As Boston Public Schools is preparing for the opening of school during the Covid-19 crisis, clear communication with a focus on building relationships and providing learning supports to families is more essential than ever before. Start the school year with strong communication to build the foundation for productive ongoing home school communication. Keep all communication focused on building relationships, culturally relevant and meaningful.
FLAMBOYAN FOUNDATION’S GUIDING PRINCIPLES FOR THE BEGINNING OF THE SCHOOL YEAR

Regardless of the strategy you choose, these principles should guide your approach to building relationships with your student’s families.

Be authentic.
Family engagement is people work—sharing yourself authentically with families will help quickly build trust and rapport. Creating a strong sense of shared humanity can help us feel connected.

Center on the student.
Ask about hopes, dreams, and expectations. This is an incredible opportunity for the teacher, student, and family to align on what’s most important to each of them in supporting the student’s academic success.

Focus on what is important to the family.
These conversations should emphasize building connections. Focus on the relationship while following the family’s lead. Some families might want to share and get to know your background; others might want academic information. Many will want both!

Consistency is key.
Relationships take time. These strategies will start the process of building relationships. Still, it is frequent and consistent communication that allows relationships to grow and sustain, especially if you do not have the opportunity to connect frequently with families in-person.

All families receive outreach.
Every family deserves to have a trusting relationship with their child’s teacher. Families should see that relationship building is for everyone!

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REOPENING STRONG
Basic Information
Welcoming Message
What is different with remote learning from last year to this year
Expectations for student safe behavior (See Appendix)
Expectations for parents to maintain safety (See Appendix)
Communication Systems for School and District Updates

Virtual Learning Expectations
Accessing the portal
Attendance expectations
Student schedules
Student assessment plan
Supports for students with disabilities-EdPlan
Virtual learning platforms
Suggestion for supporting learning at home

Identifying Family Needs
Internet accessibility
Working laptops
Access to social workers and social emotional support
Partners and additional resources and programs

Trainings and Support for Families
Google Classroom
Seesaw
Clever
Zoom

ELEMENTS TO COMMUNICATE TO FAMILIES
REOPENING STRONG
Introducing yourself personally to your families is a great way to welcome new students and start the school year strong. School leaders, provide teachers with clear expectations around parent introductory phone calls content and documentation.

**Logistics to Consider:**
- Prepare a list of questions that help guide your conversation
- Schedule time that is convenient for families
- Answer all family questions and follow-up with information you don’t have
- Use Lions Bridge, the over-the-phone interpretation Service
- Document the calls you make in ASPEN or using your school’s tracking process

**What Families Need to Know:**
- How they can contact you and how you will be sending them information

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**HOME VISITS (VIRTUAL OR IN PERSON)**

Home Visits are a great way to build authentic relationships with families by learning their hopes and dreams for their children.

**Logistics to Consider:**
- Attend a home visit training before implementing
- Track and document the work you do

**What Families Need to Know:**
- Visits are focused on hopes and dreams for the child
- The goal is to build relationships.
STRATEGIES FOR FAMILY COMMUNICATION

BEFORE SCHOOL STARTS FAMILY INFORMATION SESSION VIA ZOOM

Logistics to Consider:
- Communicate with your school widely so all families know that the session is occurring
- Consider offering multiple sessions at different times to accommodate parent schedules
- Families are busy! Keep sessions short
- Give families the option to send questions in ahead of time
- Use interpretation channels in zoom to communicate in all the major languages of your school OR offer sessions in targeted languages
- Consider having a specific session that focuses ONLY on Special education and supporting student IEPs

What Families Need to Know:
- What is different with remote learning from last year to this year
- Expectations for student safe behavior
- Expectations for parents to maintain safety
- Essential staff contact information (such as school nurse, family liaison and social worker)

WELCOME BACK ORIENTATION VIDEO

An introductory video is a great tool for reaching parents that may not be able to attend information sessions, and can be used to build school pride.

Logistics to Consider:
- Plan the content of your video carefully
- Keep it concise and clear
- Use lots of visuals
- Have the video translated

What Families Need to Know:
- How students will be welcomed
- Day in the life of a student
- Expectations from students, staff, and families

REOPENING STRONG
STRATEGIES FOR FAMILY COMMUNICATION

CURRICULUM NIGHT/OPEN HOUSE

A virtual opportunity to learn and understand the expectations for the school year. Families will get to know teachers and gain valuable insight into their child's grade-level curriculum, teaching strategies and classroom expectations.

