This handbook has been prepared by the VIPS Multicultural Committee. This committee is comprised of district staff, parents, volunteers and community members and our mission statement is as follows: “The purpose of the CFISD Multicultural Committee is to raise the level of cultural understanding and respect by sharing information with the CFISD community to encourage cultural sensitivity and parental involvement to strengthen student success.” We have compiled this information from various sources and our own personal experiences of what strategies may work best for increasing parental involvement and attracting multicultural volunteers. The ideas set forth herein are general suggestions and can be adapted for use on all campuses as individual administration sees fit for their own student population.

THE OVERALL IMPORTANCE OF PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT

The National Center for Education Statistics has research which shows that students from families with above-median parental involvement showed success rates 30 percent higher than those from families with below-median parental involvement, as measured by GPAs; test scores in math, science, reading, and social studies; and promotion, retention and teacher ratings. Where teachers reported high levels of outreach to parents, reading scores grew at a rate 50 percent, and math test scores 40 percent higher, than in schools where teachers reported low levels of outreach. Outreach to parents measured the extent to which teachers communicated with parents through, among other things providing parents materials on ways to help their children at home. Studies that compared levels of parent involvement found that student achievement increased directly with the extent to which parents were engaged in the program.

According to Anne Henderson’s *A New Generation of Evidence*, “The research evidence is now beyond dispute. When schools work together with families to support learning, children tend to succeed not just in school, but throughout life. In fact, the most accurate predictor of a student’s achievement in school is not income or social status, but the extent to which that student’s family is able to:

1. Create a home environment that encourages learning;
2. Express high (but not unrealistic) expectations for their children’s achievement and future careers; and
3. Become involved in their children’s education at school and in the community. “

UNDERSTANDING THE ISSUE OF PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT OF DIVERSE POPULATIONS

Differences in the family structure, culture, ethnic background, social class, age and gender represent only a few of the factors affecting the nature of parent involvement. Many times the school’s perspective and definitions of family involvement in school are not the same as those of the families. These differing viewpoints can create barriers to meaningful participation.

There are a few key findings when it comes to looking at the roles that families play in addressing the need to improve academic achievement among “diverse” student populations.

- No matter what their race or ethnicity, culture or income, most families have high aspirations and concerns for their children’s success. Remember that success does not look the same in every family.
• Involvement of families from various racial, ethnic and cultural backgrounds differs somewhat from the involvement of others.
• Families and school staffs’ reports about the extent of family involvement and of schools’ outreach tend to be inconsistent, with the differences increasing in schools with larger minority populations.
• Studies have identified barriers to minority and low-income families’ involvement in their children’s schooling – barriers that schools often can help to overcome.
• Findings are limited regarding the extent to which increased family involvement is linked to improved academic achievement among minority and low-income student populations; however, some intervention strategies appear to be very promising in encouraging student success.

UNDERSTANDING THE IMPORTANCE OF PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT OF DIVERSE POPULATIONS

As the population of our school district becomes more culturally diverse, it is crucial to student success to encourage more parental involvement from multicultural parents. It is also imperative to our volunteer programs’ success to attract more multicultural volunteers.

American Council on Education research shows that students with involved parents, no matter what their income or background, are more likely to earn higher grades and test scores, attend school regularly, have better social skills, show improved behavior and adapt well to school and graduate and go on to post-secondary education. Families of these students also benefit by having more confidence in and being more supportive of the school, having higher expectations of their children, showing more self confidence and being more likely to continue their own education. Schools also reap the benefits of more parental involvement because parents tend to rate the teachers higher and the teachers receive more support from the families. This can lead to improved teacher morale. Because of higher student achievement attained, the schools earn a better reputation in the community.

It is also important for multicultural students to see more multicultural parents working in their schools because they serve as role models of commitment, involvement and accomplishment.

