6

LEADING

for *Family*

Engagement

FAMILIES AS OUR PARTNERS

In a conversation during emergency remote teaching (ERT), teachers in the Yonkers School District discussed the challenges, opportunities, and surprises that they experienced with their students and families.

First-grade teacher Kiyoi Tolliver-VanWright shared an inspiring story:

> I have 6-year-olds. So coming into the pandemic classroom, I said to myself, "Wait a minute! These babies have to know how to unmute themselves. They have to know, "If I have an assignment, how do I send it to Ms. VanWright?" So a lot of these things weren't just a learning experience for me and the kids, but their parents as well. I have grandparents who are jumping in to help out! I have a grandmother who never used an iPad in her life who said, "Mrs. VanWright, how do I send you the work?" And I had to walk her through it, but now my 6-year-olds are unmuting themselves, they're sending me pictures, they're telling me, "Ms. VanWright, you're on mute!"

Ms. VanWright's experience is one of millions of moments during ERT when teachers and families connected to make learning possible for our students. This session is focused on helping school leaders build on those experiences.

THE TEACHER'S PERSPECTIVE

Just as with student engagement, traditional ways of understanding and measuring family engagement eclipse the realities and complexities of family's lives. They can, ironically, exacerbate social and cultural gaps between home and school. Such social and cultural gaps turned into an abyss during ERT and made apparent to everyone the specific challenges that both families and teachers face when they work to bridge this gap.

On the brighter side, ERT brought teachers into the living rooms of our students, giving families and caregivers greater knowledge of the language, expectations, curriculum, and activities of teaching. Teachers developed more awareness of the cultural assets, language, and social dynamics of their families as they taught students in their homes. In the process, both families and teachers learned a lot about each other, but we still have a long way to go if we want to build true partnerships between our schools and families.

In Module 1, Session 2, we described the "4 Constants" that promote resilience for our students across all learning environments: predictability, flexibility, connection, and empowerment. These four constants strengthen and support the capacity of students to respond to change or uncertainty. In Session 8 of Module 1, we looked at the same four constants from the perspective of teacher-family relationships and introduced teachers to a general framework that they can use to consider what families need in order to partner with teachers across learning environments.

4 Constants For Teacher-Family Partnerships Across Learning Environments

LEARN MORE
This infographic is based on the work of Alex Shevrin Venet on *Equity-Centered, Trauma-Informed Education.*

1 PREDICTABILITY
Teachers can prioritize predictability by:
- Creating consistent routines for engaging with families.
- Including pathways for more informal connections with families.
- Using translation apps depending on each family's preferences.

2 FLEXIBILITY
Teachers can prioritize flexibility by:
- Actively amplifying family voices.
- Diversifying the ways in which families can engage and contribute.
- Focusing first on building relationships before focusing on academics.

3 CONNECTION
Teachers can prioritize connection by:
- Making an explicit commitment to students' social, emotional, and physical well-being.
- Replicating that commitment when it comes to families' well-being.

4 EMPOWERMENT
Teachers can prioritize empowerment by:
- Prioritizing trust and mutual respect when developing partnerships with families.
- Co-creating a Parent's Bill of Rights and clarifying norms for a healthy and engaged social dialogue.

Deeper Dives

IN MODULE 5, WE DUG DEEP INTO FAMILY ENGAGEMENT AND TALE. BELOW IS A LIST OF TOPICS COVERED IN MODULE 5 THAT YOU CAN RETURN TO AND EXPLORE IN MORE DETAIL:

- Re-thinking family engagement by bBuilding trust, transparency, and capacity for partnering with families
- Using TALE to bridge the digital divide that often separates school and home
- Generating timely and efficient two-way communication with families to elevate family voice
- Building and using funds of knowledge – the knowledge and skills that students acquire in their families and communities and which can thus support academic learning
- Developing cultural competence and cultural humility related to students' families and communities
- Practicing cultural reciprocity, or the exchange of knowledge, values, and perspectives between teachers, families, and students

