



*English Learner Education  
Program Guidelines*

**PARENT  
INVOLVEMENT**

*August 2011*

# PARENT INVOLVEMENT

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## Frequently Asked Questions

### 1. Are schools required to communicate with parents of English learners (ELs)?

**YES.** Schools must communicate appropriately and consistently with ALL parents. This may include sending written communications in the parents' native language and/or via other modes such as home visits, telephone calls, meetings, and online interaction.

### 2. Should schools require parents of ELs to communicate with their children in English?

**NO.** The issue is not the language of communication; it is the communication itself. Parents should communicate with their children in the language that allows them to express their ideas and emotions clearly. The use of the native language does not interfere in the children's learning of the English language.

### 3. Should schools communicate with parents in their native languages?

**YES.** School staff should make earnest attempts to facilitate communication with parents. Having interpreters during meetings, events, or telephone conversations help make families feel more welcomed and comfortable so they share vital information with school personnel.

Note that not all parents of ELs are non-native speakers of English. In many cases, native speakers adopt children from other countries. Additionally, many parents of ELs read and write English quite well and are just shy about speaking. Take the time to know the families in the school/district.

### 4. Do school staff required to notify parents if their child is LEP identified?

**YES.** Communication with parents regarding EL programming decisions is required by state law. The school district must notify parents, in a language they can understand, within ten school days. For district receiving Title III, this notification must be annual and must include information about the district's Annual Measurable Achievement Objectives (AMAO). Additional requirements under Title III include parent involvement and outreach activities. See the Title III chapter for more information.

## Overview

According to the National Education Association, parent/family involvement in your child’s education can mean, but is not limited to the following:

- Reading to your child
- Checking homework every night
- Discussing your children's progress with teachers
- Voting in school board elections
- Helping your school to set challenging academic standards
- Limiting TV viewing on school nights
- Becoming an advocate for better education in your community and state
- Asking your child everyday, “How was school today?”

This chapter outlines some of the state and federal requirements and best practices for parent communication and parental involvement activity planning.

### **Why is parental involvement important?**

When parents are involved in their children's education at home, they do better in school. And when parents are involved in school, children go farther in school — and the schools they go to are better.

Researchers discover how important it is for parents to be actively involved in their child's education. Some of the findings of major research into parental involvement are listed below:

- The family makes critical contributions to student achievement from preschool through high school. A home environment that encourages learning is more important to student achievement than income, education level or cultural background.
- Reading achievement is more dependent on learning activities in the home than is math or science. Reading aloud to children is the most important activity that parents can do to increase their child's chance of reading success. Talking to children about books and stories read to them also supports reading achievement.
- When children and parents talk regularly about school, children perform better academically.
- Three kinds of parental involvement at home are consistently associated with higher student achievement: actively organizing and monitoring a child's time, helping with homework and discussing school matters.
- The earlier that parent involvement begins in a child's educational process, the more powerful the effects.

- Positive results of parental involvement include improved student achievement, reduced absenteeism, improved behavior, and restored confidence among parents in their children's schooling.

(To read more about these findings, refer to <http://www.nea.org/parents/index.html>.)

Parent/family involvement is essential to building successful schools. When schools and families work together to recognize and meet the emotional, intellectual, and physical needs of their school-age children, academic achievement is affected. To appeal to a variety of families including English Learners (ELs), schools need to be creative on how to engage parents as well as be flexible on the modes of plan delivery.

**IMPORTANT: Parent involvement initiatives should be integrated within the culture of the school and district. It is the responsibility of every staff member to create a safe and friendly environment for students and their families.**

Some common barriers to parental involvement, especially for those families who are new to the community and are ELs, include:

- Language barriers
- Cultural differences
- Parents not feeling welcomed
- Parents' feeling intimidated (size of school, the use of jargon, etc.)
- Parents not understanding the system
- Parents' feeling that they have nothing to contribute
- Lack of time or scheduling conflicts/difficulties
- Lack of transportation
- Lack of childcare

Some recommendations for addressing language barriers are described in Table 1.

**Table 1: Suggestions for Addressing Language Barriers**

<p><b>Language interpreters –</b></p> <p>Allow parents/guardians an opportunity to let the school staff know if an interpreter is necessary. Communication between staff is critical here. When a family arrives at the front office for initial intake, make notes if the family brings a friend or neighbor to help with documents.</p> <p>The Home Language Questionnaire is available online in multiple languages. A completed form should be on file for all students. <a href="http://education.state.mn.us/html/intro_english_lang_ques.htm">http://education.state.mn.us/html/intro_english_lang_ques.htm</a></p> <p>Provide training for school staff as well as for interpreters so everyone is familiar with district/school procedures and is consistently practicing appropriate communication strategies. For example, staff should speak directly to the parent and not to the interpreter,</p>
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pause frequently to allow for interpretation, and review any school documents with the interpreter prior to the meeting with the parent(s) to lessen potential miscommunication.

