

December 2020

## Virtual Tools Show Promise for Moving the Needle on Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Family Engagement

Tamra Mitchell  
*Kansas State University*, [tmitchell@ksde.org](mailto:tmitchell@ksde.org)

Socorro Herrera  
[sococo@ksu.edu](mailto:sococo@ksu.edu)

Follow this and additional works at: <https://newprairiepress.org/advocate>



Part of the [Bilingual, Multilingual, and Multicultural Education Commons](#), [Educational Leadership Commons](#), [Elementary and Middle and Secondary Education Administration Commons](#), [Elementary Education Commons](#), [Junior High, Intermediate, Middle School Education and Teaching Commons](#), [Other Teacher Education and Professional Development Commons](#), [Pre-Elementary, Early Childhood, Kindergarten Teacher Education Commons](#), [Secondary Education and Teaching Commons](#), and the [Special Education Administration Commons](#)



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial 4.0 License](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Mitchell, Tamra and Herrera, Socorro (2020) "Virtual Tools Show Promise for Moving the Needle on Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Family Engagement," *The Advocate*: Vol. 26: No. 1. <https://doi.org/10.4148/2637-4552.1149>

This Special Topic is brought to you for free and open access by New Prairie Press. It has been accepted for inclusion in *The Advocate* by an authorized administrator of New Prairie Press. For more information, please contact [cads@k-state.edu](mailto:cads@k-state.edu).

---

## Virtual Tools Show Promise for Moving the Needle on Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Family Engagement

### Abstract

The school building closures of spring 2020 fundamentally disrupted education in Kansas, but out of this disruption emerged the need and opportunity for schools and educators to be creative and innovative. At a time when every parent in our state was either employed as an essential worker and working longer hours, trying to work from home, or trying to navigate the loss of their job, they were also trying to support their children with continuous learning. This required Kansas schools to think differently and try new strategies for truly engaging families. One promising innovation that many schools piloted was to host a virtual, interactive, and engaging un-conference, called ParentCamp. While not perfect, the results of this pilot show promise that the use of technology doesn't have to be a barrier to equity. Virtual tools show promise for expanding opportunities for families to have direct access to educators to learn and ask questions about how to support their children.

### Keywords

virtual family engagement, family engagement, English Language Learners

# Virtual Tools Show Promise for Moving the Needle on Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Family Engagement

***Tamra Mitchell, Kansas State Department of Education***

*Tamra Mitchell is a doctoral student at Kansas State University, Manhattan, KS, and the Elementary Redesign Specialist for the Kansas State Department of Education in Topeka, KS.*

***Dr. Socorro Herrera, Kansas State University***

*Dr. Socorro Herrera is a professor in the Department of Curriculum and Instruction, College of Education at Kansas State University in Manhattan, KS, and serves as the Executive Director of the Center for Intercultural and Multilingual Advocacy (CIMA).*

## Introduction

Crises are fundamentally disruptive. On the negative side, crises often provoke angst, uncertainty, and fear as individuals deal with change, hardship, and sometimes great loss. Crises can also yield positive consequences. For example, crises often disrupt human and systemic predictability, assumptions, superficial thinking, and undifferentiated assessments of family and student need. Especially positive outcomes of such disruption are critical thinking and creative innovation.

The 2020 COVID-19 crisis has been emblematic of these painfully negative and potentially positive outcomes. In both the heartland and across the nation, the disruption of norms, assumptions, predictability, and humanity has prompted reconsideration of what lies beneath – the taken-for-granted. This has been especially true with respect to teaching and learning at a distance, and the efficacy with which growing numbers of English language learning (ELL) students and families are being reached, engaged, and educated, both before and amidst crises such as COVID-19. Emergent arguments suggest that schools and school systems may benefit from a reconsideration and reconceptualization of parent (especially ELL parent) engagement, during and after crisis management (Barko-Alva, Porter, & Herrera, 2020; Robertson, 2020).

## COVID-19: Crises and Opportunity in the Heartland and Beyond

The COVID-19 pandemic has been one of the worst since the 1918 influenza epidemic (Lovelace, 2020). At the time of this writing, there have been 7,000,000+ COVID-19 cases, and 200,000+ deaths in affected U.S. jurisdictions (Center for Disease Control [CDC], 2020). The fast-emerging and worldwide economic recession put in motion by this crisis is expected to increase unemployment in countries like the United States by as much as 14.5 percent (International Labour Organization, 2020), and low-income/low-SES households, in which the majority of ELL students reside, will likely be most affected (CDC, 2020). This reality presents educators with unprecedented questions that must be addressed.

