

English Language Learner Task Force
Parent Engagement Subcommittee

Summary of Work, 2015-2016 School Year

2015-2016 Goals:

- Develop knowledge-based recommendations of practices
- Document the issues facing parent of ELL in BPS
- Develop strategies to engage families through the process of schooling but most urgently before and during enrollment period, translation and interpreter services and an explanation of the implications of “opting out” on the education of the student
- Monitor the availability of translated materials and phone supports and the presence of translated materials and staffing in Welcome Centers

2015-2016 Activities:

1. **Monthly meetings:** The subcommittee held monthly subcommittee meetings with wide spectrum of key actors and stakeholders including district staff, parents, organizers, and community members.
2. **Established subcommittee goals and priorities:** Reviewed ELL Task Force priorities and goals and established Parent Engagement Subcommittee goals for the school year and moving forward.
3. **Documented state of ELL parent engagement:** Focused on documenting issues facing ELL parents and parent engagement through presentations from key district staff and through multiple site visits.
4. **Presentations to subcommittee:** The subcommittee scheduled presentations from BPS offices working directly with parent engagement.
 - a. Presentations from Monica Roberts (Office of Engagement), Sonia Gomez-Banrey (Countdown to Kindergarten), and Kevin Montoya (Office of English Language Learners) on the “bright spots and concerns” with regards to parent engagement.
 - b. Bright spots identified through presentations and discussions:
 - Parent U
 - ESOL classes
 - School-based initiatives - Academic Parent-Teacher Teams and Family and Student Engagement Facilitators
 - Partnerships with OELL, Black Ministerial Alliance of Greater Boston (BMA), Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative (DSNI), and Families First
 - Countdown to Kindergarten
 - District English Language Learner Advisory Committee (DELLAC)

- c. Concerns identified through presentations:
 - Lack of buy-in and involvement of principals
 - Lack of school ownership of engagement of all families
 - Lack of parent engagement in district middle schools and high schools
 - Varying degrees of engagement of ELL parents in schools that have good overall parents engagement
 - Language as the big barrier that inhibits ELL parents to be engaged.
 - No clear definition of what ELL parent engagement means or should look like among all parties.
 - Lack of language capacity to communicate with parents
 - With the exception of Countdown to Kindergarten, lack of outreach and engagement of parents of young kids that are about to go to school.
5. **Site Visits:** To better understand the state of parent engagement in the district, the subcommittee made several site visits and held focus groups with parents at the schools.
- a. Identified schools and ELL programs for potential site visits
 - b. Subcommittee crafted questions for site visits and focus groups with parents
 - c. Met with principal and parents at the Umana, Mildred, and Orchard Gardens (*with scheduled upcoming visits to JQS Upper and the Newcomers Academy/the Boston International Academy*).
 - d. Concerns and issues identified through site visits:
 - Focus on instruction: With the current focus on instruction, which is important, there is a concern that the whole child is being overlooked, as is parent engagement which is crucial to student success not receiving the necessary focus and not being adequately resourced?
 - Parent programs and strands being eliminated, moved, or reduced: During the visits the parents expressed concerns regarding ELL strands being eliminated, moved or reduced when there is clearly a history of need. We have not had a chance to talk to Dr. Esparza yet to understand where the current ELL programs offerings are and why some strands are being eliminated, moved, or reduced where there has been a history of demand. Not sure if the welcoming centers have access to this information to properly inform ELL families seeking advice.
 - Families cannot access ELL programs of their choice closest to them as a result of school assignment. At the same time, ELL seats are being reduced at schools with long wait lists.
 - School choice for ELL families? What does school choice really mean for ELL parents who are not familiar with what programs are available or how to compare and pick schools, what criteria to use, what to look for and how to evaluate programs and schools.
 - Concern about whether there is a clear strategy for effective multimedia, multilingual outreach to parents around registration and other important issues,
 - Principals also expressed concern that the actual number of students often exceed the actual number enrolled and schools are not being reimbursed for

the extra students, impacting the school's capacity to adequately meet student needs.

- Principal commitment is key to successful family engagement. We have found various degrees of principal's commitment, knowledge/information, or resources to ensure vibrant parent engagement.
- Lack of clear cultural and language competency standards for all schools – Who is holding schools and principals accountable for cultural competency to ensure that ELL children and parents are feel welcome, learning is culturally relevant and parents are engaged? Even at schools where the ELL population is in the majority, English is still the main language of communication, thereby marginalizing the majority population.
- Effects of budget cuts: schools spoke about essential staff and programs that have been cut as a result of budget cuts.
- Concerns about how teachers have been trained to teach ELL students (specifically teachers that work with parents and parents need to be engaged with).

6. Developed Partial and Draft Recommendations:

- Develop a common understanding of what ELL parent engagement means or should look like.
- DELLAC should contact, learn about, and include members of the multilingual PAC, which used to be in operation.
- Ensure that the current focus on instruction does not obscure the important role that parent engagement places in fostering student success.
- Translation and interpretation is absolutely necessary at both the district and school level to ensure optimal parent participation
- Since it is clear that principal commitment and leadership is key to parental participation, professional development for principals, teachers and staff is essential. Perhaps an event to showcase and share best practices would also help.
- Provide teacher certification in family/parental participation (including training in cultural awareness) as a part of the upcoming teacher contract. Certification requirements would have to be determined and evaluations put in place.
- Provide more resources, including space and programming that parents may need in schools to encourage parent involvement e.g. ESOL classes, parent classes and other parenting programs
- Build collaborative relationships and programs with community organizations that parents are already connected to
- Develop a comprehensive and effective strategy to reach and educate ELL families on the enrollment process, available programs and schools and how to choose schools that best meet their children's needs.
- Ensure that schools are reimbursed for all students (not under our preview but this is an issue we heard)

7. Working Plan and Timeline:

- a. The Parent Engagement Subcommittee has scheduled more school site visits in April and May.
- b. The subcommittee will present some recommendations to the ELL Task Force in April and to BPS by June for presentation at the Fall 2016 Principal Leadership Institute.
- c. Other long-term objectives are to make recommendations to district officials by October for input in the FY2017-18 Budget Process.