Logistics to Consider:
- Communicate widely so all families know when the session is occurring
- Take time to welcome all families
- Have interpretation
- Utilize breakout rooms to allow for families to communicate directly with their child's teacher.
- Teachers should share student work examples and expectations for the year
- Share course syllabus
- Include contact information for teacher and specialists

What Families Need to Know:
- How to access the portal
- Attendance expectations
- Student schedules
- Student assessment plan
- IEP plans
- How learning will be occurring (Zoom, Google Classroom, Seesaw, Panorama)
- What supports to provide for learning at home (suggestions)

ONLINE TRAINING TO OFFER FAMILIES
- GOOGLE CLASSROOM
- SEESAW
- ASPEN (PARENT PORTAL)
TIERED COMMUNICATION AND FAMILY SUPPORT

Who needs to be heard?
Who are we reaching?
Whose voice is missing?

Coordination of student participation and family outreach
(High School Level)

Develop a system for tracking student participation in distance learning and reaching out to families if no one has been in contact

ASSESSING YOUR FAMILIES NEEDS

Fostering and building relationships from day one is essential to making this school home partnership work. Use these guiding questions as conversation starters to get to know your families better.

- Will there be an adult or older child available during the day who can assist with live online learning? (For younger children)
- What was your experience last year with distance learning? Positive and negative experiences
- What are your Hopes and Dreams for your child?
- What are your goals and expectations for the year?
- How do you want me to communicate with you?
- What do you need from us to help support your child's learning process?
- Do you have what you need to support your learning at home?
- What questions do you have about the school year?
APPENDIX

- Engagement Guidance for Families
- 10 Ways to Prepare for the Start of School
- Sample Phone Script to Call Families
- School Reopening Family Zoom Information Session Checklist
- Attendance Best Practices
ENGAGEMENT GUIDANCE FOR FAMILIES

HERE ARE SOME GUIDELINES TO HELP PREPARE OUR SCHOOL COMMUNITY FOR SUCCESS FOR SCHOOL YEAR 2020–2021.

At Home Health Screenings
Everyday you must complete a home health screening checklist. Although the written results of the checklist do not need to be submitted to the school, if the checklist reveals that a student has any COVID-19 related symptoms the parent/guardian must:
1. Keep the student home; do not send the student to school.
2. Report the absence to their school administration, noting if the absence is COVID-related.
3. Call the family's primary care doctor or community health center to schedule testing for COVID-19.

Masks and Social Distancing
Everyone is expected to wear a mask whenever inside a BPS building or outside on school grounds when others are within a distance of six feet or less. Accommodations will be made for our youngest learners, students with sensory issues and for our most vulnerable and medically fragile special needs students, as appropriate and necessary.

BPS expects all students and staff to bring and wear their own cloth masks whenever possible and appropriate. Anyone who forgets their reusable mask will be provided a disposable mask to wear on the bus and within the school building.

Community Responsibility
As a means of keeping students and staff healthy and safe, visitors - including parents or caregivers - will not be allowed to enter BPS school buildings for any purpose other than to drop off or pick up their child/children, all of which will be limited to the school's administrative space. All members of a child's household should adhere to the Massachusetts travel order and any other state or city-wide regulations.

Supporting Learning at Home
Try to find a space where you live that's free or limited of distractions, noise, and clutter for learning and doing homework. This could be a quiet, well-lit place in your dining room or living room or a corner of your home that could fit a small table, if available. Attend as many school meetings as possible. Most meetings will likely be virtual and we still need to continue to have conversations with families regarding concerns, questions and changes.

Communicating with your Child's School
Check with your child's teacher about the platform that will be used to provide at home learning, such as Google Classroom or SeeSaw. Attend any training sessions provided by the school so you are aware of how to access digital resources so you can monitor and support your child's progress.