The COVID-19 school closings in heartland states, such as Kansas, have created a phenomenon that U.S. education has not experienced in almost a century (Education Week, 2020). It comes as no surprise that the COVID-19 crisis has been approached by a range of often ineffectual

responses among schools and teachers, not only nationally but worldwide (OECD, 2020). There have been few educational guidelines to follow and fewer technical solutions to the challenge of maintaining continuity in students' educational trajectories (Packer, 2020). In Kansas, school and system leaders confronted an adaptive challenge never before experienced. Kansas Governor Laura Kelly made a bold and controversial proclamation to close school buildings in March 2020, just when many school districts were beginning their spring breaks. Despite the pandemic, PreK-12 learning needed to continue.

Kansas districts shifted to implement guidance outlined in the continuous learning document provided by the Kansas State Department of Education (KSDE, 2020). This guidance, created in collaboration with previous and the current Kansas Teacher of the Year (who is now the National Teacher of the Year), provided structure and recommendations on the logistics of flipping instruction from face-to-face to virtual learning. However, teachers worried about students' physical and social-emotional health, and they cared deeply about trying to stay connected to families. One teacher summarized the situation as follows.

Every parent falls into just three categories right now. Either they are:

- Fully employed in an essential job, struggling to find adequate childcare, and struggling to support their children with continuous learning; or
- They are trying to work from home while trying to support their children with continuous learning; or
- They have lost their job and are struggling to provide basic needs while trying to support their children with continuous learning.

Every parent in our state is struggling at the same time. (Anonymous, personal communication, Spring, 2020)

### **Reaching, Engaging, and Educating ELL Students Inside and Outside Crises**

Given the dynamics of the COVID-19 crisis, ELL students who were homebound also suffered from the *digital divide* (Cherewka, 2020), an access and opportunity gap between the information-haves and the have-nots. This nationwide dilemma proved no less salient in Kansas, where ELL student numbers in some school systems have increased by more than 20 percent, 2012-2017 (Tobias, 2018). Lee (2020) has argued that broadband (i.e., Internet) availability historically has been at the core of this divide, "with an estimated 21.3 million people lacking access in 2019" (para. 4). Those ELL households that do have Internet typically suffer narrower bandwidths (Hernandez, 2020) and rely more heavily on smart phones with small screens to gain access (Cherewka, 2020).

These technological disparities and inadequacies have become increasingly relevant and significant since the COVID-19 pandemic has closed schools and educational systems throughout the nation. As a result, ELL students are overwhelmingly limited by the digital divide with regard to their schooling, based on unequal access to teaching and curriculum delivered through online technologies. ELL parents' communication with and participation in online programs delivered by local schools will be key to the ongoing academic success of this marginalized population. Parents/families who were often absent from school parental engagement activities are likely to become further disconnected from the information needed to support their children.

## Maximizing Parental Engagement

What should be the role of a K-12 student's primary caregiver(s) (e.g., parents, grandparents, other relatives, foster parents) in her/his schooling? The question itself embodies a number of assumptions that may or may not fit today's schools, students, or home environments—before, during, or after COVID-19. For example, once a student reaches the age of compulsory education, should schools lead her/his education or should the caregiver(s)? The assumption that school plays the primary role in a child's education is embraced by most parents and cultures (Herrera, Porter, & Barko-Alva, 2020).

Legal precedent in the United States, dating back to around 1867 and known as the doctrine of *in loco parentis*, has historically permitted educational institutions, including public schools, to act *in place of the parents* to assume a dominant role in the education, classroom management, and disciplining of students. Yet, not all cultures or caregivers are comfortable with *in loco parentis*, especially as education is carried out in public schools and classrooms (Mampane, 2018; Puente, 2019). COVID-19 has served to move us, as educators and professionals, toward increasingly relevant questions, such as:

- In what ways can caregivers and families bolster the efficacy and outcomes of online teaching and learning, especially for marginalized student populations?
- What can be learned from this crisis that will move us beyond assumptions and ways of doing that have never fit our culturally and linguistically diverse populations?
- In what ways can virtual platforms open up new opportunities for family/caregiver engagement that can help dismantle longstanding and often dated paradigms and models for parent involvement (versus engagement)?

A brief overview of current models used for parental engagement pre-COVID-19 may help us better understand how we as educators can move toward building relationships and using technology as the medium for connecting with and involving families and caregivers in creative and innovative ways.

