BUILDING FAMILY-SCHOOL ALLIANCES FOR EFFECTIVE PARENT ENGAGEMENT

A TRAINING MANUAL
by Parents for Teachers

ABC
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New York City
Building Family-School Alliances for Effective Parent Engagement

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INTRODUCTION
Everything now, we must assume, is in our hands; we have no right to assume otherwise. If we do not falter in our duty now, we may be able, handful that we are, to end the racial nightmare, and achieve our country, and change the history of the world.


Overview
This manual is to be used by family coordinators, teachers, parent leaders, and other interested people in schools in the effort to build positive relationships between schools, families, and communities. We hope this serves as a guide for self-reflection, planning, organizing and action.

About the Parent Action Committee
The New Settlement Parent Action Committee (PAC) is a multicultural group of concerned parents, guardians and community members dedicated to improving the quality of education for all children in New York City, with an emphasis on District 9 in the Bronx. Over the past two years, PAC leaders have discussed, planned, and facilitated workshops around developing meaningful relationships between families and schools as part of a partnership with the New Teacher Center. This partnership had its origin in a report PAC released in 2013 calling for a comprehensive system for mentoring new teachers to reduce high teacher turnover. Advocacy efforts by PAC and the New Teacher Center led the Department of Education to invest in a district-wide initiative to help retain teachers by training new teacher mentors at every elementary and middle school. In 2015, the initiative was expanded to Bronx Community School District 12. Mentors participated in eight full days of training on instructional mentoring and four half-day forums.

PAC parent leaders partnered with NTC to develop an original training curriculum on parent engagement for teacher mentors. Feedback for the first training was overwhelmingly positive, leading parent leaders to create a second curriculum centered on parent teacher conferences that was offered in Fall 2015 for both mentors and their new teacher mentees. Many participants asked if it was possible for PAC to conduct a professional development session in their school. As a result, PAC leaders envisioned a manual that could serve as a practical and effective guide to planning and facilitating family-led trainings in diverse school communities.
**Goals**

PAC identified the following goals:

- Generate open communication between teachers, families, and everyone in schools to create a better understanding between schools and families and a welcoming school community.
- Ensure that teachers develop an understanding of diverse cultures and histories.
- Teach mentors concrete skills and strategies to share in their schools.
- Build and establish trust by recognizing the multiplicity of experiences of both teachers and families.
- Encourage new teachers coming into the neighborhood to be open to the community where they will be working.
- Advocate for schools to provide interpreters consistently.
- Support the work of building alliances between teachers, families and students.

**Purpose**

The main purpose of this manual is to provide strategies for schools to build meaningful relationships between families and schools. Because New Settlement is located in the South Bronx, the content and materials parents have developed reflects the challenges schools and families face in their own community. However, the manual has been created so that it can be used for various educational settings and communities to match the needs of the respective schools and families.

**How To Use**

There are many issues addressed within in this manual, including Parent Engagement, Family-School Alliance, Best Practices, Parent-Teacher conferences, Student-Led conferences, Homework, Communication, and Cultural Competency, among others. Some of these ideas may resonate with you, while others may not. While there are a variety of stakeholders that influence the family-school relationships (such as health organizations, local community colleges, cultural institutions, etc.), this serves as a beginning to facilitate an on-going self, educator, and community reflection. Ultimately, we hope you (as an educator mediating these relationships) will begin a conversation around the important questions:

1. What kind of relationship do we want to create between families and schools?
2. How do we begin building an alliance between families and schools?

As you read through each of the sections and plan your workshop, think about the approach you want to take. You may choose to use a sample agenda or adapt it to your community needs. Also, as you establish stronger relationships between families and schools, you may be able to develop your own role-plays based on the specific issues occurring in your community.
CONCEPTUAL FOUNDATION
Why Community Engagement

Schools are sites where many people with different interests converge in one community. Families, teachers, students, school administration and local, state and national government all have a stake in what happens in schools, and specifically students, but their interests or needs may not always be in alignment. This misalignment may cause tensions among the stakeholders, particularly schools and families, because of assumptions that may be held by each group about the other. The contentious New York City teacher strike of 1968 against efforts for community control in Ocean Hill-Brownsville is perhaps the most dramatic example of how these tensions can escalate into open political conflict.

Currently, the public conversation around parent engagement often assumes that some families (e.g. Black and/or immigrant) do not care, or are not interested in participating in their children’s education. “Parent engagement” is often approached with this assumption in mind, which may be counterproductive to the establishment of community and family partnerships, as it views families from a deficit perspective [or] because it assumes that all families come into school understanding, knowing and accepting the culture established by the school system. The reality is that many barriers that inhibit parent involvement exist, such as language, work schedules, unwelcoming school atmosphere, and negative interactions with school personal among others.

