

PDAC Meeting
How can we welcome families of diverse languages?
January 20, 2015
Minutes

Mission of PDAC

Focused on student achievement, the mission of the Parent Diversity Advisory Council is to positively impact the academic achievement of a diverse student population through school-specific outreach efforts and initiatives that focus on and directly address disparate academic performance.

Welcome

Saily Joshi and Sindy Mondesir welcomed the group to the meeting. Brief history into their experience as language/culture learners. "Language is the essence of who we are" was a repeated message throughout.

PDAC role – We hope all our parents feel that their children feel welcomed. Guiding questions for tonight's discussion among panelists and in break-out session:

- *How can we welcome families of diverse languages?*
- *What have been your specific challenges regarding communication of feeling welcomed in schools?*

District Facts

Almost 1900 students are eligible for ELL Services. Over 72 different languages among ELL population. 134 students with learning loss – 3 full time itinerant staff.

Guest Panel

David Nieto, Yesenia Sanchez, Rafael Segarra

RS – It is important to break the fear of our immigrant parents. It is important to put faculty in front of staff that reflect our student population. It is important for our schools to incorporate the cultures and languages into our school events. Although there are 72 languages spoken in our ELL program, there are actually 95 different languages being spoken in the district. Sometimes it is important to meet our parents as close to their home as possible. District #204 provides ESL classes to the parents free-of-charge, as well as childcare for school-aged children.

YS – We cannot separate language and culture. It is important for bi-lingual parents to recognize themselves and their culture in the school. It is important to empower parents.

DN - It is important that our bi-lingual parents have voice and independence. Administrators and bi-lingual parents mostly agree about our goals. It is important that our bilingual parents feel safe and feel welcomed and able to participate.

Questions/Comments -

1. Will the district engage in an immersion program?
The district is looking at the financial situation of the state of Illinois. If a program is to be developed, it must be sustained.
2. It is important for our teachers to make and retain connections with our bilingual parents. We are on the same side.
3. How does the district train the rest of the staff and children?
Staff does receive training throughout the year. The English Language Common Core standards include cultural competency skills. All new teachers receive initial training in culturally relevant instruction. It is expected to expand to all teachers and administration.
4. Is there a special parent group for bilingual parents?
There is an advisory group, the Bilingual Parent Advisory Council (BPAC) that meets several times per year. It is important for our PTA's to offer expanded opportunities to include our parents.

Suggestions from Small Group Discussions

Several suggestions were offered during discussion. They included:

- Hiring a staff that represents the school population
- Seeking translators in the school
- Making a phone call that welcomes parents
- Flags that represent the student population (Scullen)
- Creative thinking with the PTSA
- Perhaps there needs to be more visuals when communicating to our parents
- Veteran parents to reach out to new parents – mentor/mentee programs (Brookdale)
- Should we utilize our big events at school to communicate to parents
- Correctly pronouncing names is important
- We need to help our parents understand school lingo
- District #214 has a welcome center
- Welcome letter (May Watts)
- Important for schools to own events
- Expand our libraries
- It is important for students to understand food differences
- Understand that everyone does not have access to email when we communicate
- Professional training for front office staff – frontline of greeting families that can set the tone for the year(s)

- PTA meetings should be flexible with meeting times
- It is important to have a common understanding of our sameness in order to understand our differences
- ELL support groups to help our bilingual parents understand our educational customs
- Library books and other resources reflected different languages