**NOTE:** Be selective when using language interpreters. Peers and volunteers are great during Open House and informal occasions. However, if sensitive or private information is involved certified interpreters or staff that already is working with the student is recommended. A possible method of communication is via a conference phone where the interpreter is not physically present.

Also be aware of any gender preferences. Ask the parent/guardian if he/she would feel more comfortable speaking through a male or female interpreter before setting up the appointment. Awkwardness and/or reservations about speaking through a male or a female may limit communication.

To maximize use of interpreters, block appointments, when possible, so one interpreter may assist with several families within a designated amount of time.

Keeping lists of preferred interpreters is recommended

**Written translation –**

Effective newsletters, notices, memos, and other written communication – Schools may establish color codes for forms. For example, red might be used for all emergencies and “read immediately” notices from the principal. Yellow may be used for lunch menus and other communication from child nutrition, etc.

Another effective strategy to incorporate to notices home is to include visual cues. Enhance the message with pictures to demonstrate meaning, if possible. Or, just simplify the language. Try to keep sentences 10 words or less. Keep paragraphs short and to the point. Additionally, use active voice versus passive.

**NOTE:** Some documents may need to be translated and distributed to those families who may need them. However, do not make assumptions of the needs of EL families. Many families have access to friends, relatives, or may have the strong English reading skills to receive the information from school. Before spending time and money translating documents, get to know the families.

Include the English version of the document with the translated one to ensure more accurate communication of information. For low incident languages and/or complex information, the use of interpreters may be more appropriate.

**Community resources –**

Schools may tap into the resources that already exist in the community. Recruitment of families and business partners that may have similar language backgrounds and/or experiences offer schools a pool of people who could help with surveys, parent nights, committee discussions, and other outreach programming.

A secondary source of language interpreters could come from the world language department. Students and staff may set up opportunities for language exchange.

Some recommendations for addressing cultural differences are described in Table 2.

**Table 2: Suggestions for Addressing Cultural Differences**

<p><b>Learning communities –</b></p> <p>“Unless we as teachers re-open our own backgrounds to look anew at how we were schooled to deal with diversity and connection, we will be unable to create school climates and curriculum, which more adequately equip today's students to do so.”  <a href="http://www.wcwonline.org/seed/key.html">http://www.wcwonline.org/seed/key.html</a></p>
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**Table 3: Suggestions for Professional Development**

<p><b>Book studies –</b></p> <p><i>How to Conduct a Book Study Group</i>          Book study groups are an effective form of professional development and can be used by educators at all levels for their own professional growth or with students of any age, with some adaptation for younger readers.</p> <p>Following are five steps, from forming a book study group to implementing the discussion and follow-up strategies.</p> <p>STEP 1- Form a Book Study Group          STEP 2 - Choose a Book and an Objective          STEP 3 - Decide How to Read the Book          STEP 4 - Read and Discuss the Book          STEP 5 - Evaluate the Book and Plan for Future Book Study</p> <p>At the conclusion of the book study, take time to consider:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Did the book stimulate thought and discussion?</li> <li>• Did the group study meet the learning objectives?</li> <li>• How might the group study experience be improved?</li> </ul> <p>Taking such evaluation into account will allow the group to bring in new members, re-form, or simply continue on, developing a new "cycle" of study.</p> <p><a href="http://www.pdkintl.org/bookstudy/home.html">http://www.pdkintl.org/bookstudy/home.html</a></p> <p>For a possible list of titles for book studies, go to <a href="http://education.state.mn.us/">http://education.state.mn.us/</a></p>
<p><b>Summer institutes/academies –</b></p> <p>A summer academy/institute may serve as a valuable forum to discuss existing programs and initiatives, review practices and curriculum, and share effective strategies. During this event, typically lasting 2-5 days, staff are able to focus their undivided attention on the topics while build networks throughout the district/community.</p> <p>Districts have provided this development opportunity to kick off a long-term project and/or have included the institute as a culminating event or midpoint of a two-three years staff development plan.</p>

To maximize time and resources, focus on what works for all students and their families. Some possible topics are effective communication skills, the understanding of diverse family structures, myths and stereotypes exploration, and community outreach strategies. Role-playing and/or “fish bowl”/laboratory observations may be beneficial.

**Curriculum review –**

*“Without systemic understanding of gender, race, class, and other interlocking societal systems, individual educators who try to transform the curriculum will lack coherence and creative flexibility in dealing with current events and scholarship, old and new. Group conversation, intentionally structured, can support teachers and administrators in creating accurate, nourishing curriculum material, and pedagogical strategies that are more gender balanced, multi-culturally equitable, and globally attuned.”*  
<http://www.wcwonline.org/seed/key.html>

Invite EL parents to be part of the conversation when reviewing texts and other instructional materials.