Therefore, this manual is meant to serve as a tool for schools to use to build relationships with families from an asset perspective that could help strengthen the school, community, and the students’ growth. Instead of parent engagement, we will use the phrase family-school alliances to better encompass how the parents, teachers, and other school and community members envisioned how this manual would serve families and schools. Indeed, building such relationships is not easy or straightforward, but the benefits and rewards speak for themselves. Students perform better academically, families feel welcomed and participate in building school culture, and schools become places where students want to be and learn.
Communicating Across Lines

Overcoming the barriers blocking school and family alliances requires shedding misunderstandings on both ends. Neither teachers nor families, particularly in urban areas, are portrayed favorably in the media or often in research. These flattened, simplified versions become the basis for how families and schools engage with one another. Building relationships requires recognizing the differences that families bring when they enter a school building or more generally, the US education system. Thus, it becomes important for communication to be able to take place across various cultures, languages and understandings of the school system. This manual includes a section on translanguaging to help foster such communication. This manual will provide resources for engaging in this type of communication, to help create a more productive and meaningful partnership among families and school.

Teacher Feedback

This curriculum created by PAC has been implemented in three teacher mentor forums convened by the New Teacher Center with favorable results. The following feedback from teachers who participated demonstrate how valuable the training was for participants.

What worked for you in this workshop?

“The opportunity to hear from parents what are some of the concerns they/other families are experiencing. How to conduct student-led conferences.”

“Different strategies from parents that actually worked for schools and their children.”

“Being able to hear from actual parents and their thoughts.”

“It was great collaborating with other colleagues and parents. Very powerful hearing from parents with authentic scenarios.”

“Being able to share out thought and opinions with fellow educators.”

“Nice to know other schools are facing some of the same issues. Some interesting ideas were shared to help save some of these issues.”

“Liked the role-play at the student led parent teacher conference. Good actionable ideas to use.”

“Role-playing was beneficial. Good to hear ways to get parents more involved.”

“It was great to hear from parents in different schools what is working or not.”

“The entire workshop was insightful. The reminder of perspective. We want to be a welcoming community of learners.”
THE ROLE OF THE TRAINER
Trainer Basics: Getting Started

As a trainer, you will want to formulate a program that addresses the needs of your school community including families and teachers. This section will provide information about how to make use of this guide to formulate a program to build family-school alliances.

The training process is not limited to the actual days of a workshop or session. Building alliances between families and schools is a long-term investment, so school communities that dedicate time and resources in an on-going process will see the most powerful results. This may mean that participants will attend multiple sessions in order to address in complex issues and engage in difficult conversations. Both preparation and follow-up are integral parts of the process.

Who is the program for?

This training centers primarily on the relationship between families and teachers, and so teachers are the primary audience. However, if it is appropriate schools can include any adults who work with and/or interact with both the students and families such as guidance counselors, teachers, parent coordinators, and school administration. If a team decides to include all staff, they should adapt the content of the training accordingly to ensure that it is relevant to all participants, and expand the team of facilitators to include these stakeholders. If you are leading a training at a middle or high school, it may be appropriate to include students as well.

Who leads the training?

PAC’s original trainings were powerful not simply because they explored critical issues in family-school alliances, but because the curriculum was developed and led by parents and community members, drawing upon their authentic experiences in neighborhood schools. The structure of the trainings allowed for exchange between teachers and families, helping each group gain a deeper understanding of the complex dynamics at play in relationships between teachers and families and allowing for meaningful conversation about the challenges the other faces. We recognize that not every school will have the capacity to work with a team of parent leaders to develop and lead their own curriculum, in which case they can make use of the curriculum materials and video clips in this guide. Ideally, however, school staff and families will initiate, plan and facilitate the trainings together with support from administration. We recommend that one or two teachers, a parent coordinator, and parent leaders from the school community form a team to identify goals and teaching points for the trainings, design content, and structure the agenda. While the tendency may be to rely on active parents in the Parent Teacher Association or School Leadership Team, it is important to invite other parents from the school community to participate, particularly families who may not be represented in the official parent leadership structures. Families are as diverse as our communities, and so it may be appropriate to include grandparents, aunts, uncles, other guardians and active community leaders in your team. Think about the students in your school community who need the...
most support—English Language Learners, Special Education Students, Students in Transitional Housing or over-aged students—and consider recruiting family members who could help teachers and staff think about how to best leverage family school alliances to support them. It is essential that all the family members and staff involved in planning the training be committed to forging a genuine family-school alliance rooted in respect.

You can divide planning and facilitation responsibilities in your group based on the skill set of each team member. Ideally, parent facilitators will give serve as overall facilitators, give testimony, and facilitate discussion of role-plays. Staff can provide logistical support, assist in the development of materials, and facilitate educator reflection activities, particularly using the Family School Alliance Assessment tool. However, keep in mind the strengths, interests, and experiences of the members of your team, and work with the group to distribute roles accordingly.

