

FOURTH ANNUAL

 Ohio Family Engagement
— LEADERSHIP SUMMIT —

Setting the Table Together:

JOY and
POWER in
PARTNERSHIPS

SEPTEMBER 22,
2023

Hosted by the Ohio Statewide
Family Engagement Center



THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY

CENTER ON EDUCATION AND
TRAINING FOR EMPLOYMENT

Beyond

COMPLIANCE



Meaningful Relationships with EL/Immigrant Families in
the Special Education Process

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Ohio Family Engagement Leadership Summit

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**How do you engage with families
in your current work/position?**

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What are some obstacles in the engagement process you have identified?



My Personal and Professional Journey

Everyone's story MATTERS

Bulgarian

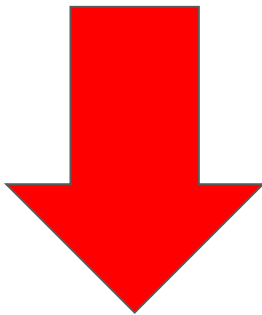
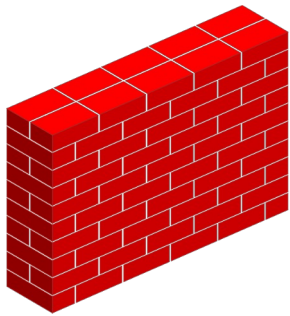
Immigrant

English Learner

Parent



- EL School Psychologist
- Education Consultant
- University Adjunct TESOL Faculty
- District EL Program Administrator
- Researcher



Advocate for inclusive, equitable and accessible education for ELs



What is should be but is not...

Family and Community Engagement: Family Engagement is a process and a practice rooted in **relational-trust** which creates opportunities for **equitable partnerships** between families and school and district staff. These partnerships, from birth to graduation, nurture **shared responsibility** for students' academic and social success and **honor the lived experiences, expertise, and cultural knowledge** of all stakeholders--students, teachers, staff, families, and communities.

- Lead with listening
- Autentic communication
- Communicate with humility and curiosity
- **Everyone is a teacher and everyone is a learner, co-create expectations and experiences**

Minnesota Department of Education - MTSS



What we Know About the SPED System and Process



- In the U.S. SPED is a **unique, evolved and integrated** system of supports for SWD
- **Conceptually** complex, highly-structured, compliance and paperwork-driven process
- **Social constructions** (e.g., educational disabilities) developed by the **dominant culture**
- **Disproportionate** representation, often due to **instructional and assessment issues**
- **Lack of representation** of EL/immigrant teaching and related services staff
- A **big decision** with significant consequences and **questionable outcomes**
- Legal mandates require **active involvement** of families in a **collaborative** process
- Many parents **DO NOT truly understand** the process, outcomes, and their role

There are a lot of areas in need of improvement, including collaboration with families

Immigrant families are typically far from the epicenter of power and control in the general education system AND the SPED process



Why Focus on Families?

They know what educators do not know

They add validity and certainty to the team's decisions

Have a lot of **knowledge and experiences** that educators do not have and often do not even recognize exist

Know their **child the best**, have valuable information about general and educational background

Develop **agency** in the educational process/system with the help of interpreters and cultural brokers

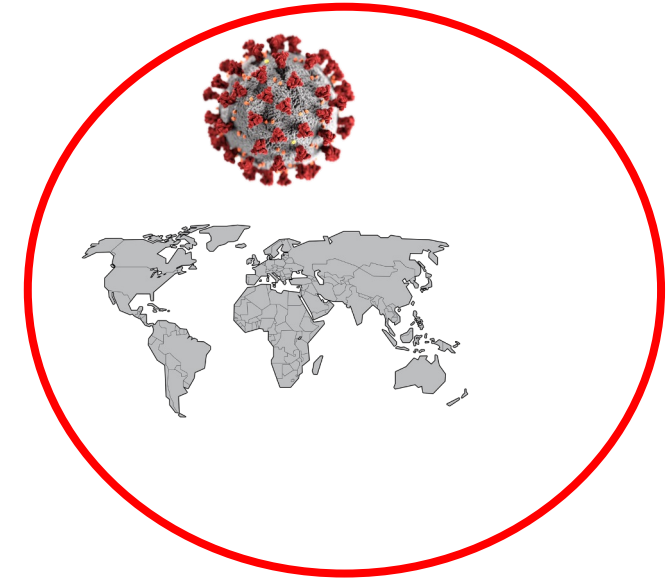
Bring **diverse perspectives** of their child's strengths and challenges

Highly value education and are most invested in their children's social and academic outcomes





Research Project (2020-2021)