**Conferences and other external training –**

Keep current with the latest professional development opportunities throughout the state and nation-wide. Encourage teachers and staff to continue building their knowledge base.

When possible, offer scholarship/mini-grants for staff, provide substitutes or coverage when staff leave the building, and allow time to share with others upon return from the conference or training.

**Cultural panels –**

Cultural panels may provide insight and perspective to static data.

To facilitate effective cultural panels, take the time to prepare.

- What is the purpose of the panel?
- Who is the audience?
- How much do the panel participants know or understand about panel discussions?
- What are other logistical considerations such as the use of interpreters?

Prior to the panel, a survey may help narrow down the topics covered and allow the panelists to gather their thoughts and prepare handouts, slides, etc., if applicable. Make sure to explain the structure of panel to the participants as well as go over any district/school policies that are relevant to the topics discussed. Make the panelist feel comfortable because the information shared is, in many cases, quite personal.

Potential panelists -

- Community leaders
- Former students
- Current parents
- Current students
- Community partners

**Table 4: Suggestions for Community Outreach**

Invite families to numerous events that happen at school, not just ESL Night. Ask community members that may speak the same language or come from similar backgrounds to help with communication during concurrent sessions.
Ask parents to come to the schools to help with activities and events. Let the parents share aspects of their language and culture with the students and staff.
Encourage volunteering and/or carpooling - some families may volunteer to carpool to bring interested families to events.
Go into the community where the families live, shop, and interact. Hold meetings in the local library or the neighborhood center. Set up information tables at social events and gatherings.
Acknowledge major holidays or dates on the school calendar/website. Feature articles about communities, events, families in the school newspaper and other publications.

**How can schools/districts be more welcoming for EL parents?**

School buildings can be intimidating for parents, especially if the edifice houses thousands of students. To help parents navigate on campus, post signs that are visible and easy to read. Train volunteers, security personnel, and front office staff to notice personal body language along with speech patterns. The tone of voice, pace, and facial expressions such as smiling communicate concepts even if the individual words used are in different languages. Be aware of the use of idiomatic expressions and jargon.

Inform parents of upcoming registration windows, Open House, or an event/activity, through mailings, phone calls, and flyers to peak their interest. By offering a variety of different languages, if applicable, parents feel more included in the school community. Advertising on local cable is another avenue to communicate with parents about school related topics.

For families new to the district, the Home Language Questionnaire (HLQ) will help staff establish the language that is most comfortable for parents. This document is available in multiple languages at <http://education.state.mn.us>  
HLQ should be on file for all students as part of the district’s registration process.

Another approach to making EL families feel welcomed is to offer a short orientation at the time of enrollment or at a later appointment. Many immigrant families are unfamiliar with the American school system. Typical school practices such as signing in at the front desk or calling the school when their child is ill may be new for some parents. Arrange several dates, times, and locations to accommodate a variety of family work schedules and/or cultural holidays.



**How can a school/district “provide creative learning experiences for parents or guardians and their school-age children” (124D.895 Parental involvement programs)?**

Family involvement programs must adapt to the needs and cultures of families. Logistical planning should consider convenient meeting times, transportation, and available childcare in addition to language needs.

To help parents better understand the school system, host workshops that include elements of the community culture. Depending on the demography of the school or district, staff may decide to offer several trainings each with a different ethnic culture in mind. The activities will vary in theme but have the same learning objectives for the parents.

Information on school policies, programs, procedures, and transitions should be clear and easily accessible to all families. Keep in mind that a school system is complex and each school within a district has its own flavor. Take the time to know the cultural and ethnic backgrounds of all families. Many parents/guardians of ELs may not be familiar with the processes and procedures and that relying on a student to be the key representative of the school puts undue stress and pressure on that student.

Other considerations include the different literacy levels of the students. Parents of secondary students may want to learn about how to select age appropriate novels that address their child’s reading level. Parents of younger children might focus on making alphabets with clay or drawing stories. Keep the workshop simple by targeting one oral language, writing, or reading objective. Take the time to explain and model the objective in great detail (<http://www.ascd.org/portal/site/ascd/menuitem.f30974e7fa59cfcdeb3ffdb62108a0c/>).

