

**BUILDING COLLABORATION BETWEEN  
SCHOOLS AND PARENTS OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE  
LEARNERS: TRANSCENDING BARRIERS,  
CREATING OPPORTUNITIES**





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In recent years, sweeping migratory flows have dramatically altered the demographic, linguistic, and cultural landscape of the United States (Súarez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2001). This growth in immigration is most striking and influential in the domain of education (Moll & Ruiz, 2002). As schools incorporate large numbers of immigrant children, many who are English Language Learners (ELLs), parent involvement could provide a significant source of support for students and for teachers. Research and practice have both demonstrated that parent involvement is central to academic achievement: Schools that support meaningful parent involvement have higher levels of student achievement, improved school attendance, higher graduation rates, larger enrollment in post-secondary education and students with positive attitudes about school (e.g., August & Hakuta, 1997; Henderson & Berla, 1994). Parent involvement can also help students be more engaged with school and motivated to work hard (López, 2001). Yet, many schools that struggle with low academic achievement, including schools with high numbers of ELLs, report minimal parental involvement (Fuller & Olsen, 1998; Valdés, 1996).

What explains minimal parent involvement and parent-school collaboration in schools that most need the support parents could provide? According to some, this lack of parent involvement is attributable to deficits in the parents: these parents don't value education and they have limited education and English skills necessary for meaningful participation (Valencia & Black, 2002; Villenas, 2001).

Other research in the field suggests a completely different view, however, and this brief is grounded in that perspective: Parents of ELLs place a very high value on education and are involved in their children's education in important ways, such as ensuring the completion of homework, actively participating in parent-teacher conferences, and attending school-based parent meetings (Delgado-Gaitan, 1990; Goldenberg, 2004). They also support their children's education in culturally-specific ways that are often invisible to school staff, such as reinforcing the importance of good behavior, hard work, and respecting one's teachers (Valdés, 1996).

Yet, some of the parents of ELLs are also limited in their ability to support their children's education as fully as they are capable of and desire (López, 2001). In many school contexts, school staff are also limited in their ability to welcome and include parents while working toward the shared goal of supporting ELL academic success (McCaleb, 1997). Barriers pertaining to language, school staffs' lack of familiarity with culturally and linguistically diverse families, and parents' unfamiliarity with U.S. schools can all impede effective parent-school collaboration. For parents of children with disabilities or those being considered for special education referral, the additional school structures and processes bring additional challenges. If school staff and immigrant parents could better understand and be equipped to address these barriers, then parents of ELLs, students, and school staff could experience increased collaboration and support (Waterman, 2006c). Therefore, the primary goal of this brief is to discuss these barriers and offer concrete suggestions to guide school staff to transcend them.



## TRANSCENDING BARRIERS:

Analysis of research and practice illuminates several factors that contribute to the paradoxical views of ELL parents and their involvement in their children's schools and education. Each of these factors pertains to having the means and opportunity for viable parent-school collaboration, in relation to: school-initiated efforts to build partnerships with parents; language; comprehensible information about U.S. schools and culturally and linguistically diverse families; special concerns related to special education referral and placement; immigrant isolation; legal status.

### 1.1

#### HAVING ACCESS TO THE MEANS AND OPPORTUNITY FOR PARENT-SCHOOL COLLABORATION

School-initiated efforts to establish collaborative partnerships between parents of ELLs are related to each of the factors influencing parent-school collaboration — encompassing each of the other factors discussed. When schools bring skill and commitment to these efforts, these efforts can be a powerful vehicle for supporting ELL school engagement and success (Delgado-Gaitan, 2001). These partnerships can take many forms, formal and informal, such as parent-teacher decision-making organizations (i.e., PTA, PTO) and parent advisory committees, as well as individual meetings with teachers or principals that involve a mutual exchange of information. Schools and teachers must make efforts to build these partnerships, however, as they will not emerge naturally. All

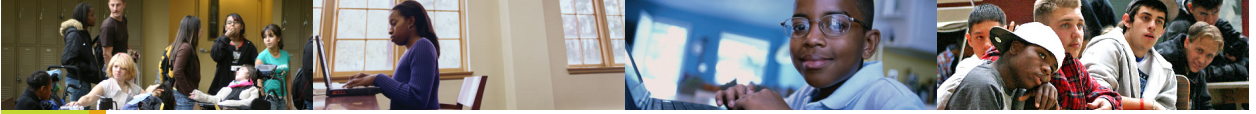
involved benefit further when these partnerships include opportunities for reflection and dialogue about topics of common interest (McCaleb, 1997).

