![Minnesota Department of Education logo] **DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION**

Promising Practices for Connecting with Students and Families

Essential Core Beliefs and Considerations

School's seeking to improve connections with students and families should be aware of Karen Mapp's four essential core beliefs regarding family engagement:

1. All families have dreams for their children and want the best for them.
2. All families have the capacity to support their children's learning.
3. Families and school staff are equal partners.
4. The responsibility for cultivating and sustaining partnerships among school, home, and community rests primarily with school staff, especially school leaders

When engaging in the family engagement process, schools must consider areas where a school's distance learning plan may be in conflict with the resources available to or the lived-experiences of the families that the school serves. For example, schools serving large numbers of Native-American students or refugee-experienced students must consider potential instructional, personal, and institutional barriers to learning and engagement.

Recommendations

To aid schools in preparing for strengthening family engagement, the Minnesota Department of Education has the following recommendations:

1. **Examine and address biases.** Educators must examine what assumptions they are making about the communities that they serve in order to effectively engage those communities.

2. **Establish a team focused on engaging students and families.** A well-rounded team of professionals that have strong community knowledge and connections will ensure that the engagement effort is well coordinated and thoughtfully implemented. Ensure the team has adequate time dedicated to the work of engaging students.

3. **Define what engagement is for you and what the priorities are.** In the era of distance learning, schools will need to revisit what engagement means and how they can stay meaningfully connected with their families. Once this definition is established, priorities need to be set to focus resources and time on what matters most to the communities that the school serves. Consider prioritizing relationships and students' well-being.

4. **Establish a formal process for monitoring engagement and for intervening when needed.** Once engagement is defined and priorities are set, schools should establish a formal process to determine how

engagement is going. This should include data points to monitor, clear direction for how monitoring should work, and clear processes and roles for monitoring and engagement.

5. **Set criteria and tier students based on individual needs.** A clear monitoring process will allow schools to determine which students or families to focus engagement towards. Any tiered-support process for engagement should involve easily-understood criteria for when additional engagement efforts are necessary and clear guidance on what additional engagement efforts should look like.

6. **Establish weekly communication and collaboration with community organizations, tribal nations, and community leaders.** Schools shouldn't have to pursue the work of family engagement alone. Establishing strong relationships and ensuring regular communication with external partners will improve the likelihood of strong engagement between the school and the communities it serves.

7. **Seek feedback from students and families.** Even the strongest community engagement plans will need revising and adjusting. Schools should elicit feedback from parents and students on their engagement efforts. The school's engagement team must set a schedule for when to collect and examine this feedback and set a process for how to revise the engagement effort based on the feedback it receives. Schools should be transparent with families and students about what they heard and how the feedback was used to improve engagement efforts.

8. **Require teachers and staff to devote a set amount of time daily to contacting students and responding to families.** Teachers and staff will need time to engage with families. By setting aside a dedicated amount of time each day, schools can ensure that engagement is consistent and that the effort is seen as a priority by all educators.

Resources

The following resources were referenced in the webinar:

- New York University released a resource on [Culturally Responsive-Sustaining Family Engagement](#).
- The Minnesota Department of Education released a [Family Engagement Toolkit](#) within the COVID-19 guidance section.
- During the webinar, an [example monitoring process](#) from Kasson-Mantorville Elementary School was included in the slides.