



**Culturally Responsive-Sustaining Education:**

**Resources for Creating a Welcome and Affirming Remote Environment**

A culturally responsive-sustaining school has a welcoming and affirming environment where children and families see themselves represented and reflected, and feel that all people are treated with respect and dignity. The environment ensures that all cultural identities (i.e. race, ethnicity, age, gender, sexual orientation, dis/ability, language, religion, socioeconomic background, etc.) are affirmed, valued, and leveraged as sources of teaching and learning. This school is a healing space for families and staff of all backgrounds and identities, most especially those that have been historically marginalized in schools and in society.

Below are some practices and resources that can help your school build a welcoming and affirming environment, even in a remote setting.

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## Classroom

Remote learning poses many challenges, but also presents new and creative opportunities for bringing students' lives and families into learning, and for creating and sustaining relationships, even from a distance.

- Start classes by checking in with students about how they're feeling before moving into academic content; make some space for that human connection with students every day.
- Maintain rituals and routines from the in-person environment (e.g. morning announcements, weekly newsletters, assemblies).
- Prioritize building and maintaining relationships with students.

Allow teachers time for personal check-ins with each student.

[!\[\]\(339a16584d5da0f0a3ca4e9ec17bf6a1\_img.jpg\) 7 Ways to Maintain Relationships During Your School Closure](#)

- Ensure that there are ample opportunities for students to interact with each other remotely, not just with the teacher. Use breakout rooms, group projects, open mics, student-led lessons, virtual afterschool clubs, town hall meetings and other formats.
- Consider augmenting lessons by inviting family members as guest speakers to share their profession, hobby, experiences or background as relevant to instructional content.
- Allow opportunities for students to talk about the ways they have been affected by the pandemic, and how they are doing.
- Use morning meetings as an opportunity for students to feel connected to you and each other, share joys, talents, interests and curiosities.
- Take advantage of remote learning to encourage students to share their lives through show-and-tell, sharing meals, bringing family members on screen and other points of connection.
- Conduct school climate surveys of students and families in both blended and remote learning. Examples:

[!\[\]\(de95854c7ee024cfadc48187bbb781b2\_img.jpg\) Panorama Education Distance Learning Surveys](#)

[!\[\]\(3211b5d1d968fc1665909b34f9f16010\_img.jpg\) California Department of Education Learning from Home Survey](#)

Additional resources:

[!\[\]\(c50c8b7b2cc2cf9ff925edec0ee94c0d\_img.jpg\) Using Reflection in Remote Learning](#)

[!\[\]\(6a9b39b98eb945faa14c645ec99e4eaa\_img.jpg\) Responsive Practices in the Virtual Classroom](#)

[!\[\]\(9c2e8d1b5bd77cb5c9f83b7a9cff79fd\_img.jpg\) Professional Learning Resources](#)



## Family and Community Engagement

Culturally responsive family engagement is the practice of authentic, equal partnership with families, rooted in a deep knowledge and appreciation for the rich social and cultural identities, assets and contexts that families bring to learning.

- In all engagement efforts, center the families that have traditionally been most marginalized in the school and in society. That means investing extra time and energy reaching out to families who don't respond online by connecting in other ways—phone calls, texts, sidewalk visits, etc.
  - ✦ [Culturally Responsive-Sustaining Family Engagement in the Time of Remote Learning, and Always](#)
  - ✦ [Tools for Educators to Listen and Learn from Families](#)
  - ✦ [Virtual home visits](#)
  - ✦ [Family wellness checks](#)
- Build relational trust with families as the foundation for all interactions.
  - ✦ [Practicing CR-S Family Engagement During Remote Learning: Establishing Relational Trust](#)
- Invest time in one-to-one calls to families, instead of emails, apps or automated calls.
  - ✦ [How to Engage with Families During COVID-19 Stay-At-Home Schooling](#)
- Use the remote environment as an opportunity to engage families who can't usually make it to the school for in-person meetings, as well as multilingual families.
- Hire professional interpreters or community members to provide simultaneous interpretation during all online meetings, using the Zoom interpretation function or a separate call-in conference line.
- Hold remote town hall gatherings for the school community to see each other, share student, staff and family talents, and stay connected despite not being in person.
- Partner with agencies that are providing food assistance, financial assistance, help applying for public benefits, physical and mental health care and other supports, and coordinate efforts to support students and families; ensure a smooth flow of information and referrals so that students' and families' survival needs are being met.

Additional resources:

- ✦ [Culturally Responsive-Sustaining Family Engagement Explained in 6 Minutes](#)
- ✦ [Rethinking Family Engagement During School Closures](#)



## Social-Emotional Support

Students must feel safe, secure, and connected in order to learn and thrive to their full potential. In times like these, schools are adopting new ways to help students heal from trauma.

- Create a support system such that every adult in the school has a group of students who they are responsible for keeping track of, talking one-to-one with regularly, building relationships with their families, identifying resources to support, etc. This can happen through the advisory model or other structures.
- Create opportunities to honor community members who have died during the pandemic, such as community remembrance event, outdoor memorials, healing circles, or other events.
- Encourage social workers and students to lead virtual town hall/open mic events where students can talk about issues they care about, share music or poetry, and connect with each other.
- Offer attention and support for families and staff whose family members are first responders/ health care workers, and those who have lost loved ones or experienced secondary trauma such as unemployment or dislocation.
- Offer affinity groups, restorative healing circles, mindfulness and meditation, somatics, art therapy, yoga, and other culturally-rooted support for staff, students and families.
- Reach out to community leaders and organizations that have expertise in cultural healing practices and bring those practices into both blended and remote environments.
- Reallocate funding and prioritize grant writing and partnership creation around mental health services, hiring additional counselors, social workers, and nurses.
- Create opportunities to honor essential workers and other community heroes who have sustained and supported the neighborhood and school community during the pandemic.
- Create abundant opportunities for students to express creativity and joy—for example through art, singing, dancing, dressing up, being silly, sharing what they love, and other activities.
- Hire youth alumni of the school and other neighborhood youth to mentor, support and tutor current students during this difficult time.
- Discontinue suspensions and shift discipline to a model of reconnecting students to learning when they have become disconnected for whatever reason.

[!\[\]\(e78f798d4ea5c530c9db49e7d26e6b95\_img.jpg\) Suspending Suspensions: Time to Reexamine Discipline in Schools in the Age of COVID-19](#)

Additional resources:

[!\[\]\(c694a3ff3b077d76910920a6a1593ab4\_img.jpg\) What We Can Learn From Black Communities to Thrive This School Year](#)

[!\[\]\(ec9132f1d27c8919987d92907322654d\_img.jpg\) Focus, Resistance and Joy: Lessons Learned from Black Communities](#)