



Minority Parent and Community Engagement:

Best Practices and Policy Recommendations
for Closing the Gaps in Student Achievement



Great Public Schools
for Every Student.

The National Education Association is the nation's largest professional employee organization, representing 3.2 million elementary and secondary teachers, higher education faculty, education support professionals, school administrators, retired teachers, and students preparing to become teachers.

Published June 2010

Copyright © 2010

Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund
634 S. Spring Street, 11th Floor
Los Angeles, CA 90014

National Education Association of the United States
Office of Minority Community Outreach
1201 16th Street N.W.
Washington, DC 20036

All Rights Reserved

Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund

Founded in 1968, the Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund (MALDEF) is the nation's leading Latino legal civil rights organization. Often described as the "law firm of the Latino community", MALDEF promotes social change through advocacy, communications, community education, and litigation in the areas of education, employment, immigrant rights, and political access

Parent School Partnership

Since 1989, MALDEF's Parent School Partnership (PSP) program has empowered parents and community leaders throughout the nation to become change agents in their communities. The PSP program provides them with the tools necessary to become effective advocates in improving their children's educational attainment.

National Education Association

We, the members of the National Education Association of the United States, are the voice of education professionals. Our work is fundamental to the nation, and we accept the profound trust placed in us.

Vision

Our vision is a great public school for every student.

Mission

Our mission is to advocate for education professionals and to unite our members and the nation to fulfill the promise of public education to prepare every student to succeed in a diverse and interdependent world.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The National Education Association (NEA) and the Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund (MALDEF) are grateful for the invaluable work of numerous individuals who contributed to this report. NEA staff who worked on the report include: Robin Butterfield, Matthew Finucane, Rita Jaramillo, William Moreno, and Cynthia Swann. MALDEF expresses appreciation to: Araceli Simeon-Luna, Veronica Rivera, Gabriela Hurtado, and Gina Montoya.

NEA and MALDEF would also like to thank the many parents and staff of different programs and organizations from all over the country who took the time to participate in the MALDEF/NEA Ethnic Minority Parent Engagement Summit to share their expertise with us.

We would also like to give special thanks to the Summit Advisory Committee which met over the summer to help plan the event. The Committee Members include representatives from the following organizations:

Appleseed, Inc.
Asian Pacific American Legal Center
ASPIRA Association, Inc.
AVANCE, Inc.
Boston Parent Organizing Network
Center for Community Development and Civil Rights of the Arizona State University
Center for Parent Leadership/ Commonwealth Institute for Parent Leadership
Congressional Black Caucus Foundation
Intercultural Development Research Association
National Indian Education Association

National Indian Parent Information Center
National Indian School Board Association
National Latino Children's Institute
National Parent Teacher Association
Parent Institute for Quality Education
Parent Organization Network
Parents for Public Schools, Inc.
Southeast Asia Resource Action Center
Southern Echo, Inc.
University of California at Santa Barbara/ Office of Academic Preparation
University of California at Los Angeles/ Institute for Democracy, Education and Access (IDEA)

A very special thank you to Southwest Airlines for "sharing the spirit" through their generous support of the summit.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Letter from MALDEF’s President and General Counsel	9
Letter from NEA’s President	11
Executive Summary	13
Introduction to Improving Ethnic Minority Parent and Community Engagement	15
ETHNIC MINORITY ORGANIZATION’S BEST PRACTICES FOR ENGAGING MINORITY PARENTS ..	17
A. Practices and Strategies from Organizations Serving the African-American/Black Community	17
B. Practices and Strategies from Organizations Serving the American Indian and Alaska Native Community	19
C. Practices and Strategies from Organizations Serving the Asian American and Pacific Islander Community	21
D. Practices and Strategies from Organizations Serving the Hispanic/Latino Community	23
E. Practices and Strategies from Organizations Serving Parents from Multiple Racial or Ethnic Groups	25
COMMON BARRIERS HINDERING PARENT ENGAGEMENT & SUCCESSFUL STRATEGIES TO OVERCOME THEM	
A. Lack of Relationship Building Between and School Officials and Parents	27
B. Lack of Trust in School Officials	28
C. Parents’ and School Officials’ Beliefs and Assumptions Engender Fear and Mistrust	29
D. Lack of Cultural Competency Creates Unwelcoming Environments for Ethnic Minority Parents	30
E. Lack of Understanding of the Roles and Responsibilities of the Local School Board and School Districts	32
F. Lack of Funding and Coordination of Resources to Provide Services to Parents	33
G. Failure to Prioritize Parent Engagement	34
H. Failure to Adjust to the Role of Parent Involvement in the 21st Century	34
I. Key Challenges to Specific Racial and Ethnic Minority Subgroups	35
POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS TO IMPROVE ETHNIC MINORITY PARENT AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT	39

A. Increase Accountability for the Implementation of Parent Engagement Plans and Policies	39
B. Increase Professional Development for School Staff and Parent Engagement	40
C. Increase Funding for Parent Involvement/Engagement in Schools	40
D. Standardize Parent Engagement Through a Parent Engagement Act and Other Legislation	41
E. Support the Expansion of Community Schools	41
F. Address Linguistic Diversity	41
G. Other.	42
WORKS CITED.	43



MALDEF

Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund

National Headquarters

Los Angeles

Regional Office

634 S. Spring Street
Los Angeles, CA 90014
Tel: 213.629.2512
Fax: 213.629.0266

Chicago

Regional Office

11 East Adams Street
Suite 700
Chicago, IL 60603
Tel: 312.427.0701
Fax: 312.427.0691

San Antonio

Regional Office

110 Broadway
Suite 300
San Antonio, TX 78205
Tel: 210.224.5476
Fax: 210.224.5382

Washington, D.C.

Regional Office

1016 16th Street, NW
Suite 100
Washington, DC 20036
Tel: 202.293.2828
Fax: 202.293.2849

Dear Reader:

In an effort to improve student achievement and to help to close the achievement gap, the Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund (MALDEF) and the National Education Association (NEA) partnered through their Parent Engagement initiatives to increase the inclusion and engagement of parents of color in their children's education.

As a result of this partnership, our two organizations convened a national summit in October 2009, with over 70 attendees, including parents and providers from national and community-based organizations across the country. The attendees met to identify general practices for engaging minority parents; discussed the dynamics that hinder parent involvement; explored successful strategies that strengthen parent engagement for closing the achievement gap; and identified recommendations to improve local, state and national parental engagement policies.

The information included in this report is a direct result of that convening. In addition, this report lists policy recommendations submitted to Congress and the U.S. Department of Education during the 2010 reauthorization process of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. I urge you to review and adopt strategies and our policy recommendations in order to ensure that more meaningful partnerships between parents and schools occur in communities of color.

Thank you for your commitment to improving education and your support for closing the achievement gap.

Thomas A. Saenz

President and General Counsel
MALDEF



1201 16th St., N.W. | Washington, DC 20036 | Phone: (202) 833-4000

Dennis Van Roekel
President

Lily Eskelsen
Vice President

Rebecca S. Pringle
Secretary-Treasurer

John I. Wilson
Executive Director

True to its founding principles, the National Education Association believes that every student in the United States has a basic right to a great public school education, regardless of background, race, ethnicity, or immigration status. NEA also believes that this work cannot be done alone.

Achieving the goal of a great public school for every student requires the broad support and involvement of everyone—students, families, legislators, business and government, foundations, institutions of higher education, and others. Most importantly, NEA recognizes the need to strengthen and expand these relationships to broaden support for public education.

In a joint effort to help close the achievement gaps, NEA partnered with the Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund (MALDEF) to host a Parental Engagement Summit, and this document captures the conversations among ethnic minority service providers in their focused attempts to support ethnic minority parents nationwide.

Our Association, representing 3.2 million educators across the nation, is proud to share this collective wisdom on reaching out to the diverse ethnic minority communities. This report confirms that increasing parental and family engagement is vital to improving student achievement, especially in our lower-performing schools. Research is clear that engaged families raise test scores, improve student attitudes toward school, improve attendance, and impact graduation rates. Recommendations are provided to help influence district, state, and national policy and legislation.

We invite you to use these strategies and policies to transform public education so that every student has a great public school.

