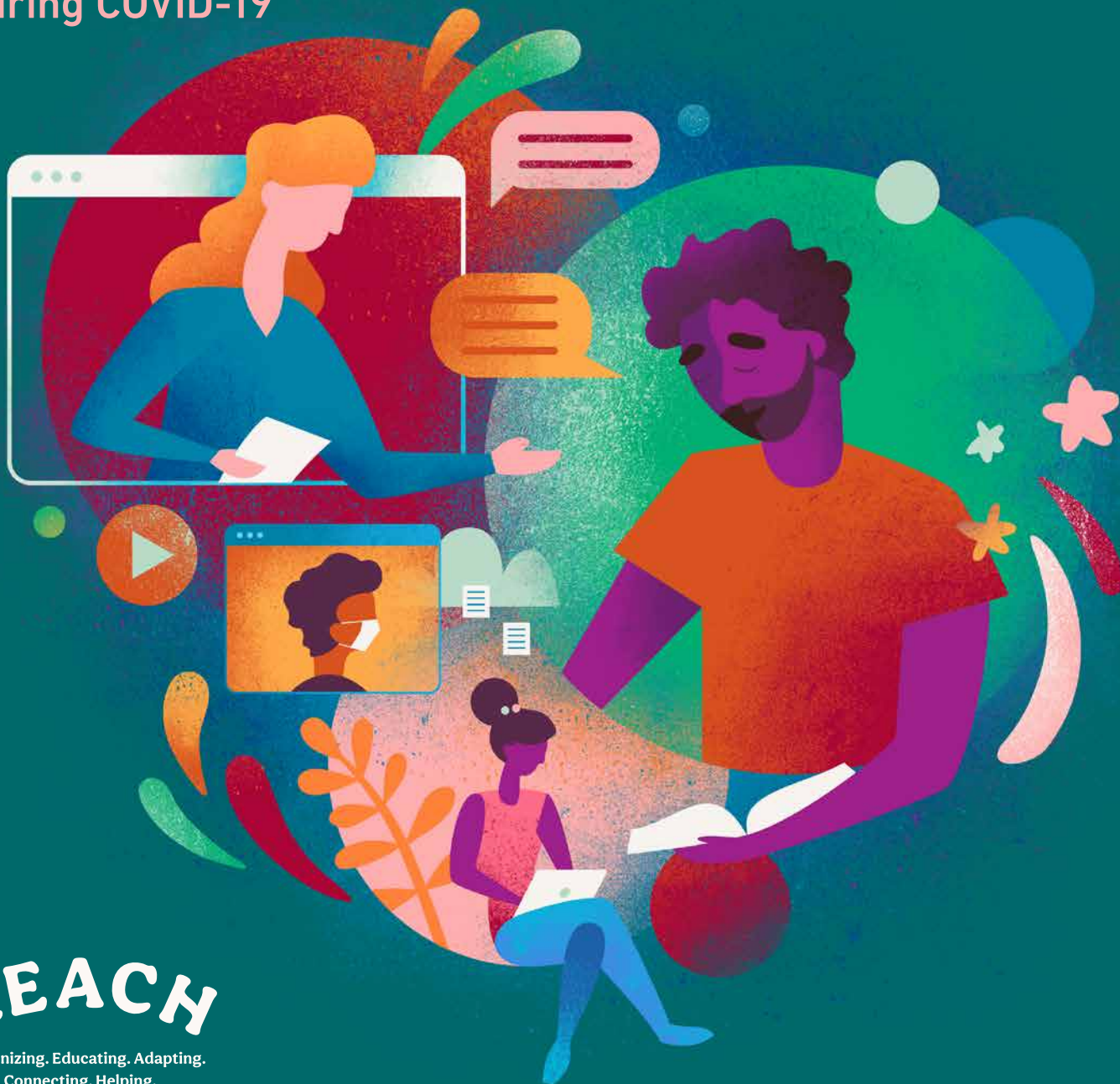


DECEMBER

# Parent, Guardian, & Teacher Partnership

During COVID-19



**REACH**

Recognizing. Educating. Adapting.  
Connecting. Helping.



# Parent, Guardian, & Teacher Partnership

During COVID-19

It is obvious to note that the COVID-19 Pandemic has severely impacted education practices, including the relationships that families have with their schools and school districts. As we end the first semester of the 2020–2021 school year, teachers, students, and parents have embarked on a new journey with one another that has had unforeseeable challenges, as well as golden opportunities for growth and partnership—especially partnership between parents, guardians and teachers.

