

PROMOTING ELL PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT: CHALLENGES IN CONTESTED TIMES

Executive Summary

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Promoting ELL Parental Involvement: Challenges in Contested Times

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Executive Summary

This policy brief analyzes factors related to the implementation of effective parental involvement with English Language Learners (ELLs). As the largest growing segment of the student population, ELLs have increased in all states over the last twenty years. At the same time, parents of ELLs face daunting barriers as they try to become informed or involved in their child's school. These barriers, which include the inability to understand English, unfamiliarity with the school system, and differences in cultural norms and cultural capital, can limit parents' communication and school participation. Research supports the importance of parental involvement for improved student achievement, better school attendance, and reduced dropout rates regardless of socioeconomic background or ethnicity. Accordingly, and given the achievement gap between ELLs and English proficient students, it is very important to identify practices that may improve ELL parental involvement and thus student achievement. Yet many programs make little effort to promote ELL parental involvement, defining parental involvement only in terms of the schools' needs or in terms of a deficit-based perception of ELL families.

This brief analyzes characteristics of the ELL student and parent population; barriers to ELL family engagement with schools; and characteristics of traditional and non-traditional parental involvement models. Diversity in ELL parents and their communities speaks to the need for both traditional and non-traditional models for ELL parental involvement. With a dual-model approach, variation in language proficiency is acknowledged, communication is facilitated and maintained, and communities are recognized and integrated within the school culture. Accordingly, it is recommended that policy makers:

- Support the implementation of traditional parental involvement programs that are culturally relevant and linguistically appropriate.
- Fund the implementation of non-traditional parental involvement programs that reflect a reciprocal involvement in the school/parent community.
- Support the professional preparation of teachers who can identify community funds of knowledge for curricular development and school outreach.

Promoting ELL Parental Involvement

- Support community-based education programs that inform parents about school values and expectations and work with parents to help them become advocates for their children.