### Models of Parent/Family Engagement

Different cultures tend to hold differing conceptualizations of teaching and learning and often maintain different conceptualizations of the term *parent* (Herrera et al., 2020). Individuals are socialized to/by schools' normative premises about ways a parent/caregiver is to behave, discipline, and prepare a child/student for today's complex society. Traditionally, U.S. schools have approached and often delimited potential caregiver contributions to classroom education as *parent participation* or *involvement* (Herrera et al., 2020). Each of these terms is grounded in the assumption of a conventional, two-parent home.

Today, the model for what might be characterized best as *conventionally bounded parental involvement* prevails in schools and schooling (Herrera et al., 2020; Watson & Bogotch, 2015). This Epstein (1991) model primarily targets a normative conceptualization of parental involvement and has endured in schools and schooling for almost thirty years. Like other traditional models, it emphasizes: school-centric parental preparation of children for their roles

as students, voluntarism through auxiliary associations such as PTA, and significant parental support for homework completion. Among its problematic assumptions are the following:

- *Parents* (plural) are the primary caregivers in the home.
- Schools should define and circumscribe how parents may be involved in schooling.
- Parents' work schedules and other adult obligations permit them the time to guide students in completing homework assignments.
- School voluntarism should be channeled through associations (e.g., PTA), as guided and controlled by school leaders or leadership representatives.

The Hong (2011) model, first characterized as a new approach to *parent engagement* versus parent involvement, popularized the notion of a *cord of three strands*. The first strand, *induction*, involved introducing parents to the complex world of schools. Thus, it was among the first to acknowledge intergenerational differences in schooling. The second strand, *integration*, encouraged the development of a parental presence in school communities. This touchstone moved parents from associations toward more direct involvement in schools. The final strand, *investment*, urged support for emerging parent leaders on a more or less continuous journey of parent engagement.

Although this model introduced alternative notions of parental participation that were more collective than individual and grounded in relationships, it continues to embody a number of unchecked assumptions about caregivers and their potential contributions and roles related to schooling. Among such troublesome assumptions are the following:

- *Parents* (plural) are the primary caregivers in the home.
- Networks can be effectively established to enable and sustain more collective parent engagement.
- Parents' work schedules and other adult obligations permit them the time to network for engagement.
- Schools exhibit readiness to encourage and support the recommendations of networks of parents anxious to engage with the schooling of their children.

A more collaborative model for caregiver involvement remains popular across a range of U.S. school systems. This Mapp model (Mapp, Carver, & Lander, 2017) targets what are characterized as *powerful partnerships*. Like the Hong (2011) model, it encourages *engagement* among caregivers but reconceptualizes them as *families*. Fundamentally, the model is predicated upon enabling, establishing, and maintaining *five conditions* thought essential to partnerships. These conditions promote (1) more direct connections to learning, (2) relationship building, (3) collaboration across families and teachers, (4) respect for home languages, cultures, and experiences, and (5) varied and interactive learning opportunities. Once again, this model operates on a number of untested assumptions, including:

- Teachers demonstrate readiness for collaborations with families.
- Respect for cultures and other differences will translate to the maximization of them in the classroom and beyond.
- Teachers and families are prepared to initiate and nurture interactive learning opportunities.

The Mapp model does acknowledge that teachers operate from schemas of culture-bound and largely unexamined beliefs about parents, parenting, second languages, cultures, and more that

must be adequately addressed for the model to prove effective. Exposing such beliefs does not, however, ensure that teachers are adequately prepared to collaborate with families from other cultures and languages in ways that are purposive and meaningful.

Understanding these three models of parent involvement and family engagement is important because schools may still function under old assumptions based on antiquated models of parent involvement that are not culturally responsive/sustaining or relevant for our diverse communities, students, and families. Consider that schools put a tremendous amount of time and effort into planning parent events and often are discouraged when attendance is low. New paradigms are emerging that provide guidance for attending to the unique and diverse family units that are present in today's educational communities (Herrera et al., 2020). These voices are redefining what the terms parent/parenting mean across different contexts and challenging old narratives that have driven outdated conceptualizations of what it is to be an involved or engaged parent within educational contexts.

### **Re-claiming/Re-envisioning Family Partnerships: An Adaptive Challenge**

Beginning in 2017, Kansas schools began a metamorphosis referred to as the Kansans Can School Redesign Project. This redesign project is rooted in four principles focused on the learner:

- Personalized learning
- Real-world applications (of learning)
- Student success skills (social-emotional learning and employability skills)
- Family/business/community engagement

Although not all Kansas schools are part of the redesign process, the KSDE has been organizing breakout sessions at conferences to increase awareness and understanding. These sessions have offered resources and information on the four principles, statewide, for the past three years. Many more schools are focusing on these principles in addition to those included in the official numbers. Educators in redesign schools have been trained to approach adaptive challenges using the four principles.

