OPENING THE SCHOOL GATE

cmy
CENTRE FOR MULTICULTURAL YOUTH

NSW GOVERNMENT Education Public Schools

OPENING THE SCHOOL GATE. ENGAGING MIGRANT AND REFUGEE FAMILIES: A RESOURCE FOR NSW PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Acknowledgements

Opening the School Gate provides teachers and other school staff with a range of strategies to specifically encourage migrant and refugee parents/carers to fully participate in the educational experience of their children at school. The trialled and documented approaches outlined in this resource were originally developed in 2006 following a partnership pilot project, Connecting CLD Parents, involving the Centre for Multicultural Youth Issues (CMYI), Reconnect Services and two Victorian secondary schools.

This edition has been developed by the CMY in partnership with the NSW Department of Education (DoE) to foster engagement by migrant and refugee families in NSW Public Schools. Opening the School Gate was initially developed to support secondary schools but is also applicable to primary settings and other education systems.

Centre for Multicultural Youth

The Centre for Multicultural Youth is a Victorian not-for-profit organisation supporting young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds to build better lives in Australia.

Our purpose is to ensure that young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds have every opportunity to succeed in Australia.

CMY was the first organisation in Australia to work exclusively with migrant and refugee young people. We've come a long way since 1988 but there are still significant challenges and much work to be done.

Young people can encounter significant barriers as they try to settle in Australia. Alongside the challenges of growing up, they are figuring out how things are done and adjusting to unfamiliar cultural, academic and social expectations.

Despite these complex issues we know that young people have the enterprise, resilience and optimism to contribute to the continued prosperity of Australia. By engaging them as experts in their own lives and focusing on their strengths, they can be empowered to adapt and thrive.

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CONTENTS

Definitions and acronyms 4

INTRODUCTION 5

Issues for migrant and refugee families 6

Issues for schools....7

PLANNING FOR GREATER ENGAGEMENT 8

Involving key staff....9

Identifying the target groups 10

Working in partnership....12

Setting objectives 13

Allocating resources 13

PLANNING A PARENT MEETING....15

Deciding on a meeting format 16

Setting the agenda 16

Seeking parent and student input....17

Choosing an appropriate time.... 18

Finding a suitable location 18

Arranging childcare 18

Arranging catering....19

Arranging transport....19

Inviting families 19

Translating information 20

Arranging interpreters 21

RUNNING AN EFFECTIVE PARENT MEETING . 23

Arranging seating 24

Preparing and managing interpreters 24

Greeting parents 25

Keeping the discussion on track 25

Building trust.... 25

Exploring expectations about school involvement 25

Explaining practical systems and roles 26

Seeking feedback from parents 26

Evaluating your strategy 26

Sustaining parent involvement 27

SUPPORTING CULTURALLY DIVERSE FAMILIES IN YOUR SCHOOL.... 29

Creating a welcoming environment.... 30

Seeking consent 30

Addressing parent concerns about camps.... 30

Catering for cultural dietary needs.... 31

Discussing welfare concerns with parents.... 32

Addressing discipline concerns 32

Reporting on student progress 33

Holding parent-teacher meetings 33

Creating opportunities for meaningful involvement.... 34

RESOURCES FOR NSW PUBLIC SCHOOLS 35

USEFUL CONTACTS.... 37

APPENDICES 39

REFERENCES 46

DEFINITIONS AND ACRONYMS

Australian-born young people
This term refers to young people from any cultural background born in Australia. The term includes young people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds and Indigenous young people.

Community Liaison Officer (CLO)
Community Liaison Officers assist schools to engage with their local communities and facilitate communication between schools and community members, including parents/carers. Some CLO positions are targeted to work specifically with families from particular language backgrounds.

Culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD/CALD)
In popular usage, this term refers to communities whose members identify as having cultural connections to countries other than Australia or linguistic affiliations to languages other than English, by virtue of their place of birth, ancestry or ethnic origin, religion, preferred language or language spoken at home. The term includes people who were born overseas or in Australia.

Department of Education (DoE)
The NSW Department of Education (DoE) manages the provision of public education, including NSW government schools.

English as an Additional Language/Dialect (EALD)
This term is used to refer to students whose first language is a language or dialect other than Standard Australian English and who require additional support to assist them to develop proficiency in English. EALD or EAL have generally replaced the term English as a Second Language (ESL).

Intensive English Centre/Intensive English High School (IEC / IEHS)
Intensive English Centres (IECs) and the Intensive English High School (IEHS) provide intensive English language tuition to recently arrived, high school aged students whose first language is not English. IECs and the IEHS also provide orientation, settlement and welfare programs to prepare students for learning in a NSW government high school and to participate in Australian society. In certain cases, newly arrived students who are Year 6 aged may be referred to their local IEC/IEHS for assessment and possible enrolment.

Interpreter
A professionally qualified person who converts information from one language into another language accurately and objectively to enable verbal communication between two parties who use different languages. On-site interpreters facilitate communication between two parties in person. A telephone interpreter delivers a service over the phone to establish three-way communication. A professionally qualified interpreter is bound by a confidentiality agreement.

Language background other than English (LBOTE)
This term is used to refer to students who speak a language other than English at home, or who have a mother, father or guardian who speak a language other than English in the home. LBOTE has generally replaced the term Non-English Speaking Background (NESB).

Migrant
A person who leaves their country of origin voluntarily to seek a better life for a range of personal and economic reasons. They have made the choice to leave, had the chance to plan and prepare for migration and generally can return at any time if they wish.

Multicultural
This term refers to many cultures and is often used to describe a society that is culturally, linguistically and religiously diverse.

New arrival
This term is used to describe a student who has recently arrived in Australia, whose first language is not English and who requires intensive English language support to enable them to fully participate at school.

Newly arrived young person
This term refers to a young person who was born overseas and has lived in Australia for a relatively short time. The Australian Government defines 'newly arrived' as someone who has arrived in Australia in the previous five years. Other definitions vary according to the length of time it is considered to take to effectively resettle (up to 10 years).

Refugee
The 1951 UN Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, to which Australia is a signatory, define refugees as people who are outside their country of nationality or their usual country of residence; and are unable or unwilling to return or to seek the protection of that country due to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion. Many refugee young people come to Australia with their immediate or extended family while others come as unaccompanied minors.

School Learning Support Officer (SLSO) (Ethnic)
SLSOs (Ethnic) provide assistance to students learning English as an additional language or dialect. They provide in-class bilingual support for EALD students and bilingual and bicultural assistance to facilitate communication between the school, students and their families.

Second generation Australian
This term is used to refer to a person born in Australia who has at least one parent born overseas. Many second generation young people are born and raised in families that are culturally, linguistically and religiously diverse.

Young person/youth
The United Nations defines 'youth' as people aged between 15 and 24 years inclusive. In Australia, government and non-government services commonly expand the definition to include 12 to 25 year olds. The concept of youth is understood differently across cultures as it relates to life stages, roles within the family and other social expectations.

Introduction

Studies have shown that the active involvement of parents in their child's education has a significant positive effect on students. Research indicates that parental engagement can lead to higher academic success, improved attendance, more time spent on homework, increased school retention and fewer discipline problems (Victorian Parenting Centre, 2005).

Aside from the important educational outcomes for students, schools can play a vital role in the settlement process for those born overseas, supporting students and their families to feel that they belong and have a meaningful contribution to make to Australian society. Parental involvement in schooling can also bridge the gap in family and cultural values between home and school life and may ease any intergenerational conflict that may arise between young people and their parents, improving the level of family connectedness. Once families are connected with schools, they can receive assistance with their child's educational and social development. Feelings of connectedness to family, friends, community and school have been shown to be the most significant factors underpinning an individual's resilience (Commonwealth of Australia, 2001).

Most schools actively seek input from parents and recognise the benefits of such involvement. Schools have a particular interest in making connections with marginalised families, which often include those from migrant and refugee backgrounds. Equally, findings from the Connecting CLD Parents project suggest that migrant and refugee parents often want more information from schools and guidance on how to support their children's education (CMYI, 2006a).

Despite the strong desire to build connections with culturally diverse communities, schools can often find it difficult to engage migrant and refugee parents. Some of the complex factors that can impede the formation of positive connections are discussed below. For a more in depth discussion about the context of migrant and refugee families and schools, see A Three-Way Partnership? Exploring the experiences of CLD families in schools (CMYI, 2006b).

Issues for migrant and refugee families

There are a number of contributing factors that impact on the involvement of migrant and refugee families in schools. These include:

Stigma: Research from the Connecting CLD Parents project indicated that parental contact with schools was largely crisis-focused and often related to discipline issues. Families often associated any contact with school with some sort of trouble, and the fear and stigma associated with school contact frequently prevented a more positive relationship from forming.

Expectations of school involvement: Within the Australian education system, a three-way relationship between students, families and schools is seen as ideal. Expectations of school involvement in other countries however can be quite different. How parents interact with schools will often reflect their own experiences of schooling overseas. For example, some parents may be used to a more strict separation between home and school life, where parents are not expected to have much of a role in the school unless a problem arises.

Family roles: Family roles often change significantly due to migration. Young people may be more confident in English and take on a new role as advocate for the family, providing assistance with settlement needs and interpreting. This can lead to a power shift within families with children taking on a great deal of responsibility. Parents may feel dependent and powerless and thus less confident in approaching the school directly. Young people may also be protective of their parents and reluctant to involve them in school activities.

Practical considerations: Migrant and refugee parents/carers may have limited time for school involvement due to family size, having young dependent children or being constrained because of work commitments. Financial pressures may be severe in migrant and refugee families. Families may be paying off overseas debts or sending money to assist relatives in need. Refugees usually arrive in Australia with no possessions or financial assets and have to rebuild their lives. Despite the availability of some government assistance and schools offering support to reduce financial disadvantage, the costs associated with education remain a heavy burden for many families. Financial difficulties may affect the family's ability to purchase uniforms and books, contribute to school levies or pay for school activities, excursions and camps.

Language barriers: Newly arrived family members often feel very uncertain about communicating with the school and can be concerned about their English language skills in the absence of the use of interpreters (Migrant Information Centre 2002:12). Parents with stronger English skills will find it easier to understand information and are also likely to feel more connected with the school.

Knowledge of school systems: Recently arrived parents/carers are likely to have varied knowledge of Australian school systems and may have significant gaps in information or understanding, often about essentials such as uniforms, assessment and textbooks. Parents' understanding or expectations regarding different educational pathways may also impact on their interaction with the school. For example, some migrant or refugee parents have set ideas about their child's education and employment options and may be reluctant to discuss alternative educational pathways with the school.

Fears: Some families feel their children are less physically safe in Australia than when they were overseas, where there was a perception that the community would intervene to protect their children. Anxiety levels can be high for refugee families who have experienced traumatic periods in which their children may have been lost or endangered. Families' fears about the Westernisation of their children and the loss of culture and values can also be great. These fears can affect parents' willingness to allow their children to participate in extracurricular activities.

Issues for schools

Forming strong relationships with all families, in particular migrant and refugee families, is a major objective common among schools. While schools want to support families and have a vested interest in each student's progress, there can be a number of factors impeding a school's capacity to successfully engage migrant and refugee families. These include:

New roles: Increased welfare expectations placed on schools impact on the role that teaching staff play in supporting students and families. Teachers and other school staff are increasingly being asked to take on roles that may be new or unfamiliar, leading to anxiety.

