Resource 2

Examining Assumptions About Families

Effective communication between home and school is the foundation of a solid partnership. When families and educators practice effective communication, positive relationships develop and students make greater progress. Effective communication does not happen by accident. Teachers and administrators must be diligent in making sure communication is meaningful and positive and that teachers practice communication skills such as good listening techniques, kindness, tact, empathy and a true understanding of parent-child relationships.

Positive Assumptions Yield Positive Results

It is important to examine assumptions about families and understand that for the home/school partnership to be effective, the following concepts must be adopted.

- **Assume all parents and families love their children.**
  Many family structures exist and all are legitimate. Parents or guardians may be absent from home or school for a variety of reasons, but this does not diminish their love and caring. Acknowledge the changes in what was once known as the traditional family structure.

- **Assume all children can and will learn and that all families have strengths to share.**
  Also assume that parents can learn new techniques in working with their children.

- **Assume all families want a positive school experience for their children.**
  Trust them and assume that they will work to ensure positive experiences from their end. Both parents and educators are committed to the nurturing, development and progress of children. Teachers must believe that parents and families play a critical role in a child’s development.

- **Respect parents and families and communicate that respect.**
  Tone of voice, body language, a teacher’s enthusiasm, facial expressions, word choice and how long we make people wait all communicate respect or lack of it. Many family members have personal, work, health or other problems that we know nothing about. Avoid being judgmental and give parents the benefit of the doubt.

- **Recognize that schools and homes have shared goals.**
  Parents and families have important perspectives of their children. Expect all parents and families to partner with you in the educational process. Clarify your expectations from the beginning. Help parents to understand their role in the educational process by:
  - asking parents what they want or need from their relationship with the school;
  - determining together, what you both need and expect from the student;
  - defining what those high expectations are; and
  - inviting them to attend professional development activities.

- **Make sure parents feel welcome when they come to school.**
  Ensure that the school has a parent handbook or volunteer manual, training procedures, parking spaces and a parent room so that parents can be welcomed and know they have an important place and role in the school.
  - Be specific about parent roles, tasks and schedules.
  - Thank and recognize parents regularly.
  - Enlist parents to help reach other parents, but don’t abdicate responsibility to one group.
Respect and Celebrate the Diversity that Students and Families Bring to School

Cultural differences are valuable to student learning and should be celebrated at school.

1. Make use of local expertise, especially elders as co-educators, whenever local language and cultural knowledge is addressed in the curriculum or local skills are used as examples.

2. Make every effort to utilize locally relevant curriculum materials with which students can identify, including materials prepared by local Native authors.

3. Participate in local and regional language immersion camps to learn and hear traditional language, cultural ways and their meaning in contemporary life.

4. Ask a parent, elder or community member to help you create a language immersion environment in your classroom.

5. Recognize and validate all aspects of the knowledge students bring with them and assist them in personal and cultural affirmations.

6. Provide enough flexibility in scheduling family participation so everyone is able to fully share. Provide enough advance notice for family members to make the necessary preparations to attend.

7. Be patient when students make mistakes speaking English and encourage their efforts.

Don’t Teach Me My Culture, Use My Culture to Teach Me