The quick shift to dependence upon parents for schooling during the pandemic has refocused attention on the importance of sharing responsibility for children’s learning. Missouri community partners in schools and districts, namely parents and guardians, are asking for examples on how to strengthen home-school relationships, to help them make this shift in the current context. With these new challenges, partnership and collaboration between parents and teachers are more important than ever to help students progress. Even prior to COVID-19, parent-teacher relationships may have been tense for some, so how does one navigate this new dynamic during these trying times? As educators are charged with creating safe, nurturing, and productive learning environments where students can learn and grow, so are families. Fostering interpersonal relationships between families and educators offers students immediate social connections and experiences while learning at school and at home.

Teachers continue to meet children where they are—literally and figuratively—and are also doing the same for parents, guardians, and families. While teachers are adjusting to the demands of virtual learning for students, they are also shifting how they engage in more intentional and consistent ways with families. Alive & Well Communities (AWC) and DESE have made this shift as well, by partnering with one another last year to assist our parents and caregivers with trauma-informed practices and to gauge how they began their journey with a trauma-informed lens. AWC created The Missouri Model for Trauma Informed Schools: Parent and Caregiver Resource Guide to help parents and caregivers

center their voice and power for the benefit of their family's needs and expectations for student learning, wellness, and wholeness.

## View Resource

Historically, family involvement has been defined narrowly, judged mainly by the physical presence of families in schools, which has been impossible during a pandemic. The educational paradigm has rarely asked families how they define “engagement”, or “family” for that matter, and has consistently not recognized many less visible ways that families support education at home and in the community, such as passing along cultural norms and building educational passion through real-world experiences. Overall, engagement has been marred by broken trust, cultural and racial bias, and some educators’ cultural assumptions about what a “good” family is and does. Re-envisioning this dynamic requires centering the families that are often invisible in our societal structure and those traditionally left out by those cultural assumptions. COVID-19 can be a catalyst for us to jettison old, school-centered ways of doing things that haven’t worked well.

As students return home from the varied learning experiences of online classrooms, hybrid classrooms, and in some cases full-time, in-person learning, parents and guardians are facing the same struggles that exist in transitions from school to being home for the holidays, only now this seasonal break comes with new anxieties for what 2021 will bring. The same insecurities that often raised their head in the past still exist and are now being exacerbated by COVID-19. Oftentimes situations at home are hidden and unobserved, but during times such as these, have risen to the surface in ways community leaders, school districts, and families have had to address. Instances such as irregular sleep patterns and behaviors, food insecurity, responsibilities for other siblings, home or community violence, and/or physically, emotionally, or psychologically unsafe home environments—coupled with parent and guardian stress, anxiety, and exhaustion—only heighten the need for purposeful relationships between school systems, educators, and families.

We know from decades of research that genuine, reciprocal, and trusting relationships are the foundation on which educators and families can overcome many educational, as well as social obstacles. Family and school engagement and partnership during a pandemic bring with it new, unimagined stressors for everyone. Focused attention on social-emotional wellness and communication, coupled with relationship and trauma-centered approaches, will help parents and educators bridge perceived and actual chasms in relationships for student and family success—with benefits to educators, too.

By focusing on genuine, strategic, and intentional partnership, and keeping student needs central to all decisions and actions by parents, guardians/caregivers, educators, and all other stakeholders, will be able to survive and possibly thrive during the holiday break. In order for educators and families to return refreshed and rejuvenated, we must focus on developing and strengthening relationships with fresh efforts and strategies. In this December Guidance Document, we will explore national best practices on relationship-building, via educational videos and trusted family engagement models, that will highlight different ways families and educators can partner together for student success.



