

# **A Parent Involvement Guide for Educators of English Language Learners**



**New Jersey Department of Education  
Division of Student Services and Career Readiness  
Office of Supplemental Educational Programs**

## Introduction

According to the report, *The Power of Parents*, “Research indicates a strong association between parent involvement with a child’s education both at home and at school and student performance in school. Engaging parents is particularly important for English learners and students from low-income families. In fact, greater parent involvement is correlated with higher student test scores and better grades for the school as a whole” (Thigpen & Freedberg, 2014, p. 7).

Epstein, Coates, Salinas, Sanders, and Simon (1997) recognize that students learn and grow at home, school, and in the community as the result of six types of parent involvement:

### 1. Parenting

- a. Assist families with parenting and child-rearing skills and assist schools in understanding families (suggestions for parent workshops: host meetings at school and in the community; offer alternate meeting times – day, evening, and Saturdays; provide childcare and transportation; provide translators; recruit a parent liaison to act as a direct communicator).

### 2. Communicating

- a. Communicate with families about school programs and student progress (consider ways to connect with hard to reach parents - for example, revolve parent events around work schedules and location).

### 3. Volunteering

- a. Improve the opportunities for parents to volunteer by considering work schedules by making all families feel welcome.

### 4. Learning at Home

- a. Involve families with their children in learning activities including homework.

### 5. Decision Making

- a. Include families as participants in school decisions, PTA, school councils, committees (encourage such participation by including parent leaders from a variety of racial, ethnic, socioeconomic backgrounds; make parents “ambassadors” to lead workshops with other parents).

### 6. Collaborating With the Community

- a. Coordinate resources and services for students, families, and the school with businesses, agencies, and other community services (suggestions for community collaboration: internship programs with local businesses; local businesses to serve as mentors; student volunteer at local charities; plan field trips that include both academics and the community; recruit retirees to volunteer in the schools).

## Tips for ELL Parent Involvement

### Introduction

Parents of English language learners (ELLs) should be provided with opportunities to fully participate in school events and activities. This includes providing guidance to parents to make them aware of how they can help their child learn. The “Helping Your Child Series” from the US Department of Education, provides tips for parents to help their children at home with reading, math, science, history, and preschool and is available in English and Spanish (United States Department of Education, 2005).

See the below link for more information about the “Helping Your Child Series”:

<http://www2.ed.gov/parents/academic/help/succeed/index.html>

When a child is identified for language assistance services, parents must be notified in writing. **Parent meetings** can be a vehicle to supplement the required Title III parent notification information such as explaining ESL teaching methods, how language proficiency is assessed, and the options parents have for selecting an instructional approach (e.g., bilingual/ESL, ESL-only, etc.) or be given the option of declining language assistance services (Waterman & Harry, 2008).

### Considerations for Meetings with Parents

Below is a list of information that may be helpful to provide to parents:

- Information about selecting books and reading with children at home.
- Information about how math is taught in U.S. schools.
- Information about what is expected of parents pertaining to the completion of homework.
- Information about how to interpret and respond to the report card.
- Information about community resources (such as medical and dental clinics and sources of emergency food and clothing). This should also include information about how to access these resources, including filling out necessary forms for reduced fees or free services.
- Information about the role of special school staff members and the services they could provide, such as the counselor and the nurse.
- Information about what decision-making committees exist at the school and what is involved for those who participate.
- Information about adult ESL classes (if applicable) and family literacy programs.

(Waterman & Harry, 2008; Cowhey, 2009)

## School Leadership

School administrators play a pivotal role in promoting viable parent–school collaboration. Therefore, it is important that the principal demonstrates support for parent-school collaboration through policy, staff decisions, and behaviors such as:

- Hiring specific personnel, such as a bilingual parent liaison and front office staff who are capable of communicating and building relationships with the parents of ELLs;
- Choosing staff capable of welcoming and building relationship with all parents of ELLs, even if they are only capable of speaking the native language of the majority of these parents;
- Attending school-sponsored parent meetings in order to hear and respond to parent questions or concerns;
- Clearly communicating to teachers and other school staff that they value parents, parent involvement programs and events, and parent-school partnership efforts;
- Giving attention to the work of parent-school collaboration at staff meetings, allocating school resources toward parent-school collaboration, making efforts to speak with parents, and being present at some parent-school collaboration activities.
- Publicly acknowledging and celebrating parent engagement;
- Providing a dedicated space for parents to meet, read, talk, or drink coffee; and
- Developing a school cultural resources binder which might include:
  - Who can translate in the school and for what languages?
  - What are some community organizations and how can they be contacted?
  - What are some local cuisines/restaurants?
  - What are the places of worship in the community?