### A Sample Parent Workshop - Action Plan Worksheet

<b>Area of Focus:</b>	<p>Language Arts Academic Standards  <a href="http://education.state.mn.us">http://education.state.mn.us</a></p> <p>KINDERGARTEN          Vocabulary Expansion  <i>The student will use a variety of strategies to develop and expand reading, listening and speaking vocabularies.</i></p> <p>Benchmarks          1. Use words to describe and name people, places, and things.          2. Use words to describe location, size, color, shape and direction.          3. Use words to describe actions.          4. Use context to predict and infer word meanings.          5. Learn new words through explicit instruction.</p>
<b>Goal:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Demonstrate questioning strategies with families so they may apply strategies at home with their children.</li> <li>• Encourage them to speak the language they feel most comfortable. Bilingual development is valuable and impacts the overall achievement of students in school.</li> </ul>
<b>Activity:</b>	“Lucky Ladybugs”
<b>What Will Be Done?</b>	<p>Families make “edible ladybugs together and then children told stories about their ladybugs, which are considered lucky in the Latino community of our school”  <a href="http://www.ascd.org/portal/site/ascd/menuitem.f30974e7fa59cfcdeb3ffdb62108a0c/">(http://www.ascd.org/portal/site/ascd/menuitem.f30974e7fa59cfcdeb3ffdb62108a0c/)</a></p> <p>Training facilitators model questioning strategies to help students build listening and speaking vocabularies.</p> <p>Participants actively create ladybugs and practice the questioning strategies with their children. Supplemental books, following the ladybug theme, may be given to families to take home.</p>
<b>Who Will Do This?</b>	<p>Latino families</p> <p><b>Note:</b> Within the any community, there are differences in the country of origin, number of years or generations in the United States, economic status, education, and family dynamics. “Lucky Ladybugs” may only apply to the particular Latino community from which the example was referenced.</p> <p>To ensure that themes are authentic or culturally meaningful for the targeted audience, include parents of that community in the planning process.</p>
<b>When? and Where?</b>	Select a convenient location and time for the majority of parents. Consider the community center or clubhouse, nearby school versus a staff development building, or the local library. Be aware of working hours and holidays.

<b>Materials/ Resources Needed:</b>	<p>Make sure to plan for pre, during, and post activity/event.</p> <p>Materials may include flyers, supplemental books, art materials, aprons, markers, paper, snacks, camera, etc.</p> <p>Other considerations -</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Transportation = carpool, walking distance (weather permitting), bus lines</li> <li>• Extra space and support staff to provide childcare for younger children who are not currently in school</li> <li>• Interpreters = volunteers, students, staff, certified</li> <li>• Collaborative opportunities</li> </ul>
<b>Evidence of Success:</b>	<p>Post-training parent survey (immediately following and subsequent survey at a later date)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Follow up/additional training participation</li> <li>• Academic progress of students</li> </ul>

**Additional online resources on parent/family involvement –**

- ❑ OELA: National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition & language Instruction Educational Programs > School-Based Parent/Community Involvement Models *Selected Resources*

[http://www.ncela.gwu.edu/resabout/parents/4\\_models.html](http://www.ncela.gwu.edu/resabout/parents/4_models.html)

- ❑ National Parent-Teacher Association

[www.pta.org](http://www.pta.org)

<http://www.pta.org/parentinvolvement/standards/appenda.asp>

- ❑ U.S. Department of Education

[www.ed.gov](http://www.ed.gov)

- ❑ National Coalition for Parent Involvement in Education

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

- ❑ National Network of Partnership Schools

<http://www.csos.jhu.edu/p2000/default.htm>

The *LEP Parent Involvement Project* was developed to be used in various adult education settings such as ESL classes, community-based organizations and parent groups for the purposes of helping parents and caretakers with limited English see

themselves as active participants in their children's learning.  
[\(http://mnabe.themlc.org/\)](http://mnabe.themlc.org/)

In addition, two training videos are available in multiple languages at the Minnesota's Bookstore - Amharic, English, Hmong, Russian, Somali, Spanish, Arabic, Oromo, and Nuer.

*You Can Help Your Children at School*  
*You Can Talk with Your Child's School*

<http://www.comm.media.state.mn.us/bookstore/category.asp?category=T&CatID=23>

## Minnesota Department of Education Contacts

Questions should be directed to:

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## Related State and Federal Law

### Minnesota Law

**Statute 120A.22 Compulsory Instruction –**  
<https://www.revisor.mn.gov/statutes/?id=120A.22>  
 See subdivision 1 - Parental responsibility.

**Statute 124D.895 Parental Involvement Programs –**  
<https://www.revisor.mn.gov/statutes/?id=124D.895>

Statute 126C.15 Basic Skills Revenue; Compensatory Education Revenue –  
<https://www.revisor.mn.gov/statutes/?id=126C.15>  
 See subdivision 1(11) – Use of revenue.

### Federal Law

**Elementary & Secondary Education, Part A – Improving Basic Programs Operated by Local Education Agencies:**

Subpart 1 – Basic Program Requirements -

<http://www2.ed.gov/policy/elsec/leg/esea02/pg2.html>

- Sec. 1118. Parental Involvement -

<http://www2.ed.gov/policy/elsec/leg/esea02/pg2.html#sec1118>