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Engaging Families of English Learners

Addressing Critical Issues

Disclaimer

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English Language Learners (ELs) are the fastest growing segment of the school-age population, doubling their numbers from approximately 2 million in 1989-1990 to more than 5 million in 2004-2005. Currently, ELs represent 10.5% of the total public school student enrollment (Arias, B. & Morillo-Campbell, M. 2008).

Family involvement is consistently cited as an important correlate of effective schools. There is evidence that family practices concerning children's education are more important for helping students succeed in school than are family structure, economic status, or characteristics such as race, parent education, family size, and age of child (Goldenberg, 2004; Jeynes, 2002). Unfortunately, not all parents and/or families have the same level of participation in school-home collaborations. Families of ELs face barriers that make their interactions with schools particularly challenging. Research studies indicate that the most common barriers include: 1) logistical issues concerning transportation, parents' labor-intensive work schedules, and child care; 2) lack of confidence interacting in a culture different than their own; 3) lack of English language skills; 4) insufficient information on home-school collaboration and/or partnerships; 5) different perceptions and expectations of their role and

the role in school related issues and activities; and 6) in some cases, lack of sensitivity and understanding on the part of school personnel. School based barriers for the engagement of ELs' families include: a) fear and distrust of different life styles; b) a deficit perspective of ELL families; c) lack of knowledge of the native languages; d) a traditional, unidirectional approach to family involvement; and e) negative school climate (Arias, B. & Morillo-Campbell, 2008; Tinkler, B. 2002).

During the last decade several approaches to effective family engagement of ELs have been developed and implemented successfully. These practices have several common characteristics including: 1) acknowledging parents' cultural values and viewing them as strengths; 2) providing a school environment that is warm, caring, inviting, and receptive to parents; 3) promoting improved communication between parents and schools by using interpreters and parent liaisons; 4) modifying meetings to accommodate parents work schedule; 5) providing child care and transportation; 6) providing school information in different languages; and 7) training school personnel on how to promote effective culturally responsive communication with parents (Rios, F. 2010; Waterman, R & Harry, B. 2008).

PROMISING PRACTICES

- Intergenerational Literacy Project (ILP) - Chelsea, Massachusetts
- Parent Institute for Quality Education (PIQE)
- How to Reach Out to Parents of ELLs - Colorin Colorado
- Funds of Knowledge Teaching Project
- Welcoming ELL Parents into the Classroom – National Education Association
- A Guide for Engaging ELL families: Twenty Strategies for School Leaders – Colorin Colorado
- Increasing ELL Parental Involvement in Our Schools: Learning from the Parents by Suzanne Panferou, Ohio State University

PUBLICATIONS

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Collaborative Inquiry, Cultural Proficiency, and Racially Diverse Learners

- Waterman, M. & Harry, B. (2008). *Building Collaboration Between Schools and Parents of English Language Learners: Transcending Barriers, Creating Opportunities*. National Center for Culturally Responsive Educational Systems (NCCREST),