Sincerely,

Dennis Van Roekel
President
National Education Association

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In October 2009, the Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund (MALDEF) and the National Education Association (NEA) hosted the Ethnic Minority Parent Engagement Summit in Los Angeles, California. The summit convened over 70 parents and service providers who work with ethnic minority parents from national and community-based organizations. The information included in this report is a direct result of that two-day convening. Improving Ethnic Minority Parent and Community Engagement for Closing Gaps in Student Achievement, provides best practices for engaging ethnic minority parents, identifies dynamics that hinder parental engagement and successful strategies that strengthen parental engagement, and provides recommendations for improving state and national parental engagement policies.

Research demonstrates that family engagement in schools, improves student attitude toward school and attendance, predicts student success, and reduces the dropout rate. Still many schools struggle with developing effective and authentic partnerships with ethnic minority parents.

Summit attendees included parents and service providers to ethnic minority parents/families who were American Indian/Alaska Native, Asian/Pacific Islander, African American/Black, and Hispanic/Latino. These folks shared many of the same barriers that hinder parental/family engagement. Overall, there were more commonalities than differences in the practices used by groups to effectively engage parents/families and successfully improve communication and strengthen relationships between ethnic minority parents and schools.

The following themes emerged from the summit and are included in this report:

- Best practices include valuing the parental/family voice, hiring culturally competent staff, and providing in-service so that school staff can become skilled and culturally competent in working effectively with diverse parents/families. Also, developing parents into trainers can help bridge cultural and linguistic gaps between schools and parents.
- Barriers hindering engagement include parents and school officials failing to acknowledge how their assumptions and negative experiences impact interaction with each other; lack of training for parents/families and school staff; not making parental engagement a priority; and limited funding.
- Successful strategies include building a genuine sense of community, improving two-way communication, focusing time and attention on family engagement and providing training to develop parents' leadership skills.
- Recommendations for improved parental/family engagement policies include increasing accountability for the implementation of parent engagement plans and policies, increasing cultural competency, overcoming language barriers, and introducing legislation to reframe the concept of parent/family engagement.

INTRODUCTION TO IMPROVING ETHNIC MINORITY PARENT AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Learning begins at home during the child's first years¹ and is then complemented by what is learned in the formal educational setting when the child reaches school age. But, not all children enter school ready and prepared for success. Racial and ethnic minority students face serious challenges from early childhood through secondary education². Ensuring that a child succeeds in school is a task that extends beyond the hands of teachers and school administrators; it is a responsibility shared by schools, parents, families, communities, community-based organizations and policy makers.

According to Weiss et al.³, family involvement strongly predicts a student's success in school. However, Weiss et al.⁴ found that within communities of low-income families and racial and ethnic minorities, learning is not perceived as a shared responsibility among school officials, communities, and families, resulting in less involvement from these parents in their child's school. Additionally, research⁵ has demonstrated that parent and community involvement positively contributes to a student's academic achievement⁶ by improving attendance, improving attitude, and reducing the dropout rate. But schools continue to struggle with developing effective and authentic partnerships with parents and families for a multitude of reasons, including but not limited to, parents' perceptions of the educational system, negative socio-political experiences of racial and ethnic minorities, and school officials' perceptions of parent involvement.

In addition, today's parental involvement is much more than volunteering or fundraising for the school; it is about engaging in meaningful partnerships, responsible leadership and capacity-building, and abiding by the law.⁷ Federal and state legislation require the involvement of parents in decision making and leadership roles at the school and district level. Still, parental involvement and engagement is a right of which many parents are not aware. Often, parents do not know how they can get involved in schools, nor do they fully understand the meaningful impact it has on their child's academic success⁸. Parent leadership development and capacity-building is needed because too often parents and schools have misconceptions about how to work together in partnership for student success.

There are many benefits to schools when they persist in reaching out to all parents and strive for authentic partnerships with parents. According to Henderson et al.⁹, parent-school partnerships are important because:

1. Partnerships between home and school have an impact on student academic achievement;
2. Partnerships help build and sustain public support for the schools;
3. Families and community can help schools overcome the challenges schools face;
4. Teachers can benefit from parental involvement and community partnerships that provide the student with "teachers" in the home and community that give the necessary support and resources to achieve literacy, math and science grade-level performance; and

5. The Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) provides partnership opportunities that can help schools meet the requirements of the law.

It is in this area where many community-based organizations play a significant role in the school and at the school district level by taking the responsibility of building parents' skills; formalizing partnership agreements with schools; and building relationships between schools, parents, families, communities, and policy-makers to support student achievement.

ETHNIC MINORITY ORGANIZATION'S BEST PRACTICES FOR ENGAGING MINORITY PARENTS

The MALDEF/NEA Ethnic Minority Parent Engagement Summit convened over 70 attendees to discuss the importance of improving parent engagement. The attendees included parents and service providers who work with ethnic minority parents from national and community-based organizations from across the country. These organizations provided varying approaches and definitions of parent engagement as well as different practices and strategies that are improving communication and relationships between ethnic minority parents and school officials to increase parent and community involvement in communities of color.

Overall, many of the community-based organizations reported using similar practices to successfully engage parents, including:

- Valuing the parent voice and listening to their opinions and helping in various ways to address their concerns;
- Hiring or training staff who are culturally competent and preferably from within the community where they will be working with parents;
- Providing specific strategies for parents to monitor their child's academics and identifying ways to help their child with homework;
- Providing training to develop parents' leadership skills so they can engage more fully in their child's school governance; and
- Developing parent trainers that can help recruit and inform other parents.

There were more commonalities than differences in some of the practices used, depending on the

population being served. For example, groups working with Asian and Hispanic/Latino immigrant parents focused their efforts on familiarizing the parents with the educational system, and emphasizing language and immigrants' rights. Groups working with American Indian and African American/Black parents touched on the importance of acknowledging some parents' negative experience with schools in the past, while persuading them to get involved with the educational system for the sake of their child. As a result, the following practices and strategies come from several well-established parental engagement organizations and are listed based on the ethnic group they serve.

A. PRACTICES AND STRATEGIES FROM ORGANIZATIONS SERVING THE AFRICAN-AMERICAN/BLACK COMMUNITY

In the African-American/Black community, parent engagement is about empowering parents by building their capacity and knowledge base around leadership and advocacy skills, and by leveraging partnerships to increase student educational attainment. Common strategies center around building a sense of community for families, building partnerships with community-based organizations, teaching parents and youth about holding elected officials accountable, and training parents to teach other parents. Efforts are made to educate and help parents understand the importance of parental involvement in their child's education.

Below are examples of two well-established parent programs that specialize in serving African Americans/Blacks.

African American Parent/Community Coalition for Educational Equity, Inc. (AAPCCEE)

www.aapccee.org

This is a parent-driven and parent-led organization whose goal is to equip parents with the knowledge and skills to become proactive advocates of their children by ensuring their academic success, college preparation, quality teachers, equitable resources and graduation support with multiple options. Parent retention is most successful when connections are formed in a respectful and engaging relationship and where a sense of community is built. Parent Training Institutes are centered on “Parents Teaching and Learning from Parents”.

Program’s general practices and strategies:

- Educating and training parents, students, educators and the community through a 6-week field-tested training curriculum that identifies and seeks remedies for the root causes of poor student outcomes;
- Helping parents and youth learn their rights and responsibilities to hold public officials accountable for improving the quality of education for all students;
- Utilizing a parent-to-parent learning process to accomplish efforts that increase parent involvement;
- Engaging in active listening of parents, asking what parents think they need to learn and validating what they already know;
- Building confidence and helping parents understand the power they have on the school campus; and
- Developing partnerships with community-based organizations to build parent capacity through a

mentorship component where parents instruct parents on educational equity and college access.

Southern Echo

www.southernecho.org

This is a leadership development, education and training organization working to develop effective accountable grassroots leadership in the African-American communities in rural Mississippi and the surrounding region through comprehensive training and technical assistance programs.

Program’s general practices and strategies:

- Empowering local communities through effective community organizing work;
- Holding the political, economic, educational, and environmental systems accountable to the needs and interests of the African-American community;
- Conducting historical analysis of where the community has been, where they are, where they need to go and how to get there;
- Using an intergenerational model of community organizing to empower African American and other communities of color;
- Focusing on substantive public policy issues designed to impact the formation and implementation of public policy at the local, county, state and national levels; and
- Building partnerships, alliances and collaborations at the local, state, regional, and national levels to maximize the capacity to impact the formation and implementation of public policy.