**Designing a program**

Workshop sessions are best conducted with at least 3 facilitators, who can offer a variety of perspectives throughout the training. Once trainers have been determined trainers should:

1. Review this training manual.
2. Decide on goals for the training, and assess the relevancy of curriculum materials in this manual to your school community.
3. Select and schedule potential dates for sessions (This may require planning alongside school administrators).
4. Either select activities and role-plays from this manual, or design more appropriate role-plays and activities based on the needs identified by your team. See "Designing Your Training" for more information.
5. Allocate roles and responsibilities among workshop facilitators.
6. Prepare for training by practicing facilitation roles and brainstorming strategies to manage difficult dynamics during the school training.

**TIPS FOR TRAINERS**

For each session, it is preferred that the pair of trainers personifies heterogeneity; for example, the trainers are of different genders and/or from different religions, ethnic, age, or cultural groups.
Training Logistics

Ensure that someone is paying attention to training logistics such as:

1. Who is attending the training? (number of people, roles of those involved)
2. Where and when will the training take place
3. How will information be communicated to attendees
4. Is there a budget for the training?
5. What materials will you needing: pens/pencils/markers, name tags, handouts, chart paper, sign-in sheet, scissors and so on.
6. If necessary, secure an interpreter and childcare for family facilitators.
7. Check to make sure that the training room will have the equipment and furniture you will need.
8. Confirm the list of expected participants a few days prior to the training.

Training Day

On the day of the workshop/session, the trainers should:

1. Arrive early to check that the equipment is in the room and that the room is suitably arranged for participant comfort and interaction.
2. Greet the participants as they arrive.
3. Begin the session on time.
4. Set ground rules and expectations of participants.
5. Inform participants of the logistics and practical aspects of the training.
6. Review the outcomes of the training with the participants.
7. At the end of each session, review participant feedback and make adjustments, as necessary, for the subsequent trainings.

TIPS FOR TRAINERS

It is important to begin the session on time, particularly the first day, as it will set expectations for the training.
Training Follow-Up

After the training, the trainers should:

1. Review the participant feedback and make notes regarding any changes you or they would make for future trainings.

2. Follow-up on any requests for information made by participants
Trainer Strategies

In an effort to elicit discussion from the entire group, here are a few strategies you may use during a session. There are many more to draw from—just ask a teacher!

Turn and Talk

This strategy permits all participants to engage in short and immediate discussion, rather than only a few people participating in a class-wide discussion

Procedure

Step One: Question
Pose a question or prompt for participants to discuss and tell them how much time they will have. A one-to-two minute discussion is most productive.

Step Two: Turn
Have participants turn to a specific partner. Pair participants using various strategies. (see variations below) Eyeball Partners or Shoulder Partners assignments should be set up beforehand so that participants can quickly and easily pair up.

Step Three: Talk
Set a timer for the allotted time, and have participants begin discussing the assigned question or prompt. When time is up, ask partners to share out thoughts and ideas from their discussion.

TURN AND TALK VARIATIONS

Eyeball Partners
When people are seated at tables or in groups, “eyeball partners” are participants who are facing each other.

Shoulder Partners
When people are seated at tables or in groups, “shoulder partners” are participants who are seated next to each other. This may also be done when people are seated in rows.
Think, Pair, Share

This discussion technique gives participants the opportunity to thoughtfully respond to questions in written form and to engage in meaningful dialogue with other participants around these issues. Asking participants to write and discuss ideas with a partner before sharing with the larger group gives participants more time to compose their ideas. This format helps participants build confidence, encourages greater participation and often results in more thoughtful discussions.

Procedure

Step One: Think
  Have participants reflect on a given question or write a response in a journal.

Step Two: Pair
  Have participants pair up with another participant and share their responses.

Step Three: Share
  When the larger group reconvenes, ask pairs to report back on their conversations.

Alternatively, you could ask partners to share their partners’ response. In this way, this strategy focuses on partners’ skills as careful listeners.

Double Entry Journal

This technique gives participants the opportunity to respond to or reflect on what they are seeing or reading. Entries can influence the overall training process because they may highlight connections, questions, problems, and concerns that participants may have. On the left side of the paper participants write what is happening. On the right side of the paper participants record how it made them feel, what connections they made to their own experiences, what questions or concerns it raised, etc.

Procedure

Step One:
  Participants divide sheets of paper in half lengthwise
  This could also be done before the training begins

Step Two:
  Participants record what is happening on the left and reflections on the right

Step Three:
  Participants share in small or whole groups to help facilitate discussions.
Tips and Cautions for Trainers

This manual has been developed to provide the content and processes you need to deliver a training. However, as you develop your own knowledge base and continue your work, you will find ways to enrich the training. You will also fine-tune the training to suit the understanding, needs, and issues of each particular group of participants.

