

September 27, 2004

EMBRACING DIVERSITY

DEBRIEF - A summary of input shared by parents of our cultural communities for parent groups, site councils and principals to use in developing strategies to help strengthen parent-school connections for *ALL* Saint Paul parents.



October 2004
www.stpaulneat.org

Part 1. Event Description

Background

Monday, September 27, 2004 NEAT hosted a *LISTENING* session on *EMBRACING DIVERSITY*. Eleven community-based organizations and 5 district departments cosponsored the event in a collaborative effort to engage parents from our cultural communities in a genuine conversation about the barriers, challenges and frustrations they experience in connecting with our schools.

Demographics

Fifty-eight people signed in at the event. Of these, 26% or roughly a quarter were staff (cosponsors or district). Sixty-two percent were parents; and 12% were community members. The ethnicity of 5 attendees (9%) is unknown; of the remaining attendees, 59% were of cultural communities; 42% Caucasian.¹

Framework

Ten representatives from seven of the cosponsoring entities met prior to the event to ask the question, “How do we pull off a genuine listening session when we could have parents speaking 97 different languages or dialects?” This group decided to structure the input portion of the event as informal conversation groups. It was decided groups should be bilingual to be inclusive (not separated by language groups), and to offer separate groups for African American and Native American parents to address concerns raised by these communities about becoming subordinate to immigrant communities.

- The room was set up with 9 conversation circles, 12 chairs each
- A microphone and podium were stage front for the opening and keynote address; the microphone was brought down to the main floor for the last portion of the evening
- Upon arrival each attendee was provided a copy of the three discussion questions in four languages (English, Spanish, Somali and Hmong)
- Bilingual facilitators were recruited to assist with Hmong, Spanish, Somalian and Cambodian groups
- Each circle had a facilitator with two clipboards, pens and discussion sheets; facilitators were asked to provide the second set to a volunteer recorder
- Some groups had both facilitators and interpreters to assist with multiple languages
- Five groups formed: African American, Native American, Somali-English, Hmong-English, and Cambodian-English.

Format

The program began with a brief welcome by NEAT followed by a short keynote address provided by Elsa Vega-Perez of the Bremer Foundation describing the importance of schools being inclusive and welcoming all parents in the school community. Elsa was asked to deliver her remarks in Spanish first, then English to give Caucasian parents the experience of attending an event where they didn't readily understand the information being presented. The conversation groups then had 35 minutes to talk about the three questions. The last 25 minutes were used to share the learning from each group. This was accomplished by inviting a volunteer (often the facilitator) forward to use the central microphone. Some interaction between participants resulted from the sharing, followed by informal networking after the close of the event.

¹ Appendix B provides further demographic detail.

Central Questions

The core purpose of the event was to identify the barriers to strengthening parent-school connections experienced by the parents from our cultural communities for two purposes: (1) to take back to the schools vis a vis the parent groups, site councils and principals for local action; (2) to help these action groups understand the needs and concerns of parents they may not often hear from; and (3) to give them a better understanding of the reasons why they have such a tough time recruiting diversity. After much discussion, the essential questions were distilled down to:

- 1) What brings you to your children's school(s)?
¿Qué hace que usted venga y/o asista a la escuela de sus hijos?
Maxaa kugu kugu kalifa inaad tagto dugsiga caruurtaada?
Dab tsi koj kojmenyuam tsev kawm ntawv?
- 2) What keeps you from being as involved in your children's school(s) as you'd like to be?
¿Por qué usted no se involucra tanto en la escuela de sus hijos, como a usted le gustaría?
Maxaa kuugu wacan inaad uga qayb qaadan sidaad jeclaan lahayd inaad uga qayb qaadato ariamha dugsiga caruurtaadu dhigato ka dhacaya?
Dab uas rau koj txaus koj me nyuam tsev kawm ntawv?
- 3) What could your school or school parent group do to help?
¿Qué podría hacer la escuela, o el grupo de padres de la escuela de sus hijos para ayudarla(o)?
Maxuu dugsigaagu ama kooxda waalidiinta dugsigaagu qaban karaan si ay arintaan kaaga caawiyaan?
Dab uas tsev kawm ntawv los yog niam txiv covtab pawg uas tau tab koj?

Part 2. Parent Input

Attachment A recaps parent input directly from recorder notes (largely unedited).