### 1.2

#### LANGUAGE BARRIERS AND ACCESS TO EFFECTIVE OPPORTUNITIES

Language often functions as one of the most significant barriers to ELL parent-school collaboration (Crawford, 1991; Trueba, 2002). This dynamic involves both parents and school staff, with many parents feeling hindered by a lack of English skills and many school staff being limited by an inability to speak with the parents of their ELLs (Ruiz-de-Velasco & Fix, 2000). This language barrier often prevents or limits both oral and written communication (Delgado-Gaitan, 1990). This, in turn, has a significant effect on communication, understanding, and relationship-building between parents and school staff (Ruiz-de-Velasco & Fix, 2000).

It is also important to consider that the vast majority of parents of ELLs are very interested in learning English. Enrollment in adult English as Second Language (ESL) classes is rapidly increasing, yet the demand for classes far exceeds the services available (Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2001). The quality of available adult ESL classes is also a factor because many of these classes are not adequately supported with funding or technical assistance. In many cases where adult ESL classes are offered in public schools, for example, the instructors receive little training or guidance, yet



they are held responsible for all aspects of the ESL class, such as registering and testing students as well as generating meaningful instructional materials and lessons (Waterman, 2006a).

English language abilities are not the only factor influencing communication, however. The translated documents that schools send to parents can also hinder effective communication. In some cases, school district translators believe that their translations must be written in very formal language in order to be of sufficient “quality.” Yet this often results in word choices and grammatical structures that are unfamiliar or misleading. In other cases, staff with limited translation skills are responsible for translating documents sent to parents, which again can result in insufficient or misleading communication. Ultimately, school staff may believe that they have transcended the language barrier through sending parents translated documents when this is not the case.

### **1.3** *LACK OF ACCESS TO COMPREHENSIBLE INFORMATION ABOUT U.S. SCHOOL SYSTEMS AND CULTURALLY AND LINGUISTICALLY DIVERSE FAMILIES*

The fact that many parents of ELLs and many school staff have had little or no prior exposure to each other’s experiences, systems, and cultures is significant when considering how much meaningful parent-school collaboration exists in any school setting. Many school staff have little or no understanding of the life experiences and cultural

values of culturally and linguistically diverse families such as those of their ELLs. In many ways, this lack of knowledge and experience impedes schools’ ability to generate meaningful communication and collaboration with the parents of ELLs. This lack of knowledge hinders schools’ effectiveness when approaching such things as homework, school-wide parent meetings, parent-teacher conferences and soliciting parental attendance at school activities.

Similarly, many parents of ELLs lack some information and understanding necessary to support parent-school collaboration. Some parents do not understand the various methods used to teach English as a second language, for example, especially those that incorporate native language instruction. When students at the secondary level are offered the opportunity to select from an array of courses, many parents are unfamiliar with the content of the courses offered and how to best guide their children’s choices (Ruiz-de-Velasco & Fix, 2000). Many parents also have limited experience with the U.S. report card and are unable to understand the information about their child’s academic progress it is intended to communicate (Delgado-Gaitan, 1991). Parents of ELLs are also often not aware of many other aspects of school systems in the U.S., including such things as the roles and responsibilities of non-instructional staff, the meaning and impact of special education placement, what extra-curricular programs and resources are available, and how to access these resources (Valdés, 1998). Simply receiving information, however, does not necessarily help parents overcome the obstacle created by unfamiliarity with U.S. schools. As with





the language barrier, this information must be conveyed to parents in a way that is comprehensible and within the context of respectful, culturally responsive relationships. Written communication needs to reflect a manner of speaking that is familiar to parents who have had limited experience with formal education (Waterman, 2006c). And in many cases, written communication, alone, is insufficient. Phone calls and personal contact through individual and group meetings is often the most effective form of communication between schools and the parents of ELLs (Waterman, 2006b).

Another ramification of this lack of familiarity with U.S. schools and diverse families is a misunderstanding about how parents are expected to be “involved” in schools and “supporting” their children’s education. Because of differences in cultural practices, many parents of ELLs are not aware of many of these expectations (López, 2001). Yet, in order for parents to have the opportunity to be involved in these ways, they and other family members must have prior knowledge of these expectations and an opportunity to consider their importance (Valdés, 1996). Equally important, school staff should not exclusively operate out of existing assumptions. They should offer opportunities to solicit parental input when determining what would be meaningful parental involvement. School staff should also receive professional development aimed at better understanding the skills and capacities parents bring and how to effectively and respectfully collaborate with parents toward common goals (Delgado-Gaitan, 1990; McCaleb, 1997; Waterman, 2006c).