Staff support and resourcing: Ensuring a school is culturally accessible requires a whole-of-school commitment to resourcing family and community engagement strategies and to supporting staff in effectively working with migrant and refugee parents/carers. In some cases, insufficient time and resources are allocated to ensure that successful engagement strategies are achievable.

Cultural diversity: Schools with students from many different cultural backgrounds may find it difficult to handle such diversity. While some schools have large, clearly defined cultural groups, such as large Greek or Vietnamese communities, others have small clusters of different cultural groups within their school community. This makes meetings more complicated to organise and more work is involved in reaching such a diverse population.

Complex needs of student population: Staff often need to address a range of complex needs within their school communities. Recently arrived and refugee families may be in need of extra assistance as may a range of other marginalised groups. Schools in areas of high refugee intake are often involved in supporting students and families who are highly traumatised with pre- or low literacy levels.

Relationships with communities: Staff may be unsure of how to start the process of relationship-building with diverse communities, which can feel quite complex and daunting at first. Schools may not have established connections with ethnic communities or organisations that could help with making initial contact. Some staff are confused by the complexity of extended families and don't know who to approach to talk to about a student.

Using this resource

Opening the School Gate is designed to provide teachers and other school staff with a range of practical strategies to assist in the process of engaging migrant and refugee families and creating a culturally inclusive school environment.

Many schools will already have developed strategies to engage migrant and refugee parents/carers, in which case this resource may offer additional ideas and suggestions. Schools where recently arrived or refugee families are entering or where the engagement of parents has been difficult in the past, may find it useful to work through the resource following the processes outlined.

Most schools will find that Opening the School Gate is best used as a "dip-in" resource to support them in areas they are not sure about or haven't really thought about before. The resource is designed to be used by schools to meet their particular needs and is not intended to be prescriptive.

Planning for greater engagement

This section outlines the essential elements of a whole-school strategy for engaging migrant andrefugee families and communities:

- Involving key staff
- Identifying target groups
- Working in partnership
- Setting objectives
- Allocating resources

Involving key staff

When planning a strategy, find out who has the capacity, skills and interest in engaging migrant and refugee families in your school. You may have staff with particular expertise or experience who should be involved. Coordination of parent support activities is vital and this may involve some out-of-hours activities and administration. You might consider appointing a community liaison officer (bilingual if possible) to implement some of the initiatives outlined in this resource.

You will need to provide support to all staff involved and share the workload so that issues are not marginalised within the school. Broad support from all staff is crucial for the success of the strategies you put in place. Professional development may be required to allow all staff to reach a shared understanding about the needs of culturally diverse families.

The attendance of the school principal and coordinators at meetings sends an important message to parents/carers about the value of their involvement. All teachers, welfare staff, school counsellors and EALD specialists have a significant role to play. The school environment should encourage teacher interest and involvement.

Community Liaison Officer (CLO)

One of the roles of the CLO is to assist with communication between the school and migrant or refugee parents. CLOs who are bilingual can provide support to parents from particular language backgrounds. They can also provide important information to staff in relation to the cultural practices and concerns of some communities.

It is important to note that CLOs are sometimes placed in a difficult position within the school. Some parents rely on the CLO for information about their child's individual situation, which may or may not be part of their role. It is important to advise parents of the role of the CLO and the way they can be an effective conduit for communication between the school and its community.

What you can do:

- Involve all staff in creating a targeted family engagement policy and related strategies.
- Support staff through professional development.
- Use existing models and resources to support a whole-school approach to engaging migrant and refugee communities.
- Appoint a coordinator and/or group of staff to assist with engaging migrant or refugee families.
- Inform all staff about the strategies the school is using.
- Delegate key staff, including CLOs, to make contact with family members.

Identifying the target groups

Whatever strategy you select for engaging parents/carers, whether formalised meetings or social events, you will be more successful if you carefully consider their needs and your motives. Preliminary questions to consider are:

- Who do you want to reach?
- What is the main objective in engaging parents/carers?
- What patterns of behaviour do you want to change/or encourage?

It may be appropriate to bring together families with a common interest, such as a cross-cultural group of Muslim families or recently arrived families. Be aware of the differences and similarities within and between groups in terms of culture, religion, language and migration history.

Student data will help you to answer the following questions:

- How many people do you wish to target?
- Will this be a small or large group?
- Do you want to engage a number of communities in a culturally diverse environment, or target parents/carers from a few key language groups?

Creating a school environment where all young people feel safe, valued, engaged and motivated will be accomplished more effectively if working in partnership with parents, family, friends, teachers and community members.

(Commonwealth of Australia, 2001).

What you can do:

Print a 'Language and Visa' report from the Enrolment Registration Number (ERN) system. This report provides information about students'

- refugee status
- language background
- EALD phase
- date of enrolment in an Australian school
- residency status
- date of arrival in Australia.

Advise parents and carers about the use of this information. Remind them of the need to keep the information and contact details current and request that they notify the school when student information changes.

Language diversity in NSW government schools

The language backgrounds of students provide an indication of the cultural and linguistic diversity of NSW government schools. In 2014, there were 242, 850 students from a language background other than English (LBOTE) enrolled in NSW government schools. This represented 31.6 per cent of all students. This figure includes students who speak a language other than English at home and/or students who have a parent/carer who speaks a language other than English at home. The following table summarises enrolments of LBOTE students for 2014 across all NSW government schools. LBOTE data is also available by individual school.

Language[1]	2014	
	Students	% of Total LBOTE[2]
Chinese:	40,529	16.7
Mandarin	*21,360*	*8.8*
Cantonese	*16,977*	*7.0*
Other Chinese[3]	*2,192*	*0.9*
Arabic	32,628	13.4
Vietnamese	15,543	6.4
Hindi	9,783	4.0
Greek	9,275	3.8
Filipino/Tagalog[4]	8,641	3.6
Samoan	7,915	3.3
Korean	7,685	3.2
Spanish	6,916	2.8
Italian	5,697	2.3
Tamil	4,163	1.7
Tongan	4,063	1.7
Macedonian	3,993	1.6
Urdu	3,968	1.6
Indonesian	3,903	1.6
Turkish	3,803	1.6
Bengali	3,631	1.5

Punjabi	3,293	1.4
Serbian	3,127	1.3
German	3,069	1.3
Japanese	3,042	1.3
Assyrian & Chaldean [5]	2,960	1.2
French	2,805	1.2
Thai	2,775	1.1
Persian (excluding Dari)	2,731	1.1
Dari	2,480	1.0
Khmer	2,384	1.0
Russian	2,222	0.9
Gujarati	2,180	0.9
Maori (New Zealand)	2,153	0.9
Portuguese	1,774	0.7
Sinhalese	1,751	0.7
Nepali	1,735	0.7
Croatian	1,629	0.7
Fijian	1,495	0.6
Malayalam	1,389	0.6
Dutch	1,364	0.6
Telugu	1,340	0.6
Afrikaans	1,236	0.5
Maori (Cook Island)	1,167	0.5
Lao	1,027	0.4
Other Language Groups	9,586	8.1
Total LBOTE	242,850	100.0

Source: Statistics Unit, Centre for Education Statistics and Evaluation, Office of Education, DoE. Extracted on October 2014. LBOTE 2014.

Notes:

1. The table is ordered by the largest language groups for language groups with 1,000 or more students in 2014. Language groups with fewer than 1,000 students in 2014 are included in 'Other language groups'.

2. LBOTE - language background other than English; students from language backgrounds other than English are those in whose home a language other than English is spoken by the student, parents, or other primary caregivers. For students where multiple languages are spoken at home, priority is given first to the primary language spoken by the student and then to that spoken by those caregivers recorded on enrolment forms and in ERN as parent 1 and parent 2 in that order.

3. The 'Other Chinese' language group includes Chinese nec (ASCL 7199), Hakka (ASCL 1027), Min Nan (ASCL 7107) and Wu (ASCL 7106).

4. Filipino (ASCL 6512) and Tagalog (ASCL 6511) have been combined into one language group.

5. The 'Assyrian & Chaldean' language group includes Assyrian Neo-Aramaic (ASCL 4206), Chaldean Neo-Aramaic (ASCL 4207) and Assyrian (ASCL 4203).

Languages spoken by newly arrived students are counted on a different basis than LBOTE. Along with country of birth and date of arrival data, the languages spoken by newly arrived students provide an indication of the cultural and linguistic support services that may be required to support students as well as the range and type of emerging communities. The main languages spoken by newly arrived students in NSW government schools in 2014 included Arabic, Mandarin, Filipino/Tagalog, Dari/Farsi/Hazaragi, Korean, Hindi, Thai, Urdu, Japanese and Nepali.

Is this discrimination?

Some schools are worried about targeting specific groups because they feel this is an exclusive or unfair approach. Targeting parents/carers from particular cultural, linguistic or religious groups, and/or particular families at risk, is not about excluding others, but about recognising that some families have extra barriers to involvement in their children's education that Australian-born parents do not have, such as lack of confidence with English or lack of knowledge about the Australian school system.

Experience has shown that inviting targeted communities to general parent meetings in the first instance is often not successful. However once you have successfully engaged with under-represented groups you can then move towards a more inclusive approach, so that groups from all cultural backgrounds are welcomed in a generalist whole-school environment. Your migrant or refugee family engagement strategy should fit within your school's overall parent engagement strategies and should supplement what already exists.

The most important thing to remember is to do what works!

Which cultural group?

If you are part of a large, culturally diverse school, you may not be able to work with all the migrant and refugee families at once. You might need to work with one group first. You could start with:

- those most in need or 'at risk' or under-represented in school activities
- the largest cultural group in the school
- groups that you have previously contacted successfully
- established communities
- new and emerging communities in the school.

It can be difficult to decide which groups are most in need or at risk to work with in your school. It is worth looking at any data or anecdotal evidence you have around social indicators or participation rates of students such as academic achievement, retention rates, absenteeism and welfare concerns as well as your previous experience in engaging particular student or parent groups.

Who to involve?

Not all family structures are the same. For many overseas-born communities, extended family relationships are very important. Many young people arrive in Australia without their biological parents and may be in the care of relatives or a sponsor who is known to the family.

At enrolment, find out who should be contacted in relation to the student. For some families it is important that the head of the family (such as an uncle who may not be the legal guardian) is involved in important decisions relating to a student. Others may expect an older sibling to attend meetings as an advocate on their behalf. Family roles may shift over time as relationships change. Rather than discourage different types of support, involve significant family members in a way that meets the needs of the family and primary carers and the legal requirements of the school.

What you can do:

- Avoid referring to 'parents' only. Make sure you talk about 'families' and/or 'parents and carers'.
- Acknowledge the diversity of family structures in your school and the important role that grandparents, uncles, aunts, siblings and other family members can play in supporting a student's wellbeing.
- Ask for the assistance of family members to record the immediate family or guardianship roles on student records and clarify living arrangements.
- In consultation with the family, design a coordinated strategy for engaging families where there is a complexity of roles and relationships.
- When in doubt about the best person to speak to in a family about a student, you may invite a number of family members who represent the student's interests to discuss concerns or issues.
- Use interpreters where needed so parents/carers can communicate effectively with the school and advocate for their own needs.

