

# Tips for **SUCCESSFUL OUTREACH** to *ETHNIC and REFUGEE* FAMILIES

**CONFIDENTIALITY:** Because of past experiences in their home country, be it political or otherwise, suspicion or distrust may color the responses of refugees, immigrants or other parents. School personnel should therefore be especially mindful to make parents feel welcome and safe. Parents need to understand that their names will be not disclosed to anyone outside the school building or any governmental agencies without prior consent.

**HAVE AN INTERPRETER AVAILABLE:** Having a person who speaks the parent's language helps build trust and mutual awareness of needs, concerns, and opportunities. Work with the school to ensure all written materials are in the parent's language.

**LEARN KEY PHRASES IN ANOTHER LANGUAGE:** Strive to learn at least the basic words and phrases in languages spoken by your students' parents, such as: *good morning, welcome, thank you, it's a pleasure to meet you,* and *good-bye*. You might find it fun to speak another language and continue learning it.

**UNDERSTAND THE REASONS WHY FAMILIES COME TO THE US:** Learn what is happening in the parents' country of origin — the political, social, economic conditions for why people come to the United States. Curiosity is golden.

**DO NOT ASSUME ANYTHING:** Be aware of your biases and assumptions as well as those portrayed in the media, and work to help break down stereotypes in yourself and in your students.

**SHARE A STORY ABOUT YOURSELF FIRST:** Sharing something about yourself helps break the ice. For example, if you have traveled to a parent's country, you might share that story with them. If you get down to "business" too quickly, it can take away from the human connection between yourself and the parent.

**ATTEND CULTURAL EDUCATIONAL SESSIONS:** All school personnel should take advantage of cultural educational sessions to learn more about the ethnic communities your students and their families come from. Learn about their customs, traditions, music, history, religion, school culture and so forth. Attend cultural celebrations.

**STRESS PARENT INVOLVEMENT:** Encourage and teach parents about how they can help their child with school work, even if they don't speak English or don't have much schooling themselves. Let parents know that you need their help to educate their child—that it's a team effort. This gives parents a sense that they can contribute to their children's education and well-being. And tell parents it's their right to be involved.

**EMPHASIZE TO PARENTS THE IMPORTANCE OF HOLDING HIGH EXPECTATIONS FOR THEIR CHILD(REN).** Too often ethnic and low-income children don't reach their potential due to low self-esteem and poor expectations.



**FIND VOLUNTEERS AND HIRE PERSONNEL FROM ETHNIC COMMUNITIES:** Including parents who come from those communities, as these will be most sensitive to the culture, language and needs of those families.

**WORK IN PARTNERSHIP:** There are many school-based, community-based and faith-based groups that offer outreach to ethnic and refugee parents. By networking with such groups and sharing your needs and concerns, you can extend your reach to the often hard-to-reach parents and show them that you are dedicated to including them. Learn about the variety of social services available to parents so that you can refer them if necessary.

**GO ON A WALKABOUT:** Research shows that meeting parents in their homes early in the school year can have a positive influence on the quality and quantity of subsequent communication and can positively influence parent-child interactions.

**HELP PARENTS UNDERSTAND THE SUBTLE CULTURE OF THE SCHOOL.**

Introduce parents to the culture of the school, and to such concepts as the PTA, PTO, how are schools funded, and the importance of parents communicating with their child's teacher, principal and school staff. Explain the importance of the Open House, parent/teacher conferences, etc.

**PLAN FOR BEFORE, DURING AND AFTER MEETINGS:**

**PRE-MEETING:** Make sure you have an interpreter beforehand, and that parents understand the purpose of the meeting.

**DURING THE MEETING:** work to make parents feel comfortable asking questions during the meeting, and be sure they understand outcomes, if any, and their roles and responsibilities.

**POST-MEETING:** Follow up with parents a week or two after the meeting, reminding them what was discussed and decided during the meeting, and inquiring about how they are handling their roles and responsibilities. Help parents understand that you are available to work with them throughout the school year.

**HOLD AN INTRODUCTION NIGHT:** You might want to introduce parents from the same or similar backgrounds to get to know each other. This might be a great way for them to network, share information and resources, and make them feel they are part of a community.

For free technical support for reaching ethnic, refugee, and hard-to-reach families, please call PIRC at (603) 848-5669.



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