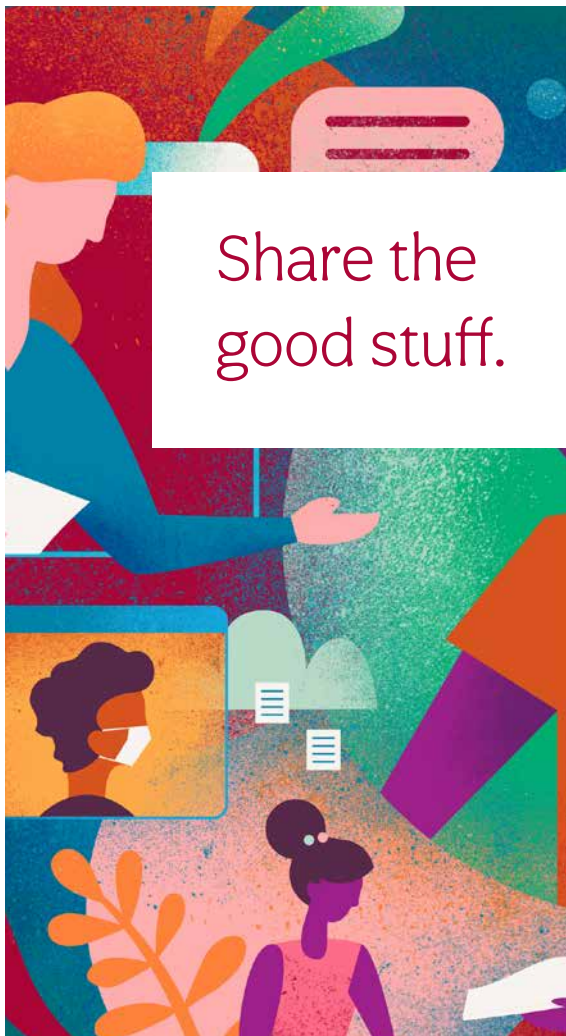
# Intentional Relationship-Building

Uncertainty and lack of communication can undermine partnerships between families and school staff. Even before the pandemic, some families often described feeling unwelcome, unheard, or excluded from meaningful involvement in the development and implementation of their students' needs. Recognizing these challenges, the REACH 4 MO initiative has embraced the opportunity to strengthen relationships and collaboration with the families of the students they serve. Educators must focus on communication and collaboration that emphasizes the need for connection and access to information and updates that allow families to engage in two-way communication about their students' educational plans during the holiday break and after. We must provide an opportunity for intentional communication. Rather than just sending quick emails, we must put a real structure in place for collaboration.

Historical evidence shows that partnerships between families and school staff are essential to supporting all students, with benefits manifesting in multiple ways, including improved attendance and increased student achievement. Strong, trusting relationships between families and school staff are key to ensuring that programs and services are aligned to needs and are accessed by families.

**There are many lessons on parent and teacher partnership and family engagement during the Coronavirus Pandemic.**

- COVID-19 presents opportunities to forge stronger connections with families.
- Insight gained through strong connections with families can support innovations that better meet student and family needs.
- With training and support, families can reinforce learning and skill development at home.



Share the good stuff.

In developing stronger connections and positive relationships with families during the holiday break and the New Year, we can create the systems and safety nets needed for successful transitions from home to back to learning environments in January. Strengthened relationships amongst families and educators offer stability, sustainability, and resilience for students, families, and educators. Intentional relationship-building and partnerships, centering families as the first and most important educator that their student will ever know, emphasizes the need for intentional collaboration between families and educators. By utilizing the National Parent Teacher Associations Pillars for Success, educators and families can effectively navigate how they build relationships and share power with one another. Educators must pay particular attention to Standard 2: Communicating Effectively and Standard 5: Sharing Power. There are assessments there to gauge educator effectiveness in communicating and sharing power with families.

[View Resource](#)

#### **HERE ARE A FEW TIPS THAT HELP IN BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS AND PARTNERSHIPS WITH FAMILIES AND EDUCATORS:**

- Nurture positive relationships with parents, guardians, and families with intentional and consistent contact.
- Share your feelings of vulnerability by sharing your testimonies and experiences with parents, families, and caregivers—the good and the not-so-good. We're all learning in the era of a pandemic. This normalizes that we are all failing and succeeding on this continuum and that we're in this together.
- Model and normalize the expression of emotions. In doing so, this removes the judgment that educators may feel about parents, caregivers, and families that express themselves differently than they do and vice versa.
- Share the good stuff—reach out to students and their families regularly and give more time to share and discuss positive outcomes and experiences at school.
- Implement restorative practices to promote healing and repairing relationships. Error on the side of inclusion and repairing of harm. De-center yourself as the educator by centering students and families always.
- Practice cultural humility. No matter the tools and skillsets that families may or may not have, or the societal ills that surface in our engagement with families, educators can never know or love the students as much or as deeply as parents, caregivers, guardians, and families.
- Communicate regularly with parents and guardians regarding shared expectations and mutual understanding.