Transportation
If your child rides a bus, plan for your child to wear a mask on the bus and talk to your child about the importance of following bus rules including seating rules. If carpooling, plan on every child in the carpool and the driver wearing masks for the entire trip. If your child takes public transportation (MBTA), reinforce the importance of wearing a mask and social distance.
10 ways to prepare for the start of school

1. Practice hand washing for 20 seconds.

2. Practice putting masks on and off. Mask should be worn whenever your child leaves the house.

3. Practice social distancing. With young children explain what this means, for older children reinforce no hugging or handshakes, only “elbow bumps.”

4. Send your child with more than one mask per day. Wash fabric masks daily and dispose of paper masks after one use.

5. Have an emergency pick-up plan for if your child gets sick and needs to go home.

6. Consider purchasing a thermometer to monitor your child’s health at home.

7. Speak to your doctor about your child’s asthma plan and update any medications. Nebulizers will no longer be allowed in school.

8. Familiarize yourself with the Boston Public Schools website, Facebook and Twitter feed as well city resources so you are aware of any updates as they happen.

9. Encourage other household members and those you come in regular contact with to practice good social distancing and mask wearing whenever possible.

10. Purchase a reusable water bottle for your child to bring to school.
Here are some guidelines to help prepare our school community for success for school year 2020–2021.

Hello my name is (your name) and I'm (student)'s teacher this year! I'm calling today to introduce myself and to see if you have any questions for me!

Is there anything I should know to make sure (student) has a great rest of the year in my class?

If needed or known, add any student-specific notes or questions here.

What are you hopes and dreams for your child?

What is your preferred way that you would like to communicate? (email, phone call, text, etc?)

We look forward to continuing to partner with you and your family this school year. Please feel free to reach out should you have any questions or concerns. Here is my contact information: (provide contact info).
School Reopening
Family Zoom
Information Session

✔ Checklist For Success

- Communicate with your school widely so all families know that the session is occurring
- Consider offering multiple sessions at different times to accommodate different parent schedules. Families are busy!
- Keep sessions short- around 1 hour
- Give families the option to send questions in ahead of time
- Use interpretation channels in ZOOM to communicate in all the major languages of your school OR offer sessions in targeted languages (especially if a large percentage of your population speaks other languages)
- Consider having a specific session that focuses ONLY on Special education and supporting student IEPs
- Plan the session ahead of time using information provided by the district to help guide the conversation and stay on track
REOPEN STRONG WITH ATTENDANCE BEST PRACTICES

Strong school attendance starts with student and family engagement, building effective relationships, and creating a welcoming and culturally affirming school environment. Schools must focus on prevention, to keep students from falling off track, and intervention, to provide effective supports for students and families facing barriers to consistent attendance. Clear and transparent communication of attendance expectations to students and families is essential for success. Below are steps your school can take to reopen with strong attendance practices:

• Call to welcome each student back in their home language.
• Host a virtual back-to-school event to set a positive tone.
• Communicate the attendance expectations and reporting processes to all students and families based on the reopening model in multiple formats.
• Establish clear communication with families of the available resources and supports to help them overcome attendance and participation challenges.
• Create opportunities for families to connect and support each other.
• Conduct periodic check-ins with students and families to ensure their needs are being met and any challenges can be identified.
• Establish a dedicated attendance team to monitor student attendance data and refer any students that may need additional services to the Student Support Team.
• Create a school attendance culture by setting school-wide and class-based attendance goals, communicating ongoing school attendance trends, and celebrating attendance successes.
• Provide student- and family-centered workshops, literature, and discussions to increase awareness of the importance of consistent daily attendance.
• Establish an adaptive attendance prevention and intervention protocol – focused on engagement and student success planning – and ensure teachers and staff fully understand their role in preventing chronic absenteeism.

Integrate progress updates, encouragement, and messaging at every student and family communication opportunity!

COMING SOON: BPS TIERED ATTENDANCE SYSTEM (TAS)

For continued support in implementing attendance best practices within your school, the Department of Opportunity Youth will introduce a Tiered Attendance System (TAS) in SY20-21. Developed by a cross-disciplinary team, and largely supported by Supervisors of Attendance, this model will help schools identify gaps in their attendance practices and then provide tools and resources to strengthen those areas.

Stay tuned for training and implementation opportunities!
Contact Brian Marques (bmarques@bostonpublicschools.org) for additional information.