What Works (What brings parents to school)

- School-sponsored evening events that excite/engage students were cited most often as the reason for going to school. Examples include performances, sports, carnivals
- Parent-teacher conferences, disciplinary actions
- Multiple communication strategies (Internet, telephone, mail - talk to the teachers, email them, teachers email); varies by cultural group

What Doesn't Work (Barriers)

- Transportation
- Childcare
- Lack of Diverse Staff
- Hectic Schedules
- Language Barriers – especially in promoting school events and parent-teacher communications
- Cultural Differences
 - Cultural Norms - expectations around parent-school-staff roles and responsibilities
 - Communication Styles – interfering with understanding, respect
 - Institutional Racism – how parents and students treated by staff; lack of diverse teaching staff

“My Native American children are invisible at school.”

- Tensions among different cultural groups (African Americans, Native Americans feeling pushed aside; conflicts among immigrant parents reflecting conflicts in home countries)
- Frustration – slow change; district not moving quickly enough to diversify staff, provide cultural sensitivity training; inclusive curriculum
- Lack of Follow Through – issues not addressed by principals; parents treated dismissively

Parent groups and site councils are caught in a Catch 22. Meetings are intimidating because they're not diverse; repeated efforts to recruit diversity have failed. Suggests groups need to reframe the way they do outreach and conduct business to be more inclusive.

What Could be Done Differently (Strategies for Actions)

Suggestions offered by parents include:

- Cultural awareness training and ongoing mentoring by multicultural mentors for teachers, staff, teachers aids (training to address both cultural norms and communication styles)
- Accountability for inclusion in curriculum realignment
- Accountability for recruiting diverse staff to reflect the student population
- More systematic implementation of multiple communication strategies in multiple languages

“We use our children to try to communicate with their teachers and other school staff because we do not speak English.”

- More systematic processes for identifying parents that need interpreters at parent-teacher conferences and providing them

“When I come to conferences and there is no translator, I just ask for papers and leave.”

- Parent education on roles and responsibilities to include how to support learning at home, how parents connect with teachers and schools, discipline policies and truancy laws, and how to advocate for their children when they think something's wrong

“It looks like the school does not care about the Hmong kids. I tried to talk to them about my child's performance at the school, but they avoid the subject.”

- Increased collaboration with local community agencies, business and media
- Schools as community-building buildings (open in the evenings for community education, ESL classes, computer training, family events, open to community-based organizations)

Essential Effort

At the core we heard that the parents of our cultural communities want what every parent wants, what's best for their children. They want to know they're sending their children to safe environments where they can learn about themselves and others. They want their children to see themselves in the curriculum and diversity of staff. They want to know how the school works and what they can do to support the school's efforts. They want to be full participants in the process. The challenge is to find new ways to make this happen.

“The point is to make our schools more inclusive and empower parents to participate in the system.”

Part 3. Next Steps

NEAT was planning to form a Cultural Communities (Advisory Council, Committee, Task Force, Study Group, whatever you'd like to call it) to work on these issues, but the energy level was so high when the representatives from seven of the cosponsoring entities met in early September that the group decided to invite the cosponsors to form a collaborative to carry the learning forward. This collaborative will need parents who are interested in working on these issues at a broader level.

Tania Sprague of The Family Project (part of Family & Children's Service) has volunteered to chair the effort through its formative stages but will be out of town until December 2. Tania can be reached at (612) 728-2040 or tsprague@fcsmn.org. Prior to December 2, anyone interested in this effort (even if just to be put “in the loop” on future efforts via email) is encouraged to contact Jennifer Armstrong at (651) 774-2957 or jen3344@aol.com

For the purposes of the event, NEAT developed a Collaborative Flyer (Attachment E) not only to let people know it plans to carry the learning forward, but also to give people a piece of paper to take home with the cosponsors' contact information in case they wanted to do something at the site level before NEAT was ready to move forward.

There is also a directory of community agencies working with our cultural communities at:

http://communityservices.spps.org/index.asp?Type=B_BASIC&SEC={7EC995AD-B6A9-4D40-B878-092F4C90E88B}

And Collaborative efforts will be updated at:

<http://www.stpaulneat.org/Diversity.html>

This site already includes some information about Cultural Competence from the Child Welfare League of America and the Greater Twin Cities United Way's Cultural Dynamics Committee. Parent groups and site councils are encouraged to use and provide input into the NEAT Web site as a way to share learning across sites.