#### **IN THE FOLLOWING VIDEOS, EDUCATORS AND FAMILIES WILL FIND EVIDENCE BASED PRACTICES TO EFFECTIVELY PARTNER WITH ONE ANOTHER FOR STUDENT SUCCESS**

##### **Family Engagement and Learning**

“The Joining Process” seeing families as a critical component to their child’s success and valuing them as part of the team.

[View Video](#)

##### **Academic Parent Teacher Teams**

A model for engaging families to be partners in their child’s academic success.

[View Video](#)



# Maintaining Relational Partnership

After initial relationships have been built, it is important that educators and families work to maintain the relationship moving forward in the school year and possibly beyond. While many of the innovative strategies on relationship building in education emerged out of necessity due to the novel coronavirus, they are likely to prove beneficial after the pandemic subsides.

The evidence around family engagement in education illustrates that more trusting **relationships** between families and schools are an essential foundation for building productive partnerships. It also shows that parents and caregivers can be an **essential** element in children's achievement in school and their social development both in school and in community. When parents and caregivers are involved and supportive of their children's learning at home, for example, by asking questions that they've created or received with their teacher or paraprofessional about their children's day or schoolwork, all children—but especially children who are from marginalized and vulnerable communities—benefit. With intentional partnership creating involved parents at home, students are more likely to attend, complete, and do well on academic achievement.

**Please find suggestions below for relationship maintenance.**

## Ask for time to connect with families.

Districts and building administration should work to carve out paid time for teachers to call, text, Zoom, and (when necessary) meet with families to check-in. The most important goal is to keep communication with families open and for educators to understand the realities families are facing.

## Create a plan for scheduled communication between students and families.

Together, we are more powerful. We can get changes we want to see in our communities if we prioritize maintaining relationships and organize them to work together for the good of our students. Listen to their stories, create intentional time to celebrate victories, and strategize about solutions to challenges with their students.

### **Organize teachers and paraprofessionals to leading school-wide family engagement.**

Family engagement is everyone's responsibility, not just an expectation of individual teachers. When possible, hire and support people who can connect across racial, cultural, and linguistic divides. Work with bilingual individuals with roots connected to the community or partner with another teacher in the school.

### **Construct family leadership and decision-making roles.**

We are not going to figure out COVID-19-era education without the knowledge and expertise of the families most impacted. Learn about the assets your families have and ask them to assess you to make sure mutual expectations and needs are being met for the partnerships you've created. Welcome their contributions to this joint effort for a win-win collaboration.

### **Invest in family members as co-educators.**

Many families do not feel ready to take on the added teaching responsibilities they have been given. Offer materials, workshops, or one-on-one support to families so they can build confidence in this new role and partnership with you.

### **Work with families to identify community partners.**

Teachers alone do not have the skills and strengths to go ahead and diminish all of these barriers that students and their families face. Addressing the racial and social inequities heightened by the pandemic requires working closely with local community organizations, agencies, businesses, and community leaders—some of whom will be family members in the school. Families are experts about their communities; they can help with this.

### **Ask for professional development.**

Teachers, staff, and administrators need more training on anti-bias and how to build authentic, equitable relationships with multilingual families of all backgrounds.

These commitments will create the foundation needed for families and educators to confront the new challenges of distance-learning during COVID-19. It is imperative that we as educators make education a priority and support the educational success of our students and families by investing in these essential commitments. When this particular crisis of the novel coronavirus has passed, we cannot return to normal. The inequities magnified by the pandemic were present prior to the pandemic and will persist and must be addressed.



# Cultural Humility

The National Institutes of Health (NIH) defines cultural humility as “a lifelong process of self-reflection and self-critique whereby the individual not only learns about another’s culture, but one starts with an examination of her/his own beliefs and cultural identities.” The term was first coined in 1998, described cultural humility as a tool to educate physicians to work with culturally, ethnically, and racially diverse populations in the United States.

