

## Progressing Parental Engagement School Fact Sheet

### Engaging with families for whom English is an additional language or dialect

#### What's in this Fact Sheet?

Information to help your school:

- Review parental engagement strategies and create change
- Show respect for the experiences, culture and languages of families for whom English is an additional language or dialect (EAL/D)
- Connect to community groups and other resources in the ACT to support parental engagement by EAL/D families

#### Why is this information important?

Parents play a big role in helping their children to be confident and enthusiastic learners – by helping kids believe they can do well at school, that trying hard and doing their best is important, as well as helping them be organised, to navigate challenges and solve problems.

For schools, this means recognising that families and schools need to work together to support children's learning. There are many things schools can do to make parents feel welcome, which is an important element of successful parental engagement.

Schools benefit through the effect of successful parental engagement on student learning outcomes and through improved family and community satisfaction with the school.

The involvement of EAL/D families in parental engagement can have additional benefits for the settlement process for those born overseas. These include supporting students and their families to feel that they belong, and that they have a meaningful contribution to make to Australian society.

#### What are some of the challenges for EAL/D families?

EAL/D families can experience some unique challenges in relation to the school system, which can be exacerbated by traumatic experiences for refugee families.

It can be difficult for parents to know how to support children with school life when the school system is very different from that in their country of origin. School can appear complex and impenetrable. Other barriers include different expectations, such as a strict separation of home and school life. EAL/D families might only expect to be contacted over discipline issues.

Research with EAL/D parents in the ACT found that they were very committed to their children's education and wanted to support their children to do well, but felt that they did not always have the right skills and knowledge. In particular, they felt that because English was not their first language they could not be effective in helping their children learn.

## **What can schools do?**

Schools can make a big difference by creating a working partnership with EAL/D families, to assist parental engagement through developing a sense of belonging.

### ***Tip 1: A culturally inclusive school***

Connecting with EAL/D families to support parental engagement is easier where those strategies are not a one-off event, but part of a wider, structured and holistic approach to culturally respectful practice in the school.

The key features to a culturally reflective approach in schools include:

- Awareness – understanding the influence of culture, religion and belief systems, including one's own, in shaping value systems, cultural norms and behaviour
- Knowledge – understanding the impact of racism, discrimination, acculturation and the dynamics of settlement for families from EAL/D backgrounds; knowledge of particular cultures which make up the school community, including child rearing practices and cultural norms
- Cultural practice skills – effective communication and engagement skills, including working with interpreters and bi-cultural workers and skills to build rapport and engagement.

### ***Tip 2: A partnership approach***

A philosophy of 'doing with' rather than 'doing to' creates a school where EAL/D families see themselves as active participants, working in partnership with teachers to share their culture and support their child's learning.

- Positive communication empowers EAL/D families. Give messages which stress the important role EAL/D families have to play in enriching the school's life, as well as their own child's unique learning
- Involve EAL/D families in the design and implementation of a culturally responsive and respectful environment with a focus on equal access and participation in school life
- Create a warm and welcoming environment with parent friendly spaces that encourage interaction between the school and parents, and between all parents
- Actively create a range of opportunities for EAL/D families to share their stories, cultural perspectives, food and customs.
- Ensure there is a person working in the school who is known in the community to have a broad understanding of the issues faced by EAL/D families, who takes the time to connect with families, is a familiar person for families to seek support from, and an advocate.
- Regularly use the Translating and Interpreting Service ([www.tisnational.gov.au](http://www.tisnational.gov.au)) to share important information and clarify misunderstandings, without concern about cost.

### ***Tip 3: Reach out and get involved***

The school is a community focal point. Having strong, open, two-way relationships with local EAL/D community groups creates a sense of belonging, reduces misunderstanding and fear and emphasises that teachers and parents both have important, though different, roles to play.

Allocate/contribute resources to a community liaison officer role as a point of contact within the community to assist EAL/D families to navigate the Australian school system, understand what is expected of parents (including around parental engagement), and to liaise with school councils to provide the EAL/D families voice

Encourage school participation in local EAL/D community events.