Working in partnership

The next step is to investigate whether there are community organisations that could offer support. A school working as a single service provider cannot effectively respond to the range of complex issues impacting on students and families. Collaborative partnerships between schools, community organisations and ethnic communities are critical in successfully engaging migrant or refugee families.

Schools have reported increased success when bicultural workers from local migrant community organisations or services are part of the process of engaging families. However, the role of a bilingual community worker is not to provide free translation and interpreting. It is important to clarify roles in bicultural work, especially if there is a Community Liaison Officer or School Learning Support Officer already working in the school.

What you can do:

- Understand the differences between organisations that work with migrant communities. Migrant resource centres and other organisations can help you negotiate the multicultural service sector more effectively.
- Find ethno-specific community organisations with an understanding of both family perspectives and youth issues.
- Develop relationships with community or religious leaders.
- Approach a community language school that operates in your area to set up a partnership.
- Work with other agencies to develop partnerships which support the specific needs of migrant and refugee families.

Choosing a partner organisation

Aim to work with an organisation with common objectives and interests. Ask a prospective partner:

- What is the focus of your work? e.g. family support, youth work.
- Who do you support? e.g. specific cultural or religious groups.
- Do you have experience in working with schools?
- Would you be interested in working with migrant or refugee parents/carers in our school?

Protocols

Many schools have found that guidelines and formal agreements need to be set down before organisations can work together effectively. The arrangement may be fairly informal initially, but may move on to a more structured and sophisticated agreement in the form of a protocol over time which outlines plans and details the roles and expectations of

the partnership. This means you are less likely to work on an ad hoc basis and any potential misunderstandings or conflict are more likely to be avoided. It is also important to meet regularly and maintain contact with partner organisations.

Working relationships between staff from the school and external community organisations should be formalised. This is especially important where staff work on a part-time basis and meet rarely. School and agency responsibilities and boundaries should be defined, especially when following up an individual family's concerns.

Developing an effective partnership

In 2008, the Commonwealth Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) published the Family-School Partnerships Framework – A guide for schools and families. This national framework identifies seven key dimensions for planning partnership activities:

- communicating
- connecting learning at home and at school
- building community and identity
- recognising the role of the family
- consultative decision making
- collaborating beyond the school
- participating.

In 2011, DEEWR developed the Strengthening family and community engagement in student learning resource to assist school communities set priorities for action and evaluate their progress in each of the seven dimensions. The resource assists schools to encourage the participation and involvement of their school communities, including culturally and linguistically diverse communities. The resource incorporates a School Assessment Tool (Reflection Matrix) to support school planning processes. Copies of the resource are available on the DoE intranet site.

Setting objectives

Teachers who want to promote family-school partnerships may want to explore the following questions to begin with:

- What do we know about our students' families, their daily lives and environment?
- What fears and barriers do they experience?
- What channels of communication do they respond to?

Selecting the right approach

Once you have answered these questions you will be able to choose appropriate strategies. Running meetings for parents has proved to be the most effective engagement strategy, but shared activities such as family picnics can also build relationships. Involving bilingual workers and community leaders provides an opportunity to discuss significant underlying issues that parents/carers are most concerned about.

Determine whose needs you are trying to meet. The most effective approach is to address issues at the top of parents' hierarchy of needs, rather than the peripheral issues. See Appendix 1 for suggestions of issues parents may be interested in.

Allocating resources

The resources required for greater engagement by migrant and refugee families in your school will depend on the strategies you choose. Many strategies are not particularly costly. For example, interpreting services which fall within DoE guidelines are provided free of charge to NSW public schools. As well as this, many of the documents which provide parents/carers with important school information are available in up to 35 languages on the NSW Public Schools website. Take the time to see what translated documents are available and download any relevant information in the required language. Newly arrived parents will probably not have the resources to do this for themselves.

More intensive, longer-term strategies may need to be separately funded.

Estimate the financial cost of the activities or meeting you are planning. Make sure you budget for things such as catering, childcare, transport and staff time.

Consider:

- What financial assistance can the school provide?
- Can a partner organisation provide other resources such as a worker's time?
- Does the school need to source additional funding?

Multicultural festivals

Some schools hold multicultural festivals, music and dancing events, or art and craft displays to attract parents/carers and community members from culturally diverse backgrounds to the school and acknowledge its cultural diversity. Although these activities may promote cultural pride and harmony, they can become tokenistic, failing to address the core underlying concerns and barriers parents face with regard to their children's education.

If selected as a strategy, multicultural festivals should not be used in isolation to engage families (or students), but as a first step towards developing purposeful relationships and an entry point into deeper discussions or activities about cultural diversity and intercultural understanding.

Planning a parent meeting

This section sets out some practical considerations to help you plan a meeting with parents and carers from culturally diverse communities, a strategy that has been found to be particularly successful in engaging migrant and refugee families in schools. The following elements should be considered when planning a meeting:

- Deciding on a meeting format
- Setting the agenda
- Seeking parent and student input
- Choosing an appropriate time
- Finding a suitable location
- Arranging childcare
- Arranging catering
- Arranging transport
- Inviting families
- Translating information
- Arranging interpreters

Deciding on a meeting format

To begin with you will have to decide whether you want to hold a meeting for parents/carers from diverse language groups or focus on one language group at a time.

Language or culture-specific meetings are effective if you have a few large cultural groups in the school. Separate meetings will reduce complex cross-cultural communication, address the particular needs of each community and make parents feel more at ease.

Multilingual formats can be effective when there are small groups from a number of language backgrounds, or when the issue you want to discuss is relevant for many groups. However if holding a meeting with more than two or three language groups, consider the challenges placed on interpreters particularly if several are required to interpret at the same time. The meeting may take longer and noise levels may be a real problem when several people are speaking at the same time.

Generalist meetings including both Australian-born and migrant or refugee parents tend not to be successful in the first instance, but adopting a more generalist approach later on, once families are engaged, will prevent groups from being marginalised in the school.

Options for language or culture-specific parent meetings

- Invite each language group to a specific meeting. Have guests present in English with an interpreter. This can be useful if there is one main language group in the school other than English speakers.
- When bilingual staff members are available, hold the meeting in a language other than English and use an interpreter for English speakers such as teachers.

Setting the agenda

Plan and advertise a meeting or activity with a definite purpose or topic in mind. Research shows that parents are more likely to attend a meeting for a specific purpose rather than a general 'get to know you', which is often not taken seriously by busy parents who are juggling many needs within the family. Send home invitations to attend the meeting in the home language. Parents will appreciate the effort. An interactive bilingual 'General Invitation' note is available in 35 languages on the NSW Public Schools website. The English version appears at Appendix 4. Where possible, involve parents in setting priorities for meetings or activities beforehand.

Remember to allow time in the meeting agenda for interpreting. You may only cover half the content in the same amount of time needed for a meeting with an English-speaking audience.

Non school-related sessions

Some schools offer sessions that may not be strictly school-related, but motivate parents to build relationships with the school such as running sewing, computer or English literacy classes or providing Centrelink or immigration information sessions. You may be able to combine these events with some discussion about school-based issues or rotate sessions so that school issues are covered every few meetings. As well as enhancing parents' skills and giving them a positive experience of school engagement, schools which use creative channels to engage parents also define themselves as community resources.

Engaging fathers

Mothers and female carers tend to come to school meetings more readily. It is also important to encourage fathers and male carers to attend:

The Children's Protection Society ran a series of very successful workshops to engage Arabic speaking men, which although community based rather than at the school, were of great relevance to the school environment. They advertised in Arabic, using community radio, local mosques and churches. They engaged male bicultural workers, who presented on topics that fathers were interested in, such as discipline, and parents'/children's rights (Elali, F, Mourad, S et al, 2001).

What you can do:

- Write an agenda to give structure to the meeting (see Appendix 2 – Suggested Agenda).
- Strike a balance between the school's agenda and the agenda parents bring to meetings.
- Start with a topic that will engage parents such as homework or assessment.
- Provide parents with information about issues they are concerned about including current teaching methods and learning English as an additional language.
- Allow time to explore parents' and the school's perspectives on the topic/s or discuss questions in small groups.
- Provide opportunities in the agenda for parents to raise any issues of their own and share their opinions. This can be useful in planning for future meetings.
- Accommodate varied concepts of time-keeping when setting your start time.
- Allow extra time for interpreting.
- Offer skills based workshops or evening meetings on topics that will encourage both male and female parents/carers to attend.

Seeking parent and student input

Parents are unlikely to remain engaged with your school if their current concerns are not addressed. One way information flow from staff can leave parents feeling frustrated and powerless, so it is important to seek some input into what issues are of concern to your target group (see Appendix 1).

What you can do:

- Ask for input from parents/carers when you are starting an initiative, to make sure it is in keeping with their ideas and concerns.
- Ask parents/carers what issues they would like to discuss (see Appendix 1). If your school is beginning a whole school strategy for parent involvement it may be worthwhile having Appendix 1 translated into the school's largest language groups. Although individual translations are not provided free of charge to the school, the benefits gained from this approach may far outweigh the costs involved. For guidance on preparation of documents for translation send an email to interpreting@det.nsw.edu.au or call 9244 5311.
- Discuss your intentions with the school's parent association to gain their support for multicultural initiatives in the school.
- Ask for feedback on what worked well and what should be changed after you have engaged a number of families.

Involving students will enhance the success of initiatives. A student's active approval or disapproval can influence family members. Students can feel a sense of stigma if their parents are contacted or appear at school without their knowledge. If you are focusing on a particular cultural group, or a few different groups, it is important to explain why they have been chosen, to avoid perceptions of racism.

Students can offer practical advice on the most effective approach to take with their families and what may be appropriate for their community or religion. It is also important to give students an opportunity to discuss school issues. For some groups, it may be regarded as culturally inappropriate for young people to voice opinions or challenge the ideas of their parents or other adults in public. This reaction to student involvement has to be handled sensitively. It may not be appropriate for students to attend meetings at the same time as adults, but it is worth exploring other avenues for their involvement.

What you can do:

- Explain your strategy to students and why you are focusing on particular groups.
- Ask advice from students and bicultural workers about what families may find culturally appropriate before launching into your strategy.
- Work separately with students to support them in exploring issues.
- Seek ways to include students' ideas in the parent session.
- Invite students to speak at meetings to represent students' ideas or views.
- Structure a dialogue between parents, students and teachers in a non-confrontational atmosphere of sharing.

Parent Café

A culturally diverse school in south western Sydney established a parent café to improve engagement levels by newly arrived parents and carers. The café provides a relaxed and supportive environment for parents and carers to raise issues and for staff to gain valuable feedback from their school community.

At the café, various topics chosen in consultation with parents and carers, are discussed on a weekly basis. Teachers and executive staff as well as guest speakers from community organisations and other government agencies present information on the selected topics which are then discussed. The school's Community Liaison Officer plays a central role in promoting the parent café and facilitating the weekly meetings.

As a result of this initiative, parent and community engagement has increased significantly at the school with parents and carers contributing regularly to school planning and decision making processes.

Choosing an appropriate time

For some cultural or religious groups there are important times in the day or week (such as prayer times) when it would be inappropriate to call a meeting or hold an event. You might provide meeting times during the evening and some during the day to suit different groups, such as working parents and those who work shifts.