COMMON REASONS FOR LACK OF PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT

▪ Prior concepts of the parents’ sense of place in their children's education.
▪ Lack of information on the importance of parental involvement.
▪ Feelings of lack of ability to help their children.
▪ Transportation issues can prevent them from being able to travel to the school.
▪ Presence of younger children at home who require child care.
▪ The perception that they personally are not needed and that someone else can do the job better.
▪ Unfamiliarity with the concept of volunteering because there are no systems in place for this in their culture can lead to skepticism about institutions which promote this.
▪ Perceptions by many cultures that the mainstream volunteer management model is too rigid and organization-driven can create a barrier to participation. Try to be flexible in your thinking when it comes to recruiting multicultural volunteers and assigning them volunteer duties.

GENERAL STEPS SCHOOLS CAN TAKE TO FOSTER FAMILY-SCHOOL CONNECTIONS

▪ Adopt formal school policies that promote family involvement and focus on engaging families who reflect the full diversity of the student population.
- Demonstrate active and ongoing support from the school principal.
- Honor families’ hopes and concerns for their children.
- Acknowledge both commonalities and differences among students and families.
- Strengthen school staff capacity to work well with families.
- Provide support to help immigrant families understand how schools work and what’s expected of both families and students.
- Make outreach a priority; take the extra steps necessary to make it possible for families to get involved at school, as well as at home.
- Relationships and trust are key ingredients to attracting and retaining ethnic volunteers. Cross-cultural training, creating a safe, welcoming environment and a mindset of acceptance and appreciation of diversity must underlie all programs and outreach efforts.
- Recognize that it takes time to build trust.
- Provide families with training and resources to support early literacy.
- Help families use specific communication and monitoring strategies to support their children’s learning.
- Encourage and support student involvement in a range of school- and community-sponsored extracurricular and after-school activities.
- Help low-income families obtain the support and services they need to keep themselves safe, healthy and well fed.
- Hold listening sessions. Ask parents what they want to learn, how they want to learn it, when they want to meet and for how long. Listen to their concerns.
- Consider sponsoring single parent and/or native language parent groups on your campus.
- Have parents teach the staff or provide trainings to other parents. Consider asking multilingual parents to give basic language instruction to students after school.

**BUILDING PARTNERSHIPS**

**EVALUATE YOUR OWN CAMPUS IDENTITY AND NEEDS**

- Evaluate your own campus identity by studying its demographic breakdown. Identify cultural make-up of student body and languages spoken.
- Identify your priorities in increasing multicultural parental involvement, i.e., more home involvement or volunteer participation.
- Accept that not every method of recruitment will work and not every effort to increase involvement will succeed.
- Decide what works best for your campus and dedicate your efforts accordingly.

**WELCOME FAMILY MEMBERS TO THE SCHOOL**

This first step in reaching out to multicultural parents can be the most difficult and yet it is the most important. It is imperative to make sure that families feel welcome and comfortable the very first time that they enter your school. The first impression that they receive will set the stage for all future interaction or lack thereof. The following are some things you can do to make sure that these families feel welcome:

- Remember that a welcoming smile is a language common to everyone.
- Post welcoming signs in hallways that direct families to a staff member who will make sure their needs are met.
- Provide basic bilingual course for front desk personnel (receptionist) so that they can greet parents in their own language.
- Provide tours of your campus in various languages (can use trained volunteers or students).
- Survey parents (can be done by form on opening day or on VIPS recruiting forms) about languages spoken and compile database of bilingual parents who may be interested in serving as mentors to families.
• Provide cultural mentors to interested parents on your campus who may need assistance to assimilate into our educational culture.
• Assign willing and experienced multicultural volunteers to act as “buddies” for new volunteers to make them feel more welcome and comfortable. Partner these volunteers on work projects until the newcomer is comfortable with the school environment.
• If possible, have a separate multilingual or bilingual volunteer coordinator (can be a school employee or volunteer) who can speak with families in their own language if needed.
• Invite family members to eat lunch with their children as allowed on your campus.
• Invite family members to visit their children’s classrooms during instructional time when a new concept or resource is introduced so that they can experience what the children are doing first hand.

