



## Building Bridges to Families

**With remote learning, engaging parents as co-teachers is more important than ever**

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Family engagement has always been key to educational excellence. And the importance of engaging families as partners in educating students has only increased since schools shifted to distance learning to prevent the spread of COVID-19.

Beyond mastering in-school pedagogical practices, educators need to cultivate new skills and mindsets to deliver effective remote instruction as communities pivot between in-school and remote instruction. This work depends on strong relationships with families.

Schools can no longer check off the family engagement box by hosting an annual family event or planning a program with the parent-teacher association. Instead, schools need to demonstrate a deep commitment to learning from parents while helping them embrace teaching practices that honor student voice and champion creatively alive children.

It all starts with relationships. Research shows that students learn best when they have positive relationships with caring adults and that family engagement increases when parents have strong relationships with educators. Crayola's CREATE™ Relationships framework sets expectations for positive interactions and reminds children and adults how to establish and maintain optimal relationships.

In response to school leaders' requests, Crayola developed the CREATE™ Relationships framework to help families and teachers co-educate. The acronym is based on six actions that can help build positive relationships:

1. **Celebrate** strengths and personal qualities.
2. **Respect** diversity by learning what is unique and universal.
3. **Engage** fully while honoring multiple voices and learning styles.
4. **Accept** mistakes as human learners, since mistakes build a growth mindset.
5. **Trust** one another with positive intent.
6. **Extend** learning with high expectations.

With the current blend of remote and in-person instruction, educators must be intentional about cultivating relationships. Even when teachers are in classrooms with students, they can't provide children with the subtle visual feedback they need; a smile, for example, will be hidden behind a face mask. Intentionally articulating each of the six pillars helps to make up for the loss of in-person contact and subtle cues.

"Celebrate strengths" and "Engage fully" are two aspects of the framework that need extra emphasis. Teachers and students alike are more easily distracted in distance learning, so honoring different learning styles is essential. "Respect diversity" and "Trust one another with positive intent" are also important in addressing bias and inequity in age-appropriate ways.

During remote instruction, family members often work alongside students at the kitchen table. Many parents/relatives have not taught the topics of personal identity and social justice, but there are no better partners to guide these reflective conversations. Their participation in the projects can "Extend learning."

When educators model a growth mindset and admit to personal fallibility, it enables family members to take risks and reflect on outdated notions of others. "Accept mistakes as human learners" is important in building relationships, especially when educators acknowledge their own missteps. The framework can guide discussions in the classroom, on digital screens, and with families.

### Best Pedagogical Practices

Sharing responsibility for distance learning with families provides opportunities to embed effective pedagogy into