To truly engage all families, especially families from underrepresented groups, a shift in current paradigms will be necessary as educators look into the future. Books and “how-to” manuals on how to plan, host, and facilitate family engagement are too often based on assumptions and structures that limit parent/caregiver participation. This challenge will require educators to conduct deep “heart work” of examining what they believe about engaging all families, understanding and appreciating cultural and linguistic differences, and examining how their school culture and climate may be contributing to or exacerbating gaps, barriers, and stereotypes. Educators frequently are bound by a system that continues to pursue parent/caregiver engagement in ways that do not accommodate the challenges (e.g., work schedules, childcare, transportation) that are present for families they serve. COVID-19 has created an opportunity for educators to maximize technology to open pathways for crossing the bridge into new ways of building relationships, informing, and learning from culturally and linguistically diverse families.

### **Initial Steps to Initiate and Strengthen Family Partnerships**

During the month of April 2020, the KSDE partnered with ParentCamp and the Kansas Parent Information Resource Center (KPIRC) with the initial charge to host a virtual parent informational webinar. KPIRC and ParentCamp previously have partnered with the KSDE to provide professional learning to redesign schools on parent and family engagement, so partnering on this specific topic was an extension of prior work. The goal of the webinar was to provide guidance to parents on how to support their children with continuous learning through the remainder of the school building closures in the spring of 2020. However, hosting a webinar for thousands of parents seemed insufficient and impersonal. ParentCamp's virtual, open format seemed a better alternative to provide more dynamic, engaging opportunities for caregivers and families to learn ways to support their children through virtual learning.

ParentCamp is an “unconference” built on the belief that when families, schools, and communities connect in equal partnership conditions, students benefit. The topics of ParentCamp sessions are driven by all stakeholders. Families and caregivers have autonomy and choice regarding the sessions they attend and how long they attend; they move freely between sessions. Sessions are organized around small group conversations, guided by a facilitator who is trained to ask questions, draw others out, and support all to participate. The facilitator is not a “presenter,” rather the facilitator is equipped to ask open-ended questions, clarify statements, and keep the conversation in the breakout session positive and moving forward. If a topic requires additional expertise, a presenter may be included. The presenter's role is to briefly share practical pieces of information and then answer questions.

ParentCamp had just experimented with hosting a virtual ParentCamp with approximately 20 families. The feedback was promising. Although ParentCamp had not previously tried to host a larger event, they partnered with the KSDE and KPIRC to (1) create a format specific to Kansas, (2) pilot two virtual ParentCamps with families and caregivers, and (3) train district leaders and education service center staff to host their own virtual ParentCamps.

### **Implementing Virtual ParentCamps**

Developing a virtual ParentCamp using Zoom was, in some ways, simpler than hosting a face-to-face event. The KSDE scheduled the two virtual ParentCamp opportunities to take place in mid-April. One evening event was for families and caregivers of elementary students; the other was for families and caregivers of middle school and high school students. The KSDE does not have direct access to families, nor was there time for a major marketing campaign. The KSDE created electronic flyers in English and Spanish with basic information and a link to register for the event. It relied on superintendents in the south-central part of the state to forward information to their families or family engagement coordinators. Within a matter of hours, both the elementary and secondary ParentCamps were filled with over 100 pre-registrations for each night.

On April 14, the KSDE and ParentCamp hosted approximately 50 elementary families from different districts for the first virtual ParentCamp. Approximately 60 secondary families were hosted on April 16. The number of families who actually participated was lower than the pre-registration numbers, which is consistent with ParentCamp's national trend data. Breakout sessions were divided according to the grades of students. At the elementary level, the bands



were grades PreK-1, 2-3, and 4-5. At the secondary level, the bands were grades 6-8, 9, 10-11, and 12.

After a brief, whole-group kickoff, the bulk of the event program was dedicated to a 40-minute, small-group breakout room discussion. Dialogue centered around four guiding questions:

1. What can we celebrate about your continuous learning experience thus far?
2. What has been most helpful to you in your continuous learning journey?
3. What has been your biggest obstacle(s) in your learning at home efforts?
4. How have you taken care of yourself or your loved ones when you or they feel stressed or overwhelmed?