COMMUNICATION

Being able to communicate with multicultural parents is the key to building a successful partnership. We have discovered that traditional methods of communication are often not effective when dealing with these multicultural families. Some alternative methods and ideas which may be more successful are as follows.

❖ Whenever feasible, make invitations to special events, meetings or other activities by personal contact such as telephone calls or in person rather than through newsletters or notes. It is much more difficult to say no to a personal request for help than to ignore an announcement in a newsletter.
❖ Be specific about any volunteer opportunities available to families: how long it will take, what the volunteer’s role will be and if it is a one-time opportunity.
❖ If written communication is the only alternative, make sure that all written messages are translated into the appropriate languages and are clear and concise.
❖ Avoid the use of educational jargon or acronyms which may be unfamiliar to parents.
❖ Written communication should not be intimidating or threatening.
❖ Written communication should avoid the use of cursive writing which may not be taught in other countries.
❖ Have staff or volunteers personally distribute leaflets in the community concerning school events, meetings or other activities.
❖ Communicating through bilingual teachers, staff members, parents or volunteers may be necessary. Some multicultural parents may be more likely to respond to requests or invitations made by their children’s teachers.
❖ Identify an involved, active bilingual parent or volunteer on your campus and recruit her/him to help.
❖ Create classroom phone trees or e-mail lists for announcements or ride-sharing. If families don’t have telephones, create a phone/word-of-mouth communication system by locating one parent in a particular neighborhood or apartment complex that is willing to pass the word.
❖ Recruit bilingual students from the National Honor Society at the local school, foreign-language majors from the local college or older siblings of students to help you communicate with non-English speaking families.
❖ Contact ethnic organizations such as churches or community organizations to communicate with families learning English. You can also try to find help at ethnic businesses too.
❖ Reinforce communications by placing additional announcements on local radio or other news sources or on the district’s television station.
❖ Consider the use of community bulletin boards such as those at neighborhood stores, in subdivisions, or apartment complexes.
❖ Physically survey your community to identify other communication options.
❖ Use the school website or the district’s Virtual Volunteer to advertise volunteer opportunities which may be of interest to multicultural parents, such as providing food for events or participating in cultural events.
❖ Try to make a computer available on campus for parents to check the school website for volunteer opportunities or to log their volunteer hours. If this is not possible, make sure to inform parents that they can use computers at all public libraries free of charge to access school information. Not having access to a computer at home may be viewed as an obstacle to involvement by parents because of the new method of logging volunteer hours. Make it as easy as possible for parents to perform these tasks.
❖ Organize staff or volunteers to distribute flyers for upcoming meetings or other useful information at the car drop-off line in the morning or afternoon. You may also offer a treat of some kind as well, such as a cup of coffee or cookie.
Communicate your volunteer needs through an organized effort to reach parents who are eating lunch with their children.

Produce a video in whatever language is appropriate for your campus which explains the role of volunteers, the different volunteer opportunities available to families and what those opportunities entail. Show it in the cafeteria during lunch, while parents are waiting to pick up their children and at all school programs and meetings.

Communication is a two-way street. You need to make sure that families know that it is okay to ask questions and tell them whom they should contact to get information on anything school-related. If you can provide that person who is knowledgeable and yet goes the extra mile to make them feel comfortable, it will go a long way toward building the trust that is necessary to build a strong and lasting relationship.