List of Attachments

- A. Group Notes**

- B. Attendee Demographics**

- C. Event Flyer** (provided for those who decide to replicate the event at a school site)

- D. Event Cosponsors**

- E. Carrying the Learning Forward: Capitol Hill Magnet School**

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Group Notes 1
African American (English)

Facilitator: Sandra Lester
Recorders: Jana Hrdinova, Ben Mchie

Attachment A.1

1. What brings you to your children's school(s)?

I see the community involvement - for safety/villages – and atmosphere; jobs for parents (if possible)
I notice more family involvement and my main purpose is education
Community and parent involvement in schools is crucial
Holding businesses accountable to be involved in the schools

I want to be familiar with the environment and also contribute.
More parents are getting involved, which makes schools better
I want to be involved to be able to advocate for diversity on the teaching staff, and also to support the school
I go to school to see what my children are involved in (plays)

By coming to the classroom we make the educational experience better and richer

I got involved because I believe that the school can get better and offer more diversity

2. What keeps you from being as involved in your children's school(s) as you'd like to be?

Being a fulltime single parent. Time crunch. Childcare.
Other activities or involvement (children's social events)
Non-diverse staff is challenging
Lack of inclusion of resources in the teaching units and curriculum

Transportation, Childcare, Scheduling conflicts
Lack of diversity at meetings (intimidating)

Support staff not properly trained on diversity issues and act dismissively and rudely toward minority children and parents. If you have diversity in staff, you do not need to have that much sensitivity training

African Americans and Native Americans are being pushed under the screen as more attention is paid to recent immigrants.

3. What could your school or school parent group do to help?

Mentorship of multicultural mentors, teachers, staff, teachers aids.
Insist on accountability for a more inclusive teaching model throughout the district
Teacher exchange for a semester
Why can't the needs of the community and children be put ahead of the system (seniority)?
Report card needs to be sent to the school board and to the schools (state?)
People of color who do not have children in the schools need to step up and emphasize the importance of having minority staff; often parents with children in schools are afraid to speak up for fear of retribution.

The point is to make our schools more inclusive and empower parents to participate in the system.

1. What brings you to your children's school(s)?

School activities (concerts, games)

When our schedules allow

Interested to understand school system

Communication helps (Internet, telephone, mail - talk to the teachers, email them, teachers email)

Very few Somalians have access to the Internet

To support my children's success in school

To follow my children; their needs

To get along with the schools

My child is special education

I come to school for my child's success. I need to be involved. To be involved, it's like working

2. What keeps you from being as involved in your children's school(s) as you'd like to be?

Language limitations

Kids in different schools (3)

Time schedules (many parents work second shift)

Networking for transportation

Weather scary

Limited education (parent)

Afraid to express or don't know their needs

Having young children who need childcare

3. What could your school or school parent group do to help?

To educate parents, learn diversity

Family meeting or activities

To educate parent on how their children learn, help them become more motivated and involved even if they aren't understanding

Activities

Childcare

Transportation

Culture specific media (television/radio talk shows)

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Group Notes 3
Cambodian & English

Facilitator: Joann Ellis
Recorder: Joann Ellis

Interpreter: Sam Ouk

Attachment A.3

1. What brings you to your children's school(s)?

Open houses, conferences, athletics & performance events, volunteering, PTO, site council

To encourage my child; make my child feel good.

When things are happening at the school that make my children feel excited

Often goes to the school to check up on children; brings older high school child to serve as interpreter

Responds to letters/correspondence to go to school

Conferences had no translators for parents – such a low turn out! Work with nonprofits (UCAM)!

Attends all conferences for children, but needs an interpreter

Attends a variety of school functions; also on site council

To advocate for my children

It's different, elementary, junior high & high school

2. What keeps you from being as involved in your children's school(s) as you'd like to be?

Scheduling/work schedules

Lack of translators (+++)

Transportation (+++)

Language barriers – lower concentration of languages, forms to fill out

Non-custodial parent – not well-informed

Health issues (helps when school calls, also letters in home language)

Some parents opt out of conferences because of lack of translators, “When I come to conferences and there is no translator I just ask for papers and leave.”