Be aware of different cultural attitudes to time-keeping. To allow for late arrivals, you could advertise an earlier start time rather than your actual starting time.

Religious commitments

It is important to recognise that religious commitments may be central in the lives of some migrant or refugee families and that they may inhibit the ability of parents to attend activities. For example, during a period of reflection or fasting (such as Lent or Ramadan) or celebrations (like Chinese New Year), families will be preoccupied and much less likely to attend school activities.

What you can do:

- Access the Calendar for Cultural Diversity through the DoE intranet site. Hard copies are also available in NSW public schools.
- While being careful not to clash with religious or cultural celebrations, consider how you might acknowledge their importance in planning activities and events. Holding an event with parents/carers close to a key time of celebration can add a sense of cultural inclusivity.
- Ask parents' advice about appropriate times for meetings.

Finding a suitable location

It is important to find a meeting location where parents feel comfortable and which allows for effective participation in discussions. The school library often leads to better engagement with families, rather than using an auditorium with stadium seating where people can't see each other or talk easily. Avoid any venue in the school that is intimidating or overly formal. Consider holding meetings off-campus at a location familiar to families to encourage involvement.

Meeting venues and spaces

Many NSW public schools run programs, forums and workshops to assist migrant and refugee families in their settlement to Australia and in supporting their children's learning. These programs are often delivered in collaboration with other government or non-government agencies and may be held either on or off the school premises.

Some schools provide a designated space for parents to meet either formally or informally on the school grounds. Many schools with identified community meeting spaces report higher levels of engagement by parents and carers, in particular by newly arrived migrant and refugee families who may be otherwise reluctant to become involved at school.

Arranging childcare

A significant barrier to parent attendance at meetings can be the lack of availability of appropriate childcare. While some migrant or refugee families may be uncomfortable leaving their children with strangers, others are happy to access childcare services. If parents have young children, look at what childcare options are available or can be offered to coincide with the meeting time.

What you can do:

- Find a local childcare agency that can provide occasional childcare.
- Fund a worker from the same cultural community as parents/carers to provide specialist childcare.
- Encourage parents to bring their small children to the meeting by holding meetings in a child-friendly environment and at a convenient time, e.g. late morning when the older children are in school.
- Ask staff to advertise the availability of culturally appropriate childcare when calling families and seek information about any particular childcare needs.
- Seek input from families about other solutions.

Arranging catering

Providing food and drink at a meeting will make families feel welcome. Make sure the food choice is appropriate and be aware of dietary restrictions. Consult Community Liaison Officers or community representatives about providing culturally appropriate food.

What you can do:

- Organise culturally appropriate food through a local caterer or shop. Some schools have found it beneficial to employ parent caterers.
- Be aware of dietary restrictions and label meat, keeping it separate from other food.
- Provide vegetarian food or sweets as they are suitable options for people from most cultures.
- Locate diverse dishes or snacks as making an effort will be appreciated by families.
- Encourage parents who offer to bring food to share, or provide a multicultural buffet. This is something you could discuss once you have established a stronger relationship with families.
- Don't assume people understand that to 'bring a plate' means bring some food to share. Guests supplying food is seen as rude in some cultures.

Arranging transport

Lack of transport is often a significant barrier to parents/carers who rely on public transport or who have no access to a car during the day to attend meetings.

Consider:

- Providing information about local transport options.
- Hiring a minibus to collect parents for the meeting. A local service may be able to help pick up parents from home or a key location.
- Liaising with community organisations and local government agencies about the possibility of accessing community transport.
- Encouraging families to arrange car-pooling for parents who are more isolated.
- Providing taxi vouchers, bus fares or transport tickets to encourage meeting attendance, in special circumstances.

Inviting families

Once you have sought input and decided on what your meeting is going to focus, think of the best way to communicate your message to parents in invitations, telephone conversations and during meetings. Link your 'marketing message' to factors that motivate parents, such as their child's educational progress or safety.

Calling and sending out invitations in first language

Written notices about a meeting are necessary, however the most effective strategy is to invite families by phone a week or two before you need to meet them using an interpreter or bilingual worker. A reminder call on the morning of the activity or the day before is also very useful (see Appendix 3: Model Interpreter Assisted Telephone Conversation). You can use the Telephone Interpreter Service at any time to invite parents to a meeting at no cost to the school. Phone 131 450 and quote the Department's client code to get an interpreter on the line. The Department's client code is available from the DoE intranet site.

Why call families?

Schools that rely on fliers only, even when translated, often find that parents don't turn up. Oral contact in the parent's first language is essential for a number of reasons:

- You know the parent has received the information.
- Parents may be competent speaking in their own language, but may not be literate in the same language.
- Many communities are largely oral communicators.
- The fear some parents associate with attending school meetings may be alleviated if they have spoken to someone personally, they understand what the meeting is about and can ask questions.
- Schools demonstrate that they are making an effort to cater for language needs if parents/carers are contacted in their first language.
- The personal contact creates a direct relationship with the family, which reduces anxiety.

Invitations to meetings/events

Step one:

Use translated material to invite families to a meeting. While oral communication is often much more likely to lead to success in engaging migrant and refugee families, written information gives families notice of your proposed activity. An interactive bilingual 'General Invitation' note is available in 35 languages on the NSW Public Schools website. The English version appears at Appendix` 4.

Step two:

Phone each family individually, or speak to them in person in their first or preferred language. This is critical for parental attendance. You may be able to rely on bilingual staff for this contact or use telephone interpreters. Some ethno-specific workers in community agencies can also assist schools in engaging parents. Ensure that student/parent information remains confidential and that contact details are not available to agencies for any other purpose, unless parents have given permission.

Distributing written information

Send invitations by mail directly to parents or hand them out in person. Avoid handing notices to students, especially in secondary school. Adolescent students are less likely to hand notices to their parents and families may miss out on the information.

If you have to hand out information to students, brief all staff distributing information about the purpose of the meeting. If students know the purpose of the meeting and are told that the meeting is important, they are more likely to hand the information on.

Translating information

Providing all information in the primary language of the family, as well as in English, is a significant factor in the successful engagement of migrant families in schools (Learning Center Even Start, Fort Collins, CO). Many NSW Public School documents and school notes such as the one at Appendix 4 are available for schools to use free of charge. School-specific translations need to be paid for by schools, however if dates and times are left blank and filled in as required, individual school translations can be used over and again for future meetings on the same topic.

Translations

A large number of DoE publications and documents have been translated into languages other than English. Parents and school staff can access these on the NSW Public Schools website by:

- document name at http://www.schools.nsw.edu.au/languagesupport/documents/index.php,

- language name at http://www.schools.nsw.edu.au/languagesupport/language/index.php or,
- alphabetical order at http://www.schools.nsw.edu.au/languagesupport/documents/index_list.php)

Translation suggestions

Translations of important school information relevant to all or most schools are organised by DoE. If you wish to make suggestions about new translations please phone 9244 5311.

Requests for translations by individual schools

Translations for individual schools will only be funded in cases relating to urgent matters regarding student welfare. Funds are not available to translate documents such as school newsletters. To check if a proposed translation meets the guidelines for funding, telephone 9244 5311.

School funded translations

If schools wish to fund their own translations, advice on cost and how to prepare documents for translation can be obtained by phoning 9244 5311. While advice will be provided it should be noted that it is the schools responsibility to arrange the translation. Further information is also available on the DoE intranet site.

Arranging interpreters

Interpreting services which meet DoE guidelines are available free to NSW public schools to ensure that parents/carers who cannot speak English well or who have a hearing or speech impairment can access information and communicate with schools.

Both onsite and telephone interpreting can be used depending on availability. Some regional schools may not be able to access onsite interpreters but will be able to access telephone interpreters and they can be pre-booked to ensure availability. For detailed information on interpreting and how to access services see the DoE intranet site.

Do I need an interpreter?

In some cases it will be obvious that an interpreter is required to communicate with a family member. In other cases, this may be more difficult to assess. The ability to communicate in English does not always mean the person can understand complex conversations. The best thing to do is ask the family member if they would like an interpreter. Bilingual staff members should not be used as interpreters unless they are conveying basic information.

There is always a need to encourage parents to become more involved in school activities, but language is a barrier for many newly arrived migrant parents. I started an English conversation class that focused on relevant topics such as helping children at school and life in Australia. The classes were held on a weekly basis and were relaxed and informal. Before long, there were 20 parents attending the class. Parent participants now feel more confident in talking to teachers and other staff members and are more willing to participate in other school activities. The regular English class, which is now supported by teacher volunteers, provides a great forum for consulting and communicating with new parents and family members and allows parents/carers to raise issues with the school.

Community Liaison Officer

What kinds of assignments fall within the guidelines for DoE funded interpreting?

The costs of providing interpreter services are, in most cases, met by the DoE. NSW public schools do not have to pay for interpreter services when communicating with parents or community members for occasions such as the following:

- Matters involving students such as school enrolment, subject choice, reporting on student progress, attendance, welfare or behavior.
- Interviews with the school counsellor, principal or year advisor.
- Meetings conducted with groups from diverse language backgrounds such as parent/teacher information sessions.
- School Council or Parents and Citizens (P&C) meetings.
- Career education or subject choice meetings. This may include delivery of training sessions for parents such as the Families in Cultural Transition (FICT) or the Settling In program.

Interpreters are not funded by DoE for events such as graduation ceremonies, school performances or school excursions. If schools wish to engage interpreters for these purposes, the cost must be met by the school.

Any cost for interpreters for international students must also be met by schools using the fees paid by those students.

For advice on whether a planned interpreter assignment falls within DoE guidelines and further information about accessing interpreters, refer to the Interpreting and translation services: Guidelines for schools on the DoE intranet site.

Why not use family members or friends as interpreters?

Families may want a family member or friend to interpret for them. However it should be noted that there may be emotional involvement in these instances leading to a lack of impartiality and/or possible misunderstandings when interpreting is not provided by a qualified interpreter.

Interpreting is a specialist skill that is not possessed by everyone who is bilingual. It requires a high level of fluency in both languages and the ability to quickly, accurately and appropriately convey the whole message from one language to another. Qualified and registered interpreters are bound by the Australian Institute of Translators and Interpreters Code of Ethics which requires them to practise impartiality, confidentiality and accuracy.

In general, it is not appropriate to use students or relatives to interpret. They may not be familiar with the specialist terminology used, the cultural nuances involved or be sufficiently fluent in both languages to accurately convey the message. It is particularly important that schools do not use students to interpret in matters relating to student welfare, counselling or attendance. Students may not have the knowledge or maturity to adequately convey the message. In addition, using students to interpret for parents may affect family relationships.

Running an effective parent meeting

This section outlines practical considerations for running an effective meeting with migrant or refugee parents which include:

- Arrange seating
- Preparing and managing interpreters
- Greeting parents
- Keeping the discussion on track
- Building trust
- Exploring expectations of school involvement
- Explaining practical systems and roles
- Seeking feedback from parents
- Evaluating your strategy
- Sustaining parent involvement

Arranging seating

When running a parent meeting, consider the seating arrangements in the room as this will impact on how comfortable parents feel, how parents interact with each other and school staff, and your ability to create an environment conducive to constructive dialogue.