**FOSTER AN ATMOSPHERE OF CULTURAL INCLUSION**

- Consider “Cultural Nights” at school at which parents of various cultures can showcase their own talents and skills or speak of their own experiences, while educating students and parents in different customs and traditions.
- Create a “Diversity Week,” perhaps during January, and ask parents of different cultures to provide food from their country of origin for staff. Collect the recipes from these dishes and publish a cookbook that can be distributed within the school.
- Hold a “Heritage Day” at school where students dress in attire depicting their families’ countries of origin.
- Run an outdoor recreation day featuring a popular international sport or other activities which can be shared with the school community.
- Hold a “Music Under the Stars” informal outdoor gathering at the beginning of the school year that all parents and students can enjoy regardless of their native language. Include music from all cultures.
- Organize an “American Culture Night” to celebrate our own culture and use this opportunity to teach immigrant families more about some of our traditions they might not be familiar with.
- Don’t charge admission to multicultural events to encourage participation.
- Use surveys to gauge interest and support of various cultural events, but don’t be discouraged by low response rates. Many of the multicultural families are uneasy about committing their intentions on paper, but will want to be involved and will ultimately participate.
- Encourage the use of a school motto such as: “Celebrate and Enjoy Your Differences,” or use such a title for your cultural inclusion activities.
- Maintain boxes full of games, clothing and artifacts related to specific cultures that teachers can utilize in their classroom.
- Enlist the help of Hispanic or other ethnic businesses that could provide advertising of cultural events or become cultural mentors.
- Approach local multicultural business owners and ask them for ideas on the best way to reach out to the families who are their customers. Can they provide materials for a parent meeting or offer something at their business to encourage parental involvement (such as offering a discount on services if the customer provides proof of volunteering at the local school)?
- Find a successful benefactor of parent volunteerism from the various ethnic backgrounds who could address parents at Parent Night.
- Consider holding a separate Parent Night just for the predominant ethnic group on your campus with the intent of disseminating basic information relevant to their children, such as TAKS testing, volunteerism, absenteeism, sleep requirements of children, etc. Never assume that information is too elementary to convey. Have all printed materials translated into the appropriate language and have translators for all spoken information.
- Create a t-shirt or other products you can sell in your school store to celebrate diversity.
- Encourage your parents or parent organization to donate library books related to multiculturalism and diversity. Investigate the possibility of acquiring grant money to fund such an addition to the school.
- Create a bookmark honoring one particular country or culture to be given to students each month. The bookmark could include basic information about the country or culture, including interesting traditions, and common words and phrases in the native language of that culture that the children could learn. Some ideas for inclusion are numbers from one to ten, “please” and “thank you,” and words of greeting such as “hello” and “good bye.” You can decide which countries or cultures to highlight based on your school’s cultural
population and can even ask for assistance in preparation from parents of that culture as a way of making them feel more included and needed.

- Encourage children to acknowledge and celebrate their cultural heritage by doing any of the following.
  1. Give each child a laminated paper doll and ask them to outfit the doll in the traditional dress of their culture.
  2. Have each child draw the flag of their country of origin and create a chain of flags to decorate a hallway in the school.
  3. Post a world map on a central bulletin board with pins marking the many countries of origin of its students.

**ACTIONS TO PROMOTE ENGAGEMENT**

Our main goal must be to make it easier for multicultural families to become involved. You may want to try some of these ideas.

- Create a multicultural welcoming committee at school made up of parents, staff and community members. This is a great way to support parents who are new to the country.
- Hold newcomer orientations to provide basic district and school information to parents who may be unfamiliar with the structure and practices of our school district. At this time, emphasize the importance of active parenting and parental involvement. Provide information on “the typical school day” of their children to make them feel more comfortable.
- Make sure to link all efforts to engage families to improving student learning. All parents want what is best for their children.
- Arrange informal social events where parents and staff can become better acquainted and to make families feel welcome and comfortable inside the school.
- Ask school staff to talk to the students about how much they enjoy having the parents come into the school to help out and use the children to spread the message to the parents.
- Consider implementing a “three for me” program,” where students take home pledge cards for their parents to sign, promising to volunteer three hours per semester or per year at the school. Post the cards along a hallway in the school and prominently mark each card after each pledge is fulfilled. Post volunteer opportunities for the upcoming week or month that family members could do to fulfill their pledge either near the pledge cards or in the school newsletter. Having the children ask their parents to fulfill their pledge can be very effective.
- Post pictures of volunteers with their children on a bulletin board in the school. This can motivate children to encourage their families to volunteer.
- Communicate that it doesn’t have to be only a mother or father who attends activities but that anyone involved in rearing the child is welcome to participate.
- Approach families in a way that makes it clear that you want to get to know that community. Don’t say “we have something great to offer you,” but instead ask “How would you advise us so that we can communicate effectively and work collaboratively?” Such outreach can not only result in increased participation, but also in leadership by these parents.
- Don’t say “We want you to help us.” Instead say “We want to help you.”
- Offer childcare for parents during meetings and work sessions.
- You might consider setting up a babysitting co-op type of arrangement where volunteers take turns watching other volunteers’ children while they are doing volunteer work. Child care time still counts as volunteer hours given to your school.
- Hold meetings or work sessions at locations which are more convenient for your school population, such as apartment meeting rooms or local churches.
- Volunteers could organize carpools or offer transportation to your campus.
- Consider contacting the school district’s transportation department to see if Title One money could be used to pay for school vans to regularly pick up families to bring them to the school to volunteer. If so, widely publicize your transportation schedule.
- If parents live close to the school, try to organize a walking club for parents. They can walk to the school together, spend a few hours working at the school and then walk home together.
- Ask local churches if they might be able to provide transportation to the school for families.
Once you have any kind of a transportation system in place for volunteers, produce a video that you can show at meetings where families are in attendance. Show a family leaving home, arriving at the school and doing their volunteer work and then going back home. “Seeing is believing” when it comes to showing family members how easy and fun the work can be.