B. PRACTICES AND STRATEGIES FROM ORGANIZATIONS SERVING THE AMERICAN INDIAN AND ALASKA NATIVE COMMUNITY

Parent engagement of American Indian and Alaska Native (AIAN) parents is grounded in knowing and understanding their unique languages, cultures, and issues related to the tribal or Native identity. Parental engagement for this community is rooted in understanding the educational and historical experiences, and the political struggles faced by AIAN parents. Parental engagement organizations work to eliminate fear of retaliation, fear of discrimination and the stereotypes that exist and are placed on AIAN families.

Below are examples of four well-established programs that specialize in serving American Indians and Alaska Natives.

Education for Parents of Indian Children with Special Needs (EPICS)

www.epicsproject.org

This organization provides training and information directly to American Indian parents who have children with special needs.

Program's general practices and strategies:

- Providing services at no-cost to parents;
- Targeting American Indian parents with children from birth to age 26 that have disabilities or special needs in New Mexico;
- Serving parents whose children attend public schools, Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) schools, or are enrolled in the state's birth to three Family-Infant-Toddler program;
- Serving as a parent resource center, building a network of parents and developing communication and advocacy skills that will help them ensure their children receive the services they need;

- Providing opportunities for parents to participate in projects where they can practice their leadership and advocacy skills by engaging with elected officials, school administrators, and the community at large; and
- Providing stipends or gas cards to participants to help them overcome the usual obstacles that prevent many parents from participating, such as not having food, materials for the class, and transportation.

National Indian Education Association (NIEA)

www.niea.org

This organization supports traditional Native cultures and values, to enable Native learners to become contributing members of their communities, to promote Native control of educational institutions, and to improve educational opportunities and resources for American Indians, Alaska Natives, and Native Hawaiians in the U.S.

Program's general practices and strategies:

- Hosting a national education annual convention which links over 3,000 Native educators, parents and communities together to provide resources, networking, best practices, success stories, language summit, policy and appropriations for native students, schools and communities;
- Hosting a legislative summit that provides an opportunity for membership to receive advocacy training, policy updates, and hill visits to the nation's capital;
- Conducting parent advocacy conference calls to connect national, regional and local organizations to create a space where organizations share about events they are hosting and sponsoring for parents of Native children. These calls create a national clearinghouse of outreach programs for various communities;
- Conducting trainings geared towards building

Indian-controlled school boards;

- Conducting parent engagement that promotes language and practices cultural traditions; and instilling the importance of integrating culturally-based educational and tribal values into the school setting and to encourage schools to engage tribal communities when adopting core values to empower parents to be the best advocates of their own children.

National Indian Parent Information Center (NIPIC)

www.nipic.org

Enhancing the skills parents already have with the goal to inspire and motivate them to become active advocates for their children and to be engaged in their child's educational ladder towards success.

Program's general practices and strategies:

- Providing training, information and support for American Indian families who have children ages 0-21 with disabilities or special health care needs;
- Working closely with the Bureau of Indian Education-operated and grant/contract schools, public schools, early intervention agencies, and early childhood programs;
- Providing training on key topics, including but not limited to: The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, Individualized Education Plan (IEP) and the Individual Family Service Plan process (IFSP), parent leadership opportunities, transition and advocacy; and
- Providing one-on-one support for families that have questions specific to the IEP or IFSP process or meetings and connecting them with other resources.

National Indian School Board Association (NISBA)

<http://nisba.skc.edu/>

This organization supports quality education in a safe environment from early childhood through life, in accordance with the Tribe's needs for cultural and economic well-being in keeping with the wide diversity of Indian tribes and communities as distinct cultural and governmental entities. NISBA will consider the spiritual, mental, physical and cultural aspects of the whole person within the family, community and tribal context.

NISBA's vision is to have empowered school board members, parents and other stakeholders exercising effective stewardship of Indian education in cooperation with their respective tribal governments.

Program's general practices and strategies:

- To protect and maintain education of Indians as a federal trust responsibility.
- To promote quality educational opportunity for American Indian people.
- To serve as a watchdog over administrative and congressional actions and advocating for necessary change.
- To assist local boards by providing definitive training and technical assistance.
- To establish a communication network and information sharing service.
- To assist member boards with local needs and issues.
- To maintain close working relationships with Indian tribes, national Indian organizations, and other appropriate agencies.

C. PRACTICES AND STRATEGIES FROM ORGANIZATIONS SERVING THE ASIAN AND PACIFIC ISLANDER COMMUNITY

The value of parent engagement is a new concept for some Asian and Pacific Islander (API) communities. While many API families are heavily invested in education, several groups are not engaged in their child's education. Many API parents operate under the notion that because their child is in a "good" school, they do not have to become involved in their education. Another notion faced by many API families is that many come from a cultural background where classroom education is not the norm in their native country or region. Therefore, parent outreach organizations face the task of addressing the experiences of immigrant parents in educating them about how to navigate the educational system in the U.S. and adapting their efforts in culturally sensitive and relevant ways that take into account the diversity of the API community.

Below are examples of three well-established parent programs that specialize in serving Asian and Pacific Islander communities.

Asian Pacific American Legal Center (APALC)

www.apalc.org

This organization provides parent training that develops the leadership skills of immigrant families to effectively advocate on issues affecting the API community.

Program's general practices and strategies:

- Partnering with similar parent outreach organizations like the Los Angeles Urban League and the Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund (MALDEF) to work across racial boundaries to develop and promote youth and parent leadership;
- Providing multilingual parent academies;

- Providing a two-series training approach: one is an academic model that trains parents with parenting skills on communication and the American public education system similar to MALDEF's Parent School Partnership Program, and the second series addresses skill and knowledge development around the public policy process, identifying leverage points, making an impact, and story-sharing about their own experiences and concerns;
- Partnering with schools that support parent engagement when providing parent training programs;
- Identifying cultural and linguistic liaisons at schools that are people with whom parents can relate;
- Bringing parents from different communities together to create relationships since they share similar experiences and often feel culturally alone due to their immigration experiences and language barriers;
- Connecting schools with broader community groups and institutions;
- Exposing API families to colleges and universities with which they are not familiar and providing opportunities to talk to other students about college life; and
- Providing technical support and opportunities to find their own solutions to common issues in their school and community.

Hmong Women’s Heritage Association

www.hmongwomenheritage.org

This organization provides capacity-building training programs to increase parent involvement in the schools in the Sacramento City Unified School District.

Program’s general practices and strategies:

- Working closely with a broad range of private and public agencies, county and federal agencies, and community-based organizations;
- Providing culturally sensitive programs and services that educate and support families;
- Inviting parents to participate in parent circles where issues affecting a child’s education may be discussed and where parents build their skills and participate in activities where parents learn to encourage their children and provide appropriate support to help them do well in school;
- Providing parents with information about their rights and responsibilities, and receiving presentations from teachers, principals, and other community partners;
- Being culturally sensitive to the experiences of parents in Southeast Asian communities;
- Eliminating barriers to parent engagement by addressing health issues, providing transportation and child care;
- Encouraging the school district to adopt different methods when outreaching to mothers or fathers from Southeast Asian communities;
- Connecting parents to school advisory committees and other leadership positions to put their skills into practice and provide them with the necessary support to be their child’s best advocate;
- Encouraging the natural selection of leaders to occur from within parent circles. This strategy promotes group cohesiveness and creates space for the group to guide individuals who self-elect to become leaders; and

- Building advocacy skills among Southeast Asian youth to increase parent engagement of Southeast Asian parents in the schools.

Southeast Asia Resource Action Center (SEARAC)

www.searac.org

This is a national organization advancing the interests of Cambodian-, Laotian- and Vietnamese Americans through leadership development, capacity building, and community empowerment.

Program’s general practices and strategies:

- Serving as a coalition-builder and leader, carries out action-oriented research projects, fosters civic engagement, and strengthens the capacity of community-based organizations;
- Instituting an education reform initiative entitled the Southeast Asian American Action and Visibility in Education (SAVE) Project that through organizing, advocacy and research, aims to increase the awareness of national and local policymakers and advocates about the diverse needs of Southeast Asian American students by building Cambodian-, Laotian-, and Vietnamese American parents’ capacity to be their child’s best advocate;
- Hosting annual leadership and advocacy trainings; and
- Finding programs run by community-based organizations (CBOs) that already engage Southeast Asian American parents.