Seating options for multiple language groups

- Seat parents around tables according to their language group. You will need more than one table and interpreter for large groups, allowing for two to three people and an interpreter at each table.

- Seat parents in clusters around an interpreter in auditorium seating (in rows). This style is less preferable and should only be used if no other options are available. People might not be able to hear well if there are multiple languages being spoken at the same time. Latecomers are often too far away from their interpreter, and this style of seating is hierarchical and discourages parents from active engagement.

Seating options for single language groups

- Arrange seating so that the interpreter and speaker(s) are located at the front of the room facing the parents.

We've learnt two things. First, you've got to give parents something they really want, as well as introduce your agenda, otherwise they don't turn up. Second, if you talk to parents about issues without allowing them to respond, or raise other concerns they have, they are turned off.

Migrant youth and family worker

Preparing and managing interpreters

It is important that staff know how to use interpreters effectively. Training and information in this area is available. A professional learning PowerPoint presentation for teachers on how to access and use interpreters is available on the DoE intranet site.

Tips on using interpreters are also available in the Interpreting and translation services: Guidelines for schools on the DoE intranet site.

Managing interpreters

Connect parents with interpreters

- Arrange seating so that people can hear their interpreter.
- Match parents to the right interpreter. Put up signs for each language so that people know where to go and make sure that anyone arriving late is directed to the right language group.

Brief interpreters, speakers and audience

- Brief interpreters before the session. Discuss the purpose of meeting, its content and the procedure.
- We recommend that interpreting occurs after every few sentences, so the interpreter is not simply summarising ideas.
- Ask the interpreter to communicate all issues and questions raised by parents without filtering information or summarising. If there is a sensitive issue, let the interpreter know (e.g. you want to use the term 'drug use' rather than 'drug abuse').
- Brief all guest speakers on how you will use interpreters. Ask them to avoid any jargon or acronyms and to explain the full meaning of important terms.
- Explain the interpreting process to the audience. Make sure participants know they can speak in their first language at any stage, but that they need to give the interpreter time to translate.

Intervene if necessary

- Don't allow speakers to talk at length without any interpreting.
- Don't allow questions to be asked before the interpreter has finished. Intervene early if this occurs.

Using interpreters in a predominantly English-speaking audience

All parents should be encouraged to attend school events by providing interpreters as standard practice. Arranging interpreters for use in predominantly English-speaking audiences can be more complicated, but still effective. Families who require interpreters can be seated to one side

of the bigger group so they can hear the interpreter. It is also important to explain to parents why you are using interpreters and the school's inclusive approach.

Greeting parents

When holding your meeting, make sure there are people present to welcome parents as they arrive. If parents are unfamiliar with the school they will need assistance in finding the meeting room. Use students who speak the parents' language to assist with this or put up signs. You can provide name- tags and an attendance list, but have someone available to write down names and up-to-date phone numbers in a sensitive way.

Keeping the discussion on track

Explain to the audience what will happen during the meeting, so they know when it is appropriate to speak. Follow the agenda you have set, but allow time for discussion. Remember to accommodate varied concepts of time-keeping when setting your start time. Maintain some degree of flexibility to allow issues of concern to parents' to be dealt with.

Addressing stigma

During meetings, it is useful to talk openly about the fact that some families feel there is a problem if the school contacts them to arrange a meeting or participate in an activity. Let parents know the reasons for your interest in their children and in forming better links with families. After a few sessions parents may be more open to discussing concerns the school has without feeling blamed or singled out.

What you can do:

- Discuss positive and neutral topics at first to build positive relationships and shared understanding.
- Give parents positive feedback about their role and attendance.
- When discussing difficult issues, give positive feedback and provide solutions where possible.
- Give families the opportunity to voice their opinions on issues so that you gain a more holistic understanding of the problem.

Building trust

Schools sometimes make contact with parents because there are particular patterns of behaviour amongst parents or students that they would like to change. This is completely legitimate, but the danger in discussing problems too early is that parents can easily feel shamed or persecuted. The experience may reinforce their fears that contact with school only happens when there are problems.

What you can do:

- Start with a topic that will engage parents such as homework or assessment.
- Explore parents' and the school's perspectives on the topic.
- Allow time to discuss questions in small groups.
- Keep discussions on track.
- Encourage parents to explore personal concerns about their family in private later.

The first meeting

Here's an example of what you could say at the first meeting:

We know that the Australian education system can be difficult and confusing for many recently arrived parents and families. Some parents say they are worried about coming to school, because they feel that there might be a problem with their child, but that's not why we have invited you here today. We would like to make parents feel more comfortable, welcome and confident to ask questions now and in the future.

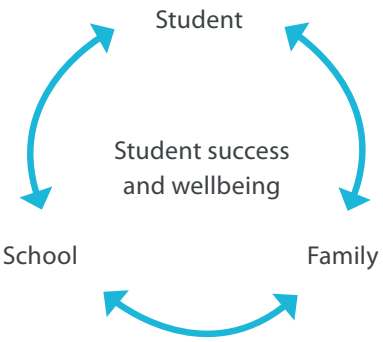
The school would love to see more parents involved in the school, but we know that the idea of getting involved in a school may not be familiar to some parents. We want to talk about that today. This is also an opportunity to talk about things that are important in the education of your children, and for you to advise the school how we could do better.

Exploring expectations about school involvement

Ask parents about their previous school involvement, both in Australia and in their home country, so they can talk about their own expectations for involvement in the school. This is often a very new concept for family members born overseas. Share with parents/carers what you hope to achieve from their involvement and why it is important to the school. You may need to introduce the idea of a three-way partnership between student, home and school (see Figure 1).

The aim is not to overwhelm parents with the school's expectations, but to exchange ideas and develop a deeper understanding of shared goals and parents' concerns. Once families have had their overseas experience acknowledged, they are more likely to be able to accept the difference in our philosophical approach in Australia, as well as its potential benefits.

Figure 1: Three-way partnership between student, school and family



What you can do:

- Explain that your intention in inviting parents is to establish a stronger partnership between the school and parents.
- Explore the idea of parent involvement as it may be an unfamiliar concept.
- Use a diagram to demonstrate the three-way relationship you want.
- Discuss parents' overseas experiences with schools.

Explaining practical systems and roles

It is important to explain school policies and procedures to parents and to use key staff to build relationships. There is often misunderstanding about school guidelines on basics like uniforms, homework and buying books. Families may want to check the information they have received from their child or other families against school policy written in their first language. Using visual aids and practical demonstrations also help to overcome language barriers.

What you can do:

- Arrange a tour of the school.
- Introduce key staff and explain their roles in the school.
- Include information on school policy and procedures.
- Bring examples of forms or reports to show parents how they are filled out, providing translated copies of documents where they are available.
- Give demonstrations of activities that you are trying to encourage.
- Use photos or videos of past activities.
- Draw pictures or diagrams or use other visual images to illustrate a point.
- Use stories, culturally relevant analogies and real-life examples or role-plays.

Seeking feedback from parents

At the end of the meeting, seek feedback from parents/ carers on how they thought the session went. You could try brainstorming with the aid of interpreters, so that the whole group can contribute. If you are after more formal feedback, ask parents to work in small groups with interpreters, who will run through a set of evaluation questions. The interpreter or a bicultural worker can note down comments from parents or work through the responses on a feedback form.

Evaluating your strategy

The process of encouraging migrant or refugee families to be more involved with the school is sometimes a gradual one and not necessarily about attracting high numbers in the first instance. If only a few migrant or refugee parents have shown up at your first meeting and you are disappointed with the low turnout, perhaps you need to re-assess success in terms of what you can provide for those who do attend, and what you can learn from them.

Have you got feedback from them about their level of satisfaction? Can they offer suggestions about what other parents want?

Some schools find that although the numbers are low at meetings specifically set up for migrant or refugee parents, they are attracting parents who have never been inside the school before. This is a really significant step for those families.

Checklist

'We've tried to engage parents before, but they just don't come.'

Consider:

- Have you made phone contact with families?
- Have you used interpreters and translated materials?
- Is the time chosen for meetings convenient for the parents you are targeting?
- Are there other practical barriers that haven't been addressed? e.g. childcare or transport difficulties
- Have you sought input from parents/ students to check what some of these barriers are?
- Are you selecting topics parents want to discuss or that are in line with their concerns?
- Have you reassessed the strategies you tried and issues you faced with the support of a community agency or bicultural worker?

Sustaining parent involvement

In order to sustain parent and carer involvement, identify the strengths and skills of participating parents/carers and create opportunities for them to use these skills on an ongoing basis in your school.

Some parents will become more involved if they know it is important to their children and they can perform a meaningful role. Others may be interested in being a contact person for an ethno-specific parents' group (e.g. a Cambodian parents group) and liaising with the school. Some schools have migrant or refugee parents on the school council who represent the interests of a cultural group or community. Many parents/carers just want to attend parent meetings and perhaps encourage other parents to come along. It is important to assist and support parents/carers in these roles.

Some parents may be prepared to take on more responsibility for meetings over time. This process of fostering leadership development is likely to happen slowly and may require some support and encouragement. It is not always possible to set up self-management of parents' associations.

What you can do:

- Provide support and resources for parents who are emerging as future leaders of an ongoing group or already play a significant leadership role.
- Identify key parent leaders to encourage others to attend events.
- Encourage culturally specific parent groups if parents are interested in managing them.

Supporting culturally diverse families in your school

This section outlines general strategies for making your school more accessible and inclusive of the needs of families from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds:

- Creating a welcoming environment
- Seeking consent
- Addressing parents' concerns about camps
- Catering for cultural dietary needs
- Discussing welfare concerns with parents
- Addressing discipline issues
- Reporting on student progress
- Holding parent-teacher interviews
- Creating opportunities for meaningful parent involvement

Creating a welcoming environment

Schools that are welcoming, positive, respectful and supportive of parents from all cultural and socio-economic backgrounds are more likely to experience the successful engagement of migrant and refugee families in school activities and thus achieve positive outcomes for students.

Schools that have 'welcome' signs and directions in key languages spoken by students and families not only provide practical assistance, but give the message that the school is inclusive and welcomes diversity. Posters depicting diversity, and traditional artwork in public areas, can also make people feel comfortable and accepted. Student artwork and school photos on display can be a talking point for families and a source of pride.

Welcome in many languages

The Calendar for Cultural Diversity, distributed annually to NSW public schools, includes a multilingual welcome poster which may be displayed in schools to welcome parents from a variety of language backgrounds. An electronic copy of the calendar and poster is also available on the DoE intranet site for schools to download and reproduce. Welcome cards in different languages are also available on this site.

What you can do:

Provide multilingual, written information about your school, including school policies, support and orientation programs and multicultural initiatives, to prospective students and their families. Secondary schools may wish to provide information about their schools and secondary education in feeder primary schools and Intensive English Centres. Written translations are especially useful for orientation meetings.

The Welcome Program

The Welcome Program – Supporting ESL students in their transition to high school, supports newly arrived students from LBOTE in their transition from the IEC to high school. The program includes a two hour orientation session for parents/carers which allows them to meet key staff and gain information on a range of topics including:

- The NSW education system
- Student attendance
- Homework: How to help your child
- Welfare
- The role of school support staff.

