

SECTION 18: PARENT INVOLVEMENT OPPORTUNITIES

Research studies consistently reveal that high student achievement and self-esteem are closely related to positive parental participation in education, regardless of economic, racial, or cultural background of the family. Therefore, parents and schools need to work together so all children can succeed in school. At a charter school parents are extremely important stakeholders and even more so in a dual immersion school.

Esperanza parents will be given opportunities to influence the management of the school. We will assist in the development of a parent group such as a PTA. Esperanza's Bylaws require that two members of the Board of Directors be parents of children currently enrolled in the school; one a native-Spanish speaker, the other a native-English speaker. These parent members will be chosen by the school's parent organization and play a direct role in the governance of the school. Esperanza will develop a five-year school-family-community plan based on the work of the National PTA, Joyce Epstein's Framework, Mavis Sanders, Anne Henderson, Delgado-Gaitan, and other experts that will provide families with opportunities to use their voice.

The six factors identified by the National PTA are:

- Regular, two-way, meaningful communication between home and school
- Promotion and support of parenting skills
- Active parent participation in student learning
- Parents as welcome volunteer partners in schools
- Parents as full partners in school decisions that affect children and families
- Outreach to the community for resources to strengthen schools

Epstein's Framework of Six Types of Involvement

- *Parenting.* Assist families with parenting skills, family support, understanding child and adolescent development, and setting home conditions to support learning at each age and grade level. Assist schools in understanding families' backgrounds, cultures, and goals for children.
- *Communicating.* Communicate with families about school programs and student progress. Create two-way communication channels between school and home.
- *Volunteering.* Improve recruitment, training, activities, and schedules to involve families as volunteers and as audiences at the school or in other locations. Enable educators to work with volunteers who support students and the school.
- *Learning at Home.* Involve families with their children in academic learning at home, including homework, goal setting, and other curriculum-related activities. Encourage teachers to design homework that enables students to share and discuss interesting tasks.
- *Decision Making.* Include families as participants in school decisions, governance, and advocacy activities through school councils or improvement teams, committees, and parent organizations.
- *Collaborating with the Community.* Coordinate resources and services for families, students, and the school with community groups, including businesses, agencies, cultural and civic organizations, and colleges or universities. Enable all to contribute service to the community.

Source: Epstein et al., 2002.

Because research shows that the more involved dads are, the better the child does in school, a concerted effort needs to focus specifically on how to involve dads. At the following website a number of research studies are noted to support the importance of fathers:

<http://www.ericdigests.org/2004-3/role.html> As part of the comprehensive plan we will provide numerous opportunities each year for parents to attend an Orientation meeting so they will have a clear understanding of the focus of Esperanza and how their involvement is critical. At these Orientation meetings enrollment packets will be distributed to those who want to enroll their children.

Each year before the school year begins each teacher will make a home visit to each student who will be in his or her class and then conduct subsequent visits throughout the year. This home visit program will follow the guidelines of the Parent Teacher Home Visit Project founded in Sacramento, CA.

Some of the specific things that will be part of the plan are to have parents complete surveys, one being the one from the Toolkit that we mentioned in the assessment section of this document and another being the survey required by IAIE (International Alliance for Invitational Education) for the Inviting School Award. We will have a parent room at the school that the parent organization (possibly PTA) will manage. In this room will be a check out library for parents and a weekly “Munch and Mingle” among other things the parents might want to add such as a suggestion box.

The PTA has developed a program called *Three for Me* that we will implement. This program asks each parent that has a child or children enrolled at Esperanza to volunteer at least three hours to the school in some way during the school year. If a parent is unable to volunteer the three hours, someone else from the extended family could volunteer. This is especially important for the Hispanic families where extended family is an underutilized source of strength. In Hispanic families aunts, uncles, grandparents, cousins play an important role and may even live in the same household. These could be helping in the classroom, chaperoning a field trip, tutoring (Spanish and/or English), mentoring, doing things at home, etc. At this Orientation Meeting it will also be explained to parents about the parent organization and how the president of this parent organization will be a member of the Board. It will be shared with them which committees they can join as well as ask them for their input on what committees we should have. Parents will be invited to attend the annual PTA Conference and the annual Utah Charter Conference to learn how to be effective in a leadership role.

Because at least half of our parents will most likely be Hispanic it is critical that all our stakeholders understand how to involve Hispanic families. We will have resources such as the book *Involving Latino Families in Schools* by Concha Delgado Gaítan as well as provide training specifically on this topic. The most important thing we need to do with our Hispanic families is create *confianza* (trust). The most successful approach is to have face-to-face conversations with parents in their primary language in their homes. We can do this by hiring someone who is bilingual, biliterate, and bicultural to be a liaison—preferably a parent. Also, our teachers will be invited to participate in *Funds of Knowledge* where they will visit Hispanic homes as learners rather than teachers. This concept is based on the book *Funds of Knowledge* and the work of Dr. Luis Moll, Dr. Norma Gonzalez, and Cathy Amanti. What is learned in the homes can then be

used to invite family members to share skills and talents when designing methods for teaching the curriculum. In other words, make it easy for them to participate.

Each teacher will be strongly encouraged to have a bilingual “blog” that is updated weekly that families can access to be kept updated on what is happening in the classroom.

It is important to give parents what they want rather than what we think they need. This includes the type of classes we offer. Even though some parents may want ESL classes, we must remember to move beyond ESL classes. Through surveys and Funds of Knowledge we can find out the talents and skills of our parents. Then we can offer classes where they teach each other.