- Consider incentives for students to encourage their parents to become involved in their school.
- Ask your school administration if you can give out “no homework” passes to children whose parents attend PTO activities. Coordinate the use of these passes with all teachers in the school and if they are in attendance at these meetings or activities, ask them to greet the families and thank them for coming.
- Pay close attention at activities where families are in attendance. Initiate personal contact at these meetings and if there are members of different families who seem to know each other, approach them as a group and invite them to the school to work on one specific small project. They may be more inclined to say yes if they are coming with someone they know well. If they do agree to come, make that first volunteer task one that will play to their strengths and make sure that their first volunteer experience is a good one.
- Provide translators (school employees or volunteers) for all meetings, orientations and work sessions.
- At your first PTO meeting, explain the basics, including what a parent organization is. Many countries don’t have them.

- Give prizes at every gathering (games, books or writing and art material for children or gift certificates from local businesses such as restaurants which can be donated to the school).
- Post pictures of volunteers with their children on a central bulletin board to motivate children to encourage their parents’ involvement.
- Recruitment tools such as application forms or interviews are significant barriers to multicultural volunteers, but can often be accepted if they are helped to understand the need for them and when they feel a level of trust and involvement in the school.
- See if there are ways that you can assist in improvement of the parent-teacher conference process to give parents with limited English proficiency a better understanding of their children’s curriculum, performance measurement criteria, classroom activities and customs in general.
- Help to organize an event to be held during the summer with presentations covering topics as varied as school policy, curriculum, holiday celebrations, code of conduct, tardiness and attendance policies and even bus procedures. The goal of the evening should be to help parents feel connected, comfortable and confident with the education their children are receiving. You can publicize the event by mailing translated flyers and then ask interpreters to follow up with phone calls urging participation. You should provide child care and can ask parents to prepare a dish to share.
- Create take home learning kits of basic supplies so that families are not limited in helping students by their lack of materials.
- Identify areas where multicultural parents can be utilized to enhance all areas of instruction and encourage parents to become involved.
- Stress to parents that they can be motivated by a desire to help others, socialize, share the skills they have, feel useful, contribute to and be a part of mainstream society.

**FAMILY OUTREACH STRATEGIES**

The traditional approach to family involvement in schools operated under the assumption that parents knew that they played a key role in their children’s education and that they were welcome and needed in the schools. This approach sometimes does not work well with multicultural families who may be unfamiliar with this concept. Schools need to reach out to parents and invite them into the schools to help them understand that they must participate in collaborative efforts to promote student success. Here are some ways for schools to reach out to families.