3. What could your school or school parent group do to help?

Phone calls and newsletters in home language help

Use nonprofits to help schools reach out to families

Recruit nonprofit organizations that already have relationships with people of other cultures to educate them about conferences

1. What brings you to your children's school(s)?

Truancy/attendance, grades

A mom said that her daughter had bad school attendance, so it was her main reason to be more involved in her child's school. Now, her daughter is in college. The mom said that even though her daughter had attendance problems in the past, she improved her attendance and successfully graduated. Another mom shared that she has six children in the Saint Paul Public Schools (SPPS). Some have attendance problems. She came to the school, talked to their teachers and she worked out this problem with the school staff. Because of that, one of her daughters was behind credits, so she had to attend summer school. Now, she is doing well in the school. The next mom had two kids already graduated from SPPS. Now they are in college, but she still has two children attending school in the district, "They are going very good in school." Another mom told us, "My daughter is right now in sixth grade (she is 12 years old). She is doing well at school."

But we also heard from another mom, "It looks like the school does not care about the Hmong kids. I tried to talk to them about my child's performance at the school, but they avoid the subject. I talked to the school counselor. The rest of my children are doing well at the school."

2. What keep you from being as involved in your children's school(s) as you'd like to be?

Transportation & Language barriers – don't know how to communicate with the teachers

- "I do not drive, so if I have to go to my children's school I have to ask a family member to take me to the school, and sometimes they cannot come with me."
- "When I come to the school, I must ask someone to fill out the forms for me because I do not speak English. Things may get better because now two of my kids are driving."
- "We use our children to try to communicate with their teachers and other school staff because we do not speak English."
- "I always try to communicate with my children's school, but it's not easy task because I do not speak English. I look forward to talk to my children's teachers, but it is hard because their teachers do not speak Hmong."
- "I cannot drive, so it is too hard for me to go to my children's schools. If I have transportation, I will be at each meeting at my children's schools."
- "If the schools provide transportation for the Hmong parents, we will be able to attend school conferences and events."

3. What could your school or school parent group do to help? (We ran out the time to finish question #3)

The Hmong parents agreed that they would be more involve in their children's schools if (1) they have transportation; (2) professional interpreters at the school; and (3) if the school hires more Hmong staff to support the Hmong children in their education.

“My greatest sadness of life is that none of my children have graduated from high school in Saint Paul.”

1. What brings you to your children’s school(s)?

Child missing school bus
Disciplinary conferences
Communicating with teachers over children’s issues and relationship issues; teacher/child issues
Parent-Teacher conferences
Go in and talk to the teachers to get to know them, one-on-one

Community events, sports, open houses, performances (band concerts, plays), exhibits, Friday Gatherings
Special events (book of the month; Pow Wow; re-hang Eagle Feathers)
School orientation
Volunteer, chaperone, site council, carnival
Cultural consultant

2. What keeps you from being as involved in your children’s school(s) as you’d like to be?

Work schedule (++++++)
Other commitments
Multiple schools (++++)
Lack of follow-up from school with volunteer offers

Disrespect from teachers, administrators and other staff
My Native American children are invisible at school. Staff who work with them are stuck in closets.

Not listened to, not heard
Interfering with parent decisions

Minnesota-nice – talking in circles
Condescension
Institutional racism

3. What could your school or school parent group do to help?

Activities at night; keep building open at night
Computer lab open for parents and children to work together

Improve understanding of communication styles – some cultural, but basically increase respect
Empower parents in knowing what their rights are and who to go to
Parent support for each other in difficult times
Parents need to know that the persons they go to will be helpful
Site council has an obligation to get other parents’ input before making decisions

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Attachment B.1

ATTENDEE DEMOGRAPHICS

Questions:

- Who were the attendees?
- Was the community of voices at the event reflective of the community of families at the district?