The concept, however, carries meaning for any educator or advocate who is responsible for the education of a student or family different from themselves—in terms of race, ethnicity, gender, religion, sexual preference, ability status, socioeconomic status, or geographic location—in any cultural context and in any part of the world. Obviously, it’s understandable to think about why it is important to consider the need for cultural humility in building and maintaining relationships with all of Missouri’s students and families.

**THE FOLLOWING DIAGRAM SHOWS THE GOALS, VALUES AND STRENGTHS OF CULTURAL HUMILITY AND HOW IT CAN ENHANCE RELATIONSHIPS WITH PARENTS, CAREGIVERS, GUARDIANS AND EDUCATORS.**

## CULTURAL HUMILITY

### GOALS

To encourage personal reflection and growth around culture in order to increase service providers’ awareness

### VALUES

- Introspection
- Co-learning

### STRENGTHS

- Encourages lifelong learning with no end goal but rather an appreciation of the journey of growth and understanding.
- Puts professionals and clients in a mutually beneficial relationship and attempts to diminish damaging power dynamics.



**As we consider the need for cultural humility in creating lasting and meaningful parent, family, and educator relationships, please consider the following as we include cultural humility in our educator toolbox of relational and social-emotional learning:**

**We move between several different cultures—often without even thinking about it.**

Though the term “culture” is often used when describing different ethnic or religious affiliations, most people experience and participate in different cultures just by moving through their daily lives. For example, a person’s family or home culture will likely have distinctly different qualities and behavioral expectations than their school culture, work culture, or social group culture. An educator cannot begin to understand the makeup and context of student’s and families’ life without being aware and reflective of their own background and situation first.

**Cultural humility is distinct from being nice and kind.**

It is important to know that to be a committed educator, “kind” and “nice” is distinctly different from having cultural humility. Educational experts post cultural humility as a strong self-reflection tool for educators. Most importantly, it encourages educational professionals to realize their own agency and advocacy and be willing to accept that acquired education and credentials alone are insufficient to address social inequality. As such, this reflective practice enables educators to understand the student and their families are experts in their own lives and that it is not the role of the educator to lean on their own understanding. Ultimately, the parents and families are the authority, when it comes to lived experiences. Those who practice cultural humility view their students and families as capable and work to understand their worldview and any oppression or discrimination they may have experienced. Cultural humility is a tool that can be utilized by educators and their social work and therapeutic partners to better connect with individuals and communities, as well as gain more insight into personal biases and identities. Cultural humility can lead to both personal and professional growth of educators and students and families.

**Cultural humility requires historical awareness.**

It is not enough to think about one’s own values, beliefs, and social position within the context of the present moment. In order to practice true cultural humility, educators must also be aware of and sensitive to historic realities like legacies of violence and oppression against certain groups of people. For example, the history of separate and unequal school systems for differently abled and special needs students, as well as Indigenous, Hispanic, and African-American students prior to the Civil Rights Act and Brown Vs. The Topeka Board Of Education, is generational and community trauma that has lasting effects. The history of mistrust between vulnerable populations and educational institutions has led to understandable skepticism about educational environments and educators. In order to build trust, the historic, systemic reasons for mistrust must be excavated and made visible. These reasons include the history of Native Americans, slavery, racism, segregation, and more recent lived experience. By recognizing the failures of the past, teachers, therapeutic communities and advocates can all contribute to building a better future that is founded in practices of cultural humility.





# Community Connectedness: A Resource

**The Coronavirus Pandemic has created isolation for many families and educators alike. It has removed many from the feelings of connection and interconnectedness that the community of classroom, school buildings, and extra-curricular activities provided.**

This has left students, families and educators often feeling anxious, adrift, and without the anchor that “school” and school-based activities can foster. Now, more than ever, it is important that families feel connected with their student’s teachers, and most importantly, that they are not alone. Brainstorm the ways that we as educators can create community and community connectedness as a resource for our students and their families. What are the ways that we can do so?

