



Engaging Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Families

Educators play a critical role in the successful participation of their students in instruction and assessment. The purpose of this Fact Sheet is to provide educators with strategies that will help them engage culturally and linguistically diverse families and their children. These strategies can help overcome the challenges of gaps in communication, cultural differences, culturally responsive teaching, and understanding home culture and individual students' characteristics, including disability and English learner status. Additional strategies are provided for working with culturally and linguistically diverse families whose children have disabilities or are receiving English language development services.

Challenges Faced by Classroom Teachers

- Recognizing gaps in communication and cultural difference
- Knowing student characteristics

- Understanding behaviors of students who are culturally and linguistically diverse
- Acknowledging assumptions about parents/caregivers of students who are culturally and linguistically diverse
- Engaging parents/caregivers in the process of both instruction and assessment

Strategies

- Ask parents/caregivers about their preferred ways to communicate (such as emails, hard copies sent home with the child, text messages, and telephone calls).
- Build two-way communication with families. Request an interpreter if parents/caregivers are not proficient in English. Arrange for the interpreter to be at meetings, including meetings of the Individualized Education Program (IEP) team if the child has a disability.

- Connect with parents/caregivers in a culturally responsive manner. Ask them how they would prefer to be addressed (e.g., Mr./Mrs./Ms., Sir/Madam, Dr., Chief, other).
- Explore the possibility of a home visit so that you can understand the family situation as you develop your instructional approaches.
- Set up a time to meet before school begins if the student is new to the school.
- Listen carefully to parents/caregivers to understand the individual needs of the student.
- Focus on a strength-based approach when working with students and communicating with parents/caregivers.
- Use person-centered practices that focus on the needs and preferences of all students and their parents/caregivers.
- Seek to understand previous schooling experiences to determine how to address individual student's needs.
- Ask questions about the student's study habits and the home culture.
- Use music or artifacts that are inclusive of diverse cultures when teaching.
- Provide parents with the school calendar of events where they can connect with other parents and school leaders.
- Inform parents/caregivers about state, district, and classroom assessments and engage them in decision-making about instruction and assessment.
- Tell the parents/caregiver about what their child will be taught.

Working with Parents/Caregivers of Students Who are English Learners

- Clarify the individual needs of the student with an interpreter to make sure everyone has the same understanding.
- Help parents/caregivers understand how the child will receive English language development services and how this will affect their learning and assessment plans.
- Clarify that the child has a right to participate meaningfully in both instruction and assessment, and that meaningful participation may mean extra supports in instruction and accommodations during academic assessments.

Working with Parents/Caregivers of Students Who Have a Disability

- Listen carefully to understand the child's needs.
- Understand what is in the child's Individualized Education Program (IEP) and help parents/caregivers know its implications for curriculum and assessment.
- Clarify that the child has the right to accommodations for both instruction and assessment.
- Empathize with parents/caregivers who are culturally and linguistically diverse and whose culture may have negative views of individuals with disabilities.
- Encourage parents to be active participants in meetings.

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