MODULE 5
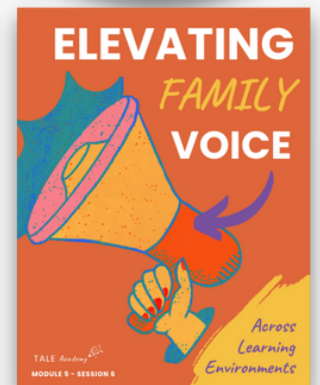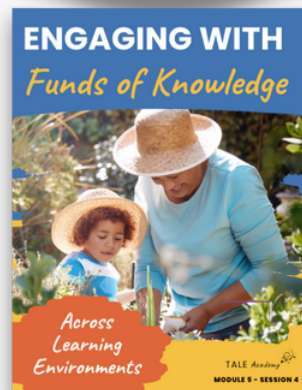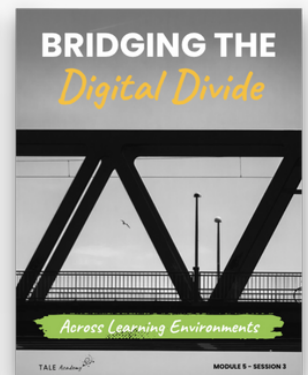
THE SCHOOL LEADER'S PERSPECTIVE

Before we focus on family engagement, it is helpful to think through your school's priorities for community relationships – both internal and external. One place to start is to consider whether your school practices outreach or engagement (or something in between).

Outreach

Outreach is usually a one-way street where schools send out communications to families, school leaders issue memos to staff, and teachers issue directions and the occasional newsletter to students and families.

Engagement

Engagement is a two-way street where school leaders, teachers, students, and families engage in conversations, take part in shared governance/decision-making, and strive for interaction rather than action-reaction.

While you will have an opportunity to assess the level of your school's community engagement (CE) in Activity 7.6.2, use the grid below to reflect on the key differences between outreach and engagement.