Seeking consent

Many schools find that parents from migrant and refugee backgrounds may be reluctant to give consent to their child participating in extracurricular or out-of-school activities and often do not return permission forms. There are a number of strategies that can be implemented to resolve this situation:

- Provide information in the first language of parents/carers and seek informed consent.
- Use translated permission forms and other materials. This is critical to ensure that parents/carers can access information about the purpose of the activity, on what is being asked of them and what their child will be doing.
- Acknowledge parental fears and develop an understanding of their perspectives.
- Make personal approaches to families with the aid of an interpreter, bilingual member of staff or community worker when the student feels permission may be an issue. This allows for open dialogue and exploration of concerns.
- Seek practical solutions to address concerns. Teachers may be able to provide schoolwork in advance for students who miss out during an out-of-school event. Transport arrangements can be modified to provide a greater sense of security for the family.

What you can do:

- At enrolment, collect information about the student's needs and convene a meeting between the year advisor and parents, using an interpreter where necessary. This is an opportunity to discuss issues such as academic history, health, parents' perceptions of their child's academic progress, homework, family views regarding education and parental involvement in the school.
- Support new parents by establishing and supporting a 'buddy' system, pairing new parents with existing parents. Provide a description of the program for parents.

Addressing parent concerns about camps

Many migrant or refugee parents fear for their child's physical and emotional safety when they are away from home. They may be concerned about students missing class to participate in other learning environments, attending culturally inappropriate activities and the safety of girls in particular. While schools may want to adopt a holistic approach to developing children's social, physical and academic skills, this may not be understood by parents in the same way.

School camps are often of particular concern to parents. Some schools have tackled the problem by sharing more information with parents.

What you can do:

- Show a video or photos so parents can see what the camp site looks like.
- Outline the learning that will occur at the camp.
- Ask students from similar cultural backgrounds who have previously attended the camp or their parents/carers to contribute information about their experiences. They could be invited as a guest speakers at a parent meeting or to write an article for the school newsletter.
- Talk about staff supervision of students while they are away from home.
- Talk about how you address students' religious, cultural and dietary needs at camp.
- Consider allowing some parents to attend camps and activities. Some groups feel more comfortable if a respected community member attends on behalf of a group of families.
- Adopt a flexible approach to overnight stays. Some parents may not want their child to sleep away from home, but after discussion, they may be prepared to transport them to the camp site for the day.
- Evaluate your camp strategy. Is a day trip more appropriate for your school community?

Catering for cultural dietary needs

Parents need to be reassured that their child's religious and cultural needs, including their dietary requirements, will be met at school and during extracurricular activities. It can be straightforward to discuss and cater for these needs, allaying parents' fears and making them more likely to allow their children to participate in school activities.

What you can do:

- List a selection of dietary requirements (for example, 'Halal, Kosher, Vegetarian, and Other') on consent forms. This will give parents the feeling that the school is aware of their needs and will respond to them.
- Take a school canteen list to a parent meeting and ask for ideas, or work on a school canteen policy together. Families are happy to provide advice if the school is struggling to adapt meals and wants to make sure food is culturally appropriate.
- Consider asking a parent or parents to provide advice to canteen staff on culturally appropriate dishes. Is there also an opportunity for some part-time work for parents who are interested?

In marketing camps to parents we highlighted the educational benefits. Rather than simply talking about students making friends, doing physical exercise and forming better relationships with teachers, we thought of ways to include these messages within the context of educational attainment, which addressed parents' key motivations.

We said that it was up to each family to decide what was best for their child, but we wanted to provide more information for them to make up their minds. Parents were shown photos so they could see what it was really like and we had a well-respected Somali student talk to parents about the benefits of attending the study camp.

We discussed fears about gender issues, the need for boys and girls to sleep separately and be supervised, and talked through parents' concerns about safety and culturally appropriate activities.

School Welfare Co-ordinator

Canteen policy

In reviewing its canteen policy, a school with significant religious diversity consulted with families from a wide range of backgrounds to ensure its new menu was inclusive and catered for the dietary requirements of students from different faiths. In addition to meetings with students, the school held meetings with parents and carers to develop the new menu and also consulted with relevant, local ethno-specific community organisations.

Discussing welfare concerns with parents

Many parents who have not developed a relationship with teachers fear the worst when a teacher makes contact and this can cause problems in communication about welfare concerns. Schools need to develop effective and supportive ways to assist families with the issues their children face and be able to recommend solutions that parents are happy with. Issues handled ineffectively can have a devastating effect on relationships at home and exacerbate issues at school.

Family conflict, teenage pregnancy, truancy, mental illness, homelessness and drug use are all highly taboo subjects in some communities. Wherever possible, involve a migrant or refugee youth and family worker in providing advice about how to talk to a family before contacting parents. Approach problem-solving sensitively with family members to reduce any negative consequences for the student.

The Wellbeing for Schools website at http://www.det.nsw.edu.au/wellbeing provides resources for strengthening the wellbeing of all students in NSW public schools. Advice about what schools can do to support the specific needs of refugee students, including information on the impact of refugee experiences on families, is available on the DoE intranet site.

For further assistance with your school's approach to supporting the wellbeing of refugee students, the Victorian Foundation for Survivors of Torture has produced a useful guide, Schools in for Refugees (see Resources section), which outlines a range of strategies schools can use to ensure they are meeting the needs of refugee students and their families with regard to curriculum, welfare and other important aspects of school life. Many of the suggestions can be adapted to meet some of the needs of non-refugee students from culturally diverse backgrounds.

Addressing discipline issues

Schools are aware that crises such as student suspension or expulsion require careful and supportive handling to minimise the impact on family relationships. Families may need information on options for their child and help in understanding policies and procedures around discipline issues. Schools that have integrated welfare and disciplinary procedures often report successful outcomes in relation to discipline matters for students, families and staff alike.

Involving youth and community workers who are able to offer assistance around these issues is often useful. Those who specialise in support for migrant and refugee young people are often very skilled in this area and can assist school staff to negotiate positive outcomes.

What you can do:

- Provide opportunities for parents to get to know teachers, welfare coordinators and the principal before any issues arise, so that an element of trust is established.
- Ensure parents are aware of the Wellbeing Framework for NSW public schools and receive translated information about the welfare support offered by the school at enrolment.
- When a student has difficulties, involve families as soon as possible to prevent a crisis response.
- Develop a contact list of organisations and bicultural workers who can provide advice on cross-cultural approaches to discipline. Remember not to provide details about the student or the situation if you don't have the family's consent.
- Seek student and parent permission to involve youth or community workers in the matter, including workers from the same cultural background as the family. Remember that some families may be too ashamed to involve members of their own community in personal or family affairs.
- Review disciplinary, welfare and academic progress policies in the school to ensure that they are complementary and integrated where appropriate.
- Provide interpreters when required. They are vital for any legal matters where family members must fully understand the situation or provide informed consent, and where English language ability may be diminished in a crisis.

Reporting on student progress

One of the difficulties for parents reading reports is deciphering the grading system and assessment methods. Due to a lack of information in their first language, parents from migrant or refugee backgrounds often rely on verbal feedback from their children about their progress at school, which may not provide an accurate description of progress. This situation can lead to family conflict. Schools may need to explain the reporting system to parents at meetings.

The biggest barrier for parents is often English literacy. If written translation of a report cannot be provided, schools can offer interpreter assisted parent-teacher interviews as strategy for parents/carers to access information out about their child's progress.

Distributing reports

Some schools have reported that parents do not always receive their child's school report. Many schools send reports home with students, which is cost effective, however it is difficult to determine whether the family actually receives the report. Some migrant or refugee parents' report that their child hides a report they are ashamed of when it has been given to the student directly. Parents sometimes don't know when a report is due and as a result don't know when to approach their child or the school about reports. Schools that post reports home say they have more success with reports being received by parents. Some schools choose to distribute reports at parent-teacher meetings.

Holding parent-teacher meetings

Schools often report poor involvement of parents from migrant and refugee backgrounds in parent-teacher meetings (Migrant Information Centre, 2002:27). Low attendance at parent-teacher meetings is often an indicator of a lack of previous involvement with schools in Australia or overseas.

Those who are more familiar with parent-teacher interviews often fear their language skills are too limited and parents/carers may not know that interpreters are available. They may not have had any previous experience of interpreters being provided at the school or they may be afraid that if the school reports problems with their child, the interpreter will reveal this information to others in the community.

What you can do:

- Call parents to invite them to the parent-teacher interview using the family's preferred language. Explain why you would like them to attend.
- Use trained interpreters. Explain to parents that interpreters must follow a professional code of ethics and that the information discussed is confidential.
- To develop staff confidence, support their training in the use of interpreters.
- Discuss the relevance of parent-teacher interviews at parent meetings.
- Be sensitive to the language and approach used in interviews. Make sure you give context to comments made about a student's progress, ensuring you give positive feedback where the student is making good effort and achieving before discussing any concerns.

Encouraging participation

A school with large numbers of newly arrived students distributes semester reports at parent-teacher nights as a way of encouraging parent attendance at these events. Interpreters are provided at the parent-teacher nights to assist as required. Parents/carers who do not attend are contacted by phone, using telephone interpreters where necessary, to discuss how they feel their child is going at school. The school reports a high rate of participation by newly arrived families with limited English.

Using an interpreter at a parent-teacher meeting:

- Brief the interpreter on what the conversation will be about before the interview.
- For on-site interpreting, position yourself so that you can speak directly to parents/carers (and students, if present) with maximum eye contact.
- Talk directly to parents/carers and use the first person when speaking (e.g., say 'Do you...' instead of 'Ask them, do they...');
- Use plain English, avoiding slang and colloquialisms with a normal tone and volume;
- Make one point at a time. Keep each question or statement short.
- Do not ask the interpreter to edit your information or to tell you about the family's cultural background. Ask the parents/carers directly for such information.

Creating opportunities for meaningful involvement

Involving migrant or refugee parents in the initiatives you plan is vital to the success of your engagement strategy. A model which includes parents at every level is more successful at engaging parents in a long-term, sustainable and meaningful way than programs in which parents are simply the recipients of information (Even Start Learning Center, 2005). Studies have found parents are much more motivated and take more active leadership when they participate in decision-making roles in programs (Bromley, K.C. 1972, and Gillum, R.M. 1977).

Examples of meaningful activities for parents include:

- attending and assisting with school excursions or sports events
- joining in social activities
- helping with development of culturally relevant policies e.g. establishing a prayer room
- providing advice on culturally appropriate food for the canteen
- fundraising
- participating on parent advisory and decision-making groups
- using specialist skills to support teaching and learning within or across subjects including individual or professional skills or cultural or linguistic knowledge and abilities
- inviting parents as guest speakers to share their professional knowledge
- being a mentor to a student, e.g. seeking work in a related industry
- participating in curriculum working groups, e.g. the selection of community languages or culturally appropriate resources
- attending working bees.

RESOURCES FOR NSW PUBLIC SCHOOLS

The DoE intranet provides a range of materials, resources and professional learning programs in anti-racism, multicultural, EALD and refugee education for NSW public schools. Information on interpreting and translation services as well as resources for engaging families from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds in NSW public schools are also available on this site. For the full range of programs and resources that promote community harmony, cultural inclusion and support EALD and LBOTE students, see the multicultural education pages on the DoE intranet site.