Experiences of Immigrant Families in the Special Education Process

Objectives

- to determine the parents' understanding of the key concepts, activities, and implications of the process
- to identify specific challenges parents faced in their experiences and ideas how to improve their experiences

Setting

- large suburban district with a one-third of the population coming from other countries
- 70 different home countries and 75 different languages

Participants

- 12 immigrant families, 9 countries, 7 languages
- **Middle class, college educated professional families**



Family Interviews - Key Takeaways



No assumptions and/or generalizations should be made, each family has a unique set of experiences, knowledge, background, and needs

Limited acculturation leads to limited understanding, regardless of educational level and language proficiency

Absence of language barrier does not equal understanding the process and roles

The short and long-term outcomes are often controlled by access to social knowledge and resources and immigrant families do not have access to social and cultural capital

The process is overwhelming, confusing and frustrating for the families and educators are the primary source of support

Parents state the process “does not feel right” but have hard time identifying the specific problems They recognize the lack of “power”

- Families have a strong desire to share and participate in a meaningful way
- Their input needs to be actively pursued and integrated in the process
- Additional considerations and supports need to be in place to develop authentic partnerships
- Legal requirements are the minimum

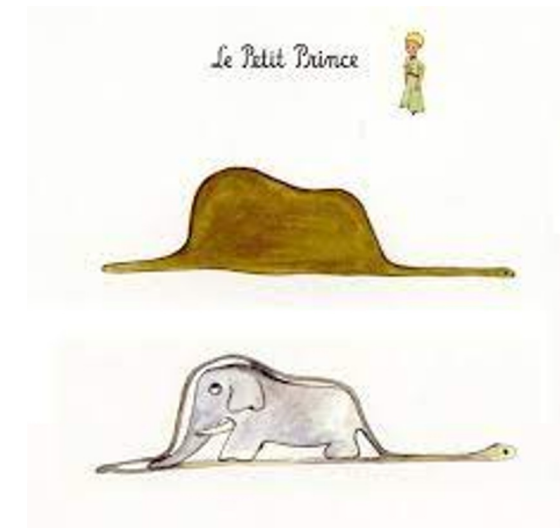
Visible and Invisible Barriers

- **Visible**

- **Communication**
- Legal compliance and **paperwork-driven** process
- **Inter-agency** collaboration

- **Invisible**

- **Lack of familiarity** with the general education school system
- Understanding the Special Education **system AND process**
- Understanding the **role of the parents** in the educational experience
- **Discomfort** in interacting with school personnel
- Trust in educators' work and decisions/viewing **educators as experts**
- **Lack of respect** for the parent and negativity towards the child
- **Cultural clash** and challenges to navigate the conceptual differences (terms)
- Transportation, work schedules, child care, immigration status concerns



What Educators can do for ALL?



Systemic Factors

- Be mindful of instruction, interventions and assessment limitations
- Remember that schools are shaped by the views and experiences of the dominant culture
- Recognize the many barriers that exist for diverse marginalized groups
- Abandon a deficit perspective and adopt a strength perspective
- Utilize existing structures and processes to maximize parent involvement and contributions

Meaningful Partnerships

- Create welcoming and inclusive culture (sense of belonging)
- Provide language and logistical supports (transportation, time)
- Engaging in a meaningful dialog in “low pressure” situations when decisions are not made
- Engage in reciprocal learning
- Value and integrate the contributions of families
- Educate families on how general AND special education systems work in U.S.
- Continuously ask for meaningful feedback and input

Targeted Support in the SPED Process

Additional Resources

- Cultural brokers
- Family advocates, possibly with similar cultural background
- Individual mentoring
- Support groups for families
- Collaboration with other agencies
- Emotional support
- Additional meetings
- Share tools and guiding questions

Example: [worksheet](#)

Awareness and Communication about

- Limitations of instruction and assessments for ELs
- **Overpromising**
- Be open and honest about the decisions
- Explicit review of key terms & expectations
 - Disability
 - Special Education
 - Parental roles and rights
 - Impact on general education
 - Outcomes

Checks for Understanding

- Do not just ask if there are any questions
- **Use open-ended questions**
 - Can you tell me in your words what the team just decided?
 - What do think these decisions mean for your child?
 - What do you think will happen next?
 - What questions or concerns specific to these decisions do you have?

Remember: Each family is different! One size does not fit all!

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What are some new strategies you will use in the future?

Tear Down the Wall and Other Barriers



- **Families are our PARTNERS**
- **We have access to unutilized potential**
- **There are many opportunities for authentic partnerships and shared ownership of the process and outcomes**
- **It is up to us to create more socially valid process and outcomes as we build on what we are already doing**



THANK YOU FOR WATCHING!

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Ohio Statewide
**Family
Engagement
Center**

—at The Ohio State University—



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