## 1.4 SPECIAL EDUCATION AND DISABILITY ISSUES

The framing of special education under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (1990) reflects concepts, structures and processes that are often unfamiliar to parents from non-English speaking and immigrant backgrounds. Service providers schooled in the U.S. system, however, may not realize how culturally embedded their own practices are and how foreign they seem to culturally and linguistically diverse parents (Kalyanpur, Harry, & Skrtic, 2000).

Research on culturally and linguistically diverse families’ interpretations of the concept of disability indicate that, for many, mild cognitive or behavioral differences are likely to be interpreted as simply a part of the natural range of human variation. Thus, parents often respond to the assignment of labels such as Learning Disability, Mild Mental Retardation, or Emotional Disturbance with disbelief and confusion (Harry, 1992; Kalyanpur & Harry, 1999). Such parental responses may be seen as “denial” by professionals, rather than as an opportunity for dialogue regarding differential cultural meanings of these terms. In the case of more clear-cut, biologically evident developmental differences, culturally and linguistically diverse parents may agree with school personnel regarding the significance of the condition but not regarding its cause. Several studies have documented the likelihood of spiritual rather than physical or scientific interpretations of these conditions as well as the ensuing miscommunication between parents of



CLD and service providers (Fadiman, 1997; McHatton & Correa, 2005; Skinner, Bailey, & Correa, 1999). Miscommunication can also occur because of differential cultural assumptions about appropriate parental roles, in particular, an attitude of deference which may mask parents' true concerns about their children's needs (Cho, Singer, & Brenner, 2003; Lai & Ishiyama, 2004; Lynch & Hanson, 2004). Issues related to transition planning have also been a source of misunderstanding and disagreement between service providers who hold traditional U.S. values of independence and individuality and parents whose cultural models of adulthood assume greater interdependence between adult children with disabilities and their families (Rueda, Monzo, Shapiro, Gomez, & Blacher, 2005). Overall, all of these issues require much cultural awareness on the part of professionals and the need to clarify the decision-making process for CLD parents (Klingner & Harry, 2006).

## 1.5

### IMMIGRANT ISOLATION

Many parents of ELLs experience tremendous isolation from other parents in their communities and this reinforces the barriers caused by ineffective home-school communication and insufficient information about schools (Delgado-Gaitan, 2001). Conversely, when schools create opportunities for immigrant parents to come together and build relationships, this constitutes a significant source of support for parent-school collaboration (Shirley, 2002). Opportunities for parent-to-parent contact, such as adult ESL classes, parent advisory boards

and social/cultural events help parents of ELLs create social networks, facilitating their ability to circulate knowledge about many aspects of U.S. society and schools (Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2001; Waterman, 2006a). These social networks, in turn, often function to cultivate trust and an exchange of information and resources, which helps build long-term relationship and facilitate school and community involvement (Moll, Amanti, Neff, Gonzales, 1992; González, et. al., 1993).

## 1.6

### UNDOCUMENTED LEGAL STATUS

A large number of the parents of ELLs have not been able to obtain legal residency in the U.S., in spite of tremendous effort and interest, and this can negatively influence their involvement in schools (Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2001). In some cases, parents will not fill out forms that ask for a social security number, such as the application for free or reduced-price lunch (Waterman, 2006c). In other cases, parents will not volunteer at a school if the principal requires them to provide fingerprints to the local police office. It is important, therefore, that school staff be aware of this factor and determine appropriate ways to help all parents feel welcome and safe in public schools. Undocumented legal status can also influence parental support of high school graduation and efforts to apply to college. This can occur when parents learn about the difficulty their children will face when attempting to advance within the U.S. education system without a social security number. In a recent nation-wide study, 97 percent of the





children of immigrants expressed the belief that education was critical to their future in the U.S. For these children, a high school diploma and a college degree is key to obtaining a meaningful and well-paid job. Like their parents, they hope to have more options than manual labor or service-level employment. Yet, the current reality in most U.S. states is that ELLs who have been unable to obtain legal status cannot receive any form of financial aid for college or qualify for in-state tuition (Súarez-Orozco & Suárez Orozco, 2001). For this reason, many ELLs and their parents become discouraged once they reach high school, especially if no one intervenes and provides information about resources available to fund college tuition.