Adaptation

New Settlement PAC created this curriculum to address the realities and issues occurring in District 9 and District 12. However, in other districts adaptation should be based on the historical context of the geographical area of the participants; in particular, the political, economic, cultural, religious, class, gender, sexual, and other social issues/oppressions of the area. Adaptation should be made in collaboration with a small group. You will probably need several planning sessions to ensure that one group does not have a dominant voice and is not imposing or ‘rescuing’ a subordinate group.

Acknowledging Assumptions

As you engage in facilitating and processing activities, you will draw on your assumptions around the relationship between families and schools as well as around the community. It is important to reflect and investigate your own assumptions as they will influence participant engagement during a session.

Empathize with the Experiences of Participants

It is likely that the workshop sessions will touch on difficult experiences and struggles for all participants. Sara Lawrence-Lightfoot, a Harvard sociologist who examines the culture of schools, has observed that the relationships between families and teachers turn around the essential question of how we raise our children: an intimately political question that charges these relationships with tension. Families may have had challenging experiences during their own time in school, or feel frustration as a result of their past interactions with educators. In addition to assumptions teachers may hold about families and communities, they may not have had any previous professional development focused on working with families, and may feel that they are not provided with meaningful support to build strong family school alliances. It is essential that facilitators validate the contributions of both families and teachers and offer a positive vision of powerful family school alliances. Sharing both positive and challenging parent testimonies, included in the “Building Learning Communities” section, is a good strategy to set a constructive tone. Establishing this foundation of empathy will make difficult conversations about how we address challenges in family school alliances possible.
Creating a Positive Environment

As a trainer, it is critical that you facilitate an environment where all voices are heard and complex issues are allowed to be addressed. Participants should ideally include all individuals involved in student interactions and learning. As schools are places where a multiplicity of personal and political ideas converge, it is important to centralize issues of race and class from a historical perspective. Thus, creating an opportunity where participants can agree to be generous with each other. Furthermore this effort may maintain that sessions are a space for learning, facilitating the building of strong family-school alliances. In “Building a Learning Community,” we suggest several strategies for creating a positive environment, but here are some things to consider:

- The environment includes the physical and psychological surroundings of the workshop session, including location, room arrangement, and tone of the training.

- Set the tone by personally welcoming participants. In your introduction, tell them something about yourself – find ways to connect your experiences with their experiences. Organize the room so that you are not isolated from the participants (for example, you are not stationed behind a podium).

- Ensure the physical environment is accessible and comfortable for all participants.

Silence and Wait Time

It is extremely important for trainers to be comfortable with extended periods of silence. Remember that people need thinking time. Allow the silence to work. Wait: the silence will always seem longer to you than it does to the participants. When trainers jump in too soon with more questions, the process can be disrupted

Different people take different amounts of time to process information and ideas. It is important to respect participants’ cultural and personal variables as well recognize the extra language process time required by many who may be English learners.

TIPS FOR TRAINERS

Being comfortable with silence and wait time is essential for trainers. Wait time and silence is essential for participant to think and meaningfully engage with questions and activities.
Debriefing is Essential

If you find during a break that participants are seeking you out to debrief, you may not have helped them debrief their feelings sufficiently during the workshop. In the subsequent session, take time to find out if other participants are feeling the same way. If so, give the group an opportunity to debrief feelings further. Be sensitive to the balance between debriefing and moving forward. Moving forward without enough debriefing after major activities can be destructive to the training.
DESIGNING YOUR TRAINING
Designing the workshop: Multiple Pathways

The tools provided in this section will help you create a road-map to develop your own family-school alliance training. There are multiple pathways to building family-school alliances. It is important to take time to assess current practices while historicizing and contextualizing the relationship between the community and the school. A sustained and diligent effort can take time yet can also provide a solid foundation to work through difficulties and challenges that arise from the conversations between families and teachers.

After you review the curriculum developed by PAC, you may decide that the testimonies and role-plays are relevant to challenges in your school community and choose to use these materials as the foundation for your training. You may also acknowledge that your school community faces different challenges, and decide to develop your own curriculum. Regardless, it will be important to incorporate feedback from school stakeholders in your agenda and planning. You may host a single session, or you may choose to create a series of mini workshops to address one role-play at a time. Your ultimate goal is to facilitate thoughtful conversations and help generate reflective practices for building family school alliances: organize your training in whatever manner works best for your school community.

Getting Started

Once you have built your team of trainers, your first step is to identify goals and possible topics for the training.

Reflect on experience: As a group, reflect on your own experiences building family-school alliances in your school community. What are some good experiences parents and staff have had working with one another? What are some challenges parents and teachers have faced in building family-school alliances? Are these experiences shared by other stakeholders in your school community? What have you learned from these experiences that should be shared with other staff members? Starting from your own experience allows for community building among facilitators, and ensures that the curriculum you develop will be an authentic reflection of the strengths and challenges of your school community.