(Waterman & Harry, 2008; King & Goodwin, 2002; Cowhey, 2009)

## Title III Parental Requirements for ELLs

Title III of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act emphasizes that school districts should implement the following practices to guide communication with families of diverse backgrounds.

*Elementary and Secondary Education Act / No Child Left Behind Act of 2001*, Title I Part A, Sec. 1112 (g)(1)(A), Title III, Part C, Sec. 3302, and Title IX, Part A, Sec. 9101

- Parents must be notified that their child has entered a language instruction educational program.
  - Parents of English language learners (ELLs) who are identified after the start of the school year must be notified within 2 weeks of the child's placement in a language instruction educational program.
  - Parents of English language learners (ELLs) who were in a program before the start of school must be notified within 30 days of the beginning of the school year.
  - Specific information must be included in a parent notification letter.  
Requirements are explained on the following webpage:  
<http://www.nj.gov/education/bilingual/title3/accountability/notification/>.
- If a school fails to make progress in meeting the state's annual measurable achievement objectives (see <http://www.nj.gov/education/bilingual/title3/accountability/amao.htm>), then the school must separately inform ELLs' parents no later than 30 days after they are notified that they did not meet their objectives.
- A school receiving Title III funds must implement an effective means of outreach to parents of ELLs. Outreach to parents must include information on how parents can become involved in the education of their children and how they can actively participate in helping their children learn English, achieve at high levels in the core academic subjects and meet state standards. Outreach also must include regular meetings for parents and notices of such meetings to parents so that they can provide suggestions and recommendations.
- All information must be provided to the parents of ELLs in an understandable and uniform format and, to the extent practicable, in a language that parents can understand. A child cannot be admitted to or excluded from participating in a federally assisted education program on the basis of a surname or the language(s) a child speaks.

## Guiding Questions

When working with linguistically diverse families, the following guiding questions can help to focus school districts' efforts in engaging these families:

- Do we understand the parents' and students' educational background and the educational system of the parents' and students' country of origin?
- Are we providing information to parents about the U.S. educational system? Do they understand the educational process and their role? Are we providing time and opportunity for answering their questions?
- Are we making it clear to parents why we want them to be involved?
- Are we helping parents feel comfortable at meetings?
- Are we communicating in a language they understand and in a culturally- responsive manner by valuing their diverse ethnic and linguistic backgrounds? Are we aware of families' cultural practices and traditions?
- Are bilingual personnel available for those parents who do not speak English?
- Are we providing childcare, transportation, or alternate meeting days and times, if needed?
- Are we communicating regularly with parents by offering culturally- appropriate resources to parents, such as providing interpreters when necessary, respecting personal space, eye contact and time ordering of interactions; in some cultures, stand closer to each other than others; some cultures avoid direct eye contact; "business before pleasure" is typically an American concept, whereas other cultures prefer lengthy social conversations before attending to the topic at hand.
- What forms of communication will be most effective for the family? Are we providing documents, or oral translations of documents, in a language they understand?
- Are we helping them understand and access available community resources?

(King & Goodwin, 2002; Cowhey, 2009; Vermont Department of Education, 2010; Council for Exceptional Children, 1991)

## References

- Cowhey, Mary (2009). "Learning to Roar." *Teaching Tolerance*, 36, 26-29. Print.
- Council for Exceptional Children (1991). *Communicating with culturally diverse parents of exceptional children*. Reston, VA: ERIC Clearinghouse on Handicapped and Gifted Children.
- Epstein, J.L., Coates, L., Salinas, K.C., Sanders, M.G., & Simon, B.S. (1997). *School, family, and community partnerships: Your handbook for action*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.
- Thigpen & Freedberg (2014). *The power of parents: Research underscores the impact of parent involvement in schools*. Oakland, CA: EdSource.
- King, S.H., Goodwin, A.L. (2002). *Culturally responsive parental involvement: Concrete understandings and basic strategies*. Washington, D.C.: American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education.
- United States Department of Education (2005). *Helping your child succeed in school: Helping your child series* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.). Washington, D.C.: United States Department of Education.
- Vermont Department of Education (2010). *ELLs in Vermont: Distinguishing language difference from disability*. Barre, VT; Vermont Agency of Education.
- Waterman, R. & Harry, B. (2008). *Building collaboration between schools and parents of English language learners: Transcending barriers, creating opportunities*. Tempe, AZ: National Center for Culturally Responsive Educational Systems.