ATTENDEE DEMOGRAPHICS

Attendee Type	Count	Percent
Community Cosponsors *	9	16%
Parents	36	62%
SPPS Staff **	4	7%
School Board	2	3%
Community Member	7	12%
Total Attendees	58	

ATTENDEE DEMOGRAPHICS

SPPS STUDENT ETHNICITY

Attendee Ethnicity	Count	Percent	Percent	Count	SPPS Student Ethnicity – 10/03
African American	3	5%	28%	11,910	African American
African – Immigrant (Somali)	4	7%	7%		African – Immigrant (Somali)
Cambodian	11	19%	19%		Cambodian
Hmong	5	9%	9%		Hmong
[Asian American]		28%	29%	12,188	Asian American
Caucasian	22	38%	29%	12,430	Caucasian
Latino	4	7%	12%	4,943	Latino
Native American	4	7%	2%	761	American Indian
Unknown	5	9%	12%		Unknown
Total Attendees	58			42,232	Total Students***
Percent of Color ***		59%	71%		Percent of Color

* Does not include NEAT members or SPPS staff.

** SPPS staff counted as parents (most important hat at NEAT events), when known to have child(ren) in the district.

***Unknown factored out.

***District information is presented by student; no information is available about families (factoring in siblings).

http://datacenter.spps.org/vertical/Sites/{D03903F8-E2BF-4077-AAF3-4003D3B6E051}/uploads/Race_Schools_FY04_3-23-2004.pdf

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Attachment B.2

ATTENDEE DEMOGRAPHICS			CITY OF SAINT PAUL ETHNICITY – 2003 Census		
Attendee Ethnicity	Count	Percent	Percent	Count	Saint Paul Ethnicity–2003 Census
African American	3	5%	13%	38,405	African American
Somali	4	7%			Somali (not reported)
[Asian American]		28%	13%	38,655	Asian American
Cambodian	11	19%			Cambodian (not reported)
Hmong	5	9%			Hmong (not reported)
Caucasian	22	38%	65%	199,865	Caucasian
Latino	4	7%	7%	22,710	Latino
Native American	4	7%	2%	5,995	American Indian
Unknown	5	9%	0.3%	820	Unknown
Total Attendees	58			305,630	Total Population***
Percent of Color ***		59%	35%		Percent of Color

* Does not include NEAT members or SPPS staff.

** SPPS staff counted as parents (most important hat at NEAT events), when known to have child(ren) in the district.

***Unknown factored out.

***Excludes Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander

www.communitydataworks.org/StPaul/data/excel_pd.zip

ATTENDEE DEMOGRAPHICS			SPPS PRIMARY LANGUAGE GROUPS (2002-03)		
Attendee Primary Language	Count	Percent	Percent	Count	SPPS ELL Language
English	29	55%	58%	44500	Total SPPS Enrollment 2002-03
Somali	4	8%	2%	26007	English
Asian (Cambodian, Hmong)	16	30%	28%	669	Somali
Latino	4	8%	8%	12305	Asian (including Cambodian, Hmong)
Unknown	5	9%	*****	3681	Latino
Total Attendees	58			*****	Unknown
Percent ESL	45%			16400	Total ELL Students
				37%	Percent ELL

www.ell.spps.org/index.asp?SEC={ED724DFE-975F-445E-A3CC-365299ACF7A3}&Type=B_BASIC



"Diversity is the thing we celebrate the most and talk about the least."

–Arlington High School Student

Embracing Diversity

**KEYNOTE SPEAKER & FACILITATOR –
Elsa Vega-Perez, Bremer Foundation**

Monday, September 27, 2004, 7:00 - 8:30 pm, Rondo Red Atrium
560 Concordia Avenue, enter yellow doors. Childcare available with RSVP.
Spanish, Hmong, Somali, Cambodian, Igbo interpreters available. To
RSVP, email info@stpaulneat.org or call (651) 290-4755.

- *What barriers do parents from our cultural communities experience in connecting with the schools?*
- *What can we do to strengthen parent-family-school connections for ALL Saint Paul families?*

*Come share your story and hear what other parents have to say!
This forum is designed as a "LISTENING SESSION" where
parent group leaders can LEARN about the concerns of the
parents they represent.*

Cosponsored by –

The African American Leadership Council, African Parents Support Group (TAPS-Group), American Indian Family Center, City of Saint Paul Department of Human Rights, Council on Crime and Justice, The Family Project (FCS), Hmong American Partnership, Minnesota College Savings Plan & Minnesota Higher Education Services Office, Minnesota Minority Education Partnership, St. Paul Urban League, United Cambodian Association of Minnesota, Working Family Resource Center and the Saint Paul Public Schools Indian Education Program and Offices of Family & Community Involvement, Educational Equity and English Language Learning.