D. PRACTICES AND STRATEGIES FROM ORGANIZATIONS SERVING THE HISPANIC/LATINO COMMUNITY

Parent engagement programs that work within the Hispanic/Latino community focus their efforts on building parents' capacity to understand their child's rights, their rights and what their responsibilities are as parents in the American public education system to advocate for their child's educational attainment. Organizations also focus their efforts on serving immigrant families. Recent immigrants often live in high poverty areas with multiple social problems, including low performing schools.

Organizations recognize that Hispanics/Latinos are a very diverse group of people coming from different countries of origin and, therefore, have varying socio-political experiences, and variations in demographics, culture, history, and language.

Below are examples of four well-established parent programs that serve Hispanics/Latinos in the U.S.

ASPIRA, Inc., APEX www.aspira.org

Parents for Educational Excellence Program (APEX) aims to increase the involvement of Hispanic/Latino parents in their children's education by helping them learn about the intricacies of negotiating change and improving education in their communities.

Program's general practices and strategies:

- Using a 10-session curriculum for parents on topics ranging from parenting to leadership skills such as parent involvement, organizing parent networks, and school structure;
- Promoting community empowerment through parent involvement;
- Making the curriculum available in English and Spanish;
- Having parents recruit other parents;

- Training parents to become facilitators of the program; and
- Providing technical assistance to Parent Trainers.

Avance Inc.

<http://national.avanceinc.org/>

The Avance Parent-Child Education Program teaches parents how to be the primary teachers for their children and full partners in their education.

Program's general practices and strategies:

- Promoting "Community Resource Awareness" to give parents the information and tools to help themselves;
- Using home visits to provide one-to-one guidance on more effective parenting and home teaching skills;
- Providing early childhood education to participants' children to introduce them to stimulating classroom environments;
- Fostering Adult Education that promotes economic self-sufficiency; and
- Providing transportation and other support services to help families participate on a consistent basis.

Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund (MALDEF)

www.maldef.org

The Parent School Partnership (PSP) program provides parents with the tools necessary to become effective advocates in improving their children's educational attainment. The PSP program seeks to increase parent involvement in schools and help parents understand how they can best support their child's academic achievement and access to college.

Program's general practices and strategies:

- Using a 12-week curriculum on how to navigate the public educational system, centered on parents' rights and responsibilities, parent leadership development, and advocacy skills;
- Inviting local community experts to present key curriculum topics in a culturally and linguistically sensitive manner;
- Taking parents and their nuclear families on a fieldtrip to a local university that includes a tour of the campus guided by students currently attending the university, learning from ethnic minority students about college life and the majors they have chosen to study, and receiving information about college admissions and financial aid from bilingual counselors;
- Helping to develop parent-driven community projects where parents put into practice the knowledge and skills developed through the program;
- Implementing a Training of Trainers model that creates cadres of instructors, usually composed of parents, teachers, administrators and community leaders, dedicated to implementing the PSP model in communities across the country; and
- Developing an Alumni Affairs program that provides additional opportunities to continue learning, advocating for students at the state and national level, and developing leadership skills.

Parent Institute for Quality Education (PIQE)

www.piqe.org

PIQE's Parent Engagement Education Program educates parents on how to foster a positive educational environment for their children both at home and at school.

Program's general practices and strategies:

- Using a 9-week curriculum that focuses on how parents can help create a positive and lasting educational environment at home using a number of proven academic success tools: dedicating a home study location and time of day for homework; creating ongoing dialog with their children about their academic successes and challenges; discussing children's college expectations;
- Creating a bridge between home and school by educating parents about how grades are used for college admittance; which classes are important and required for children planning to attend college; how to navigate the school system, and other information vital to academic success of their children;
- Classes are taught in 16 different languages by professional PIQE facilitators, who are members of the communities they serve; and
- Culminating the class series in a parent group meeting with the school principal, followed by a PIQE graduation ceremony.

E. PRACTICES AND STRATEGIES FROM ORGANIZATIONS SERVING PARENTS FROM MULTIPLE RACIAL OR ETHNIC MINORITY GROUPS

Parent education organizations that serve parents from more than one racial/ethnic group strive to engage with parents to close the student achievement gap and increase graduation rates among ethnic minority students. Their efforts tend to focus within a specific school, district, or geographic area. These organizations achieve their goals by building the capacity of parents by developing parents' leadership and advocacy skills; by increasing their knowledge of the public educational system; and by equipping them with the courage and ability to work in partnership with schools.

Below are examples of five well-established parent programs that specialize in serving parents from multiple racial/ethnic minority groups.

Boston Parent Organizing Network (BPON) Parent Task Force

www.bpon.org

Established to address the needs of Boston Public School (BPS) families. The Task Force also creates a platform to begin developing an individual membership base which supports BPON's new organizational model.

Program's general practices and strategies:

- Supporting parent advocacy efforts and building awareness on issues and concerns related to BPS students;
- Enhancing knowledge and expertise of parents;
- Building effective and diverse city-wide parent collaboration;
- Ensuring parents have the opportunity to be a part of the BPS decision-making process;
- Developing common issues agenda among diverse group of parents; and

- Organizing city-wide campaigns and events around school reform.

Los Angeles Parent Organization Network (PON)

Part of Los Angeles Multicultural Education Collaborative composed of APALC, Los Angeles Urban League, and MALDEF.

This organization's mission is to connect, empower, and mobilize parents and parent organizations across the greater Los Angeles area in order to build a movement of parents who will work to transform the public education system to ensure a high quality education for all students.

Program's general practices and strategies:

- Promoting parent involvement in the schools through a set of five Parent Engagement Standards that are a reflection of what parents expect from schools to enable them to work together towards academic success;
- Creating a partnership model for schools, parents, and districts for authentic sustainable parent engagement around student outcomes;
- Conducting campaign activities such as petition drives, media events, or school house meetings;
- Recruiting already established parent organizations and assisting in starting new parent groups;
- Actively soliciting feedback from the parent community across Los Angeles County about priority issues in their child's public school. Through focus groups, informal discussions and surveys, PON has collected and analyzed data about parent involvement and school reform issues; and
- Building community capacity by providing workshops on grant writing, researching school data, and using organizer tools to develop school campaigns.

Migrant Education Program, Los Angeles County Office of Education <http://www.lacoe.edu/orgs/287/index.cfm>

Established to support children of parents who depend on seasonal or agricultural work, this program provides skills development, information, training and opportunities to parents to raise their awareness about the public educational system. Further, the program develops parents' leadership abilities and supporting their active participation in decision-making school councils. This is a restricted, federally funded program for migrant eligible families and their children ages 3-21 who cross school districts and state lines looking for seasonal, temporary employment.

Program's general practices and strategies:

- Building the capacity of parents as first teachers of their children;
- Building the capacity of parents to support the education of their children;
- Building the capacity of parents as leaders in their schools to be leaders of other parents;
- Building the capacity of parents to be partners in the development and implementation of programs where parents help establish programmatic goals and itemize the budget;
- Viewing parent involvement as a strategic opportunity; and
- Promoting community partnerships that continue and increase services to migrant students and their families.

National Parent Teacher Association (PTA)

www.pta.org

The nation's largest, volunteer child advocacy organization

Program's general practices and strategies:

- Coordinating Community Cafés and Deliberative Dialogues;

- Developing PTA's National Standards for Family School Partnership discussion groups; and
- Developing meaningful parent involvement programs and policies that focus on urban development: Urban Development-NPTA's Urban Family Engagement Initiative (UFEI) is a community-based model to enhance parent involvement and, in turn, support student success. The goal is to be the key convener of families in urban communities, serve as a relevant resource to those families, and provide training to parents to collaborate with schools and community leaders.

Parents for Public Schools www.parents4publicschools.org

This is a national organization of community-based chapters working with public school parents and other supporters to improve and strengthen local public schools.

Program's general practices and strategies:

- Establishing chapters across the country;
- Leading a statewide effort in Mississippi called "Schoolhouse to Statehouse" Project that consists of three key activities: Organizing and building a powerful network of parents who are engaged in school improvement efforts; providing training to increase the capacity of parents through leadership development so that all members of a community can effectively communicate with policy-makers and become decision-makers; and mobilizing parents for advocacy and action, at the state and local level, to improve public education and access to opportunities for all students; and
- Operating the Parent Leadership Institute (PLI), which consists of six intensive days of parent training where parents are trained on how school districts work, how state standards and assessments work, and how to work effectively with educators and the community to improve schools.

