

Position Statement on Family Involvement in the Education of English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) Students

As parents and families are children's first teachers, schools must have the tools and the personnel to maintain open lines of communication with students' family members. Unfortunately for the families of English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) students, schools can be intimidating and unwelcoming places. New to the U.S. system of education, complicated consent and other bureaucratic procedures can have a chilling effect on parents' perception of school. These feelings affect their attitudes about participation. Even for the families of students who are natural-born citizens, a language barrier can prove to be a major deterrent to becoming involved in the education of their children. Thus, it is incumbent upon schools to create a welcoming environment for the parents and families of ESOL students and also to communicate with them in a meaningful way about academic programs, services, and their children's progress.

Recommendations

Schools should serve as education centers for the entire community. Parents of ESOL students also need educational services, such as English as a second language (ESL) classes, literacy programs, introductions to the U.S. educational system, and civics education. By providing these types of services, schools can further engage ESOL families in the learning enterprise and increase their involvement in the education of their children.

Programs that involve ESOL families should incorporate the following:

- **A thorough intake process with resources for implementing support services**

Schools should have a comprehensive intake process for ESOL students and their families. This process should include developmentally appropriate assessments of the student's linguistic and academic skills in English and their home language, as applicable. In addition, the intake process should include information on the family's educational history, and an orientation to the school system, its programs, and services. This process should be delivered by trained staff in the language of the families.

- **A fully implemented communication system across cultures**

Schools should have a comprehensive system for communicating with parents and families. In working with ESOL families, the system should include

- Translation and interpretation services
- Specialized bilingual staff that serve as family-school liaisons
- Biliterate sources and resources, including access to technology

Family Involvement in the Education of ESOL Students (continued)

- Family members from the community as resources to the schools
 - Two-way communication: Teachers and other school staff come to understand the community through home visits and by interacting with ESOL families. ESOL families come to understand the U.S. education system through active participation in programs at school and in the community.
 - Sustained professional development on cross-cultural communication for school staff and ESOL families.
- **Family literacy models that are responsive to and respectful of the community, languages, and cultures of the ESOL families**

Family literacy programs should provide a foundation at home that supports academic success at school. Successful programs should also be tailored to the communities they serve, by drawing on the experience and knowledge of adults and elders of the community. This knowledge and experience should be incorporated into the fabric of the programs and curricula so that they are respectful of cultural values.

- **Homework assistance for ESOL students**

Homework is essential for practicing and applying the skills taught in the classroom. Unfortunately, many parents and other family members, especially those who speak a language other than English, feel ill-equipped to assist their children with homework. Successful family involvement programs should address this critical need.

- **Broad community involvement through community-based organizations and the private sector**

Schools are part of a larger community. Effective programs that involve families should leverage the resources of the entire community, including businesses, community-based organizations, libraries, and other institutions.

- **Wrap-around service, such as before and after school activities, that reach out to ESOL students and support their families**

Schools should make an extra effort to involve ESOL students in extra curricular activities that enrich their learning experience and provide opportunities to interact informally with native language speakers. This service enables valuable learning opportunities and social interactions that ESOL families may not otherwise be able to provide.

*Approved by the TESOL Board of Directors
June 2000*