Brainstorm Goals: What are you hoping will be the outcome of this training? Do you want to build stronger relationships between parent leaders and teachers? Is this training meant as a first step towards developing a stronger family engagement strategy? Do you want all teachers to try out a new, specific strategy to reach out to families? Knowing what you hope to achieve will help you prioritize what to include in your training session.

Brainstorm Specific Topics: Based on your goals, what content do you want to include in your training session? If there is a large community of immigrant families, you may want to focus on strategies for engaging parents who do not speak English, or on creating welcoming and inclusive classrooms. If you want to improve parent teacher conferences, it might make sense to share the model of student-led conferences, or discuss how teachers can coach parents on how to support their children at home.
Integrating Input from School Stakeholders

Once you have brainstormed goals and possible topics, it is important to build buy-in for the training among all stakeholders by consulting them about the practices they already use to build family-school alliances, the strengths of their strategy, and the challenges they face in building family-school alliances. You can also ask stakeholders which of the training topics your group has identified are most relevant to their experience. Below is a sample survey developed by PAC and distributed to teacher mentors before the first session PAC led. PAC leaders distributed a similar survey to school leaders. You can adapt the questions in this survey, you can make your own, or conduct a focus group with teachers who will participate in the training.

Congratulations on being a new teacher mentor! We’d like to know what themes and skills would be most useful to you.

Please take a minute to complete the survey below.

1. What goals does your school have this year for communication with families?
2. What strategies or practices do you use now to work towards your goals?
3. How do you evaluate your methods to determine their success?
   What tools do you use to address areas of improvement in your school?
4. What are your strengths as a mentor in coaching new teachers to engage families?
5. In what areas do you need more training and support to effectively support new teachers to engage families?
6. Our family members have already identified some potential training topics. Which are most interesting to you?
   Which seem less relevant to the teachers at your school?
   Check the topics that are most relevant in the space provided.

   • Community tour to focus on community strengths and history, but also barriers families face to engagement.
   • Strategies to build positive constructive relationships with families.
   • Strategies to communicate with families who don’t speak English.
   • How culture affects communication.
   • Discussion about school discipline and classroom management and how parents can be engaged in creating a positive school climate.

What additional questions or concerns do you have?
Is there anything else you would like to add?

Thank you for your feedback, and for everything you do for children in District 9!
After you have collected input from participants, reflect on how their feedback aligns with the goals and topics brainstormed by your group. Do you agree about your school community’s strengths and challenges in building family-school alliances? Are there new topics you hadn’t considered? Based on what you have learned, finalize and prioritize your training goals and topics.

**Identifying Teaching Points**

Once you have finalized your training goals and topics, it is time to get specific about what key concepts and practical skills you want participants to learn from your training. Look back at the notes from your first conversation about your group’s experiences building successful family-school alliances. What were the strategies that families and teachers used to build a positive working relationship? Once you have refreshed your memories, brainstorm what lessons you want to share for each of your topics, making an effort to be as specific and constructive as possible. It is important that participants leave your session with practical ideas they can put to work immediately!

After an initial brainstorm, it may be helpful to spend a session reviewing research on the topics you have identified. For example, when developing teaching points on productive parent teacher conferences, PAC leaders reviewed articles from the Harvard Family Research Project, identifying new strategies to highlight in their session.

**Creating a Participatory Agenda: Using the Resources in this Manual**

When you have created goals and finalized your teaching points, the next step is to decide how to structure your session in an engaging and participatory way. Whether you use PAC materials or develop your own, it is critical that your session be built around dynamic dialogue and exchange. PAC leaders felt that one of the most valuable parts of the training sessions was the opportunity to learn directly from teachers about their experiences, building trust and mutual respect in the process.

The curriculum materials included in this manual were designed by PAC leaders and community organizers for two separate sessions for mentors and new teachers in Winter and Fall 2015. The basic structure of each session included the following:

- Community building/icebreaker activities to establish a positive tone
- Individual reflection to allow mentors to reflect on their own practices and the areas in which their new teacher mentees need support
- Sharing both encouraging parent testimonies about constructive relationships between families and teachers and challenging stories about barriers, miscommunication and missed connections between teachers and families.
• Breakout groups centered on role-plays that explored the challenging dynamics in family-school alliances
• Report back from breakout groups and discussions
• Identifying next steps both for mentors and new teachers using the Collaborative Assessment Log.

The mix of positive and challenging testimonies helped open the conversation by acknowledging the transformative potential of family-school alliances while introducing some of the challenges in these relationships, previewing the role-plays.

Below is a sample workshop agenda from the first session in February 2015. You will notice that the discussion questions listed for the role-plays are different than the questions we include with the role-play scripts in this manual. PAC leaders edited the questions following the initial trainings based on their experiences of how best to facilitate constructive conversations between parents and teachers.