COMMON BARRIERS HINDERING PARENT ENGAGEMENT & SUCCESSFUL STRATEGIES TO OVERCOME THEM

When members of four ethnic groups (American Indian and Alaska Native, Asian/Pacific Islander, African Americans/Blacks, and Hispanics/Latinos) engaged in identifying barriers that hinder parent engagement, it was apparent the groups shared many of the same barriers and several of the problems identified are interrelated. The research shows parent involvement is necessary to improve student success, and community-based organizations (CBOs) have developed an expertise in serving parents. Still, most parent engagement organizations reported challenges in:

- Persuading school administrators to allow them into the schools to work with parents;
- Having to re-establish their work and reputation if the school administration changes;
- Having schools adopt the strategies or curriculum used by the community-based organizations to engage parents, even after establishing that the methods used are research-based and effective at increasing parent involvement; and
- Obtaining funding to sustain or expand their work with parents.

The participants in the summit engaged in deep analysis of the issues, beginning with the prioritization of key challenges and their root causes, including institutionalized racism; schools and parents making assumptions about each other; or subscribing to outdated beliefs and practices about how a school should operate, even when following these practices does not increase parent involvement or improve student achievement.

A. LACK OF RELATIONSHIP BUILDING BETWEEN PARENTS AND SCHOOL OFFICIALS

Although parents, teachers and administrators are all essential stakeholders who need to engage together in the education of a child to result in student success, misunderstandings among these stakeholders hinder the process of building constructive relationships amongst them. For positive relationships to grow organically, there needs to be a process with activities that will intentionally develop collaboration over a period of time. This can be accomplished when perceptions and value systems shift to authentic relationships between parents, families and schools.

Some strategies to consider when building stronger relationships with parents are:

- Embrace parents as a critical component to student success;
- Understand that the parent is the child's first teacher;
- Believe in, promote, and implement two-way communication where schools communicate with parents and parents communicate with school officials;
- Discuss values and develop an understanding of how experiences of racism and classism play out in a school setting and affect communication and interaction; and
- Ask questions and listen to how parents feel disconnected from the schools. Do more listening than talking.

B. LACK OF TRUST IN SCHOOL OFFICIALS DISCOURAGES PARENT PARTICIPATION

Laws exist at the federal and state level that provide all parents the right to be involved and engaged in their children's schools. However, too often ethnic minority parents feel schools coordinate meetings with them only to comply with the law, rather than to really provide them with full information or to consult with them before a decision is made. As a result, an unintended cycle begins.

Parents do not feel their opinion, knowledge or person is valued, and consequently, they do not return to the school or meetings unless absolutely necessary, resulting in low parent turnout at events. In turn, school officials interpret the low attendance as parents' disinterest in their child's education, and adopt the belief that it is solely up to them to plan and decide all school matters. When parents learn the school is not engaging them for important decisions, that their concerns are not addressed, or their recommendations are not integrated into a school's plan, it reinforces the sense that participating in school events is not worth their time resulting in low turnout and disengagement.

Some of the indicators parents deem evidence of lack of trust and education officials' authenticity to engage them include:

- No follow-up after an event or meeting takes place. Parents may have attended a meeting but there is no mechanism to provide feedback or no next steps are planned;
- Perception that little or nothing happens as a result of raising concerns;
- Scheduling meetings at times when it is not convenient for parents because in addition to other competing priorities parents work multiple jobs;
- Not providing basic resources needed by parents to attend meetings such as interpretation, childcare, transportation, and refreshments; and

- Observe that only some parents are welcomed, but not all .

Some strategies to increase parents' trust in school efforts:

- Provide classes and training that will help parents and staff improve communication between schools and parents;
- Provide parents information about school decisions, school meetings, and student success in a timely manner. Furthermore, designate a person to provide more information or explanation on communications the school sends home;
- Invest in parent outreach. Learn what days, times, and methods of communication are preferred by parents. For many communities of color, the best strategy is person-to person communication. Designating a staff person or volunteer to call parents is time-consuming but effective in yielding higher turnout for meetings;
- Develop processes and systems where any and all parents' voices are heard. Do not just provide information in meetings, but mail the notes taken, make them available via website, or send a message about the results of a meeting through an automated phone service; and
- Host community-school meetings where constructive dialogue happens between parents, teachers, and administrators on issues affecting their children and the schools they attend (i.e. budget cuts, safety problems, evaluation of after-school programs or other services). Include parents as full partners in decision-making about these issues. Be transparent about the decision-making process and do not over-promise positive results.

C. PARENTS' AND SCHOOL OFFICIALS' BELIEFS AND ASSUMPTIONS OF EACH OTHER ENGENDER FEAR AND MISTRUST

The role of parents in schools is critical, as data shows parent involvement is a factor that is highly correlated to student success. Yet, more often than not, school officials and parents tend to have more of an adversarial type of relationship stemming from mistrust. As a result, there is often lack of clear two-way communication, or infrequent and ineffective communication between families and school officials.

When engaged in this discussion, parents from all the ethnic groups shared that parents are sometimes fearful that school administrators may retaliate against them and their children if they voice too many opinions or ask too many questions about policies and practices their school administrators adopt. This fear can have a chilling effect, inhibiting more parents from expressing their opinions or suggestions. Parents perceive that principals appear to be fearful of empowered parents due to the pressure they can exert to make school officials more accountable. At the same time, some administrators may not feel comfortable sharing power with involved parents.

Participants identified key causes of fear and mistrust:

- Parents and school officials each adhering to their own value systems, but not aware of the others';
- Parents and school officials behaving according to the assumptions they have about each other based on stereotypes of race or ethnicity, level of formal education, class, language spoken, immigration status, etc.;
- Parents who do not feel knowledgeable about the educational system or lack a strong sense of self-efficacy, not addressing problems at school

in order to avoid embarrassment (i.e. losing face, or males feeling they will lose honor or manhood); and

- Punitive, zero tolerance and other policies (i.e. discipline violations, dress code violations, ensuring services for special education students, etc.) providing settings where the nature of the parent-school official interaction feels adversarial.

A key strategy to overcome this barrier:

- Build a sense of community: all ethnic groups at the Parent Engagement Summit emphasized that developing a sense of community is necessary to engage ethnic minority parents and students. Although building community is more difficult to describe, all parents and organizations participating agreed on what happens when there is no community.

They describe these schools as places where:

- Parents and students feel isolated from others;
- Students become ashamed of their culture;
- Parents do not want to participate or ask information from the school;
- There are no community representatives or liaisons to serve as bridge-builders on campus;
- There are no educational opportunities for parents inside of the schools; and
- Parents and the students feel a lack of ownership of the schools.

A sense of community is built when people know your name and care for you. As a result, an individual cares and feels ownership as it relates to his or her family, school or community. It is this sense of community that the participants see spreading into the schools in order for parent engagement to increase and have the desired result of improving student

success and closing academic achievement gaps.

Also, an important element of building community is seeing the community as an extension of the school. This means the students and their entire families are welcomed in the school, and the school is open to partnering agencies and community-based organizations to provide additional resources. This would greatly help school officials play an important role in helping the community coalesce to resolve problems. Although school officials will not be able to solve every problem, and societal or community problems are beyond their jurisdiction, if a problem is affecting the families they serve, they can:

- Analyze how a community problem may be affecting student learning and determine how many students are being affected;
- Determine if school resources (e.g., financial, human and real) can be used to alleviate the problem. If that is not an option, then consider calling upon a non-profit or government agency to provide families information or resources;
- Offer the school campus for town-hall meetings where the community can come together with community members, police, elected officials, and the school to address a problem;
- Designate the school as a safe haven or safe zone and publicize this to the community; and
- Allow for peer support and mentoring to happen for both students and parents.

D. LACK OF CULTURAL COMPETENCY CREATES UNWELCOMING ENVIRONMENTS FOR ETHNIC MINORITY PARENTS

Lack of cultural competency refers to an inability, or disinterest to understand the background and issues of other cultural groups and not being able to relate to their experiences. Parents at this summit expressed that there is a fear in our country and in our schools. There is also a reluctance to support the multiple languages, other than English, spoken in communities of color. Further, there is a resistance and intolerance towards poor communities of color.

Some parents also expressed a fear of the school systems. Negative staff beliefs and assumptions about ethnic minority parents may be reflected in the quality of service schools provide. This can prevent parents from getting involved in the school, and develops mistrust of school officials, and stops parents from obtaining basic information about their children or their school. This can result in parents being discouraged to participate at deeper levels and for long periods of time.