## What do parents from EAL/D backgrounds have to say?

*"... if you missed the education from your own country now you come to this new country either as a migrant or refugee parent, but it is not easy to digest a whole schooling system, and, you know, you've got school newsletter and school report, and... the core, the tests come from the school from time to time, and the school enrolment form. These things are all technically written in English, so if a parent in one household don't read functional English have to rely on the next-door [neighbour]."*

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*"So if the structure is there the school can't be ... the school teacher can't be there all the time, you know, you've got one teacher, 20 or 28 student in the class, then the teacher can't be, you know, policing everyone at the same time. So I think the parent is... in our... you know, in our proverb, in our proverb from our country, and the parent is the first teacher."*

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*"Multicultural Morning Tea is a good way to get all the families with different cultures together. They share food. Not just the food; their stories; what they went through when they first came here; their experience. It is not easy to leave your loved ones behind and start a new life in a new country. For some people it is a necessity because of the conditions in their country, and for some it is just the circumstance. The Multicultural Morning Tea gives us a chance to come together, share our stories, and makes you feel that you're not the only one that has had these experiences. Food, of course, is the important part of it. Thank you to the teachers involved, and the Principal, for organising the morning tea – we hope to have many more in the future."*  
(Macgregor Primary School parent)

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## Where can I find more information?

ACT Education and Training Directorate, 2015. Advice for Parents. English as an Additional Language or Dialect: [http://www.det.act.gov.au/teaching\\_and\\_learning/english-as-an-additional-language-or-dialect](http://www.det.act.gov.au/teaching_and_learning/english-as-an-additional-language-or-dialect)

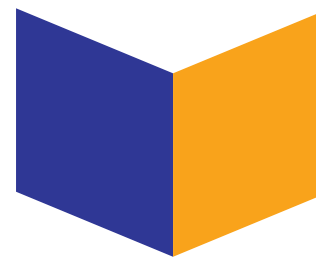
Centre for Multicultural Youth Issues, 2006. *Opening the school gate: Engaging CLD families in schools – A Resource for Teachers*, CMYI: Carlton

Companion House, 2013. *Tips for Teachers, Working with school students from refugee backgrounds*: <http://www.companionhouse.org.au/media/tips%20for%20teachers%20feb2013.pdf>

Companion House, 2014. *Supporting your child's education: An information sheet for migrant and refugee parents of school aged children in the ACT*: [http://www.companionhouse.org.au/images/Useful\\_Resources/Supporting\\_your\\_child\\_at\\_school\\_Info\\_Sheet\\_2014\\_English.pdf](http://www.companionhouse.org.au/images/Useful_Resources/Supporting_your_child_at_school_Info_Sheet_2014_English.pdf)

Hennessey, A, 2002. *Guidelines for facilitating culturally inclusive school communities*, Southern Metropolitan MRC: Western Australia

KidsMatter, 2014. *Building Relationships with Families*: [https://www.kidsmatter.edu.au/sites/default/files/public/eCALDV3%20Building%20relationships%20with%20families\\_Update\\_250614.pdf](https://www.kidsmatter.edu.au/sites/default/files/public/eCALDV3%20Building%20relationships%20with%20families_Update_250614.pdf)



## About this project

The ACT Education and Training Directorate partnered with the non-profit Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth (ARACY), The Catholic Education Office of the Archdiocese of Canberra and Goulburn, the Association of Independent Schools of the ACT, the ACT Council of Parents and Citizens Associations, the Catholic School Parents Archdiocese of Canberra and Goulburn and the Association of Parents and Friends of ACT Schools. Together, the alliance developed a shared understanding of parental engagement in the ACT, based on what the evidence shows has the biggest impact and the things that matter most to ACT families and schools. The international evidence has been reviewed and parents and teachers have been consulted on what is important to them.

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More resources will be available in 2015.