### New Settlement Parent Action Committee
### New Teacher Center
### Parent Engagement Mentor Forum
### Wednesday February 11, 2015

**1. Welcome**
(15 minutes)
- Introduction of overall facilitator (Morning: Ana Maria Garcia, Afternoon: Esperanza Vazquez)
- Overview of PAC and involvement in District 9 New Teacher Mentoring Initiative
- Overview of workshop goals: Providing mentors with tools to support new teachers to more effectively engage parents
- Review Agenda
- Icebreaker: Divide into triads, with parent leaders participating in select groups. Introduce yourselves and explain your role as a parent or teacher in improving student achievement.

**2. Collaborative Assessment Log Reflection** (Morning: Karali, Afternoon: Raquel) (10 minutes)
- Ask mentors to complete the first two boxes on their CAL to describe what their mentee is doing well and what is proving challenging in the area of parent engagement. (5 minutes)
- Mentors share their notes with a partner (3 minutes)
- Mentors write down their questions on parent engagement on post-it notes and pass them forward.
- Facilitator organizes them into similar categories on the wall during role-play activity.
3. Testimonies (15 minutes)

- Positive parent-teacher relationships in District 9
  - Morning:
    Esperanza Vazquez (Key message: Early relationship building leads to good communication around student achievement)
  - Afternoon:
    “Esperanza Vazquez (Key message: Early relationship building leads to good communication around student achievement)
- July Alcantara (Key message: constructive and consistent communication to improve student outcomes)
- Victor Almanzar (Key Message: Effective partnerships between parents and teachers.)
- Challenging parent-teacher relationships
  - Morning:
    Soranyi Encarnacion (Key Message: Lack of interpretation and limited communication leads to mistrust between parents and teachers vs. effective example of parent-teacher communication despite language barrier)
  - Afternoon:
    Karen Jimenez (Key Message: Negative communication vs. positive communication)
- Teacher “Testimonies”
  To encourage exchange of experience, ask two mentors to share areas of strength and challenges from the CAL that new teachers face in engaging parents.

4. Role-Plays

- Divide into three groups to reflect on strategies to help new teachers more effectively engage parents. Mentors should select the role-play that best reflects the challenges their mentees are facing.
  - Three Scenarios:
    Spanish Speaking Mother
    (Morning: Alicia Toscano, Afternoon: Karen Jimenez)
    Frustrated Parent
    (Morning: Ana Maria Garcia, Afternoon: Angel Martinez)
    Effective relationship-building
    (Morning: Alonda Myers, Afternoon: July Alcantara)
  - Each Scenario has three components:
    Select one mentor to play the role of a new teacher in a role-play. Parent facilitator + volunteer act out role-play from script. This first scenario is "challenging"- full of common mistakes.
    Parent facilitator + volunteer act out role-play from script. This first scenario is "challenging"- full of common mistakes.
Creating a Participatory Agenda: Crafting your own materials

After your group develops goals and teaching points, you may decide that the materials developed by PAC are not relevant to your school community. In that case, you’ll need to create your own testimonies and role-plays. You can use the worksheets below as roadmaps to help you!
### Writing Your Own Testimonial for a Role-Play

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Prompting Questions</th>
<th>Your Response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What is the goal of your testimony/role-play?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What are the key points you want to address?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What are some stories from your own experiences (or those of your friends or family) that might illustrate some of the key points you want to address?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Designing Your Own Role-Play from Testimonials

Write out a draft:

Compare your draft to the key points. Are they effectively addressed?

Revise/Edit for a Final Draft (incorporating changes)
Putting it all Together: Structuring Your Agenda

There are many different ways to build an agenda to meet the needs of a group. However you create one, a clear and well-constructed agenda is a crucial step for a productive, inclusive, and meaningful workshop session. The facilitator’s job is to keep the participants on track by following the agenda as well as paying attention to when the agenda isn’t working and changes need to happen.

Whether you use the materials in this guide or develop your own, here are some best practices to keep in mind as you organize your activities into an agenda.

• Some groups like a more emergent and organic style for building an agenda. If this is your group, participants can spend the beginning of the session writing each agenda item they’d like to discuss on an index card, and then the group can use different visual tools to select the card(s) people are most moved to talk about. In the case of building a family-school alliance, this would work after several sessions where a common objective towards this goal is established. The downside: you don’t know what you’re talking about in advance, so you can’t prepare or share your thoughts if you’re not able to attend.

• Review the agenda at the beginning of the meeting. Share your reasoning before asking for amendments or changes. It is important that the whole group be on board with the agenda.

• Announcements and report-backs at the beginning of the meeting can save a lot of time.

• Give it variety: mix up the length and type of agenda items.