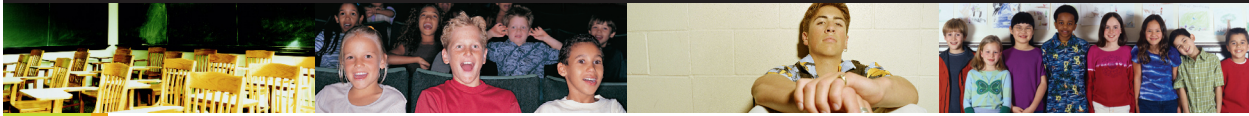
## **KEY ELEMENT 2:** *RECOMMENDATIONS FOR POLICY AND PRACTICE*

Considering each of these factors influencing meaningful ELL parent-school collaboration, a number of policy recommendations for schools and districts emerge. These recommendations are intended to guide school staff to better transcend existing barriers as well as support compliance with one or more of the legally mandated requirements established by No Child Left Behind (NCLB, Title I, Part A, subpart 1, section 1118; NCLB, Title III; Public law 107-110, section 3302). Schools may need to gradually introduce new programs or policies, so this information is presented in an order that reflects the skills and resources necessary for successful implementation, beginning with those that require relatively basic skills and resources on to those that require a more complex and developed set.

## **2.1** *SCHOOL PRINCIPALS PROVIDE EXPLICIT SUPPORT FOR PARENT INVOLVEMENT WORK* (MCCAULEB, 1997; SHIRLEY, 2002; WATERMAN, 2003)

The school principal plays an extremely pivotal role in promoting viable parent-school collaboration. Therefore, it is important that the principal demonstrate support for parent-school collaboration through policy, staff decisions, and behaviors such as:

- hiring specific personnel, such as a parent liaison and front office staff who are capable of communicating with and building relationships with the parents of ELLs;
- choosing staff capable of welcoming and building relationship with all parents of ELLs, even if they are only capable of speaking the native language of the majority of these parents;
- attending school-sponsored parent meetings in order to hear and respond to parent questions or concerns;
- clearly communicating to teachers and other school staff that they value parents, parent involvement programs and events, and parent-school partnership efforts; and
- giving attention to the work of parent-school collaboration at staff meetings, allocating school resources toward parent-school collaboration, making efforts to speak with parents, and being present at some parent-school collaboration activities.



## 2.2

### INITIATE EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION WITH PARENTS

(EPSTEIN, 2001; WATERMAN, 2006C)

Communication between the home and the school is vital to increasing and sustaining parent-school collaboration. It is essential, however, that this communication be in the native language of the parents and in a way that is clear and comprehensible. If not, even well-intended attempts to communicate with parents can create a barrier between parents and schools. Whenever possible, several parents of ELLs should be asked to read a written translation and provide feedback before it is sent out. Schools should also use phone calls as a means to communicate with parents as often as resources allow, as written correspondence is not always sufficient.

While all forms of communication between parents of ELLs and schools are important, information from teachers about the progress of students, sent home on a regular basis, is particularly helpful toward promoting parental support of academic work. Offering parents a clear and simple way to follow-up with teachers, with questions or comments, is also very important. Yet, school staff should not assume that e-mails or internet notices will be accessible or familiar to parents of ELLs. In many cases, bilingual parent liaisons and bilingual front desk secretaries can be extremely valuable in answering parents' questions and helping them understand how best to communicate with teachers or principals about specific questions or concerns.

## 2.3

### OFFER OPEN-ENDED MEETINGS INVOLVING TEACHERS AND PARENTS

(DELGADO-GAITAN, 2001; VALDÉS, 1996; WATERMAN, 2006C)

Many parents of ELLs do not speak English fluently and may feel uncomfortable or hesitant about approaching school staff and discussing questions or concerns. Many of these parents are also unfamiliar with aspects of U.S. school systems. Similarly, many school employees are not familiar with the experiences of the parents of ELLs, which can result in a lack of awareness of the knowledge these parents bring or the questions that they may have.