- You may need to reach out to multicultural families by visiting them in the community. School staff or volunteers can attend cultural celebrations or other gatherings such as church services.
- Parent liaisons that have been trained in recruitment strategies can have great success when making personal home visits.
- Conduct meet-and-greet walks in the students’ neighborhoods to reach out to these parents.
- Try to identify families who may need particular help assimilating into our educational culture. Utilize school staff or trained volunteers to walk these families through the process of school registration, meet-the-teacher nights and all ongoing school activities. It is very easy for these new families to become overwhelmed and they won’t feel comfortable getting information at large parent meetings. Give them
basic information in small but detailed chunks. Shorter sessions held more often can be effective. When
given too much information at once, they can just give up. Approaching these families in this way can
build trust and ensure a good working relationship between the family and the school and make them more
likely to become and stay involved.

- At a special multicultural parent orientation, you can give parents a chance to learn behaviors that are
  uniquely American – like the need for students to maintain eye contact with teachers and to participate
  frequently in classroom discussion. In other cultures, students are told to look down and away from elders
  and teachers and not to question authority, unlike in the United States. In addition, parents are discouraged
  from getting involved with their children’s homework and meetings of parent groups are unheard of. You
  can also hold mock parent-teacher conferences to explain teacher expectations and effective
  communication techniques.

- Identifying issues that are important to non-English speakers can help draw them to meetings. To find out
  what those issues are and establish personal connections, try reaching out to parents when they are
  dropping off or picking up their children or when they are having lunch with their children. Recruit
  bilingual staff or volunteers to talk to volunteers and ask what they are concerned about. You can then
  tailor meetings to meet the needs of these families and if you can provide information that is relevant, then
  the school is seen as the primary source of information. Then, at the next meeting, there is more rapport
  and connection to that community.

- Offer classes to parents on strategies to improve home reading or other homework activities at a local
  community center, library or church or anywhere they may feel more comfortable.

- Hold special meetings on parenting skills at a local community center, library or church.

- Accept that recruiting multicultural volunteers can be hard work which must be ongoing.

- Multicultural families can prefer to volunteer for culturally specific activities focused on preserving
  elements of their culture such as dancing, food or other traditions because they think it is important to
  preserve it to pass it on to future generations. Create opportunities for these families to participate in
  cultural activities on your campus to get them used to being involved in their children’s education and
  school.

**AVOID RELIANCE ON A SELECT GROUP OF VOLUNTEERS**

Sometimes when one parent or a small group of parents are given too much authority or responsibility, other parents
are shut out. Strategies to promote a wide spectrum of involvement might include the following.

- Ask volunteers to bring a friend, additional family member or neighbor.
- At all meetings or school activities, make sure that you mingle with everyone and make them feel welcome.
  If you can, recruit bilingual parents to assist with this so that people can be approached in their own
  languages. If parents are obviously uncomfortable speaking English, approach them in private so that they
don’t feel put on the spot.
- Use the parent buddy system to pair new volunteers with parents who are experienced with working within
  the confines of school policies and procedures and make sure the experienced volunteers are onboard with
  your new recruiting strategy. If possible, try to pair volunteers of the same culture to work together to
  make the newcomer feel more welcome and assure them that there are “people like them” involved at the
  school.
- Consider utilizing grade-level representatives to coordinate parent participation at each level. This can
  ensure good one-to-one communication which can be much more effective than a blanket request for
  volunteer help given at a general meeting. Those who might not speak up due to language or cultural
  barriers may feel more comfortable speaking to or asking questions of a specific representative.
- Involve students in presentations at community organizations that also support the school to raise
  awareness and support of special programs and make contact and recruit new resources, partners and
  participants at these meetings.
- Contact neighborhood churches or local businesses to recruit multicultural global volunteers.
- Recruit volunteers at all campus meetings. Set up a booth on campus during ESL classes or bilingual
  parent gatherings to recruit volunteers and reinforce the importance of parental involvement.
To make all volunteers feel welcome, it is important to avoid the appearance of “cliques” forming within cultural groups of volunteers. Groups of experienced volunteers may not always make newcomers feel welcome and it is imperative that you address this issue as early, clearly and sensitively as possible. You may want to stress to volunteers the importance of broadening the volunteer base to act as cultural role models for all children. If no “buddy” program is in place, you may want to assign smaller, specific tasks to pairs or small groups which include experienced volunteers and newcomers so that they get a chance to know each other before being involved in a larger group project. A new volunteer walking in to work with a large group of experienced volunteers can feel very isolated.