**PLEASE TRY SOME OF THE FOLLOWING IDEAS FOR COMMUNITY CONNECTED AND COMMUNITY RESOURCE FOR YOU AND YOUR PARENT PARTNERSHIPS:**

- Show interest in your parent’s well-being. Engage in one-on-one conversation whenever possible.
- Suggest and institute ZOOM family restorative circles or community meetings where parents get to check in with educators and one another and share their experiences. Model vulnerability and ask honest questions and allow space for silence and time for answers. Also provide different ways for parents and families to engage via the “chat” option in Zoom, or by suggesting that they start a journal to write down their feelings and questions.
- Facilitate conversations among your students during class times by using icebreaker activities. Help kids connect to one another and see that they are not alone. Allow them to discuss the good things they are doing and experiencing during this time.
- Encourage and demonstrate positive feedback loops for parents such as text message chains, or ways to engage online or through apps such as Class Dojo, BuzzMob and others.
- Create community resource lists that parents can add to via social media apps or online. Share this information within the restorative circles or community meetings. This helps to provide shared partnership with parents and families, as well as, growing self-agency and self-efficacy amongst parents and caregivers.
- Suggest parent accountability pairs or trios to help with creating community and collective power and as a means of disseminating communication quickly and efficiently.



# Champions & Leaders

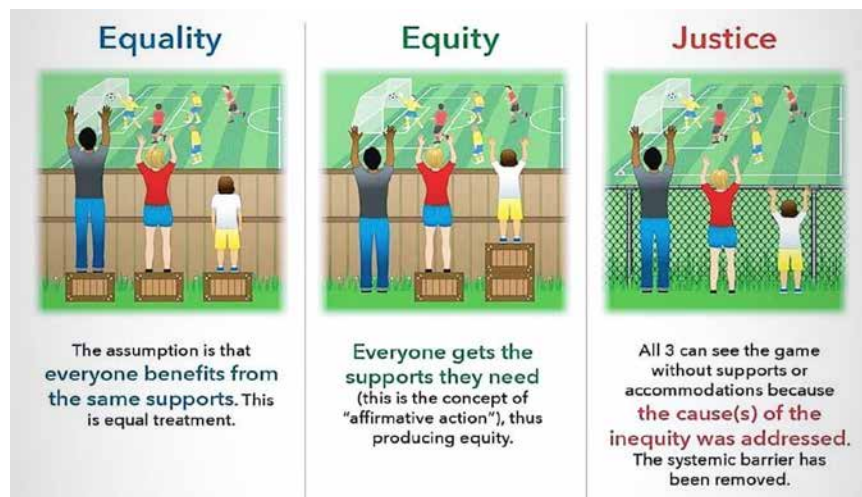
**It is imperative that our building and district leaders and champions, our building principals and district administrators must strive to increase their own understanding to and commitment to social emotional learning, trauma informed and restorative practices, and provide space centering these important frameworks in student and family learning and relationships.**

A commitment to a safe and secure environment, building positive relationships and ensuring a sense of community and connectedness within the school community is the responsibility and the privilege of all who work in that community. It is paramount to empowering and supporting faculty and staff through the process is a critical component to success so that they can provide the same for our families.

- Acknowledge and address staff concerns and allow them to be a part of the process when establishing rules and expectations.
- Offer reassurance on a regular basis.
- Give your time. Listen. Have conversations. Visit virtual classrooms as a method of relationship-building and not simply for evaluation purposes.
- Encourage self-care, including setting boundaries and taking time off when needed. Lead by example.
- Establish a work community that focuses on the principles of trauma-informed care.
- Safety: Ensure physical and emotional safety, recognizing and responding to how racial, ethnic, religious, sexual, or gender identity may impact safety through the lifespan.

# EQUITY

How does systemic and structural oppression affect our parents and students? An example of this is the digital divide that many of our families in rural Missouri experience with the lack of access to adequate technology. Similarly, the equity we see extended to children today is less than 100 years old and the most recent equity policy for children occurred in 1991 in the United States. A state of being in which an individual's outcomes are no longer predictable by special needs, ability status, race, or another demographic factor. The process of giving individuals what they need, not just what's "equal."



- Proactively and openly address the role that systemic oppression and implicit bias may play in creating a traumatizing environment for staff and students. When engaging in shared anti-oppression and anti-bias work, consider the emotional impacts of doing so for staff with marginalized identities as well as for students. Do not wait for them to share their concerns or discomfort to take action in supporting their wellbeing.
- Utilize an Equity Framework in assessing your efforts to improve educator wellbeing. Ask yourself:
  - Whom does this benefit?
  - Does this differentially impact racial and ethnic groups?
  - What is missing that will decrease or eliminate disparities?



# Alive & Well Principles in Action:

## Safety

Ensure physical and emotional safety, recognizing and responding to how racial, ethnic, religious, sexual, or gender identity may impact safety throughout the lifespan.

