexandria, VA. For more information, visit www.nafsce.org.