For questions, childcare or additional interpreters, contact:

English -	Jennifer Armstrong Email: jen3344@aol.com	(651) 774-2957
Hmong -	Blong Thao	(651) 771-5458
Spanish -	Rolanda DelaMartinez Email: RDelamartinez@aol.com	(651) 340-5034
Cambodian -	United Cambodian Assn of MN	(651) 222-3299
French, Ewe, Mina & Fon -	Ama Sabah Email: ama.sabah@state.mn.us	(651) 296-7563 or (651) 295-4531 (cell)
Igbo -	Kate Onyeneho Email: kateonyeneho@yahoo.com	(952) 707-9684

NEAT is About:

Strengthening
Engaging &
Empowering

Parents & community groups to support public education in St. Paul.

That happens by helping people connect with each other and our schools, neighborhoods, district and community. It happens by helping parents tap into local resources to support learning at home. It happens by helping people ask questions and find solutions to the challenges we face in supporting our schools.

**SEE NEAT
SEE the Connections**

www.stpaulneat.org

Come help put the "Action" into Network of Education Action Teams!

Can't attend? Mail your story to:

NEAT
1030 University Ave W
St Paul MN 55104

Or email it to info@stpaulneat.org.

NEAT engages, strengthens and empowers all St. Paul public school parents, parent organizations and community members working together to improve public education in St. Paul.

Hmong:

Hawm Txog Txhua Leej Txhua Tus

Hnub Tim 27 Lub 9 Hli thaum 7 Teev txog 8:30
Teev, ntawm lub tsev kawm hu ua Rondo
Education Center hauv hoob sibntsis liab.

560 Concordia Avenue, nkag los the cov qov rooj
daj

Muaj neeg zov menyuum tib si.

Muaj kev swm li cas ntawm cov niamtxive yuav tiv
tauj rau cov tsev kawm ntawv.

Yuav ua tau li cas thiaj pab tau cov niamtxiv thiab
tsev kawm cog lus koom tes pab tag nrho peb cov
tsev neeg hauv St. Paul.

Tuaj piav qhia tswvyim los yog hmloog txhog
sawvdaws cov kev koom siab.
Yuav muaj ib lub sivhawm rau sawvdaws hmloog
thiab tsa suab los ntawm cov niamtxiv.

Yog koj muaj menyuum rau peb pab zov no ces hut
au rau (651) 771-5458 los yog ntaus xov faisfab
tuaj rau qhov chaw hauv qab no.

Email: info@stpaulneat.org.

Somali:

Aaminaada Isdhexgalka bulshada

Embracing Diversity

Bisha Siteembar 27, 2004, markay saacadutahay
7:00 – 8:30 fiidnimo Waxaad timaadaa Rondo
Education Center, oo ku taal
560 Concordia Avenue, enter yellow doors.
Waxaad ka soo gashaa albaabka yelollow oo
waxaad timaadaa qolka xafladaha lagu dhigo ee
lagu magacaabo Red Atrium. Caruurta Si
waanaagsan ayaa laguugu haynayaa

Waa maxay dhibaatooyinka waalidiinta
bulshooyinka kala dhaqanka ay kala kulmayaa
xiriirka dugsiyada la leeyihiin?

Maxaan qaban karaa si aan si aan u xoojino xiriirka
waalidiinta qoysaska iyo dugsiyada DHAMAAN
qoysaska magaalada St. Paul.

Imoow oo nala qaybso nalaqaybso sheekada
khibradaada oo dhegayso sheekooyinka waalidiinta
kale! Kulankaani waa iKULAN LAYSKU
DHEGAYSANAYO! Waa meel hogaamiyayaasha
waalidiintu ay ku BARANKARAAN
cabashooyinka ay soo jeedinayaan waalidiinta kale
ee ay matalayaan.

Haddii aad u baahantahay cid caruurta kuu haysa
waxaad soo wacdaa: Abdisalam Adam, (651) 767-
8341 ama Email ugu soo dir:
Abadisalam.adam@spps.org

Spanish:

Abrazando la Diversidad

27 de Septiembre, 2004, 7:00 - 8:30 pm, Centro
Educativo Rondo, Atrium Rojo.
560 Concordia Avenue, entre por las puertas
amarillas.
Habrá cuidado de niños. Contaremos con
intérpretes.