Families and caregivers could exercise autonomy and stay in the same breakout room for the duration of the session, or they could leave the session and ask the Zoom facilitator to join another dialogue group. The program closed with a whole-group opportunity to share positive shout outs, takeaways, and possible future topics. Feedback from these two pilot events was overwhelmingly positive. See Appendix A for a detailed agenda. Descriptive notes on the event are provided in Appendix B.

### **Expanded Implementation of ParentCamp Events in Kansas Schools**

As successful as the two pilot, virtual ParentCamps were, the planning team—composed of the KSDE, ParentCamp and KPIRC leaders—realized that providing the atmosphere of collaboration and the autonomy for caregivers and families to move flexibly across breakout sessions would be a logistical challenge for hosting events that would accommodate a larger audience. The planning team also realized that although they wanted to create opportunities for families who do not speak English to participate, the logistics of having translators and translated materials were more than this pilot experience could manage, given the rapid timeline. If this method of engaging families and caregivers was worthwhile (and the team believed it was), then more school and district leaders would need to experience ParentCamp and learn how to facilitate their own versions with their stakeholders.

On April 23 and 24, the KSDE hosted two virtual ParentCamp “experiences” for school, district, and educational service center representatives. These experiences were a shortened version of the ParentCamp pilot program; they followed the same agenda, with the exception that the breakout discussion session was 20 minutes and the wrap-up allowed time for participants to ask specific questions about how they might host their own ParentCamps. At the first event, 89 participants attended; 73 participants attended the second event. Feedback from attendees indicated that it was more meaningful for them to experience the event themselves than to simply be presented information about it. Throughout the remaining two or three weeks of school, several schools and districts subsequently hosted their own events.

One Kansas middle school was able to host two virtual parent events prior to the end of the traditional school year in mid-May. Their first event was attended by approximately 30 families. Families could choose from three topics for breakout discussions: (1) transitioning my middle-schooler to high school, (2) keeping my student physically active during this stay-at-home time, and (3) motivating my student to stay engaged with school. At the end of that first event, the facilitator polled the participants to ask what topics they would like to discuss in the

future, which then provided data to plan for the breakout session discussions of their second event. New topics included transitioning my fifth grader to middle school and considerations for social-emotional wellbeing. The number of participants grew; they hosted over 70 families at the second event. When commenting on the virtual event, one teacher expressed, “I can’t remember a time that we ever had a turnout of 72 families that came to a parent night.”

### **Lessons Learned: Problematizing Processes to Find Solutions**

Reflecting on the two pilot, virtual ParentCamp events held for caregivers/families resulted in key considerations and questions to be explored.

- Only approximately 50% of those registered participated in the event each night. Questions to investigate include:
  - What challenges or barriers did families face that prevented them from participating as they had planned?
  - Did families need tech support or prior coaching to use the platform?
- Promotional and registration materials were translated into Spanish, a Spanish-language parent email was provided to districts, and a Spanish-language breakout session was offered each night. However, participation was low, with only two Spanish-speaking parents attending on the second night. Questions to investigate include:
  - Were promotional materials sent to Spanish-speaking families? If so, to what extent?
  - Were automated Zoom responses and instructions presented in Spanish, if the family’s browser was set for Spanish? If not, how might this obstacle be overcome in the future?
  - What cultural considerations need to be accounted for to encourage virtual participation?
  - What assumptions were made about the community and family?
- The pilot was a test run and, for this reason, sessions were offered in only English and Spanish. What must happen in order to include *all* languages spoken by families in a community? Is it possible to have an integrated virtual event, or should virtual events be customized to meet the needs of families with specific language and cultural backgrounds?
- Having a well-planned marketing campaign is essential, and it must reach all families, whether they have Internet access or not. The features of the virtual meeting platform (e.g., Zoom, Google Meet, Skype, Microsoft Teams) can expand/limit access. In this pilot, Zoom allowed participants to call in using a meeting phone number. However, if promotion was only done via email, then those without email or Internet access would not have seen the invitation to join by phone.
- Hosting a virtual ParentCamp that included families from different districts was interesting. On one hand, it was powerful in that parents could share openly about their challenges without feeling embarrassed, because they were talking to other Kansas parents that weren’t from their same small town. However, conversations with the most impact likely will take place within school communities, where parents/caregivers are facilitators, educators support, and relationships are ongoing.

Lessons learned yielded insights about the possibilities of rewriting the script for how family engagement is defined, the opportunities for creative and innovative use of technology that have been missed, and the kind of risk taking needed to bridge the valley of emptiness that currently exists between home and school. The exploration and decisions made today will shape the opportunities created for tomorrow and into the future.

