



TIPS FOR HAVING A MEANINGFUL CONVERSATION ABOUT THE EFFECTS OF SCHOOL CLOSURES

Now more than ever, schools need the support and partnership of parents to navigate these difficult times and make important decisions about how to measure student learning and continue to provide the academic support students need. One of the best ways to do that is to have a discussion with your school leader. This may seem a bit overwhelming at first, which is why we've compiled the tips below to help you get started.

BEFORE

Get Ready for Your Conversation

- **Gather information and data on parent and family perspectives.** If you are able to do so, survey parents on what questions they have about school reopening, remote learning, how school closures are affecting the progress of our school and students, and what the future of school will look like.
- **Give appropriate notice.** School leaders are busy, so give the administrator one to two weeks to fit you into their schedule and prepare for the conversation with the resources included in this toolkit.
- **Follow up when necessary.** Don't assume that no immediate response means they aren't interested. If you don't hear back right away, be sure to follow up and consider other types of communications such as a phone call.
- **Send an agenda for the meeting.** Use the sample email outreach language and add a few specific items or questions you have. This additional transparency will better frame the conversation and help the principal better prepare.

DURING

Framing the Conversation

- **Opening the discussion is everything.** How you start the conversation sets the tone for the rest of the discussion. Start by thanking the school leader for the time and commitment to supporting students and the school during this unprecedented time. Think about opening the conversation by sharing a new activity your child is enjoying or something your PTA has been doing to support students, educators and families in the larger community during school closures.
- **Keep it conversational.** It can be easy for the discussion to unintentionally turn into a Q&A session, but this isn't the best way to foster a partnership. The most effective way to approach these conversations is to think of them as a friendly dialogue.
- **Keep it factual and focused on students.** With so much uncertainty on the effects and the future of the pandemic, conversations can easily veer off track. Reframe the conversation back to your goal and the facts.
- **Anticipate uncertainty.** Without clear guidance from federal, state and/or local health agencies, school leaders may not have the answers to all of your questions or immediate solutions regarding COVID-19, school closures and reopening. It's okay if they don't have all the answers at this time. This is an opportunity to partner to help the school succeed and make sure families are included in these important decisions that affect student well-being.

AFTER

Maintain Engagement and Communication

- **Send a follow-up email.** Thank the school leader for meeting with you and include a recap of your next steps. You also may want to consider sending some notes from the discussion.
- **Continue the partnership and have additional discussions.** Reach out regularly to ensure family engagement in decisions on reopening, remote learning and/or assessments. Take a look at the "What's Next?" resource for ideas of how to strengthen your partnership.