• Put agenda items that will build energy and establish a positive tone to build momentum and excitement! Follow with more challenging conversations.

• Schedule breaks after big discussions, and at regular intervals for any meeting more than 90 minutes long.

• Finish on a positive note with an evaluation of the meeting and an acknowledgment of progress. “One word,” where each participant shares one word to describe how they feel at the end of the workshop, is a good strategy.

• Display the agenda so that all can see it (either on flip-chart, blackboard, projector, or printed out).

• Label items with their expected actions: decision, discussion, play, evaluate, brainstorm, review, update, silence, feedback, appreciations and concerns.
Practice and Prepare

If members of your group are not experienced facilitators, you should budget time before the first session to practice their sections of the agenda so that they feel confident and well prepared. PAC leaders conducted a full run through of the agenda the week before the training and gave each other feedback on their facilitation. This kind of practice can also help you identify what additional activities or materials might be useful to round out the agenda.

As a group, brainstorm possible challenges that could arise during your session, such as conflict between participants or push-back on parent facilitators by school staff, and create a plan of action for how you will address them and who will take the lead if necessary.
Developing a Learning Environment

In order to create an effective workshop for teachers and members of the school community, we must think about barriers which are present and are reproduced inadvertently. Even schools with thoughtful communication systems and processes can unintentionally perpetuate obstructions to full member participation and access to democratic processes. This happens through group dynamics of power, privilege and oppression that often marginalize women, people of color, queer, trans and gender non-conforming folks, people with disabilities, among others. This section introduces certain structures and practices which can help build strong, active communities and successful initiatives.

Community Agreements

Community agreements help define your role as facilitator and clarify the group’s expectations of you and each other. One of your big responsibilities to the group is to make sure these agreements are sustained. This is not about creating rules—it is about creating and clarifying agreements and expectations that allow everyone in the group to participate. In order for these to be meaningful, they need to come from the group itself. Once a group creates its agreements, they can be used over and over. As a facilitator, you get to contribute to this list, too. Once created, community agreements should be revisited as needed to modify for anything that arises throughout the various trainings.

Here are some community agreements that can be helpful in sessions, to get you thinking:

• ONE PERSON, ONE MIC
  Please, only one person speaks at a time. (It can also be useful to ask people to leave space in between speakers, for those who need more time to process words, or are less comfortable fighting for airtime in a conversation.)

• NO ONE KNOWS EVERYTHING; TOGETHER WE KNOW A LOT
  This means we all get to practice being humble, because we have something to learn from everyone in the room. It also means we all have a responsibility to share what we know (as well as our questions) so that others may learn from us.

• MOVE UP, MOVE UP
  If you’re someone who tends to not speak a lot, please move up into a role of speaking more. If you tend to speak a lot, please move up into a role of listening more. This is a twist on the on the more commonly heard “step up, step back.” The “up/up” confirms that in both experiences, growth is happening. (You don’t go “back” by learning to be a better listener.) Saying “move” instead of “step” recognizes that not everyone can step.
• **WE CAN’T BE ARTICULATE ALL THE TIME**
  As much as we’d like, we just can’t. Often people feel hesitant to participate in a workshop or meeting for fear of “messing up” or stumbling over their words. We want everyone to feel comfortable participating, even if you can’t be as articulate as you’d like.

• **BE AWARE OF TIME**
  This is helpful for your facilitator, and helps to respect everyone’s time and commitment. Please come back on time from breaks, and refrain from speaking in long monologues.

• **BE CURIOUS**
  We make better decisions when we approach our problems and challenges with questions (“What if we…?”) and curiosity. Allow space for play, curiosity, and creative thinking.

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**TIPS FOR TRAINERS**

There are a few community agreements that participants often bring up that should be questioned. Two of the most common ones are “assume best intentions” and “default to trust.” The reason these agreements should be questioned is because when someone is unable to say they’re feeling untrusting of someone, or unsafe, having a community agreement telling them to feel differently will not address the root cause. These agreements aren’t always possible, especially when we take into consideration that when people have been harmed by sexism, racism, homophobia, transphobia, classism, they/we build up necessary tools to take care of and protect themselves/ourselves from such harm. Therefore, agreements to offer instead that capture the spirit of “assume best intentions” are “we can’t be articulate all the time,” “be generous with each other,” or “this is a space for learning.”
Investigating Our Practices and Assumptions

From previous collaboration and work with the New Teacher Center, PAC created a tool for teachers to assess their community building practices. One purpose of this tool is to guide individual reflections, guide shared discussions amongst staff, and create a series of professional development for teachers. Another purpose of this tool is to recognize a variety of systemic and structural issues that inform experiences in schools. The hope is for this tool to generate meaningful discussions around effectively engaging families and building family school alliance. The inner oval focuses on individual assumptions and practices in developing family-school alliances. The outer oval focuses on the contextualizing or understanding of broader and historical dynamics informing individual interactions. You may choose to focus conversation on one of the sections or on several.
Family School Alliance Assessment Tool