¿Qué barreras experimentan los padres de nuestras
comunidades culturales al conectarse con las
escuelas?

¿Qué podemos hacer para fortalecer las conexiones
de padres-familias-escuelas de TODAS las familias
de Saint Paul?

¡Venga y comparta su historia y escuche lo que
otros padres tienen que decir! Este foro es una
Sesión para Escuchar, donde los grupos de
liderazgo de padres pueden APRENDER sobre las
preocupaciones de los padres que representan.

Si necesita cuidado de niños, llame a Rolanda
DelaMartinez (651) 340-5034 or
Email: RDelamartinez@aol.com



EVENT COSPONSORS

The idea to invite cosponsors came about at the August NEAT board meeting when we talked about how we wanted to help parent groups (and ourselves) better understand the experiences of the parents of our cultural communities to strengthen parent-school connections for all parents, and to help parent groups and site councils recruit parents from these communities to build stronger school communities where the decisions being made by these groups reflect the voices of the whole community.

We really didn't want to invite someone to come in to pontificate about we should do. What we really wanted to know was about the challenges, barriers and concerns of the parents of our cultural communities so that parents at the school sites and NEAT at the broader, systemic level could work on addressing those barriers. We decided the best way to get at that was to invite the parents of our cultural communities come share their concerns.

We also decided that traditional methods of outreach don't work and that if we really wanted broad representation at the event, we needed to do something different. That's when somebody suggested, "Let's ask the community agencies to cosponsor the event. They're working with parents on real issues (jobs, housing, learning English, parent education). They have strong relationships and broad reach."

Once we decided to invite cosponsors, we had to answer the questions, "What do we mean when we're asking people to cosponsor the event? What are we asking for?" We decided to ask cosponsors to help with promoting the event/outreach, attend one planning meeting to orchestrate the event, and provide a food item for 40 people or \$50 toward food costs. This worked out incredibly well to various degrees. Some cosponsors did a lot to help promote the event. Others were more limited in their participation. Flexibility is key.

Virtually everyone we talked to was excited about the event, even those who couldn't participate for various reasons. What was different, perhaps, was a strong, genuine effort to *LISTEN*. Indeed, the reason this report is written the way it is, is so that parent groups and site councils can replicate it at the site level by asking the parents of the school's cultural communities to come share their concerns.

We are grateful for the participation, support and outreach provided by the cosponsoring agencies and encourage school-based groups to contact them as they pursue future efforts. Collaborating on this effort was in some ways a "baby step" toward engaging all parents, but in other ways a strong step toward strengthening parent-school-community connections.

NEAT Cultural Communities Collaborative



The Cultural Communities Collaborative is being formed to focus efforts to strengthen the parent-school-community connections for the parents of our cultural communities.

The cosponsors of the September 27 NEAT event: EMBRACING DIVERSITY are invited to join the Collaborative to carry-forward the learning and continue to work together to support ALL Saint Paul parents as we work to increase student achievement.

Participation in the Collaborative is open to all parents and community members working to support public education in Saint Paul.

For more information, contact:

Tania Sprague at (612) 728-2040 or tsprague@fcsmn.org

Collaborative updates will be posted at:

www.stpaulneat.org



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Carrying the Learning Forward: Capitol Hill Magnet School
Reprinted with permission to show how individual schools can carry the learning forward.

From: Tom Vellenga
To: Capitol Hill Site Council/Parents
Re: NEAT Forum: Embracing Diversity, 9/27/04

(NEAT is the Network of Education Action Teams, an organization run by parents of St. Paul public schoolchildren working to improve public education in Saint Paul.) On September 27, NEAT held its “Embracing Diversity” Forum. Its designers intended the Forum to help parents find ways to help schools find creative ways to embrace diversity at all levels, and its focus was on involving parents from St. Paul’s myriad “cultural communities.” Tim Erickson, a Capitol Hill parent, is a volunteer with NEAT, and he helped produce the Forum. Site Council members and parents Sherri Knuth and Tom Vellenga attended, as did Tim Erickson and Capitol Hill parent Mary Reis.

Concentrating on parents of children of color and children from other cultural communities, the Forum’s designers suggested three introductory questions for parents who face barriers to participation in schools:

- 1) What brings you to your children’s school?
- 2) What keeps you from being as involved in your school as you’d like to be? and
- 3) What could your school or parent group do to help?