A NEW LIFE FOR REFUGEES: AUSTRALIA'S HUMANITARIAN PROGRAM – A RESOURCE FOR SCHOOLS
This resource is produced by the Department of Immigration and Border Protection for Australian primary schools. It tells the story of refugee resettlement in Australia. Copies may be downloaded in three parts from Department of Immigration and Border Protection website.

See: http://www.immi.gov.au/media/publications/general/new-life-ref.htm

CALENDAR FOR CULTURAL DIVERSITY
The Calendar for Cultural Diversity provides details of major celebrations and events relating to Australia's diverse cultures and communities. It is accompanied by Information for Teachers that aims to assist teachers in the development and implementation of teaching and learning programs which acknowledge and celebrate Australia's cultural diversity. Copies of the calendar are sent to NSW government schools each year. Digital copies of the calendar and the accompanying teachers' handbook are available on the DoE intranet site for NSW public schools.

COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS: MULTICULTURAL AGENCIES
This resource has been developed to assist NSW public schools in developing partnerships with culturally and linguistically diverse communities. Included in this resource are contact details for national, state-wide and local agencies that support multicultural communities. The resource is available on the DoE intranet site.

CULTURAL EXCHANGE NSW
This website provides information on a range of strategies and models for fostering intercultural understanding and promoting community harmony. It also provides information on how to implement effective school-based cultural exchange programs.
See: http://www.culturalexchange.nsw.edu.au/

HARMONY DAY
This website provides information on Harmony Day as well as a range resources and ideas for Harmony Day events. Included are a range of educational resources designed for use by teachers and students. The website is managed by the Department of Social Services.
See: http://www.harmony.gov.au

INTERPRETING FOR NSW PUBLIC SCHOOLS
NSW public schools are encouraged to use interpreters to assist in communicating with parents/carers who do not speak or understand English well or who are deaf or having a hearing or speech impairment. Schools may use on-site or telephone interpreters. The costs of providing interpreters in NSW public schools are in most cases met by DoE. Information on booking interpreters as well as guidelines for schools is available on the DoE intranet site.

RACISM. NO WAY!
This website provides anti-racism education information and resources for Australian schools. It includes a comprehensive set of resources to assist schools, teachers and students to understand and counter racism in the school environment. The website is managed by DoE on behalf of all Australian schools.
See: http://www.racismnoway.com.au/

RECONCILIATION AUSTRALIA
Reconciliation Australia is an independent, national not-for-profit organisation which aims to promote reconciliation by building relationships, respect and trust between the wider Australian community and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. The website provides a range of resources and information that may be used by individuals, schools, workplaces and other organisations.
See: http://www.reconciliation.org.au/

ROADS TO REFUGE
This website provides students, teachers and the wider community with relevant, factual and current information about refugees. It includes a range of reference materials and resources as well as teaching ideas for schools. The website is a joint initiative of DoE and the Centre for Refugee Research, University of NSW.
See: http://www.roads-to-refuge.com.au/

SCHOOL'S IN FOR REFUGEES
School's In for Refugees: A whole-school approach to supporting students of refugee background is a resource that supports schools and school-based professionals in their efforts to provide a high quality education to young people of refugee backgrounds. The resource has been produced in consultation with teachers and others in the community, health, family services and education sectors. It includes background information about understanding the refugee experience and the impact of trauma on learning, development and wellbeing. The resource may be downloaded in sections from the Foundation House, Victorian Foundation for Survivors of Torture website.
See: http://www.foundationhouse.org.au/schools-in-for-refugees/

RESOURCES FOR NSW PUBLIC SCHOOLS

STRENGTHENING COMMUNITY HARMONY - ADVICE AND RESOURCES FOR SCHOOLS
This document provides a range of suggested strategies for schools in building and maintaining community harmony and how to respond in the event of community disharmony. NSW public schools may download copies of this resource from the DoE intranet site.

STRENGTHENING FAMILY AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT IN STUDENT LEARNING
This toolkit provides information and resources to assist schools in strengthening engagement by families and communities. It was developed by the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) to support Australian schools.
See: https://www.det.nsw.edu.au/media/downloads/about-us/our-reforms/local-schools-local-decisions/reform-agenda/working-locally/family-community-engage/strengthen-student-resource.pdf

STRENGTHENING FAMILY AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT – OPTIONS RESOURCE FOR SCHOOL COMMUNITIES
This guide has been developed by DoE to support NSW public schools in strengthening family and community engagement. The guide draws on the DEEWR Strengthening Family and Community Engagement in Student Learning resource.
See: https://www.det.nsw.edu.au/media/downloads/about-us/our-reforms/local-schools-local-decisions/reform-agenda/working-locally/family-community-engage/option-resource-communities.pdf

TRANSLATED DOCUMENTS FOR NSW PUBLIC SCHOOLS
A large number of publications for NSW public schools are available in translation. Translated documents are available on the NSW Public Schools website. Advice for schools on what to consider when developing school-based documents for translation is available on the DoE intranet site.
See: http://www.schools.nsw.edu.au/languagesupport/language/index.php

WELCOME CARDS - INDIVIDUAL LANGUAGES
A series of individual cards with welcome translated by language are available for use by NSW public schools. Welcome cards are available in over 60 different languages from the DoE intranet site.

WELCOME POSTER - MANY LANGUAGES
This poster, Welcome in many languages, is an A2 size poster available in high and reduced resolution versions. NSW public schools may download the poster from the DoE intranet site. A welcome poster is also included as the last page in the Calendar for Cultural Diversity which is distributed to schools annually in hard copy and also available in digital format on the DoE intranet site.

WELCOME TO COUNTRY & ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF COUNTRY: GUIDELINES AND PROTOCOLS FOR NSW PUBLIC SCHOOLS AND TAFE NSW INSTITUTES
These guidelines have been developed by the DoE in collaboration with the NSW Aboriginal Education Consultative Group (AECG) to assist NSW public schools and TAFE NSW campuses in acknowledging Aboriginal custodianship of country at meetings, ceremonies and events. These guidelines are available from the DoE website.
See: https://www.det.nsw.edu.au/media/downloads/dethome/yr2005/welcomecountry.pdf

USEFUL CONTACTS

The DoE Equity team, in collaboration with Educational Services teams, provides support to NSW public schools in the delivery of multicultural education. This includes advice and support for schools in engaging families from culturally and linguistically diverse communities.

For more information, see the DoE intranet site.

National organisations

Australian Human Rights Commission

The Australian Human Rights Commission is an independent statutory organisation that reports to the Federal parliament through the Attorney General. The Commission investigates complaints about discrimination and human rights breaches. The Commission has responsibility to monitor Australia's performance in meeting its international human rights standards.

Phone: (02) 9284 9600, Complaints Infoline: 1300 656 419

General enquiries and publications: 1300 369 711
TTY: 1800 620 241

Website: http://www.humanrights.gov.au

Refugee Council of Australia

The Refugee Council of Australia (RCOA) is the national umbrella body for refugees and the organisations and individuals who support them. It has more than 180 organisational and 700 individual members. RCOA promotes the adoption of flexible, humane and practical policies towards refugees and asylum seekers both within Australia and internationally through conducting research, advocacy, policy analysis and community education.

Phone: (02) 9211 9333

Website: http://www.refugeecouncil.org.au

Statewide bodies

Multicultural NSW

Multicultural NSW is the leading government agency supporting multicultural communities in NSW. Multicultural NSW has strong relationships with ethnic community groups and fosters extensive networks throughout various communities through its programs and services.

Phone: (02) 8255 6767 TTY: (02) 8255 6758

Website: http://www.crc.nsw.gov.au

Ethnic Communities Council of NSW

The Ethnic Communities' Council of NSW (ECC) is the peak body for culturally and linguistically diverse communities in NSW. It is a non-profit association which actively promotes the principles of multiculturalism and lobbies for the development of a culturally inclusive society.

Phone: (02) 9319 0288

Website: http://www.eccnsw.org.au/

Anti-Discrimination Board of NSW

The Anti-Discrimination Board of NSW promotes anti-discrimination and equal opportunity principles and policies throughout NSW. It handles complaints of discrimination under the NSW Anti-Discrimination Act 1977.

Phone: (02) 9268 5544 Toll free: 1800 670 812 (for regional NSW only)

Website: http://www.antidiscrimination.lawlink.nsw.gov.au/

Multicultural Disability Advocacy Association NSW Inc.

The Multicultural Disability Advocacy Association NSW (MDAA) provides a range of advocacy services and projects for people with a disability from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.

Phone: (02) 9891 6400, Toll free (GRANVILLE, Sydney) 1800 629 072

Website: http://www.mdaa.org.au

Multicultural Youth Affairs Network (NSW)

The Multicultural Youth Affairs Network (MYAN) NSW develops policies, strategies and resources that address multicultural youth issues at the local, regional and state-wide levels. MYAN is made up of community workers from the youth and multicultural sectors and government employees who support young people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds and their families.

Phone: 0435 146 979

Website: http://www.myan.org.au/nsw/

Migrant and multicultural community services

A number of community based organisations, including migrant resource centres, provide services which cater for the needs of culturally diverse communities at the local government level. This includes information, referral and support services for migrants and refugees.

Services for refugees and asylum seekers

A range of government and non-government agencies provide settlement support and assistance for refugee students and their families. This includes 'on-arrival' settlement support, health and legal services and programs that assist refugee and humanitarian entrants to develop the knowledge, skills and social connections they need to participate in Australian society.

Ethno-specific organisations

There are numerous organisations that conduct activities to benefit and support specific community groups. This includes organisations which may represent the cultural, linguistic and religious interests of particular ethnic communities. These organisations may have national, state or local affiliations.

For a more details on national, state-wide and local agencies supporting multicultural communities, refer to Community Partnerships: Multicultural agencies. NSW public schools may download copies of this resource from the DoE intranet site.

Appendices

APPENDIX 1: ISSUES PARENTS MAY BE INTERESTED IN

TOPICS	NO. INTERESTED
Supporting students with their studies at home and school	
Student assessment and reports, parent–teacher nights	
Uniforms, books, voluntary contributions – policy, process	
Subjects offered at school, what they mean, choices	
The NSW education system – primary, secondary, tertiary	
Education pathways from school	
Making appointments with teachers, introducing key staff roles	
Welcome and orientation to the school (tour of buildings)	
Transitions to school – Starting primary/high school, IEC to high school	
What to do when there is a problem with your child	
Student wellbeing	
What to do when your child is sick (notifying the school)	
Homework (school's expectations and support options)	
Communication between parents and the school	
English as an Additional Language / Dialect Support	
Camps and excursions	
Raising teenagers in Australia, improving family relationships	
Bullying and racism	
Drug and alcohol issues	
Immigration issues	
Centrelink benefits	
The rights of parents, children and the law	
National or state-wide assessment programs such as NAPLAN, NSW HSC	
Parent involvement in class and school activities	
Other ideas	

APPENDIX 2: SUGGESTED AGENDA – INITIAL MEETING WITH MIGRANT AND REFUGEE PARENTS

Time: 2 hours

1. Welcome to the school

2. Meeting introduction

- Introduce names and roles of staff, and ask parents' names.
- Discuss the purpose of the meeting and issues planned for the day. Let everyone know they can ask questions at any stage and explain how you will use interpreters. Talk about why you want to explore parental involvement in the school and thank parents for coming, reassuring them that the meeting is about forming positive relationships. Talk about the stigma parents can feel in attending the school, and how great it is they have come despite this possibility and their busy lives.

