

Successful Teacher-ELL Parent Communication:

1. Make yourself as visible as possible. This is especially helpful during the first weeks and months of school. Try to touch base with parents when they drop off or pick up their children. Greet parents and make them feel comfortable.

2. Create a list of bilingual speakers. Have a list of older children at your school who are fluent in English and their native language so that they can translate for other students in emergencies.

3. Enlist children to translate. Ask bilingual children to help translate during any special program with performances that bring parents to the school. Have students make invitations for their parents that they can then translate aloud at home. Or perhaps the students can also write the invitations in their first language.

4. Send home correspondence in different colors. As simple as this sounds, it can save time and confusion. If each piece of correspondence is in a different color, when parents call you about a flyer or a form they must sign and return, they can cite "the yellow paper" or "the pink paper" and make it easier for you to identify to what they're referring.

5. Recruit bilingual staff as parent liaisons. They can be invaluable in making personal contact with parents by phone. Likewise, if parents know when a bilingual parent liaison is at school, they can call with questions during those hours.

6. Explain the value of educational activities. In different cultures, field trips—such as a trip to the zoo—are seen as an extravagance and not a necessity. As you send home permission slips, you might need to send a flyer—which students can translate—explaining why the trip is more than just a fun outing.

7. Try to schedule meetings when parents can come. Many parents work at jobs with hours that conflict with parent-teacher conference times. Try to schedule meetings on parents' days off and, if possible, schedule a monthly time to meet individually with interested parents so they can learn about their children's progress and what they need to practice at home. This may take a bit more of your time at first, but the payoff—committed parents who are eager to be a part of their child's learning—may just be worth it.