### **Parental Involvement/Engagement Paradigms Reinvisioned for the Present**

What assumptions do we educators, as members of a system that is entrenched in outdated paradigms, hold about engaging families and caregivers? Are the assumptions appropriate for the families that comprise the school community? How might we realign our vision of family engagement and utilize technology to build relationships of caring and trust—relationships that foster equitable ways of meeting the needs of students and families (Herrera et al., 2020)? Our re-envisioning of possibilities for the future will require us to ask difficult questions and align our visions and missions to include families as active participants, informing the way we make decisions within our communities, school districts, schools, and ultimately classrooms. Each educator plays a role in inviting, informing, and setting equitable conditions for all members of the school community to participate in the education of the children they are charged to nurture and support to the best of their abilities. When explored and utilized to its full potential, technology has the power to support equitable parental engagement.

### **Implications and Vision for the Future**

The ParentCamp pilot was one small attempt for the KSDE, ParentCamp, and KPIRC to experiment with a virtual format for engaging families, learn from that pilot, and share the resulting insights with educators throughout the state. The results were sufficiently positive to energize innovation on family engagement and expand possibilities. Yet these steps were just the beginning. As previously discussed, there are many questions to be asked about what is assumed and about how culturally and linguistically diverse families will be served best. Now is the time to re-examine beliefs and antiquated assumptions that keep our communities separated and to create a new vision for what family engagement can mean for all families and caregivers.

The technological divide that currently exists is two-fold. First, it cannot be assumed that providing students and their families with computers and Internet access will be enough to support culturally and linguistically diverse populations. Second, a plan must be envisioned that is based on the needs of the communities and biographies of the families and students. Such a plan will ensure training for families to foster understanding and use of technology to advance learning within their homes. The technological divide must be addressed by lawmakers, communities, and Internet companies. Schools and districts may be able to provide appropriate devices for students, but there are areas of Kansas that do not have access to broadband Internet, even if families could pay for it. The Institute of Education Sciences provides a map indicating such areas where there is not appropriate Internet available to handle the load that apps such as Zoom require (IES, n.d.). There is also the challenge of families affording Internet services. If access to the Internet is to be required for education, then communities will need to come together and support all members to eradicate this and many other resource inequalities that divide the “haves” and the “have nots.”

Educators are challenged to ask: Why do parents need to physically “show up” to school to be counted as engaged? As a nation, we are learning more about offering and supporting asynchronous learning for students of all ages. Perhaps we can acknowledge that family engagement *has always been* synchronous and asynchronous. Intentionally offering and supporting asynchronous opportunities for families and caregivers to engage with their children in learning and providing social-emotional support might very well be part of the vision for the future. For example, families do not need to show up to a parent meeting to listen to announcements and presentations. Information can be shared via video recordings, and links can be posted to a website or social media. Secure platforms can be utilized so that communication can be two-way and occur at times when it works for families and educators. Through collaboration, families and educators can ideate creative, asynchronous family engagement opportunities that will be meaningful to the families in their community.

Assumptions about who schools are trying to engage must also be reexamined. What if the primary caregivers are not the parents? How can schools be more inclusive in their language regarding who should be engaged for certain events? While opportunities like “Muffins for Moms” or “Donuts for Dads” are well intended and named with catchy phrases, the names themselves exclude a whole host of family members who may be a child’s option. Yes, grandmothers can go to “Muffins for Moms,” but how do they feel about that? Is it awkward? Does it announce to the school community that a child does not have a mother? What is the purpose of such events? If the event is intended to present information with little or no interaction, then how might families and caregivers receive that information asynchronously? If the purpose is to have families and caregivers interact with one another, might there be virtual options that are more inclusive? Perhaps the event can be renamed to be more inclusive of any family member or caregiver who may attend, rather than signifying gender-specific groups.

Barriers regarding transportation, childcare, shift-work schedules, wariness to enter the school building, and other challenges might be alleviated by providing ways for families and caregivers to connect and learn through virtual means. School leaders and educators must refrain from making assumptions about families who do not show up to on-site parent-teacher conferences, family nights, or other events. School communities that care about family engagement will seek feedback from families that do not attend, to understand the barriers that prevent them from doing so and to create strategies for removing those barriers. Schools must also reexamine their purpose for such events. It is not enough to simply meet the Title I requirement to host events; rather, events should be planned to ensure they are interesting, fun, and beneficial for families.