According to the participants from this summit, the following are ways in which school officials send unwelcoming messages to parents and the community:

- Failing to learn about the history of the school site community where they work; of the students they serve; and the socio-cultural background of parents and their extended families;
- Failing to take into account that a parents' experience of having a history of poor treatment by a school may cause them to not want to engage with school officials. It may be recent negative experiences from their child's schools, or negative experiences from the parent's own educational journey;
- Having unfriendly staff in the main office that ignore parents when they come in, ridicule

parents for their lack of information, do not provide parents with the information requested, or intentionally mislead parents or students;

- Requiring a state-issued identification from all parents in order to enter the school when some parents do not have the proper documentation and cannot provide the specific type of identification required by school personnel;
- Having security guards escort parents at all times during their visits;
- Having staff that are not culturally competent and aware of differences between ethnic groups; and
- Having staff that are unaware of the history of the communities they serve. For example, not taking into account the negative history connected to schools desegregation efforts, or how American Indian families remember that schools were used as the vehicle to destroy their families' cultures.

Some strategies to overcome these barriers:

- Develop welcoming environments. Superintendents and school boards need to encourage principals to develop a welcoming environment on campus for parents by:
 - Posting visible signs in multiple languages on the campus for visitors to easily access information;
 - Providing customer service training to staff in the main office; and
 - Having administrators send a strong message that staff are to provide quality service to parents and students to the best of their abilities. School administrators can foster a culture of providing quality customer service by requiring staff to participate in training, and more importantly, by setting the example of how parents and community representatives are to be treated when they visit the school.

- Increase cultural competency. Schools can foster an appreciation of various cultures in their student population by:

- Allowing parents to coordinate cultural festivals or celebration of cultural traditions;
 - Hosting a movie night for students and staff twice a year, where an educational movie or documentary that is age appropriate for students and families depicts the culture of a group; and
 - Celebrating cultural heritage months for African Americans/Blacks, American Indians, Asian Americans, and Hispanics/Latinos. Have teachers adapt lessons related to important historic figures or events from various racial/ethnic minority groups, especially those groups represented by the school's population attendance.
- Investigate and take complaints seriously from ethnic minority parents or students. Be aware of staff making inappropriate statements about a person's race or ethnicity, sex, legal status, etc.
 - Integrate culture into lesson plans and strategies for student success. Include culture as a topic of discussion in grade-level teacher department meetings.
 - Overcome the language barrier. Parents who speak languages other than English need access to interpreters to participate in any school meeting or activity. Further, when interpretation and translation services are provided, provide background information on education terminology. Since many parents are not familiar with the educational jargon, they do not fully comprehend the messages school officials try to convey. School officials could assist by:
 - Providing simultaneous interpretation with various languages when requested, and especially during meetings;

- Providing training for interpreters to learn to explain the education terminology in layman terms;
- Providing workshops at least once per year on education jargon for parents to be able to understand translated documents and interpretations;
- Developing an evaluation process for parents to rate the quality of the service they received from the interpreter. This can help the school or district determine if they should continue to hire the interpreters/ translators;
- Forming a parent committee or task force that can help staff translate documents, or provide feedback on the content of a document being sent home; and
- Sharing with teachers the specific resources or supports available at the school or district to communicate with parents when there is a language barrier.

E. LACK OF UNDERSTANDING OF THE ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE LOCAL SCHOOL BOARD AND SCHOOL DISTRICTS

There is a lack of clarity around education goals and priorities in many school districts. Most schools have a written statement on what their mission and goals are, often found in district documents and on websites. However, this may be different from what is actually implemented. Oftentimes, there is a lack of a shared vision and an equity agenda. Too many school staff and parents may be unclear about what the priorities are and what education levels should be achieved by all children. School leaders need to transform the way success is defined and send clear messages to all staff as to what the goals and priorities are for their district. This vision needs to be shared with all parents as well.

Participants identified the important role school board members can play in education when they truly advocate for the interests of the entire community they represent and when they demand accountability from the district superintendent. However, sometimes school board members act on interests other than the children and community they have been elected to represent. The board should reflect diversity and be representative of the district. If the board has historically represented only the interests of some but not all groups, investigate if the district could benefit from having district-elected board members. Consider redistricting if representation is not balanced.

Some strategies to increase parents' understanding of the role and responsibilities of the local school board and district include:

- Host a class for parents where they can learn about the role and function of the school district and the school board and to demystify the process to participate in board meetings. Invite

the school district superintendent or a school board member to speak with parents about their role they play in education;

- Ask the person designated to work with parents to provide parents information or referrals where parents can get information about school board elections;
- Host a forum for parents where candidates running for the school board may share their vision for the district so parents and community members can best determine who may be committed to improve the educational outcomes and the educational experience for all students;
- Offer your school campus to be used as a polling place;
- Encourage parents to ask questions about the candidates' background on education and strategies they will promote to help schools close the achievement gap for various sub- groups (ethnic minority groups, English learners, at-risk students, special education students, etc.); and
- Encourage parents to attend school board meetings to help hold school board members accountable for addressing key problems.

F. LACK OF FUNDING AND COORDINATION OF RESOURCES TO PROVIDE SERVICES TO PARENTS

One of the main issues identified is that schools, especially Title I schools serving communities of color, have some funds to do parent involvement, but oftentimes those funds are allocated to improve parenting skills but do not offer enough advocacy or leadership development. Moreover, the groups in this convening felt the funds were used to cover other expenses not related to Title I, and for many schools these funds do not trickle down to community-based organizations to provide services to parents.

Too often there is staff or volunteers who are minimally qualified and committed to help reach out to parents and families and implement parent engagement policies effectively. Usually these positions are not full-time, and they tend to be staffed only during school hours. Further, these positions tend to focus on providing school-related information, but schools that are most successful in establishing strong relationships with parents, often also provide information and referrals to families to get help for non-education related issues affecting them such as, unemployment, homelessness, low-income housing, divorce, hunger, domestic violence, drug and alcohol abuse, health problems or an illness, etc.

Basic items to include in any budget for parent engagement include childcare, interpretation services, refreshments, and transportation, especially for parents to participate in rural areas.

Some strategies schools can utilize to overcome these barriers include:

- Apply for grants to increase the amount of unrestricted resources to fund special projects;
- Designate a school representative who works with families to create a resource directory to be able to refer parents to a myriad of social services and community-based organizations;
- Vary the work hours for those who work with families. Assign some to work during the day and others to work during the evening or weekend;
- Partner with local government agencies and community-based organizations to provide monthly workshops or services at the school or host a local resource fair for the community; and
- Partner with a community-based organization to operate a joint parent center to maximize resources.

G. FAILING TO PRIORITIZE PARENT ENGAGEMENT

Most teachers and administrators acknowledge the importance of parent engagement but many do not prioritize parent engagement in their daily activities. Nor is the subject of parent engagement and successfully engaging communities of color often included in teacher or administrator preparation programs. As a result, parent engagement is frequently omitted from plans to help a school or district with academic improvement. When it is included, it is often not allocated enough resources to achieve the desired results.

Strategies to support importance of parent engagement:

- Ensure parent engagement is part of the school and district plan to improve student success. The parent engagement strategy works best when it is integrated throughout the various sections of the plan, and not just when this responsibility is delegated to one or a few people in a school.
- Increase the cultural competency of staff in a school, which will help the implementation of a parent engagement plan. Provide training on the history of the community where staff works or host a community conversation. Dispel myths and express the importance of education to help teachers and staff more fully understand and appreciate the experience of students in that neighborhood and community.
- Obtain data about how parents would like to stay informed, and involved in their children's education. Having this type of information would greatly improve how schools should proceed with parent engagement policies and successful outreach efforts.
- Assign community liaisons to conduct focus groups, or talk to parents about what is happening in the community, and what is preventing them from connecting with the school; and

- Allow third party organizations, including community-based organizations, to conduct focus groups, administer surveys, form an evaluation task force, and conduct randomized calls to help the school determine the level of parent engagement and the effectiveness of the school's efforts.
- Set realistic expectations and gradual goals to increase parent engagement. If the outreach consistently fails or if parents have never been involved, it will take time for school staff and parents to change their behaviors and to achieve higher levels of parent engagement in the school.