Using these three questions as a springboard for discussion, the Forum asked participants to discuss their own questions and answers. We took away a number of working considerations and guidelines for administrators, site councils and PTOs (in no particular order):

1. Build relationships with businesses and organizations in our surrounding neighborhood, reflecting diverse cultural communities.
2. Look for opportunities to replace departing faculty members with replacements who represent diverse cultural communities. It is important for children of color to see teachers and administrators who share their background. There may be external resources for achieving this goal. For example, one expert suggested “teacher exchanges,” in which schools or districts trade teachers.
3. Transportation assistance, child care, and intelligent scheduling around normal working hours are three good ways to improve participation of parents who face barriers to participation in the school.
4. School staff, ranging from the front office to the lunch line, must be trained in excellent “customer service” – meaning that they should always present a welcoming attitude, a service-oriented disposition, a friendly smile, and an offer of assistance to parents of color, parents for whom English is a second language, and other parents of cultural communities. Such parents may be intimidated or simply put off by a less than helpful encounter.
5. When parents make complaints about faculty or staff behavior related to cultural or racial attitudes, administrators should be open-minded, welcoming of constructive reports and criticism, and work collaboratively and decisively to address such concerns (“walk the talk”).
6. When a European-American, attempting to “say the right thing,” compliments a person of another culture on a performance or skill that is taken for granted among European-Americans, it can be perceived as an insult. People in positions of power should avoid being “patronizing”.
7. It may be helpful to assess a school’s performance in embracing diversity, using an outside group capable of issuing a “report card.” It is useful for administrators to use “outside” and “third-party” validators to confirm

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Attachment E.2

their success in embracing diversity. Parents will respect a credible outside expert who “blesses” the achievements a school has made.

8. It may make sense for a school’s administration to work with its site council to design an action plan with deadlines and points of accountability to ensure that progress is made (one commentator called this the “build a better mousetrap” plan). Before undertaking any such strategy, the school should survey parents to understand their values and goals and to bring them into the process.

9. Any school embracing diversity should devise a strategy to educate parents and other stakeholders of the school, from the get-go, as to the strategy’s goals and plans.

10. Throughout any dialogue on diversity, which can be difficult, it is crucial to improve every participant’s understanding of the unique communication styles of every cultural community.

11. Administrators, site councils and PTOs cannot simply invite parents to participate in the school and its processes: we must find ways to reach out and actively draw in parents who find cultural, language, communication, and other barriers to their participation.

12. In group discussions on this topic, it is helpful to discuss values first. Often, clarity about participants’ respective values yields understanding as to goals. A second aim should be to identify participants’ differing goals.

13. Electing and appointing and involving parents of color and other unique cultural communities on site councils and PTOs is a very effective way to reach out to their communities and children.

NEAT is creating the NEAT Cultural Communities Collaborative to focus efforts to strengthen the parent-school-community connections for the parents of our cultural communities. The collaborative will be another way to support public education, to **involve ALL parents**, and to improve student achievement. NEAT strongly encourages parents of all backgrounds to **join and contribute** your time to this new and important organization. **For more information, contact Tania Sprague at tsprague@fcsmn.org or at 612-728-2040. See this website as well: www.stpaulneat.org.**

Supplement to Tom Vallenga’s Report from Sherri Knuth:

At the NEAT Diversity Forum, I was involved in a group discussion involving Cambodian-American parents and European-American parents. Prominent among the Cambodian-American parents’ concerns were language barriers and transportation barriers. Sometimes a Cambodian-American parent has been unable to communicate with their child’s teacher because of language barriers or has had to rely on the child to translate. This has been true even at conferences because interpreters have not been available.

Some things that have helped Cambodian-American parents are: (1) flyers or letters from the school in their native language; (2) teachers calling a taxi for the parent to come to a conference (because the parents may have trouble communicating with the taxi dispatcher); (3) translators.

One Cambodian-American commented that immigrant communities can be spread across the Twin Cities, as compared to smaller cities where the immigrant communities may be more concentrated. In the Twin Cities, the result is less support for each other among immigrant community members, making communication with the dominant American culture harder. One Cambodian-American suggested that if a school wants to reach out to an immigrant community and develop ways for mutual interaction, it should contact a non-profit organization involved with that community.