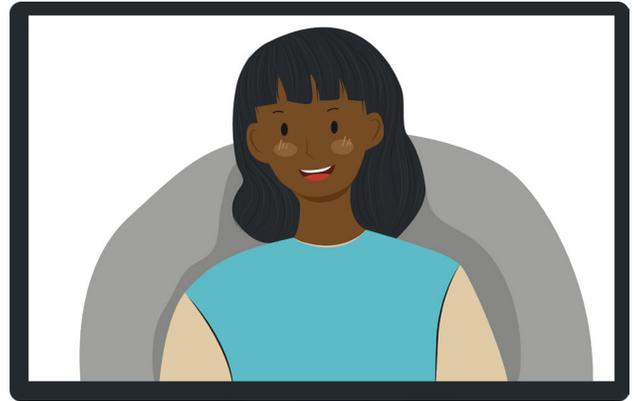


STRATEGY 4: COMMUNITY BUILDING MEETINGS

Community Building Meetings – online or in person – can be a meaningful way to begin building relationships with families, disseminate information, and allow families to connect with each other. At the start of the year, Back to School Night is the most widely used Community Building Meeting. Still, there are also Meet the Teacher events, Community Townhalls, and so many more ways to use Community Building Meetings at the beginning of the year.

Community Building Meetings have a clear purpose that is communicated to families. When families choose to spend their time attending events, whether online or in person, educators must make every minute count!



Consider:

- What are the goals of the event? How are these goals responsive to families' needs and wants?
- How will families get information and resources that help them communicate high expectations, monitor and support their child's progress, advocate for their child, and guide their child's education? [see the [Five Essential Roles](#)]
- How is this information relevant to the family's child?

Ideas:

- Connect families with critical school and community resources that are specific to students' and families' needs.
- Allow families to examine grade-level work and rubrics, and share strategies they can use to monitor progress and hold high expectations at home.
- Build families' skills with school systems like online grade books to monitor their child's progress and assignments.

TECH TIPS:

- Zoom can be a great way to host virtual events. Get to know all the different ways to boost engagement including polls, the chat box, and breakout rooms!
- Social media is an effective way to reach families since so many are on the platforms already. Check with your LEA's social media policy before using this strategy.



Community Building Meetings allow families to connect with other families.

Community Building Meetings are just that – a meeting to build community! Design the event to intentionally make families feel encouraged and connected with other families. This can also include families (and students!) being the designers or leaders of the event.

Consider:

- How will you foster a sense of belonging? Do families feel individually known and valued at the event?
- How are families connecting with members of the school staff and other families who can support them to help their child?

Ideas:

- Add an icebreaker at the beginning of a Meet the Teacher event.
- At Back to School Night, break families into smaller discussion groups to practice using online learning platforms.
- Encourage families to stay connected to one another through a classroom listserv introduced at a Meet the Teacher event.

A note on virtual Back to School Nights

- ✓ Consider school-wide, grade-level, and classroom-based conversations. Using Zoom Breakouts can make this possible.
- ✓ Plan to onboard families to any virtual learning platforms being used such as Remind, Clever, Google Classroom, etc.
- ✓ Share pictures or videos of safety protocols.
- ✓ Infuse moments of joy such as accomplishments from the previous year, personal celebrations, or anecdotes from students and families.
- ✓ Record the event and share it with entire school community so all families have access to the information.
- ✓ Use closed captioning and translation throughout the event to ensure greater accessibility for all families.
- ✓ If using Zoom or another online platform, send a reminder link for the event within 15 minutes of start time so families have it easily accessible.