For these reasons, it can be extremely valuable for school staff to offer an initial, open-ended meeting for parents and select school staff as a way to guide future parent involvement efforts. This meeting should not be constrained by pre-set agendas; while it can be guided by points of information that have been determined to be of value to parents, it is essential that the primary focus be on facilitating opportunities for parents to ask any questions or raise any concerns regarding their children's education. The school principal should be present, as should some teachers who work with ELLs. When all parents speak a single second language, a bilingual staff person should facilitate a dialogue between parents and school staff. In school settings where multiple language groups are represented, translators could be used in conjunction with a single, skilled facilitator. This facilitator should focus on creating new opportunities for parents and school staff alike to gain insights and understanding that will support student achievement and parent-school collaboration.



## 2.4

### OFFER SKILL-BASED WORKSHOPS AND INFORMATIONAL MEETINGS:

(DIAZ-SOTO, 1997; MCCALEB, 1997; SHIRLEY, 1997, 2002)

Similar to the open-ended parent meetings, informational meetings could help provide parents with information about unfamiliar aspects of U.S. schools and/or provide staff with information about the experiences of ELLs and their families. These opportunities could be especially helpful for parents whose children are going through the special education referral process and who may be confused as to the intent and possible outcomes of the process. The skill-based workshops could focus on the kinds of skills that parents have expressed an interest in learning, such as supporting literacy development at home or helping with math homework. In all cases, these meetings and workshops should be a reflection of parental needs and interests, as determined in relation with parents and school staff who work with parents. Equally important, these workshops should function to provide school staff with an opportunity to better understand what approaches to “parent involvement” may or may not be meaningful or comprehensible, as well as how to modify existing assumptions and approaches.

An initial, open-ended meeting is an ideal way to determine what skill-based workshops or informational meetings might be most meaningful to parents and school staff. The following topics for informational meetings and skill-based workshops have frequently emerged from initial parent meetings:

### POSSIBLE TOPICS FOR MEETINGS FOR PARENTS:

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

### INFORMATION TO INCORPORATE INTO STAFF DEVELOPMENT SESSIONS:

1. What parents are already doing to support literacy development and what more they might need to know.
2. Information about how foreign-born parents were taught math (aimed at helping school staff better support the completion of this homework).
3. Information from parents for teachers about how to make homework better function as it is intended — as a way to practice skills already learned during the school day.
4. Information from parents about how the report card could be modified in order to increase teacher-parent communication and collaboration.



5. Information for school staff about how parents perceive special staff and special programs and what parents have experienced as barriers to accessing these resources as well as what has facilitated access.
6. Information for school staff about how existing school-wide decision making committees are, or are not, welcoming and engaging to parents, and information about how to build on existing strengths and modify programs to mitigate their limitations.

Informational parent or staff meetings can also be a way for school districts to fulfill their responsibility for providing information to the parents of ELLs (NCLB, Title III; Public law 107-110, section 3302). Through a parent meeting, for example, schools could inform parents about the instructional methods used to teach English as a second language, how children's skills and needs are assessed and what options parents have for selecting a particular instructional method. Schools are responsible for being honest and ethical with parents, even if that means they need to acknowledge their limitations. However, parent meetings could also offer an opportunity for dialogue about how parents and school staff could work together to address any limitations the schools may face. Many parents of ELLs would be receptive to an invitation to this kind of collaboration.

## 2.5

### APPROACH SCHOOL-SITE DECISION MAKING BODIES DIFFERENTLY:

(DELGADO-GAITAN, 1990, 2001; NOGUERA, 2001; WATERMAN, 2006C)

Most schools would like their school-site decision-making bodies to include a diverse representation of parents. Yet many schools struggle to achieve this goal, in spite of good intentions and the devotion of resources toward this goal. The following recommendations are offered as suggestions that could help schools in this area:

- Designate a staff person to specifically focus on involving the parents of ELLs—as well as other parents who are under-represented on their school-site decision making organization.
- Designate a staff person to arrange and conduct pre-referral meetings with parents of children experiencing learning or behavioral difficulties, and to ensure that official IEP and other special education conferences are conducted with adequate, personalized information to the parents ahead of time as well as with appropriate clarity, respect, and translation services where needed.
- Assess what topics and meeting format would be most welcoming and engaging for these parents.
- Engage parents in an open-ended agenda that includes such things as discussion of instructional approaches and school resources, as opposed to a focus on fundraising activities or special holiday events.
- Survey parents in order to determine if childcare or transportation support is necessary. Work with parents to offer this support in a meaningful way, drawing on parental leadership and collaboration.