### PRINCIPLES IN ACTION:

- Acknowledge and address families concerns about physical and emotional safety. Whether we believe another's fears to be warranted or not isn't ultimately important. We must work to create a sense of safety that everyone feels.
- Encouraging self-efficacy, identifying strengths and building skills which leads to individual pathways for healing while recognizing and responding to the impact of historical trauma and oppression, highlighting anonymity.
- Offer incentive programs for families partaking in activities that support emotional and mental well-being.
- Use a tool like the self-care clock to support families in having a self-care plan they can utilize while at work. Normalize that it's an appropriate use of a plan period, lunch time, etc. to engage in a 15-minute well-being practice.

## Trustworthiness

Foster genuine relationships and practices that build trust, making tasks clear, maintaining appropriate boundaries and creating norms for interaction that promote reconciliation and healing. Understand and respond to ways in which explicit and implicit power can affect the development of trusting relationships. This includes acknowledging and mitigating internal biases and recognizing the historic power of majority populations.

### PRINCIPLES IN ACTION:

- Practice transparency. The constant feeling of being left out of information or decision making can be very emotionally taxing and can make educators feel as if they aren't an important part of the process.
- Approach families with the belief that it is the role of building and district leaders to earn trust and be worthy of it. Proactively address the power dynamics that exist within decision making and work collaboratively to find solutions.
- Create standards of practice to assess and plan for family success and well-being. Equip teachers with tools to use in these conversations.

# Choice

Maximize choice, addressing how privilege, power, and historic relationships impact both perceptions about and ability to act upon choice.

## PRINCIPLES IN ACTION:

- Create opportunities for families to have agency. As schools navigate the challenges created by COVID-19, it is especially important to identify and communicate clearly where educators have choice.
- Listen to families about their concerns regarding school discipline, behavior management as the needs of the student populations. Eliminate sources of stress and honor what they say will help.

# Empowerment

Encourage self-efficacy, identifying strengths and building skills which leads to individual pathways for healing while recognizing and responding to the impact of historical trauma and oppression.

## PRINCIPLES IN ACTION:

- Encourage and celebrate when families find innovative ways to engage students in the classroom and when they are implementing restorative solutions to behavior challenges.
- Celebrate diversity and inclusion loudly and boldly and empower families and members of the school community who promote and encourage those values in the educational setting.
- Explore new ideas or improvement suggestions when families bring them to the forefront of conversation.



# Collaboration

Honor transparency and self-determination. Seek to minimize the impact of inherent power differentials while maximizing collaboration and sharing responsibility for making meaningful decisions.

## PRINCIPLES IN ACTION:

- Challenge yourself to share power with families in decision-making even when it feels risky. Create opportunities to work, learn, and fail together. Own challenges together, but also own successes together.
- Find your staff members who are trusted members of the school community and encourage their partnership as you work to establish an environment of collaboration and help.
- Eliminate practices that create unhealthy competition between teachers and families; establish opportunities for educators to build relationships with families that intentionally shares power.

Parent and teacher engagement is a critical component of student success. Of course, it can be challenging, but working together as a community to cultivate inclusion, safety, security diversity, equity, and a welcoming environment for all, is part of any school's trauma-informed journey and is the reward. This includes meeting families where they are and adjusting to their needs and how we partner and collaborate together. If you want to learn more about what you can do to support your school's trauma-informed work, visit [reach4mo.org](http://reach4mo.org) or [awcommunities.org](http://awcommunities.org)

# Links In This Document:

## Page 3

Parent and Caregiver Resource Guide to help parents and caregivers center their voice and power for the benefit of their family's needs and expectations for student learning, wellness, and wholeness.

[https://dese.mo.gov/sites/default/files/cnsl-traumainformed\\_parent\\_resources.pdf](https://dese.mo.gov/sites/default/files/cnsl-traumainformed_parent_resources.pdf)

## Page 5

Assessments there to gauge educator effectiveness

<https://www.pta.org/home/run-your-pta/National-Standards-for-Family-School-Partnerships>

Family Engagement and Learning

<https://youtu.be/dvqGmThFYHg>

Academic Parent Teacher Teams

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1YNsWrFiYfY&feature=youtu.be>

## Page 6

<https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED593896>

<https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED474521>