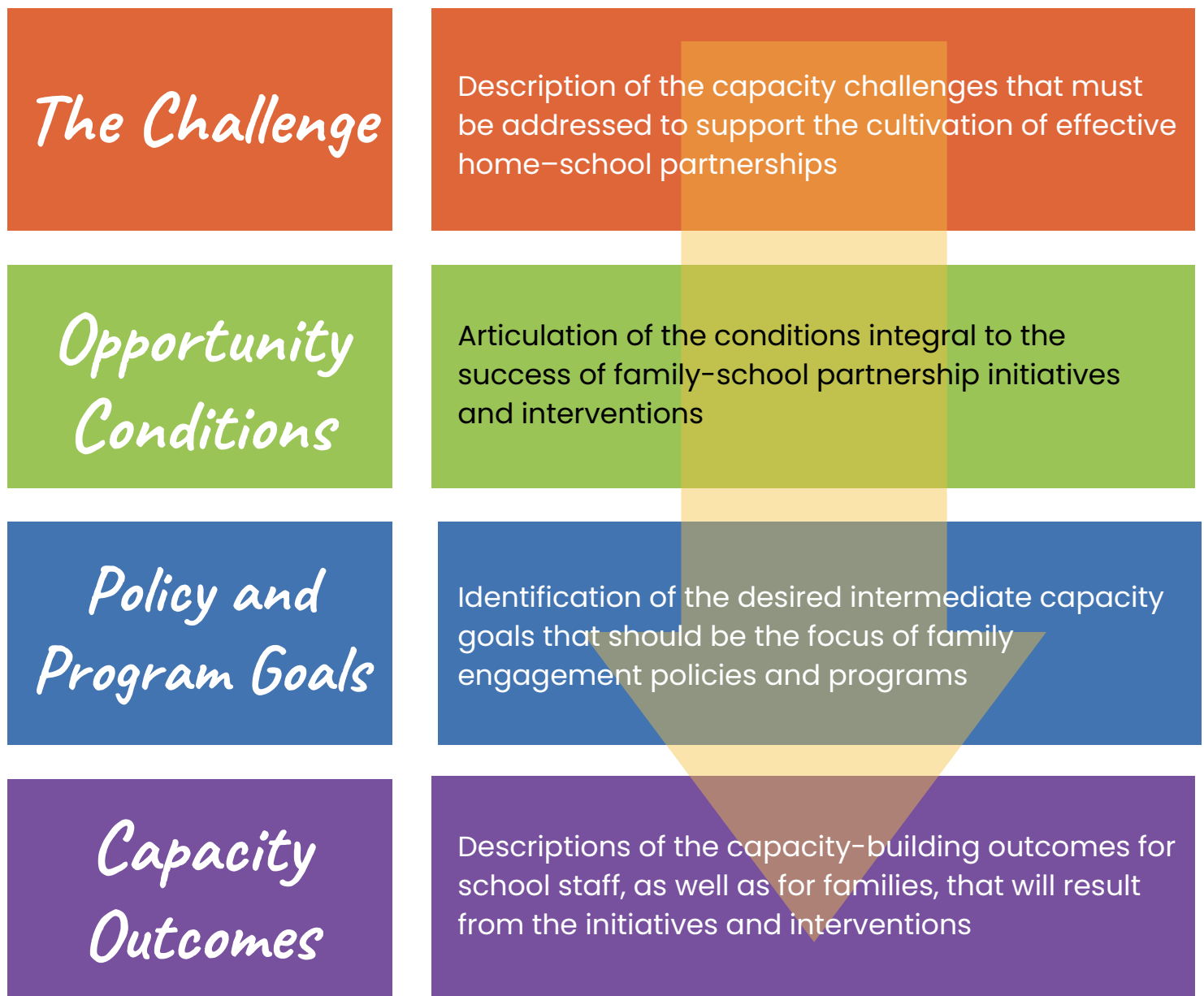| HOW DO YOUR ORGANIZATIONAL POLICIES AND STRUCTURES SUPPORT ENGAGEMENT?		
OUTREACH		**COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT**
The organizational culture is primarily focused on OBTAINING SPECIFIC OUTCOMES.	→	The organizational culture is focused on learning and it values EMERGENT AND LONG-TERM OUTCOMES.
Staff may NOT REPRESENT the community.	→	Staff REFLECTS the community.
The school ADHERES TO WAYS OF OPERATING that reflect the DOMINANT CULTURE, such as using Robert's Rules for meetings, prioritizing staff to speak, etc.	→	The organization CREATES SPACE FOR DIFFERENT CULTURAL WAYS, such as offering cultural foods and social spaces/times, giving elders a special role, etc.
Racism and power may not be discussed or may be DEALT WITH SUPERFICIALLY.	→	The organizational culture supports discussion to UNDERSTAND AND DISMANTLE structural racism to help heal historical trauma and claim individual and community power.
The organization adheres to ORGANIZATION-DRIVEN policies and structures.	→	The organization demonstrates a willingness to revisit organizational policies and structures to RESPOND TO COMMUNITY NEEDS AND IDEAS.

SOURCE: _Nexus Community Engagement Institute_

LEADING FOR FAMILY ENGAGEMENT

School leaders are the linchpins in successful family engagement, as it is school policy, practices, professional development, programming, and support that truly shape the possibilities for successful family-school partnerships. The Dual Capacity-Building Framework provides the clearest and most compelling road map for school leaders to fulfill their role in engaging families and measuring the quality of the school's efforts. The framework helps schools build capacity among educators and families to partner around student success. The framework includes four components:

The Challenge	Description of the capacity challenges that must be addressed to support the cultivation of effective home–school partnerships
Opportunity Conditions	Articulation of the conditions integral to the success of family-school partnership initiatives and interventions
Policy and Program Goals	Identification of the desired intermediate capacity goals that should be the focus of family engagement policies and programs
Capacity Outcomes	Descriptions of the capacity-building outcomes for school staff, as well as for families, that will result from the initiatives and interventions

Take a look at the adaptation of the full dual capacity-building framework for family-school partnerships on the following page, where we highlight the key points on intervention for school leaders in the framework.