## 2.6

### ASSIGN STAFF TIME SPECIFICALLY TO THE WORK OF PARENT-SCHOOL COLLABORATION:

(RIOUX & BERLA, 1993; RUIZ-DE-VELASCO & FIX, 2000)

The role of a parent liaison is vital to supporting viable parent-school collaboration. In schools throughout the country, parents of ELLs most often report that it was the outreach of a bilingual staff person, or someone designated to serve in the role of parent liaison, that first inspired or guided their involvement in their children's schools. Schools could consider filling this role with a full-time parent liaison, a part-time liaison, a Teacher on Special Assignment (designated to focus on parent-school collaboration) or a staff person with specific hours devoted to parent-school collaboration.

When selecting the person who will serve as parent liaison, it is most important that she/he can speak the native language of the majority of the ELLs. Equally important, these staff members should either be from the community of the parents or should demonstrate an ability to build relationships and understanding between the parents and the school. In order to be most effective, liaisons should also be capable of implementing and developing school-wide parent involvement programs, rather than only having skills and experience related to contact with individual parents. They should also receive on-going training to support their ability to work with parents of diverse backgrounds, connect parents to local resources, and guide both parents and school staff to work corroboratively toward the educational success of English language learners.

In order for this position to effectively support parent-school collaboration, it is also essential that principals and other supervising staff allow the liaisons to remain primarily focused on work with parents. Particularly in schools newly experiencing a large influx of ELLs, liaisons are too often requested to be responsible for translations and interpretations, which ultimately leave them with insufficient time to implement effective parent involvement work.

## 2.7

### OFFER PARENTS AN ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE CLASS OR A FAMILY LITERACY PROGRAM

(RIOUX & BERLA, 1993; ST. PIERRE, SEARTZ, GAMSE, MURRAY, DECK & NICKEL, 1995; WATERMAN, 2006A)

Offering parents English as a Second Language (ESL) classes or a family literacy program, in the school building, can play an important role in promoting increased parent-school collaboration. In schools that serve high numbers of ELLs, adult ESL classes could facilitate increased parental presence in the school and increased relationship with teachers and school staff. These classes could also facilitate increased parent-teacher collaboration by supporting such things as parental ability to: (a) ensure the completion of homework, (b) better understand the written communication between the school and the home, and (c) better understand how to support literacy development. These classes could also promote parent-school collaboration by supporting such things as school staffs'



understanding of the motivation and capacities of the parents of ELLs, the ways that language and some communication efforts hinder relationships and understanding, and what instructional approaches are most engaging and effective with ELLs. Family literacy programs are also an excellent way to increase parental involvement and parent-school collaboration. These programs, by definition, include components directed at helping parents feel more welcome in the school, and increasing their capacity to develop their children's education in the home. Both ESL classes and family literacy programs also inspire children's motivation and school engagement as children are influenced by seeing their parents in their school, modeling a value of academic learning.

## 2.8 CREATE AND SUPPORT A SCHOOL-BASED PARENT VOLUNTEER PROGRAM:

(EPSTEIN, 2001; WATERMAN, 2006C)

Creating and effectively supporting a school-based parent volunteer program is a valuable way to increase meaningful parent-teacher partnerships. This is a serious commitment, however, as should be reflected in specific ways that principals allocate staff resources. As an initial step, teachers and other school staff should work with the principal to determine some of the ways that parents (who may not speak English fluently) could best be utilized. Consideration should also be given to providing parents opportunities to volunteer at various times and in various capacities. And before parent volunteers begin any work, schools need to offer a well-organized training for parent volunteers and

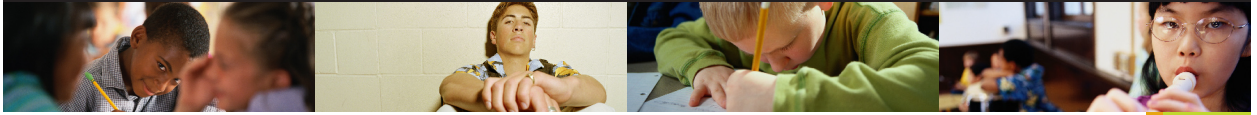
the school staff who will work with them. A staff person should be assigned to provide on-going support--- for the program, the parents and the school staff. If this kind of organization and infrastructure does not exist, efforts to involve parents as volunteers could fail and cause further problems between parents and school staff. Parents and teachers could become frustrated and parents could doubt their capacity or value.