Finally, and most importantly, educators will need to do the difficult heart work of examining their own beliefs and biases regarding “good” parenting, second languages, and other cultures. In Kansas, the overwhelming majority (91%) of teachers are White (KSDE, in press), well-intentioned people who care deeply about students and work toward mastery of their profession. Most are required to take a course in teaching culturally and linguistically diverse learners as a requirement for their teaching licensure. Although a step in the right direction, one class is insufficient to effectively change mindsets and acquire the skills and knowledge needed to leverage the assets of students and families who bring diverse racial, ethnic, cultural, and linguistic backgrounds. Educators need to have a deep understanding of their own biases,

privileges, subjectivity, and culture to intentionally move beyond themselves and, with an open heart, begin to eliminate the divide and connect with others different than themselves.

In this new vision for family engagement, all families and caregivers will be effective in supporting their children in academic and social-emotional learning. They will be true partners with teachers to create and sustain personalized learning opportunities both inside and outside of the school building and traditional school day. Families will be connected to and supportive of one another and an integral part of their school and larger community. They will have what they need in the way of physical, emotional, and psychological resources. Stronger families will lead to stronger communities, and stronger communities will lead to a stronger Kansas and nation.

## References

- Barko-Alva, K., Porter, L., & Herrera, S. (2020). Technology as technocracy: Educators' conscientious use of technology for authentic family engagement. In R. E. Ferdig, E. Baumgartner, R. Hartshorne, R. Kaplan-Rakowski, & C. Mouza (Eds.), *Teaching, technology and teacher education during the COVID-19 pandemic: Stories from the field* (pp. 765-768). Waynesville, NC: Association for the Advancement of Computing in Education (AACE).
- Center for Disease Control (CDC). (2020, October 14). Cases and deaths in the US. Retrieved from <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html>
- Cherewka, A. (2020, September 3). The digital divide hits U.S. immigrant households disproportionately during the COVID-19 pandemic. *Migration Information Source*. Retrieved from <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/digital-divide-hits-us-immigrant-households-during-covid-19>
- Education Week. (2020). The coronavirus spring: The historic closing of U.S. schools. Retrieved from <https://www.edweek.org/ew/section/multimedia/the-coronavirus-spring-the-historic-closing-of.html>
- Epstein, J. L. (1991). Effects on student achievement of teachers' practices of parent involvement. In S. B. Silvern (Ed.), *Advances in reading/language research: Literacy through family, community, and school interaction* (Vol. 5, pp. 261-276). Greenwich, CT: JAI Press.
- Hernandez, E. (2020, April 27). "The differences between the haves and have-nots:" Hispanic students disproportionately lack internet access. *The Denver Post*. Retrieved from <https://www.denverpost.com/2020/04/27/colorado-english-language-learners-coronavirus-covid/>
- Herrera, S., Porter, L., & Barko-Alva, K. (2020). *Equity in school-parent partnerships: Cultivating community and family trust in culturally diverse classrooms*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Hong, S. (2011). *A cord of three strands: A new approach to parent engagement in schools*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Press.
- Institute of Education Sciences (IES). (n.d.). Internet connectivity across Kansas. Retrieved from <https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/edlabs/projects/covid-19/documents/pdf/KS-internet-connectivity-508.pdf>
- International Labour Organization. (2020). Retrieved from <https://www.ilo.org/global/lang-en/index.htm>

Kansas State Department of Education (KSDE). (in press). *2019-2020 licensed personnel report*. Kansas State Department of Education (KSDE). (2020). *Continuous learning task force guidance*. Retrieved from <https://www.ksde.org/Portals/0/Communications/Publications/Continuous%20Learning%20Task%20Force%20Guidance.pdf>

Lee, N. T. (2020, March 17). What the coronavirus reveals about the digital divide between schools and communities. *TechTank*. Washington, DC: Brookings Institution. Retrieved from <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/techtank/2020/03/17/what-the-coronavirus-reveals-about-the-digital-divide-between-schools-and-communities/>

Lovelace, B., Jr. (2020, August 13). Scientists say the coronavirus is at least as deadly as the 1918 flu pandemic. *CNBC*. Retrieved from <https://www.cnbc.com/2020/08/13/scientists-say-the-coronavirus-is-at-least-as-deadly-as-the-1918-flu-pandemic.html>

Mampane, S. T. (2018). Exploring the practice of in loco parentis in public schools. In *Education in modern society* (Vol. 16, 183-188). Sofia, Bulgaria: Bulgarian Comparative Education Society (BCES). (ED586169)

Mapp, K. L., Carver, I., & Lander, J. (2017). *Powerful partnerships: A teacher’s guide to engaging families for student success*. New York, NY: Scholastic.