THE DUAL CAPACITY-BUILDING FRAMEWORK FOR FAMILY-SCHOOL PARTNERSHIPS

The Challenge

Lack of opportunities for School/Program Staff to build the capacity for partnerships

Ineffective Family–School Partnerships

Lack of opportunities for Families to build the capacity for partnerships

Opportunity Conditions

Process Conditions
- Linked to learning
- Relational
- Development vs. service orientation
- Collaborative
- Interactive

Organizational Conditions
- Systemic: across the organization
- Integrated: embedded in all programs
- Sustained: with resources and infrastructure

Policy and Program Goals

To build and enhance the capacity of staff/families in the "4 C" areas:
- Capabilities (skills and knowledge)
- Connections (networks)
- Cognition (beliefs, values)
- Confidence (self-efficacy)

Areas of Intervention for School Leaders

Family and Staff Capacity Outcomes

School and Program Staff who can
- Honor and recognize families' funds of knowledge
- Connect family engagement to student learning
- Create welcoming, inviting cultures

Effective Family–School Partnerships Supporting Student Achievement & School Improvement

**Families who can negotiate multiple roles**
- Supporters
- Encouragers
- Monitors
- Advocates
- Decision Makers
- Collaborators

THE BIGGER PICTURE

If family engagement was "nice" before the pandemic, it is now clearly "necessary." In fact, researchers at Columbia University's Center for Public Research and Leadership are proposing that we expand what we consider the instructional core for teaching and learning to include families. Why is this important for school leaders? Richard Elmore of the Harvard Graduate School of Education explains it this way: "What the instructional core does is it helps us identify where we are trying to improve. If you change one [element], you have to change them all." He uses the example of increasing the skill and knowledge of the teacher but maintaining a low-level curriculum. The result: "You've got tensions between what teachers can do and what the content is capable of doing."

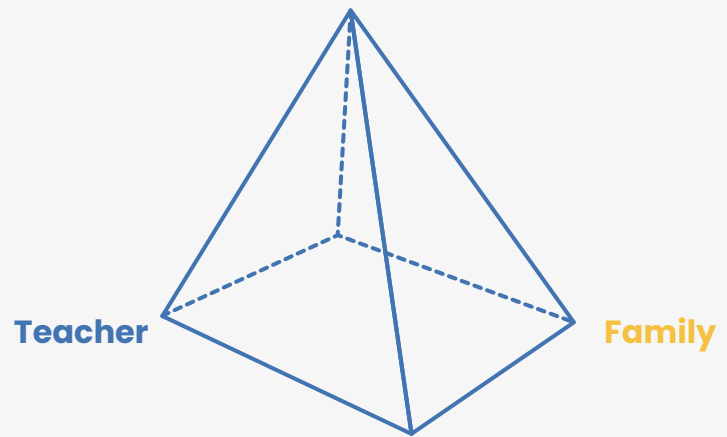## Traditional Instructional Core

Instructional Materials
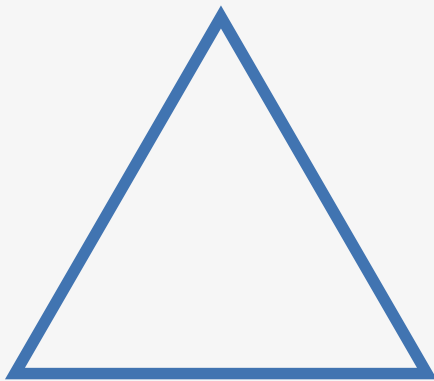
Teacher   **Student**

Source: *Pandemic Learning Reveals the Value of High-Quality Instructional Materials to Educator-Family-Student Partnerships*

Expanded Instructional Core

Instructional Materials

Teacher   **Family**

Student

Columbia University researchers conducted 300 interviews with students, families, and educators from nine school districts and charter school organizations about their experiences during emergency remote teaching (ERT). In July 2021, they released their findings and made four specific recommendations:

1. Expand the required dimensions of high-quality instructional materials to be educative for families, tech-enabled, and culturally responsive.
2. Leverage high-quality instructional materials to coordinate academic co-production among the four anchors of the expanded core (instructional materials, teachers, students, and families).
3. Sustain curriculum-based professional learning focused on the expanded core, with an explicit focus on implementing high-quality instructional materials in ways that respond to student, family, and community needs.
4. Create systems and structures for families, teachers, and students to design, monitor, and improve upon learning experiences.