H. FAILING TO ADJUST TO THE ROLE OF PARENT INVOLVEMENT IN THE 21ST CENTURY

Currently, parents and participants at this summit felt schools still have outdated perceptions about parents and their role in education. Too many school officials only allow parent volunteers to cut paper for teacher's projects, bake for celebrations or sales, help their child with homework, attend workshops to improve their parenting but, above all, not question school policies, implementation plans and school practices.

However, the role of the parent in the 21st century has evolved and parents not only need to be involved but they need to be engaged in their children's education and schools for students to be successful. Today, parents who are often successful at ensuring a quality education for their children are savvy at navigating the educational system, know who and where to ask for resources for their children, and become involved at various levels to best support their children throughout their academic journey.

As a result, several parent organizations have developed curricula and programs to increase

parents' knowledge on navigating the educational school system. Many parents, especially immigrant parents, see the educational school system as the authority and do not question decisions made by school staff because this may have been how education operated in their home country. To counter this notion and provide parents with key information on how schools operate in this country, information is often offered on the following topics:

- Parents' rights and responsibilities;
- Effective parent-teacher meetings;
- Structure and function of the school, the district, and the board;
- Rights and resources for students with special needs;
- Information about academic standards;
- School accountability measures;
- Tutoring and other after-school resources;
- College requirements and the admission process;
- School disciplinary policies;
- Parents' self-confidence to engage schools;
- Participation in school board meetings, school council, and advisory committees;
- Analysis of student and school data; and,
- School improvement plans and how to participate in the process and monitor their implementation.

Some strategies schools could adopt are:

- Survey parents for topics they are interested in learning and provide them with the information requested;
- Contact local community-based organizations to provide parent training opportunities;
- Provide parents with information about school procedures, programming, and budgeting; and
- Provide parents the opportunity for their voices

to be heard when the school needs to make an important decision, and provide a structure for parent representatives to have a vote in local school matters. Moreover, when structures already exist, ensure that proper training be given to new members, monitor the effectiveness of the meetings, and adhere to the bylaws of the local council in order to have successful engagement and representation of school staff and parents.

I. KEY CHALLENGES TO SPECIFIC RACIAL OR ETHNIC MINORITIES SUBGROUPS:

For *immigrant parents*, the lack of legal immigration status causes parents to feel intimidated to participate in schools as these are government institutions. A parent may be intimidated if an official at school inquires about their immigration status, asks for a social security number, or proof of legal residency. There is also a lack of understanding of what immigration status is and what the consequences may be for a parent or a student in this situation. For example, in most states there may not be access to state sponsored preschool, and there may be limited opportunities to pursue higher education.

Some recommended strategies are:

- Educate key staff, especially those responsible for student enrollment, about the documents required by the law to enroll a student. Discuss explicitly what is acceptable and what is not when it comes to serving parents who may not be protected by legal status; and
- Provide training or discussions with staff if a school experiences a sudden influx of immigrants, to strategize on how to best serve the new student population and also provide key information as to why people immigrate. Learn more about the area where immigrants are

coming from to better connect with families and their students, and dispel myths and stereotypes about the new subgroups.

The *African American/Black* community experiences a high percentage of single parent homes, or there may be children who are being raised by extended family members, especially a grandmother.

Some recommended strategies are:

- Provide resources and referrals to different social services to single parents or foster families;
- Form a support group to help single parents to overcome barriers they may be facing, and help them find a way to become more involved in their children's education; and
- Support the development of programs to reconnect individuals released from institutions to society.

Fathers from ethnic minority groups experience a gender barrier when participating in their children's education because this task is often delegated to the mother, and because education is a field dominated by women. As a result, many fathers do not feel comfortable assuming new responsibilities or challenging what they learned about their gender role.

Some recommended strategies are:

- Coordinate programs or activities specifically designed to get fathers to come to into the school campus and participate in their child's education. Oftentimes, CBOs that work with parents may have already developed such activities. For these activities to be effective, it is important for these activities to be led by and for men.

Schools that serve diverse communities may have difficulty getting groups of parents from different racial or ethnic backgrounds to work together. Many times parents make assumptions about each other

based on stereotypes and may avoid interaction with each other, especially if there is a language barrier. School officials may not consider that building unity among different parent groups is part of their job. However, very often, tensions affecting the adults in the community are then reflected in the student's behavior, which can negatively affect overall campus atmosphere and academic performance.

Some strategies that foster unity among different groups of parents:

- Educate parents from different ethnic groups about each other's diverse experiences in this country to help build empathy towards one another and help find commonalities in the struggles they may currently face.
- Design activities where all parents need to collaborate with one another to help improve their local school, such as asking parents to coordinate a campus beautification project, asking the parents and students to help paint a mural depicting their history and contribution of the community, or inviting parents to participate in developing a plan to improve student achievement.
- Provide leadership and multicultural training to parent leaders from each of the different parent groups in school so they can model positive interactions with one another.
- Ensure all parents are invited to participate and are provided the same information.
- Have interpreters available to help parents interact with each other. Host a meeting in two or more languages, where all participants get to hear part of the meeting in their language, and another part with headphones.
- If more assistance or strategies are needed, contact a commission on human relations at your city, county, or state level.

In the *Asian and Pacific Islander (API)* communities the myth of the “model minority” often obscures the great need to devote resources to parental engagement and student support. This myth suggests that all API students are high achieving and hides the fact that many individual communities, including many Southeast Asian and Pacific Islander communities face educational challenges related to unique historical or socioeconomic factors, such as refugee status, language access, weaker formal education systems in some native countries, and poverty. To avoid making generalizations about an ethnic minority group, it is recommended to:

- Consider the unique characteristics and needs of each community. Develop outreach programs that address issues such as language barriers, schedule parent-teacher conferences that accommodate low-income parents with multiple jobs, and be aware that there may be differing cultural attitudes toward the relationships between teachers and parents.
- Leverage relationships or build partnerships with trusted organizations and leaders to connect with parents from a specific community. Your local CBOs, community leaders from the specific ethnic subgroup you want to reach, school-employed liaisons, and bilingual teachers can play a critical role in helping and educating parents on how to navigate the educational system.

For *American Indians/Alaska Natives and Native Hawaiians*, maintaining their culture and sovereignty is of utmost importance. Successful school efforts to engage students, parents, and community members from this ethnic minority group, integrate the concepts of culture and sovereignty in class lessons, and in the daily school practices when communicating and interacting with the community. Some ideas to integrate these concepts in school include:

- Create Native parent training curriculum materials that recognize the intergenerational

historic trauma endured by Native people, created by the boarding schools. This curriculum should assist in rebuilding Native parent trust in educational systems and involve greater efforts by schools in reaching out to Native parents.

- Wherever possible, encourage schools and individual classroom teachers to integrate American Indian/Alaska Native and Native Hawaiian language and culture into the core content areas and invite Native parents to present tribally specific customs, practices, folklore and foods.
- For tribes involved in Native language maintenance and revitalization efforts, parental engagement information needs to be in the Native languages where possible.
- Policies need to honor how Native traditional extended family relationships play an influencing role in Native student achievement. Many instances exist where relations other than parents are actively involved in the life of a student.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS TO IMPROVE ETHNIC MINORITY PARENT AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

A. INCREASE ACCOUNTABILITY FOR THE IMPLEMENTATION OF PARENT ENGAGEMENT PLANS AND POLICIES

- Ensure schools, school districts, and states include parent engagement as a key component of any strategic plan to improve student achievement, with a shared vision for interaction between parents, teachers, schools, administrators and school boards.
- Increase transparency to the public on school improvement plans by requiring the details of any strategic plan be shared with the community, including the inputs and outcomes of a plan, those responsible for implementing the change, details of outreach to each ethnic community, success measurement, and those accountable if the plan does not work.
- Require schools to measure the effectiveness of their parent engagement efforts by having schools collect data from parents and making the results of the evaluation available to the public.
- Require states and districts to review, assess, and revise parent involvement and engagement policies annually to ensure that issues of poverty, limited English proficiency, access to technology and varying cultural expectation barriers among different ethnicities are addressed.
- Monitor how Categorical Funding is spent in schools by reviewing, on an annual basis, the spending patterns of districts and schools, specifically, ESEA funds expended that cover parent involvement; and provide a process by which a parent can file a complaint against a school's non-compliance.
- Mandate that school districts make available specific training for parents to monitor the implementation of plans and policies, including providing information on:
 - Parent rights and responsibilities; election/appointment of school board members; attendance at school board meetings and participation in public comment agenda items during a meeting; school systems; policy; and data analysis.
 - Key components and characteristics of effective strategic and school improvement plans, including identifying inputs and outcomes, identifying those responsible for implementing the change, explaining the metrics often used to measure success, specifying a timeline, and incorporating various levels of accountability that should exist.
- Increase the amount of student achievement data, disaggregated by individual ethnic group and gender within each group, available to parents.