3. First group discussion

- How are parents involved in schools in your home country, or other countries where you've lived? Why would you visit the school in your home country?
- How have you been involved with schools in Australia? Are they the same?
- Facilitator to seek input from parents and write raised issues on the whiteboard.

4. The education system in Australia

- Some things you might expect in Australian schools.
- Presentation: Comparing Australian education system with the system in parents' country of origin.

5. Morning tea break

6. Second group discussion

- How could we help your children improve their participation at school?
- Are there any barriers we can help you overcome?
- Write issues on the whiteboard.

7. Consultation

- What issues would you be interested in discussing in the future?
- Read out a list of topics they may be interested in. To prioritise the most important issues, ask for a show of hands if they are interested in the suggested topics. Seek any other suggestions.

8. Evaluation

- What is something you thought was good about today?
- Is there anything you suggest we change for next time?

9. Closing comments

Thank parents for the time they have set aside and their input. Discuss date and time of next meeting after consultation with parents. Ask if anyone would be willing to be a contact person to help with ideas about the next meeting. Encourage parents to spread the word and bring other families they know to the next meeting.

APPENDIX 3: MODEL – INTERPRETER ASSISTED TELEPHONE CONVERSATION – INVITATION TO A MEETING

Introduction

- State your name and role, and that you are calling with an interpreter (check the language selected is OK if you are unsure). Indicate that you are not calling about a problem with their child and not to worry.

Reason for the meeting

Example: Have you heard there will be an important meeting for families and guardians at the school next week? We hope all families who have children in the school will come to the meeting. The school really wants to help your children to succeed at school and would like to hear from you about how the school could be doing better.

This is also an opportunity to provide parents with important information about the Australian education system, and for you to ask some questions about the school, or make some suggestions. It is a chance to tell the school about what you would like in the future for your child.

Sometimes parents can feel uncomfortable about coming to the school because of language or lack of confidence, but there will be an interpreter there, and some workers who also speak your language.

We would like fathers and mothers (or male and female guardians/carers) to be there.

Check the details:

Date: 12 July

Time: From 10.00 am to 12.00 noon.

Place: School library. Check they know how to get there.

Language:

We will arrange interpreters to be at the meeting. Can you tell us what language you would like for the interpreting?

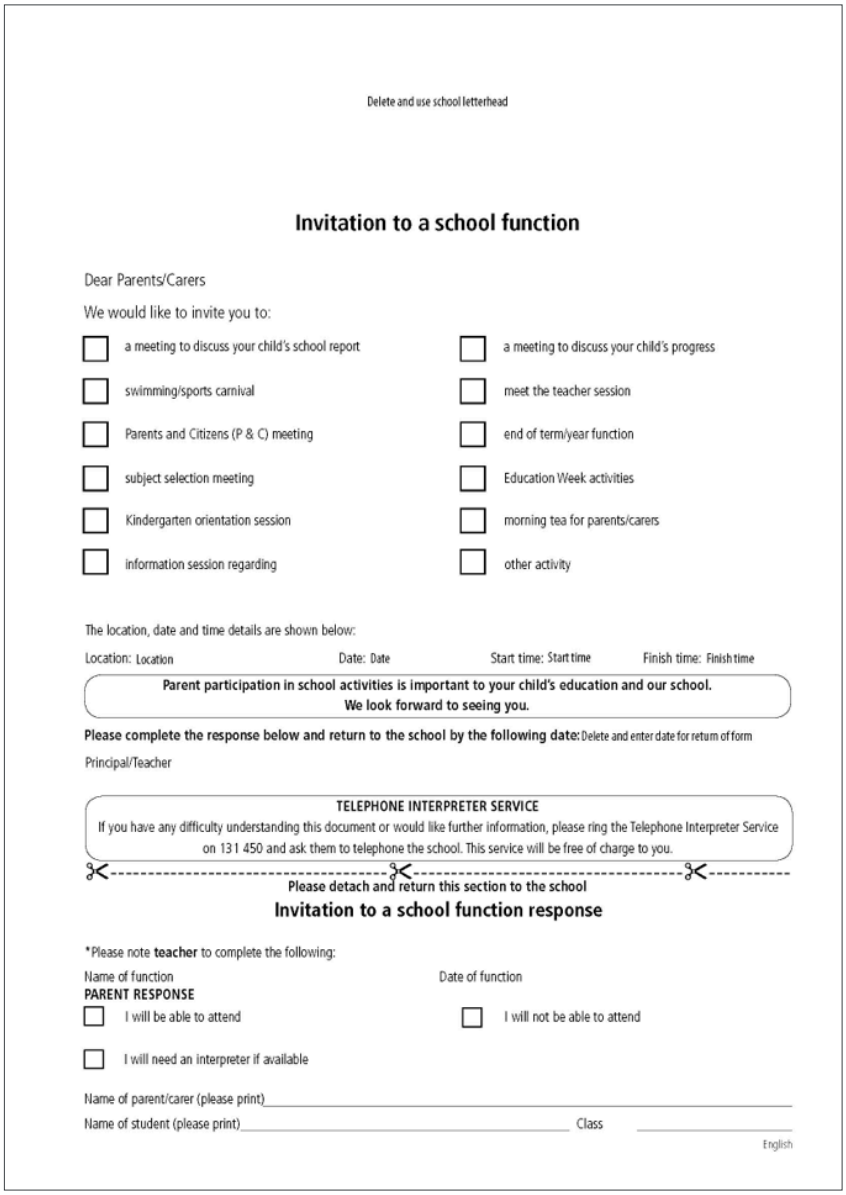
Childcare:

There will be a childcare worker for younger children at the local community centre. Childcare is free. Do you think you will need childcare? If so, how many children will you bring? (If any, fill in your childcare form.)

Conclusion

We really hope you can come – is there anything we can do to help you to get there next week (transport, any other barriers)? Do you have any questions?

APPENDIX 4: GENERAL INVITATION TO A SCHOOL FUNCTION



Delete and use school letterhead

Invitation to a school function

Dear Parents/Carers

We would like to invite you to:

- ☐ a meeting to discuss your child's school report
- ☐ a meeting to discuss your child's progress
- ☐ swimming/sports carnival
- ☐ meet the teacher session
- ☐ Parents and Citizens (P & C) meeting
- ☐ end of term/year function
- ☐ subject selection meeting
- ☐ Education Week activities
- ☐ Kindergarten orientation session
- ☐ morning tea for parents/carers
- ☐ information session regarding
- ☐ other activity

The location, date and time details are shown below:

Location: Location Date: Date Start time: Start time Finish time: Finish time

Parent participation in school activities is important to your child's education and our school. We look forward to seeing you.

Please complete the response below and return to the school by the following date: Delete and enter date for return of form

Principal/Teacher

TELEPHONE INTERPRETER SERVICE

If you have any difficulty understanding this document or would like further information, please ring the Telephone Interpreter Service on 131 450 and ask them to telephone the school. This service will be free of charge to you.

Please detach and return this section to the school

Invitation to a school function response

*Please note **teacher** to complete the following:

Name of function Date of function

PARENT RESPONSE

- ☐ I will be able to attend
- ☐ I will not be able to attend
- ☐ I will need an interpreter if available

Name of parent/carer (please print)_____

Name of student (please print)_____ Class _____

English

Translations

This invitation is available in translation in 35 languages at: http://www.schools.nsw.edu.au/languagesupport/documents/schfunc_inv.php.

For the full range of translated documents available for use by NSW Public Schools, see: http://www.schools.nsw.edu.au/languagesupport/documents/index.php

APPENDIX 5: CASE STUDY 1 – COMMUNITY LEARNING APPROACH IN A NSW GOVERNMENT PRIMARY SCHOOL

Program content:

The 'Community Learning Approach' was used in a highly culturally diverse school to facilitate greater understanding of Australian schooling and teaching strategies among parents and families. Topics for a series of parent workshops run by teachers came from informal discussion during the first session. The school focus was on sharing information on 'how to do maths' with parents of Stage One students.

Structure:

An expression of interest was sent to Stage One parents and carers inviting them to attend a meeting.

Six two hour workshops were offered to parents/carers with between workshop tasks to be completed with their children. The workshops were facilitated by teachers. A final sharing session was also included and parents had to bring a friend to this session. The final session was co-facilitated by teachers and parents who had attended previous workshops.

Issues discussed:

Informal discussion during the first workshop about shared experiences as learners informed future workshop content: building parents' understanding of the 21st Century Learning Model; unpacking the NSW Mathematics syllabus; problem solving steps; Newman's Prompts; and concrete and abstract maths strategies.

School community profile:

95% of students came from LBOTE with the main language backgrounds being Tamil, Hindi and Gujarati. 52% of parents/carers were born overseas. Over 70% of parents/carers had tertiary qualifications, mostly bachelor degrees or above.

Outcomes:

Parents demonstrated a deeper understanding of problem solving processes, indicated increased trust and highly rated 'sharing experiences with teachers'. Teachers formed purposeful relationships which allowed assumptions to be challenged and this led to a shared vision of quality education and students' strengths and needs.

Co-ordination:

A team of five teaching staff supported by academic partners and a specialist consultant.

What was learnt:

Shared understandings between parents and teachers came from changing the approach of parental participation from that of consumers of information to that of partners in the education of children. Teachers identified a need to learn more parents' beliefs and expectations as a future area for action.

APPENDIX 6: CASE STUDY 2 – BUILDING INTERCULTURAL UNDERSTANDING AND A SENSE OF COMMUNITY

Program content:

A whole school research project involving students, teachers and families was implemented in a non-metropolitan school to facilitate shared understanding of the cultural diversity within the school community. Cultural diversity was also explored by students in complementary teaching programs that focussed on cultural identity and heritage.

Structure:

A pre and post-test involving a visual learning activity to gauge students' prior and gained knowledge/attitudes was conducted. Parents/carers were involved in family tree activities, surveys about their cultural heritage and some in-class activities. Teaching units K-6 included literature studies, listening to the first-hand experiences of parents and community members, an art show and a family day.

Issues discussed:

Teachers reported limited access to reliable data on the cultural and language backgrounds of students and their families; an insular school community; and hesitation by some students and families to acknowledge their cultural backgrounds.

School community profile:

Student population of 150 students with 30% from LBOTE. Student mobility 10% per year. School located in the outskirts of Sydney with limited public transport.

Outcomes:

Increased student knowledge of their complex cultural backgrounds and a shift in attitudes about cultural diversity. Increased teacher knowledge of the cultural heritage of their students and their families. Increased teacher professional discussion about cultural diversity, local communities, values, ethics and engaging students. Increased knowledge amongst parents/carers about their own family history as well as the history and diversity of the whole school community. Students and parents reported an increase in pride about their cultural heritage.

Co-ordination:

The project team included four teachers and six parents, supported by a specialist consultant.

What was learnt:

Teachers identified a need to explicitly teach about multicultural issues and assist students to explore Australian identities and what it means to be Australian. Teachers also identified the need to maintain family involvement in supporting a culturally inclusive curriculum and to actively include parents in whole school learning activities. Teachers, students and parents reported a stronger sense of belonging and increased understanding about the nature of the school and local community.

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