THE BIGGER PICTURE (CONT)

One of the key "linkages" between the four anchors of the expanded instructional core for TALE is technology. While we will explore technology leadership for TALE in greater detail in Session 8, let's look at some of the key considerations for using family engagement technology in ways that support the goals outlined in the Dual Capacity-Building Framework and address the need to integrate families into the instructional core. Start Early: Champions of Learning identifies **10 critical elements that school leaders should consider when selecting family engagement tools.**

RESEARCH-BASED	Is there a research base provided by the technology provider that supports their app/tool? Does the developer have an affiliation with researchers?
EVALUATION STRATEGY	Does the developer have an evaluation strategy that aligns with student outcomes? Does the developer have a theory of change that clearly states the app/tool's intended impact? Do they have clear measures to evaluate that impact? Do they provide data collected in a transparent and understandable format?
CO-DESIGNED	Was the app/tool co-designed with families? This should go beyond focus groups and informational interviews such that families are not just part of identifying the problems but also part of developing the solutions. Did families help identify the impact the app/tool should have, as well as the success measures used?Did families participate in the testing of the app/tool?
ACCESSIBLE	Is the app/tool accessible to people who speak languages other than English? Are there content pathways in the app/tool for people with low levels of literacy? If the app/tool requires a fee from families, is it affordable? If it is mobile-based, does it require the use of data plans that may be too costly for your families? How does the app/tool fit into the lives of your community (both teachers and families)? Can content be consumed in pieces or does it require a significant amount of time to be set aside by the user?
DATA IN THE HANDS OF THE USER	Does the app/tool provide access for teachers and families to their own data? Does the app/tool help users connect data to effectiveness?
BUILDS COMMUNITY	Does the app/tool help create connections with teachers and families?
ACCOMMODATES TWO-WAY AND PEER-TO-PEER COMMUNICATION	Does the app/tool allow for two-way communication between teachers and families (i.e., not just "push notifications")? Does the app/tool allow users to connect with other users to share their own content (teachers-to-teachers, family member-to-family member, etc.)?
INCORPORATES RAPID FEEDBACK CYCLES	Does the app/tool developer monitor user feedback and quickly incorporate it into iterations of their product?
BUILDS USER SELF-EFFICACY	Does the app/tool help families develop strong skills to support their children's learning and academic success? Does it fill in knowledge gaps where they exist by providing families with information on high-value practices they can use at home to support learning?
EMBEDDED IN EXISTING SYSTEMS	Can the app/tool be embedded in your existing systems, such as the learning management system (LMS)?

Adapted from Start Early.

Now It's Your Turn!

In one of the activities for this session, you will self-assess your school's efforts and see where your collective approach to partnering with families falls. Is your school doing family and community outreach or **engagement**?

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About Us

The TALE Academy
The TALE Academy is a series of virtual learning experiences available to all New York State educators and offers a rich array of resources on topics related to teaching across learning environments (TALE). The TALE Academy is built upon the work New York State educators carried out during emergency remote teaching (ERT) throughout the COVID-19 pandemic and extends it toward the future. TALE invites educators to think beyond online learning to consider a broader perspective on teaching and learning that encompasses teaching across multiple environments (in-person, remote, and hybrid).

The Teaching in Remote/Hybrid Learning Environments (TRLE) Project
The TALE Academy is part of a broader New York State Education Department (NYSED) initiative known as Teaching in Remote/Hybrid Learning Environments (TRLE). In July 2020, NYSED was awarded funding through the United States Department of Education's Education Stabilization Fund-Rethink K-12 Education Models Grant to implement TRLE – a three-year project to build the capacity of teachers and educational leaders to effectively implement remote/hybrid learning for all students. Launched in the depths of the pandemic, the first phase of the TRLE project focused on getting resources to the field through partnerships with Boards of Cooperative Educational Services (BOCES) and school districts across the state. The second phase, which began in February 2022, focused on aggregating lessons learned and emerging teaching and learning strategies to address a broader field of practice: teaching across learning environments.

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