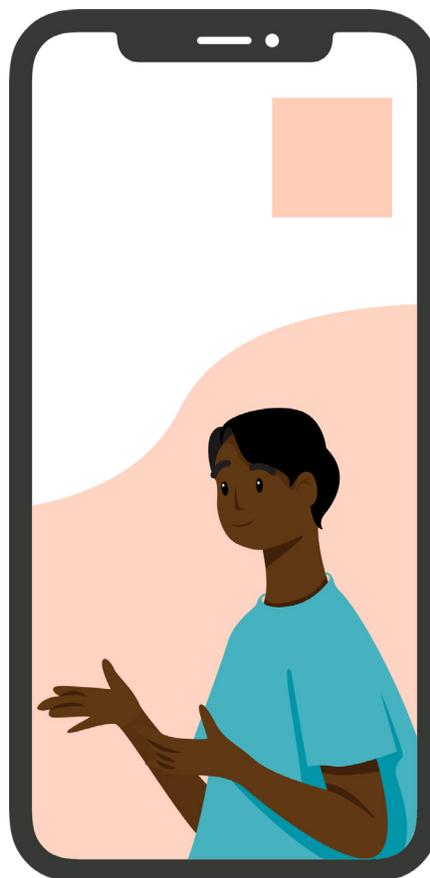
Community Building Meetings provide actionable information and resources. A staple of family events is discussing student data. These engagements should equip families with actionable information and resources so that they can hold high expectations, monitor and support learning at home, and advocate for their child.

Consider:

- What will families walk away knowing or being able to do to support their child's growth?
- Do families have the tools and resources to take action immediately?

Ideas:

- At Back to School Night, review the calendar for the school year, including key dates and family engagement related events.
- A teacher-family book club focused on age-relevant books. Families and educators discuss strategies for home and school.



School Leader Moves

- ✓ Provide time for teachers to plan and host meaningful Community Building Meetings.
- ✓ Communicate expectations to staff and families for in-person or virtual events (based on CDC guidelines and the policies of your LEA).
- ✓ Ensure teachers are equipped with the training and tools to make Community Building Meetings meaningful.
- ✓ Provide templates and examples that include any expectations you have for the Community Building Meetings.
- ✓ Participate in Community Building Meetings and give feedback.

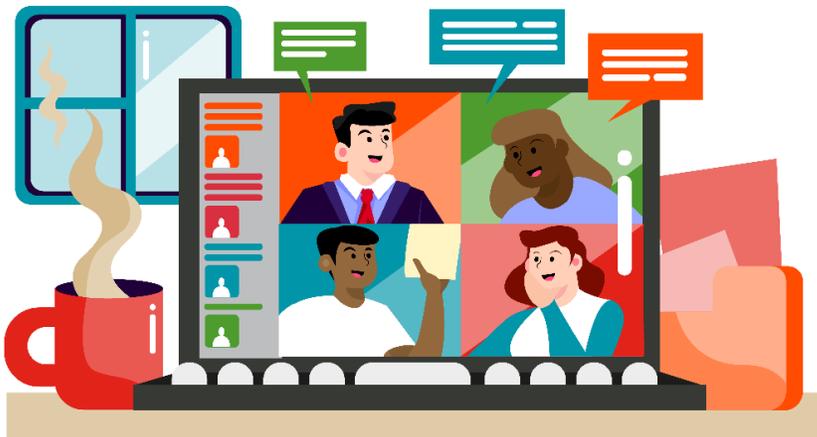
Community Building Meetings are experiential. Children and adults alike tend to better understand and retain information when they have a chance to practice things firsthand and get real-time support.

Consider:

- What is the family experience at the event?
- How are families practicing and learning the content alongside the educator and fellow families?

Ideas:

- An exhibition where families assess grade-level work with their student.
- College Night, where families and students analyze college applications.
- At Back to School Night, families log on and navigate the school's grade book, practicing how to check their students' overall grades, view assignments, and message the teacher. In middle or high school, students can teach families how to do this!



Guiding Principles for Beginning of the Year Relationship Building

Regardless of the strategy you choose, these principles should guide your approach to building relationships with your student's families.



Be authentic.

Family engagement is people work— sharing yourself authentically with families will help quickly build trust and rapport. Creating a strong sense of shared humanity can help us feel connected.



Center on the student.

Ask about hopes, dreams, and expectations. This is an incredible opportunity for the teacher, student, and family to align on what's most important to each of them in supporting the student's academic success.



Focus on what is important to the family.

These conversations should emphasize building connections. Focus on the relationship while following the family's lead. Some families might want to share and get to know your background; others might want academic information. Many will want both!



Consistency is key.

Relationships take time. These strategies will start the process of building relationships. Still, it is frequent and consistent communication that allows relationships to grow and sustain, especially if you do not have the opportunity to connect frequently with families in-person.



All families receive outreach.

Every family deserves to have a trusting relationship with their child's teacher. Families should see that relationship building is for everyone!