OECD. (2020). *A framework to guide an education response to the COVID-19 pandemic of 2020*. Retrieved from [https://oecd.dam-broadcast.com/pm\\_7379\\_126\\_126988-t63lxosohs.pdf](https://oecd.dam-broadcast.com/pm_7379_126_126988-t63lxosohs.pdf)

Packer, G. (2020, June). We are living in a failed state: The coronavirus didn’t break America. It revealed what was already broken. *The Atlantic*. Retrieved from <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2020/06/underlying-conditions/610261/>

ParentCamp (2020, August). *Ground rules for a ParentCamp*. Retrieved from <https://www.parentcamp.org/>

Puente, D. (2019). *In loco parentis: The dad who knew too much*. Retrieved from <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/in-loco-parentis-dad-who-knew-too-much-david-puente>

Robertson, K. (2020). *Distance learning for ELLs: Lessons learned about family partnerships*. Retrieved from <https://www.colorincolorado.org/article/distance-learning-ells-family>

Tobias, S. (2018, May 7). What’s coming for Kansas schools? More students who need help learning English. *The Wichita Eagle*. Retrieved from <https://www.kansas.com/news/local/education/article210459694.html>

Watson, T. N., & Bogotch, I. (2015). Reframing parent involvement: What should urban school leaders do differently? *Leadership and Policy in Schools*, 14(3), 257-278.

### Appendix A Virtual ParentCamp Agenda

Time	Activity	Guiding Questions
10 minutes - Kick Off	Whole group: Wave therapy, orientation to Zoom, set conditions for creating a caring virtual community	

<p>40 minutes - Breakout Sessions</p>	<p>Breakout Sessions: Participants have voice and choice regarding which breakout room they select. They are able to switch breakout rooms as desired.</p>	<p>Guiding Questions:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. What can we celebrate about your continuous learning experience thus far?</li> <li>2. What has been most helpful to you in your continuous learning journey?</li> <li>3. What has been your biggest obstacle(s) in your learning at home efforts?</li> <li>4. How have you taken care of yourself or your loved ones when you or they feel stressed or overwhelmed?</li> </ol>
<p>10 minutes - Wrap Up</p>	<p>Whole group: Reflection, gratitude, and celebration</p> <p>Participants are encouraged to unmute to answer or put answers in the chat.</p>	<p>Reflection Questions:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Give a positive shout out - who is one person from your group who really made an impact on you tonight?</li> <li>2. Using Mentee, what is your biggest takeaway from tonight?</li> <li>3. Using Mentee, what other topics might be of interest to you in the future?</li> </ol>

### Appendix B Virtual ParentCamp Event Notes

During the event kickoff, the lead facilitator set a friendly and welcoming tone. She posed a simple introductory question and asked, “Where are you from? How old are your children?” This gave everyone a chance to become familiar with the chat feature of the platform and provided a soft start while participants were joining the session. Wave therapy was a fun way to quickly build community. Participants were asked to wave into the camera while the lead facilitator took a couple screenshots. The facilitator explained how Zoom works and how the breakout sessions would proceed. She also shared the following simple ground rules of a ParentCamp (ParentCamp, 2020):

- Caring connection and communication are the goals.
- Law of two feet: Families and caregivers are free to go where they want and switch breakout rooms to facilitate their learning.
- Law of two-way conversation: talk, listen, ask questions
- Relationships are the foundation of a connected community where opportunities and support flow freely to kids.
- Mute your microphone if you are not talking.

Participants were then divided into their virtual breakout sessions where each facilitator was equipped with the following questions:

1. What can we celebrate about your continuous learning experience thus far?
2. What has been most helpful to you in your continuous learning journey?
3. What has been your biggest obstacle(s) in your learning at home efforts?
4. How have you taken care of yourself or your loved ones when you or they feel stressed or overwhelmed?

All participants and facilitators rejoined the main room for the wrap up, where the lead facilitator had a poll ready with the question, “What is your biggest takeaway from your conversations tonight?” Participants could see responses in real time, which was powerful. Three example statements included:

- “Thankful to talk to other parents. My child is autistic and this whole [situation] has been quite terrifying to her.”
- “I felt like a terrible parent, but now I know this is hard for everyone.”
- “I appreciate the kindness of the other parents and encouragement from all.”

The poll brought the event to closure on a very positive note.