## 2.9 CREATE AND SUPPORT PARENT LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT:

(DELGADO-GAITAN, 2001; SHIRLEY, 1997, 2002)

School-based efforts to cultivate parent leadership can generate a strong base of support for high quality parent-school collaboration, in a variety of ways. Such efforts could yield ELL parent representation on committees intended to develop "parent involvement" approaches or produce recommendations for improving the instruction of ELLs. These efforts could also serve as a way to generate broad-based parent outreach, as parent leaders are often a school's most valuable resource for recruiting other parents. Parent leadership classes and workshops can also help develop parents' awareness of their value and power, thus creating opportunities for parents to better recognize the skills and experiences they bring to their support of their own children's education, as well as all that they bring to support teachers, other parents, and all children in the school community. These processes can be of particular importance to families of children with disabilities, who benefit greatly from peer networks that offer information and support.





## 2.10

### CREATE AND SUPPORT A DISTRICT-LEVEL PARENT-SCHOOL ADVISORY COUNCIL:

(DELGADO-GAITAN, 2001; WATERMAN, 2003)

Building on the work previously discussed, creating a district-level Parent-School Advisory Council could strengthen the work of parent-school collaboration in significant ways. This program could allow school staff and parents of ELLs an opportunity to share ideas and experiences as well as build their knowledge and skill-base. This kind of Advisory Council could increase parent motivation to be involved in their children's schools, particularly as a leader of parent-school collaboration efforts. It could also increase school staff's understanding of parents, how to best build relationships with parents, and generate added insights about providing effective instruction to ELLs.

In order to be successful, however, these efforts require administrative level support, at the level of individual schools as well as the district level. Most importantly, district level staff would need to authorize a staff person at each school – those who are involved with ELLs and/or their parents – to participate on this Advisory Committee. This staff person should also commit to inviting parent representatives to attend the meeting.

There are many ways to structure these meetings. Key to their success is providing multiple ways for building relationships, discussing current challenges, exploring potential resources, and reviewing agreements and commitments made during the

meeting time. For example, the first part of a meeting might feature families discussing their own contexts as well as resources that they've used and how they found them. The second half of the meeting could be devoted to providing information or training related to supporting meaningful parent-school collaboration, such as ideas about how to improve school staff's understanding of the parents; necessary components of workshops offered to parents in schools; suggestions about how to best enlist the support of the principal; and information about a community resource relevant to family needs or developing existing strengths.

After each meeting, it is recommended that the school-based staff person arrange for a meeting with the building principal in order for all involved to share what was learned and discuss possible application at the building level.

## CONCLUSIONS

Parents of ELLs represent a vital source of support for increased student engagement and achievement; they bring skills, values and knowledge that would benefit both students and teachers. Most importantly, they bring profound commitment and motivation: The majority of the parents of ELLs have come to the United States in order that they and their children will have a "better life." And many of these families quickly come to believe that supporting their children's educational attainment is central to turning this dream into a reality.



At the outset, however, it is important to understand that ELL parent–school collaboration cannot be approached in the same ways that parent involvement has traditionally been understood and implemented in schools. The experiences, strengths and needs of this population are different, as are the vehicles for inviting school engagement and relationships with school staff.

Ultimately, the possibilities are promising and compelling. If schools devote time and resources toward developing new ways of understanding and approaching parent-school collaboration, they will generate a strong and cohesive source of support for increased ELL school engagement and success, as well as increased satisfaction for parents and school staff.



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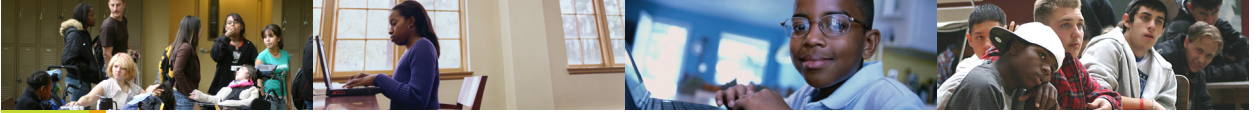
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## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- I. General Parent-School Collaboration/ “Parent Involvement” Resources: Breaking Down Barriers, Creating Space: A guidebook for increasing collaboration between schools and the parents of English Language Learners. By Robin A. Waterman, EdD. Published by the Colorado Department of Education.