## Resources/Articles/Websites

<http://www.ed.gov/audience/audience.jsp?type=I&top=Parents+%26+Families>

"The U.S. Department of Education's Web Page for Parents and Families"

<http://www.ncrel.org/sdrs/areas/Pa0cont.htm>

"Family and Community Issues"

<http://www.ncpie.org/>

"National Coalition for Parental Involvement in Education"

[https://usccb.adobeconnect.com/\\_a833422997/familyengagement/](https://usccb.adobeconnect.com/_a833422997/familyengagement/)

"Refugee and Family Engagement in the Schools"

[http://www.nccrest.org/Briefs/PractitionerBrief\\_BuildingCollaboration.pdf](http://www.nccrest.org/Briefs/PractitionerBrief_BuildingCollaboration.pdf)

"Building Collaboration between Schools and Parents of English Language Learners: Transcending Barriers, Creating Opportunities"

<http://www.colorincolorado.org/educators/reachingout/outreach/>

"How to Reach Out to Parents of ELLs"

<http://www2.ed.gov/parents/academic/help/hyc.html>

"Helping Your Child Learn Series"

<http://www.colorincolorado.org/principals/family/>

"A Guide for Engaging ELL Families: Twenty Strategies for School Leaders"

[http://www.colorincolorado.org/pdfs/guides/CC\\_toolkit\\_0412.pdf](http://www.colorincolorado.org/pdfs/guides/CC_toolkit_0412.pdf)

"A Toolkit for Educators Reaching out to Hispanic Parents of English Language Learners"

<http://www.ascd.org/publications/newsletters/education-update/jun13/vol55/num06/In-the-Classroom-with-Liliana-X.-Aguas@-Promote-Parental-Engagement.aspx>

"In the Classroom with Liliana X. Aguas: Promote Parental Engagement"

[http://www.mcowhey.com/learning\\_to\\_roar\\_91299.htm](http://www.mcowhey.com/learning_to_roar_91299.htm)

"Learning to Roar"

<http://tinyurl.com/CowheyParentWebinar>

"ELL Parent Empowerment and Student Achievement Webinar"

<http://www.latinoliteracy.com/>

"Four Steps to Improve Spanish-speaking Parent Involvement"

<http://www.colorincolorado.org/article/c44/>

“Parent Outreach for English Language Learner Families”

[http://education.vermont.gov/documents/educ\\_ell\\_sped\\_resource\\_guide.pdf](http://education.vermont.gov/documents/educ_ell_sped_resource_guide.pdf)

“English Language Learners in Vermont: Distinguishing Language Difference from Disability-  
A Resource Guide”

[http://www.state.nj.us/education/bilingual/esl/resource\\_guide\\_adult\\_english.pdf](http://www.state.nj.us/education/bilingual/esl/resource_guide_adult_english.pdf)

“Resource Guide for Adult English”

## Examples of Best Practices

Atlantic City School District, Sovereign Avenue Elementary School, Parent Resource Center,

<http://www.acboe.org/>

111 N. Sovereign Avenue  
Atlantic City, NJ  
(609) 343-7260

Hackensack School District, Bilingual Parent Outreach Program,

<http://www.hackensackschools.org/departments.cfm?subpage=846194>

191 Second Street  
Hackensack, NJ 07601  
(201) 646-8000

Lawrence Township School District, “Latinos Unidos”

<http://www.ltps.org/admin.cfm?subpage=7477>

2565 Princeton Pike  
Lawrenceville, NJ 08648

New Brunswick Public Schools:

[http://www.nbpschools.net/group\\_profile\\_view.aspx?id=cf4e2337-f762-4827-815b-6032fc529605](http://www.nbpschools.net/group_profile_view.aspx?id=cf4e2337-f762-4827-815b-6032fc529605)

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