



Family Learning Partnerships

ACROSS LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS

MODULE 5 - SESSION 7



TALE Academy 



Excuse me,
where is my
Learning
Pod?

In the aftermath of the 2020 school closures and while reopening was looking uncertain, the phenomenon of the **learning pod**, or **microschool**, took off in communities across the country. Families with the time, the financial means, or both formed small, in-person learning groups. Some parents worked collaboratively to teach the pod, while others hired teachers, tutors, or other specialists to oversee student learning.

This practice, while understandable, immediately raised a red flag about educational equity. In a Facebook group called Pandemic Pods and Microschools, parent Alexis Kushner de la Pena made this observation after noticing that most of the other parents in the group were white professionals: “We should all think about how pods might further the gap between our students,” she posted. “Families of underserved communities might not be engaging on Facebook, might not speak English, might not have means to pay, to drive, etc.”

The learning pod approach that arose during COVID-19 meant that some parents could take control of their children’s safety, social lives, and academic progress. It also exposed the structural inequities preventing many families from ensuring the same ideal for their children. Let’s take a look at how we can support every child’s “learning pod” through family partnerships.

A Checklist for Equitable Student Learning in Digital Spaces

As a result of their long-range study on the implementation and impact of digital tool use in two low-resource school districts, Learning Forward identifies four **leverage points** – the best places to apply a solution – for increasing equity and supporting parents as co-teachers across learning environments. We can use the following indicators for monitoring progress:

Leverage Point 1

Structure policies, contracts, and budgets to provide transparency and resources for implementation, emphasize equity in resource allocations, and engage parents in decision-making.

- The school budget reflects equity (meeting people where they are and getting them what they need) versus equality (everyone gets the same). This includes digital devices, internet access, instructional materials, and teachers' time.
- Educators advocate for all students and families' basic needs to be met so they have the necessary foundations for learning.
- The school community has discussed what it would take to collaborate with parents as teaching partners.
- The school community has discussed the role of parents in deciding which digital platforms to use and contract with.

Leverage Point 2

Offer targeted and continuous learning opportunities to build the capacity of educators and families to work together in implementing digital learning effectively.

- Specific supports for classroom teachers are in place to enable engagement with all families about digital learning. For example, instruction is provided on how to connect multilingual families with translation and interpretation services.
- Families have access to training and support about using the digital tools and understanding instructional approaches common with virtual learning.

Leverage Point 3

Prioritize student-centered and responsive instruction designed to facilitate authentic student work.

- Parents and students are seen as experts in their own cultural contexts and partners in designing curriculum and instruction that reflects and sustains those cultural contexts.

Leverage Point 4

Build capacity for research and evaluation.

- Parents and students review digital platforms. All families have access to and information about the platforms.
- Parents and students have a role in collecting feedback from other parents about digital platforms – for example, by using a participatory evaluation approach.



From Necessity to Opportunity

For the vast majority of students who remained in school, the shift to remote or hybrid learning required that families – parents, grandparents, siblings, caregivers – take on an important new role in teaching. Through the medium of digital tools, families were exposed to the language, goals, and methods of instruction. Similarly, teachers had more exposure to the home lives and family dynamics of their students.

As we explored in Session 3, schools and families encountered the reality of the digital divide together. Though challenging at the time, this experience granted schools and families an opportunity that is ripe for expansion. Unlike the family-by-family strategies that were developed during the shift to emergency remote teaching, we can take this moment to consider systemic actions to prevent the widening of the **opportunity gap** between students with more access and those with less access to resources. In this session, we will build our capacity as individual teachers to equitably support families as co-teachers.



3 Rs: Relationships, Routines, Resources

At this point in the TALE Academy, we know that the best practices are those that travel well – digital tools that expand the potential of our in-person teaching as well as support online learning. The workbook resource from eTeachNY, [Families as Partners](#), details three focus areas that can build our capacity for engaging effectively with teaching partners at home. These focus areas – *relationships*, *routines*, and *resources* – are familiar teacher moves for working with our students; here they are expanded to include the family as learning partners.



Relationships

The relationships focus area refers to the positive connections that foster interaction and establish a nurturing environment of trust and support. We explored the importance of developing trust and support with families in Session 2 and effective communication in Session 4.



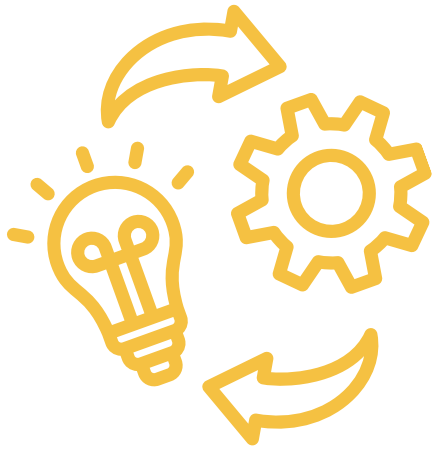
Routines

The routines focus area refers to rehearsed and predictable practices that provide structure to support efficient and effective learning.



Resources

The resources focus area refers to the materials, tools, and supplies that support active learning and skill development across learning environments. This category includes educating families on workspaces, instructional materials, and technology tools.



Implementing the 3 Rs

The 3 R's framework builds upon RELATIONSHIPS by including the following:

- Seeking feedback from families about preferred methods of communication and ease of accessing needed information
- Clarifying roles and responsibilities by sharing learning goals and defining consistent expectations for both home and school learning
- Establishing well-being structures for students by building awareness of student well-being, establishing a healthy balance between work and relaxation as a priority, and by connecting families with resources to support their children

ROUTINES that support in-person, remote, and hybrid learning may include the following:

- Establishing weekly learning routines and goal-setting (for homework, flipped classrooms, or virtual learning)
- Leveraging age-appropriate digital tools for organizational development, such as note-taking templates
- Developing consistent support routines, such as family office hours, to provide assistance or to answer questions about learning tasks

Best practices for implementing RESOURCES may include the following:

- Developing shared expectations for dedicated personal workspaces
- Providing explicit instruction regarding instructional materials and standardizing technology tools to minimize the learning curve for families
- Having support structures for troubleshooting technology issues and providing alternative means to access learning materials

Digital Resources to Share with Family Learning Partners

Khan Academy

Offers educational videos for math, science, reading, social studies, and even SAT prep. Videos are available for pre-K to college level.

PBS for Parents

Provides resources to help promote learning for children ages 2-8.

Education.com

Shares activities and worksheets are available for pre-K to 5th grade.

BrainPop

Provides short animated videos to help further explain complex topics in science, math, English, social studies, art, music, health, and technology (grades 3-12).



Your Turn!

The good news: family engagement increased during the shift to emergency remote teaching. Find out more about families as co-teachers, school-family partnerships, and building on the increase in family engagement as you work through the rest of this session.

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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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