B. INCREASE PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT FOR SCHOOL STAFF ON PARENT ENGAGEMENT

- Increase professional development including pre-service and in-service on a regular basis, for administrators and teachers on parent engagement and cultural competence, including basic parent rights and responsibilities.
- Encourage local school boards to adopt a policy that requires all teachers and administrators to have at least one unit/course of learning on parent engagement with an emphasis on cultural, linguistic, immigration, and ethnic issues.
- Include parent involvement in teachers', administrators', and front office staff's annual performance evaluation process.
- Mandate all educator/administrator preparation coursework in higher education institutions to include a diversity and cultural competence framework for increasing knowledge that includes, among other things, community engagement, ethnic minority involvement, cultural awareness, relationship building skills, and racial/social justice parent engagement learning models.
- Require districts and schools to provide, as part of expanded planning time, time to talk with parents about student progress. Encourage unions and districts to include in the negotiation of contracts time to be specifically allotted for teachers to use in contacting parents.

C. INCREASE FUNDING FOR PARENT INVOLVEMENT/ENGAGEMENT IN SCHOOLS

- Increase funding under ESEA specifically for parent outreach.
- Encourage states to provide structured paid time for teachers and administrators to engage families and students outside of the classroom in order to collaborate with, engage with, and learn from parents.
- Award financial incentives to schools that implement high quality programs that consider: basic needs of parents, cultural competencies, leadership development, capacity building and professional development.
- Provide federal and state incentives for schools to partner with Community-based Organizations (CBOs) that work with parents, and require that a percentage of total allocation of funds be designated to CBOs to provide parent training.
- Fund the creation of parent centers that are independent of schools, either run by CBOs or run in cooperation with CBOs and treat parent centers as community centers that offer classes that enhance parent skills or provide a new skill set to parents.
- Increase funding for Parent Information Resource Centers to provide technical assistance to school staff to support improving parent involvement and engagement in schools or areas where there is not a local CBO available.

D. STANDARDIZE PARENT ENGAGEMENT THROUGH A PARENT ENGAGEMENT ACT AND OTHER LEGISLATION

- Enact a Parent Engagement Act that creates and supports Parent Engagement Standards where federal and state government develop or adopt and implement grassroots standards for parent engagement.
 - Standards should take into account diversity, race, class, immigration, history, regional differences, politics and cultural competency; include common principles; and involve community stakeholders.
 - Standards should include rubrics, strategies, resources and evidence sources for compliance that engage parents from early childhood education through high school graduation; that differentiate between parent engagement and parent involvement as not being one and the same; and that allow for the creation of support/networks for parents to have a space to work together and create leadership among parents.
 - The Act should afford parents a leave of absence from their place of employment for school-related activities and provide other incentives to schools like child care, flexible scheduling and stipends to increase parent engagement. The incentives should engage fathers, parents who have been in jail, and other nontraditional caregivers and non-custodial/legal guardians.
- Redefine “parent” in current legislation to include other care-giving adults and non-custodial/legal guardians.
- Adopt policies that establish a wide range of acceptable forms of identification for parents to present when visiting a campus and volunteering.

E. SUPPORT THE EXPANSION OF COMMUNITY SCHOOLS

- Encourage and fund high-quality community schools in the ESEA reauthorization and in state education budgets, aligning with the coalition for community schools and best practices in a range of communities that support technology for families, legal advice and social services in a way that reflects the cultural and linguistic needs of the community.
- Establish criteria for high-quality community schools that include: parent engagement in the creation of the community school, family resource centers, extended business hours during evenings and weekends, after-school programs, parent and community-based organization use of school facilities, on-site community school program staff, community partnerships, and inclusion of rural parents.

F. ADDRESS LINGUISTIC DIVERSITY

- Improve communication with parents of English Learners (ELs) through taking into account linguistic diversity by having states and school districts create a plan and a framework for adequate translation and interpretation services at the school and district level to meet the specific needs of the students and families in the community; and provide training and resources to schools and districts for translations and interpretation services.
- Provide translation and interpretation to parents through bilingual and bicultural staff and for tribes involved in Native language maintenance and revitalization efforts; parent engagement information needs to be in the Native languages where possible.

- Use community interpreter models and expand the models to create linguistic accessibility. Asian American and Pacific Islanders as well as other communities of color should not be overlooked in translation and interpretation services.
- Build incentives to encourage staff to learn an additional language(s) and provide institutional support training such as culture competency that will assist school staff to prepare them to work with a diverse group of parents.
- Require schools to educate parents of ELs about the programs available for students to learn English, the process to exit out of an EL program, ways to monitor progress in learning the language, and an expected timeline of when the student should exit out.

G. OTHER

- Encourage policies to provide funding to states and school districts to develop and launch a multimedia campaign to raise awareness of the importance, impact and power of parent involvement in supporting student achievement.
- Encourage policies to provide funding to states and school districts to create a youth development program that includes issues of race, ethnicity, and individual pride and incorporates multi-generations that are useful in celebrating ethnic youths' parents.
- Encourage policies that are designed to recruit, mentor, train and retain Native teachers in their home communities to help with the scarcity of Native teachers for the classroom by adding funds to Title VII of ESEA.

WORKS CITED

1. Weiss, H., Caspe, M., Lopez, M.E. (2006, Spring). Family involvement in early childhood education. Family Involvement Makes A Difference, Number 1 in a series. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Family Research Project. Retrieved February 20, 2010, from: <http://www.hfrp.org/publications-resources/publications-series/family-involvement-makes-a-difference/family-involvement-in-early-childhood-education>. Page 15
2. Weiss, H.B., Bouffard, S.M., Bridglall, B.L., Gordon, E.W. (2009, December). Reframing family involvement in education: Supporting families to support educational equity. Equity Matters, research review No. 5. Retrieved April 5, 2010, from <http://hfrp.org/publications-resources/browse-our-publications/reframing-family-involvement-in-education-supporting-families-to-support-educational-equity>. Page 15
3. Weiss, H.B., Bouffard, S.M., Bridglall, B.L., Gordon, E.W. (2009, December). Reframing family involvement in education: Supporting families to support educational equity. Equity Matters, research review No. 5. Retrieved April 5, 2010, from <http://hfrp.org/publications-resources/browse-our-publications/reframing-family-involvement-in-education-supporting-families-to-support-educational-equity>. Page 15
4. Rosenberg, H., Lopez, M.E., & Westmoreland, H. (2009, November). Family engagement: A shared responsibility. Family Involvement Network of Educators Newsletter, 1(4). Retrieved, February 20, 2010, from <http://hfrp.org/publications-resources/browse-our-publications/family-engagement-a-shared-responsibility>. Page 15
5. National Education Association. (2009). Parent, family, community involvement in education. Washington, DC: Author. Page 15
6. Caspe, M., Lopez, M.E., Wolos, C. (2006/2007, Winter). Family involvement in elementary school children's education. Family Involvement Makes A Difference, Number 2 in a series. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Family Research Project. Retrieved February 20, 2010, from: <http://www.hfrp.org/publications-resources/publications-series/family-involvement-makes-a-difference/family-involvement-in-elementary-school-children-s-education>; Henderson, A.T., Mapp, K.L., Johnson, V.R. & Davies, D. (2007). Bey Page 15
7. Westmoreland, H. Rosenberg, H.M., Lopez, M.E., & Weiss, H. (2009, July). Seeing is believing: Promising practices for how school districts promote family engagement. National PTA & Harvard Family Research Project. Page 15
8. Westmoreland, H. Rosenberg, H.M., Lopez, M.E., & Weiss, H. (2009, July). Seeing is believing: Promising practices for how school districts promote family engagement. National PTA & Harvard Family Research Project. Page 15
9. Henderson, A.T., Mapp, K.L., Johnson, V.R. & Davies, D. (2007). Beyond the bake sale: The essential guide to family-school partnerships. New York: The New Press. Page 15



*Great Public Schools
for Every Student*

MINORITY
COMMUNITY
OUTREACH



Office of Minority Community Outreach
1201 16th Street, N.W.
Washington, DC 20036-3290
202.822.7274
www.nea.org/mco