**THE IMPORTANCE OF FOLLOW-UP**

Recruitment and retention of these “harder-to-reach” volunteers can be hard work, but follow-up with these families is critical. It is important to remember that once first contact is made, school staff or a volunteer coordinator need to continue to contact parents on a regular basis. Strategies to promote a continuous cycle of interaction might include the following.

- Let families know that communication and interaction is not a one-time action, but that they can expect to receive periodic communication about school activities or needs.
- Provide a calendar of events to families so that they are always aware of what is happening at the school.
- If possible, give families a timeline of when to expect periodic documents, information or activities.
- Where feasible, repeat key actions on a weekly or monthly basis. For example, if parents know to expect communications every Monday, they will look for this information.
- If you update your school calendar online once a month, make sure families know when to check for new information. If new volunteer opportunities are posted weekly, let families know when regular postings are made.
- Create a “Multicultural Corner” in your school newsletter which is dedicated to providing information to multicultural parents. If it is done on a regular basis, families will begin to look forward to it and see it as a continuous effort to reach out to them rather than just as a one-time message.

**THE CARE AND FOSTERING OF VOLUNTEERS**

All school volunteers want to feel appreciated for the work that they do. It is particularly important to make an extra effort to retain and recognize multicultural volunteers. Many parents will take tentative first steps toward becoming more involved and their acquaintances and friends might take a cautious “wait and see” approach before getting involved themselves. There are three things that are essential to the retention of volunteers.

1. You must make certain that multicultural volunteers feel that they belong. Friendly, open camaraderie is an important element of a happy volunteer work force. Parents must feel that they are a part of the campus team. Encourage staff and other volunteers to make newcomers feel welcome.
2. New volunteers must feel needed. Few parents can resist the idea that their work is necessary to providing a better education for their own children or that they are making a positive impact on the lives of other children.
3. Parents have to know their efforts are appreciated. A sincere smile or heartfelt “thank you” can make all the difference in the world for any volunteer.

You may want to spotlight the work of a multicultural volunteer with a special recognition at an appropriate time to encourage more families to become involved.

If you list the names of new volunteers in your newsletter, it will not only show appreciation, but may inspire other parents to volunteer.
ENCOURAGING PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT IN THE HOME

Even if multicultural families are not comfortable at first becoming school volunteers, they should still be educated on the important role they play in their children’s education. It is important for schools to inform families what it means to be an active parent. Schools also need to share with parents the district’s goals in that regard and its ideas of the role that active parenting takes in helping students reach their academic potential. Parents ultimately may not understand the significance of volunteering unless they realize the importance of parent involvement.

Schools should be considering implementation of some or all of the following.

- Encourage the development of the total child. The developmental readiness of children to participate as active learners is important to student success. Schools need to educate families on the importance of enough sleep, appropriate diet, health and mental status to the academic development of children.
- Practice trust- and relationship-building strategies with families and recognize that it takes time, particularly with multicultural families.
- Help families learn strategies to support students’ academic needs. Multicultural families may have limited experience or skill for tasks they are asked to perform when working with their children. School staff needs to work with families to help them learn strategies that support classroom instruction and reinforce classroom learning. You may consider providing materials to make this job easier.
- Educate families from all cultural backgrounds, education and income levels that they need to encourage their children, talk with them about school, help them plan for higher education and keep them focused on learning and homework. Remember that all families can have a positive influence on their children’s learning.
- Foster the idea of educational expectations. It is critical that families know to place a high value on education and overcome the tendency of an almost total absence of educational goals in children’s long-term plans.
- Develop family learning activities (including multilingual activities) to send home to involve the family.
- Implement a bilingual hotline number where parents can get information on how to help their children at home.

REFERENCES


