

Planning for Family and Community Engagement: Where Do I Start?

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This resource draws on resources created by the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO), TNTP, and Education Resource Strategies.

As fall approaches, school systems are still facing much uncertainty. Many systems spent this spring and summer preparing for a return to school buildings, focused on solving the myriad health, safety, and logistical challenges required. But due to the continued spread to COVID-19, more and more systems have decided to keep buildings closed to start the year—leaving them scrambling to prepare for more distance learning.

This challenge underscores one of the most important components of a school system’s reopening plan: community engagement. As plans change, it is critical for systems to authentically communicate and partner with families and communities so that students are set up for success.

But, especially given the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic, it can be hard to figure out where to start. That’s why we created this resource. It contains a series of questions that school systems can ask themselves to determine how to make the most of two other recent resources: [TNTP’s Five Essentials for Engaging Families and Community Partners in Reopening Efforts](#) and [CCSSO’s Restart & Recovery: Considerations for Teaching and Learning: System Conditions](#), developed in partnership with TNTP and other organizations.

We encourage system leaders to review the questions in the first section below, check off the ones you have completed, and then use the second part of the document to identify critical next steps. This will position systems to make the most of the instructional opportunities they have and deepen relationships and feedback loops with students, families, and the community—while helping students feel safe, connected to their peers and adults who care about them, and clear on their academic progress.

For more guidance on preparing for the school year, please read CCSSO’s complete [Restart & Recovery: Considerations for Teaching and Learning](#) guidance. TNTP also offers implementation support on the recommendations in this document; [contact us to learn more](#).

Questions to Diagnose Your Progress

Reach Out: Do all your families have access to consistent, transparent updates and a means of getting answers to their questions and sharing what they need?

- Have you established strong two-way communication with every family in the school system? Did you ask parents about the best way to contact them or where do they go to get school-related information?
- Have you shared information transparently so students, families, and community members know the state of your planning for next school year and how they will be engaged in the plan?
- Have you developed a comprehensive plan for tracking down students who have not been easily reached?

Listen: Do families have a variety of ways to connect with you, receive accessible and easy-to-understand updates, and give feedback about what is and is not working?

- Have you collected information on students' and families' needs and experiences?
- Have you set up a diverse stakeholder advisory committee to provide more detailed feedback about your students' experiences and how you're approaching your work this fall?
- Have you engaged families and existing community partners to understand which trusted partners are already providing support to students?

Assess: Are you actively sharing and discussing what you learn with families in easy-to-understand ways? Are you partnering with community organizations to address any gaps in support?

- Have you mapped out assets and potential partners within the community, identifying where you can also support the community to meet its stated needs?
- Have you begun to strategically match student and family needs with community partners?
- Have you shared feedback trends with students, families, and community organizations?
- Have you partnered with internal and external stakeholders to address gaps in the feedback you've received?

Plan: Is every department required to make decisions with families and incorporate family ideas, perspectives, and priorities into their plan?

- Have you developed a comprehensive education support plan that leverages resources, addresses gaps, and includes roles for students, families, and community members (as well as schools and school systems)?
- Have you supported every department in incorporating family ideas, perspective, and priorities into their plan?
- Have you summarized the plan in accessible language and given families and communities time to provide feedback before finalizing it?

Engage: Are you sharing data, resources, and training with community partners and engaging them in the planning to support students and their families?

- Have you partnered with trusted community partners to share your plan?
- Have you provided a regular forum for sharing information about reopening priorities and students and family needs for community partners?
- Have you trained community partners in any academic or connection steps specific to this time that you'd like their support in taking?

Interpreting and Using Your Results

To interpret and use your results, reflect on the next steps you should take using the guidance below. Note that while the CCSSO System Conditions guidance was written as if you were reading it well before school was starting, **you can still use these resources even if your school year has already started.** TNTP also offers implementation support on the recommendations below; [contact us to learn more.](#)

Reach Out: Have you started a dialogue with families and community partners before making decisions?

If you didn't check off...	...consider the following next steps:
Have you established strong two-way communication with every family in the school system? Did you ask parents about the best way to contact them or where they go to get school-related information?	<p>Target individual family outreach using the steps outlined in the CCSSO System Conditions guidance under action step action step 1.A.p.3 (share with stakeholders how their feedback informed decision-making) and action step 1.B.p (target individual family outreach).</p> <p>Consider setting up a hotline students and families can call to get their questions answered by a district staff member. Ensure that this hotline supports accessible information for all families, including those who speak languages other than English.</p>
Have you shared information transparently so students, families, and community members know the state of your planning for next school year and how they will be engaged in the plan?	<p>If you have not yet shared information about how students, families, and community members will be engaged in your planning process for next year, share it now using the models in the CCSSO System Conditions guidance under 1.B.I.1 (communicate the vision and plan for the school year).</p> <p>These examples demonstrate how to clearly communicate your plan and how students and families can share feedback and questions moving forward.</p>
Have you developed a comprehensive plan for connecting with students who have not been easily reached?	<p>Build a plan to connect with students and families you haven't reached using this guidance from the the Flamboyant Foundation. If you have already rolled out your plan or started school but answered "no," this is an especially important step to take, as it's likely you have some students in your system you have struggled to reach.</p>

Listen: Do families have a variety of ways to connect with you, receive accessible and easy-to-understand updates, and give feedback about what is and is not working?