*This resource contains an analysis of research, a discussion of No Child Left Behind (as it pertains to Parent Involvement laws and obligations), and a detailed discussion of parent-school collaboration strategies that have proven successful in Colorado public schools. There is also a detailed appendix with a listing of publications and organizations that offer support for the work discussed in the guidebook.*

This document can be downloaded for free on the Colorado Department of Education website: [http://www.cde.state.co.us/FedPrograms/nclb/downloads/pi\\_ELLGdbk.pdf](http://www.cde.state.co.us/FedPrograms/nclb/downloads/pi_ELLGdbk.pdf)

1. *School, Family and Community Partnerships: Your Handbook for Action*. Corwin Press: California. By Epstein, J., Coates, L., Salinas, K, Sanders, M., Simon, B. (1997).
2. FINE Network  
Harvard Graduate School of Education  
3 Garden Street  
Cambridge, MA 02138  
(617) 495-9108  
[hfrp@gse.harvard.edu](mailto:hfrp@gse.harvard.edu)  
[www.gse.harvard.edu/hfrp/contact.htm](http://www.gse.harvard.edu/hfrp/contact.htm)

3. National Center for Parent Involvement in Education (NCPIE) [www.ncpie.org](http://www.ncpie.org)
4. Strengthening Parent Involvement: A Toolkit  
This toolkit is a comprehensive document designed to help schools and districts comply with the regulations for Parent Involvement as prescribed in NCLB. It provides information about NCLB, parent involvement research, ideas re: how to implement Title I Parent Involvement requirements, and a discussion of the parent involvement planning process and a substantial listing of available resources.  
[www.cde.state.co.us/cdeunified/download/pi\\_toolkit.pdf](http://www.cde.state.co.us/cdeunified/download/pi_toolkit.pdf)

### II. Parent Involvement Materials specifically for Latino Families:

1. Bilingual (Spanish/English) Materials for Parents: [www.morenoed.com](http://www.morenoed.com)
  - a. Parents, Teach your children to learn before they go to school
  - b. Preventive discipline and positive rewards for all children
  - c. Parents, your school and home involvement can help your children learn
  - d. Teaching ideas for parents to use with their teenagers
  - e. Help your children become strong readers and effective learners
  - f. Questions and answers about college  
And more than 30 more!!!





2. Colorin Colorado: [www.colorincolorado.org](http://www.colorincolorado.org)  
This is a bilingual (Spanish/English) website providing information, activities and advice for Spanish-speaking parents and educators of English language learners.

### III. Instructional Materials for School-based ESL classes for parents

1. FLASH: Families Learning at School and Home: A series of adult ESL instructional materials, including four levels of adult ESL/ literacy lesson plans and corresponding student handouts. There is also a School-based Life Skills Assessment System for the adult ESL student, which includes a placement test and a scoring sheet for each level of the ESL Curriculum.

[www.fiu.edu/~flash](http://www.fiu.edu/~flash)

2. Parenting for Academic Success:  
This is an adult ESL curriculum consisting of 12 units that can be implemented comprehensively or as separate learning experiences for parents. For more information or to order these materials: [www.delta-systems.com](http://www.delta-systems.com)

Information also available at: The National Center for Family Literacy website ([www.famlit.org](http://www.famlit.org))

3. Practitioners Toolkit: Working with Adult English Language Learners  
A comprehensive guide for adult ESL teachers that includes ESL lesson plans

related to integrating family literacy and parent involvement into ESL instruction. Also includes guidance re setting goals and student assessment. This Toolkit can be downloaded for free from the following website:

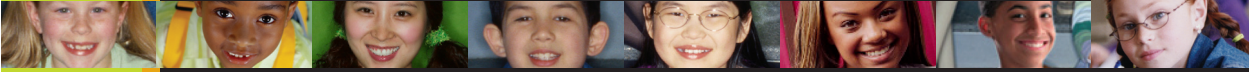
[www.famlit.org/Publications/Practitioners-Toolkit-ELL.cfm](http://www.famlit.org/Publications/Practitioners-Toolkit-ELL.cfm)



## NOTES



*THE U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION'S OFFICE OF SPECIAL EDUCATION PROGRAMS FUNDS THE NATIONAL CENTER FOR CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE EDUCATIONAL SYSTEMS (NCCREST) TO PROVIDE TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT TO CLOSE THE ACHIEVEMENT GAP BETWEEN STUDENTS FROM CULTURALLY AND LINGUISTICALLY DIVERSE BACKGROUNDS AND THEIR PEERS, AND REDUCE INAPPROPRIATE REFERRALS TO SPECIAL EDUCATION. THE PROJECT TARGETS IMPROVEMENTS IN CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE PRACTICES, EARLY INTERVENTION, LITERACY, AND POSITIVE BEHAVIORAL SUPPORTS.*



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