Culturally Responsive Parent and Family Engagement
Question?

What does the phrase “culturally responsive parent and family engagement” mean to you?

Or, what do you think it means to be “culturally sensitive?”
Cultural sensitivity means being aware that cultural differences and similarities exist and have an effect on values, learning, and behavior.

Stafford, Bowman, Eking, Hanna, and Lopes-Defede
Demographics

• In 2000 approximately one in three school children were minority students.

• In 2020, children of color will constitute 54% of the public school population.

• Over 66.7 M people in the U.S. speak a maternal language that is not English.

• Teachers are facing classes of students who speak a dozen or more languages and dialects.
Changes demand new strategies

- The families joining our schools may have different experiences with formal education.
- They bring new challenges to the schools.
- Parents who are immigrants may be undergoing cultural dissonance and acculturation.
Meaningful family engagement can enhance student success

- Parents know their children best and are in the best position to discuss their children’s needs.
- Success of our nation depends on the success of every child.
- Every child needs to be educated and prepared for life.
Parents want to be involved

• Parents of different cultures want to be supportive.
• School MUST figure out a way to make these parents feel welcome.
• Schools MUST let go of narrow definitions of parent and family engagement.
• Schools MUST examine their own attitudes about parents – discard negative and inaccurate assumptions.
• Make a STRONG commitment to working with ALL parents.
Too often, the parents who are involved are those who feel the most comfortable in schools—typically those who are White, English-speaking, and/or middle class.
The African proverb, “It takes a village to raise a child,” reminds us that teachers cannot educate children alone.
Parents are key to successful reform

- Parents and their child’s community should be the school’s first ally and partner.
- Parents as allies are far more productive than parents as adversaries or passive observers.
Schools must develop strategies to work together

Productive, mutually respectful, dialogic relationships do not just happen. With concrete structures that define activities, mission, accountability, responsibility, and evaluation, the ongoing efforts to build strong, consistent, and comprehensive parent and family engagement will be more successful.
Where do you stand?

• Do you make assumptions about students and families based upon their clothing? Their physical appearance? Their accent?

• Do you form opinions about students or families based upon their surname before really getting to know them?

• Do you have predetermined feelings or notions about a particular culture without truly having an understanding of that culture?
A sixth-grade teacher looks over the new class roster and sees that about half the students have Asian last names. The teacher exclaims, “Good! A smart class at last.”

What bias has this teacher shown?

Why are these comments inaccurate and inappropriate?
Things to Consider

• The teacher is subscribing to the stereotype that all Asian students are smart.

• The teacher is ignoring the fact that all students are different intellectually regardless of ethnicity.

• The teacher is implying the non-Asian students would not be as intelligent.

• These are dangerous assumptions to make.
Common Misconceptions
Misconception #1:

Parents who don’t visit the school don’t care about their child’s education.
Misconception #2:

Good parent and family engagement looks a certain way.
Misconception #3: All parents respond to the same strategies.
Misconception #4:

All parents have the same goals for their children.
Be aware of cultural differences

Everything we do, regarding time, personal space, body language, tone of voice and volume, eye contact, hygiene, and eating is shaped by our culture.

When you have students and families that possess cultural differences take the time to understand the differences.
Cultural awareness

Do not interpret the behavior of others only through the eyes of your own culture.

Do be aware of how much culture affects language acquisition, behavior, and establishing relationships of trust.
Strategies for reaching out and staying focused
Clearly express commitment to culturally responsive parent involvement

- A concise vision and clear mission statement can initiate conversations about parent and family engagement and how it can become more inclusive and respectful of diversity.
- It also sends a message to the entire community about school priorities.
- It ensures that PFE becomes a point of accountability.
- It is a lens for self-review and evaluation.
Inventory parents’ concerns, perspectives, and ideas

- Use a questionnaire or survey to capture as many parental perspectives as possible.
- The questionnaire or survey needs to be translated into languages spoken by parents.
- Administer in several different ways:
  - As a class assignment on diversity
  - Help of local community organization
  - Email
  - Mail
  - Class meeting with parents
  - Give to parents as they drop off their students (elementary)
Assign a parent and family engagement liaison

- Does not have to be a full-time position
  - Can even be several staff members on a rotating schedule
- Provide training to the liaison
- Person selected should be passionate about family engagement

*When someone oversees overseeing the process, things are less likely to fall between the cracks.*
Additional strategies for success

- Respect the uniqueness of each family system.
- Develop a personalized relationship with families.
- Communicate in culturally appropriate ways.
- Recruit staff who view diversity as an asset.
- Create alliances with cultural guides.
- Evaluate process and outcomes.
Effective programs consider:

- Provide childcare during parent meetings or training, then parents don’t have to worry about leaving the children at home or disturbing them while meeting.
- Provide transportation
  - Busing
  - Carpools
  - City bus tokens
- Create take-home learning kits
What educators can do

• Adopt formal policies that address issues related to the involvement of diverse families and include strategies in the DIP/CIP and district and school PFE policies.

• Engage principals in active support of these programs.

• Train staff to work with diverse families.
What educators can do

• Demonstrate a positive attitude toward cultural diversity
• Plan instruction that includes integration of traditions, history, and achievements from other cultures and ethnic groups
• Focus on the uniqueness of each student and family (avoid stereotypes)
• Do not create different standards for different groups
• Be direct and deal with student biases right away
Additional steps

• Help ALL families navigate the system.

• Provide outreach rather than traditional approaches.

• Practice trust and relationship building strategies and recognize that it takes time.

• Help families learn strategies to support their child’s academic needs.

• Encourage the development of the total child.
Putting it into practice

- Welcome family members to the school.
  - Post welcoming/directional signs
  - Invite them to eat lunch with their children
  - Invite them to visit classrooms
  - Distribute school event information in the community
  - Have staff make phone calls inviting families to participate
Putting it into practice

- Meet on their turf
- Conduct meet and greet walks in the students’ neighborhoods
- Offer classes to parents
- Do lunch bag seminars
- Visit their place of worship
- Meet at their workplace
- Home visits
Putting it into practice

- Remember once is NOT enough.
- Make use of all communication channels.
- Avoid reliance on a select group of volunteers.
- Take time to talk to parents about what they believe.
In Summary

Creating a school and/or classroom environment that is accepting, appreciative of differences, and free of stereotypes and judgments will benefit all students.

Knowing how to sensitively communicate with families will foster their confidence in the school system and benefit the student in a variety of ways.
Resources

- National Education Association: Diversity Toolkit
  [www.nea.org/tools/30402.htm](http://www.nea.org/tools/30402.htm)
- AIR – [www.air.org](http://www.air.org)
- IDRA – [www.idra.org](http://www.idra.org)
- Region 16 - [http://www.esc16.net/page/title1swi.home](http://www.esc16.net/page/title1swi.home)
Title I, Part A Parent and Family Engagement Statewide Initiative at Region 16 Education Service Center

Funded by Texas Education Agency

For more information contact Terri Stafford or Skip Forsyth at t1pfe@esc16.net

Go to www.esc16.net, and click on the Title I Statewide Initiative icon
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