If you didn't check off...	...consider the following next steps:
Have you collected information on student and family needs and experiences?	<p>Option 1: Administer a survey to your students, families, and community partners. Consider using the sample items here, and distribute the survey using two-way communication channels like e-mail and text messaging.</p> <p>Option 2: Plan community conversations with your students and families. Use the planning guide found here. Even if you've already started school, this is an especially important step to take so that you can hear feedback on what students and families need and how they are perceiving their experiences at school this year.</p>

<p>Have you set up a diverse stakeholder advisory committee to provide more detailed feedback about your students' experiences and how you're approaching your work this fall?</p>	<p>Set up a year-long stakeholder advisory committee including students, families, and community partners following the steps outlined in the CCSSO System Conditions document under 1.C.p.1 (establish a year-long stakeholder advisory committee).</p> <p>Even if you've already started school, this is an especially important step to take so that you can hear feedback on what students and families need and how they are perceiving their experiences at school this year.</p>
<p>Have you engaged families and existing community partners to understand which trusted partners are already providing support to students?</p>	<p>Using your year-long advisory committee and other opportunities you have for two-way communication, ask families about the services they have been receiving, and ask existing community partners about the support they have been providing.</p> <p>Even if you've already started school, this is an especially important step to take so that you can build deeper community partnerships during the school year.</p>

Assess: Are you actively sharing and discussing what you learn with families in easy-to-understand ways? Are you partnering with community organizations to address any gaps in support?

If you didn't check off...	...consider the following next steps:
<p>Have you mapped out assets and potential partners within the community, identifying where you can also support the community to meet its stated needs?</p>	<p>Use the information you gathered from community partners and families to create an asset map as outlined in the CCSSO System Conditions Guidance under 1.C.p.3 (determine community partners and local businesses that can meet the expressed needs of families).</p> <p>Even if you've already started school, this is an especially important step to take so that you can build deeper community partnerships during the school year.</p>
<p>Have you begun to strategically match student and family needs with community partners?</p>	<p>Use what you've learned from two-way communication with families and your asset mapping to match families to community partners as outlined in the CCSSO System Conditions Guidance under 1.C.p.3 (determine community partners and local businesses that can meet the expressed needs of families).</p> <p>Even if you've already started school, this is an especially important step to take so that you can build deeper community partnerships during the school year.</p>
<p>Have you shared feedback trends with students, families, and community organizations?</p>	<p>Share feedback trends with families and outline how it informed decision making as outlined in the CCSSO System Conditions guidance in step 1.A.p.3 (share with stakeholders how their feedback informed decision making).</p> <p>Even if you've already started school, you should consider sharing the trends in feedback with students, families, and community organizations.</p>
<p>Have you partnered with internal and external stakeholders to address gaps in the feedback you've received?</p>	<p>Systematically share all the feedback you've received from families with your system-level team and support them to address the gaps that families and community partners have identified through their feedback. To do this, ensure that you've communicated the importance of family and community engagement to your team as outlined in the CCSSO System Conditions</p>

	<p>Guidance under 1.A.p.1: (communicate the importance of family and community engagement).</p> <p>Even if you've already started school, after you've collected feedback on how students and families are experiencing school, you should partner with internal and external stakeholders to address gaps in the feedback you've received.</p>
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Plan: Is every department required to make decisions with families and incorporate family ideas, perspectives, and priorities into their plan?

If you didn't check off...	...consider the following next steps:
Have you developed a comprehensive education support plan that leverages resources, addresses gaps, and includes roles for students, families, and community members (as well as schools and school systems)?	Take what you've learned in your asset mapping and build a comprehensive education support plan, naming how you'll leverage the resources and assets you found to address gaps in what the school system can provide. Ensure the plan clearly articulates the roles that students, families, educators, and community members will play in this school year.
Have you supported every department in incorporating family ideas, perspective, and priorities into their plan?	If you haven't shared the importance of listening to student and family perspectives with all your central office staff, do that as you share the feedback you're hearing. Set the expectation that all departments in your central office use the feedback from students and families to improve their planning and execution, and ensure that your community engagement lead has set clear expectations for how all departments can access community partners' support when it is needed to advance the quality of their work.
Have you summarized the plan in accessible language and given families and communities time to give feedback before finalizing it?	<p>Communicate your vision and plan for the school year using a variety of methods and in each family's home language using the steps found in the CCSSO System Conditions guidance 1.B.1: (communicate critical start-of-school decisions to families).</p> <p>You'll want to make the plan as clear and simple as possible for families—for example, by offering a "quick guide" version rather than a long, detailed plan (though you can link to the longer plan for curious families.) Ensure that your plan summary has clear deadlines for families.</p>

Engage: Are you sharing data, resources, and training with community partners and engaging them in the planning to support students and their families?

If you didn't check off...	...consider the following next steps:
Have you partnered with trusted community partners to share your plan?	<p>Share start-of-school information with all community groups and facilitate conversations to invite their feedback as outlined in CCSSO System Conditions 1.C.I.2 (share start of school information).</p> <p>This is an especially important step to take even if you have already started school. Once you identify trusted community partners who you'd like to partner with to support students and families, share your plan with them and explain how you hope to work together moving forward.</p>

<p>Have you provided a regular forum for community partners to share information about reopening priorities and students' and families' needs?</p>	<p>Provide a regular communication forum for the community partners with whom you are working. Consider hosting a weekly or biweekly virtual group meetings where your community partners can share trends in what they are seeing and hearing from students and families, and use that time to share steps you're hoping you can partner on, too.</p> <p>This is an especially important step to take even if you have already started school, as your community partners will be an important source of information about the needs of students and families.</p>
<p>Have you trained community partners in any academic or connection steps that you'd like their support in taking?</p>	<p>Support any community organizations that are leading remote learning sites as outlined in CCSSO System Conditions 1.B.1.2 (share resources with families and community groups).</p> <p>This is an especially important step to take even if you have already started school, as your community partners can be an valuable asset in supporting your students' academic and connection needs.</p>