In reflecting upon your own practice, respond to the following:

1. What practices are you effectively using to develop family school alliances?

2. What are challenges you face in building a family school alliance?

3. What are your questions or assumptions around family school alliances?

4. How can you learn more about the community?

In reflecting upon the school community, respond to the following:

1. What are effective school practices that build community relationships?

2. What is the historical relationship between the school and community?

3. How can your school create a stronger alliance? What specifically do we need?

4. What are the structural forces (policies, laws, -isms) in the community that create obstacles for families?

You can present participant responses through the figure shown below. This graphic serves to highlight the interconnected and embedded influences in the work to strengthen relationships between families and schools.
Family School Alliance Assessment Tool

Reflection on Community Engagement
ICEBREAKERS:

Here are a few icebreaker suggestions you may want to use as you design your workshop. They are split up into several categories including creating connections, highlighting community advocates, and bringing laughter and fun into the room.

CREATE CONNECTIONS

Concentric Circles is a powerful bonding exercise because it gives individuals the opportunity to share their thoughts and experiences with others in one-on-one conversations. Because people are given an ordered situation in which to have these conversations, they are able to build relationships with others without the pressure and awkwardness that are often part of social interactions. For new groups, simple, engaging questions are best to break the ice and create connections. More challenging questions or themes should only be explored in groups where trust has been established.

Note: If the group has an uneven number of people, a facilitator should participate in the circles. However, if there is not a second facilitator to keep time, you can either arrange one set of chairs as a triad or have one chair outside the circle in which a different person will sit out each round.

The following set of topics would be appropriate for a training session for school staff:

• Talk about an interesting person in your family and what makes them interesting
• Talk about the neighborhood you grew up in and some of your earliest memories.
• Talk about your favorite and least favorite teacher from elementary school.
• Talk about a time that you broke a rule, and what happened.

Instructions

1. Have the group arrange their chairs so that they are facing each other in two circles, one inside the other. You can have the group count off by 2s (1, 2, 1, 2…). Then have all the ones form their chairs into an inner circle, facing the twos who were to their left. Or you can simply say that every other person should move their chair to face the person to their left. If the group includes people from different subgroups (for example, teachers and students), tell one subgroup to form the inner circle, so they will be talking with people from the other subgroup rather than to each other.
2. Once the circles have been created, tell the group that they will be having a series of short conversations with a series of partners. They should introduce themselves to each new partner, and they should share the time so that each person has a chance to speak.

3. Give the group a question that each pair is to discuss.

4. After one or two minutes, call time. Allow less time for younger people and more time for older. (Keep the time short enough so that people still have more to say when they need to move on.) Tell the inside circle to move one seat to the left so that everyone is facing someone new.

5. Remind people to introduce themselves to their new partners. Then give another question for the new pairs to discuss.

6. In smaller groups, this continues until the inside circle has moved completely around to where they began. In larger groups, have people move 5 to 20 times, depending on how long you can dedicate to the exercise. Adjust the time you give each pair and the number of times you have people move according to the needs of the group and the constraints of the meeting.

GROUP MEMBERSHIP

The goal of this icebreaker is to create a supportive environment in which the learners can disclose their group memberships and to allow them to find unknown commonalities.

Instructions

Have the learners form a large circle. You will call out different interests or characteristics, and individuals who share this interest or characteristic go inside the circle.

Begin with "low-risk" interests or characteristics (e.g. have brown hair, come from a large family, enjoy walking, like dancing bachata, etc).

Applaud when each group forms in the middle.

The group in the middle will then rejoin the large circle.

After a few rounds, ask participants to share a new characteristic or interest to keep playing.
DISTINGUISHING GROUPS/ CONTEXTUALIZING

STAND UP

The goal of this icebreaker is to highlight the different experiences participants may have in the community.

Instructions
Everyone begins sitting down. For each statement, participants will stand up if the sentence applies to them. Everyone who remains sitting can applaud in sign language. (See image left)

Then participants will sit back down and wait for the next statement.

1. Stand up if you work or have ever worked in the school.
2. Stand up if you live or have ever lived in the Bronx.
3. Stand up if you were born in the Bronx.
4. Stand up if you attended this school.
5. Stand up if you have a student attending this school.

Statements can be adapted to highlight your breadth of experience in the community.

FOR FUN, LAUGHTER AND TO GENERATE ENERGY

LOOK UP LOOK DOWN

This is an elimination game involving eye contact.

Instructions
Players stand in a circle, all with their heads looking down. The facilitator yells “look up”.
All players look up at someone else (they cannot change who they are looking at after they look up).
If two people happen to be looking at each other (i.e. make eye contact), they both are eliminated.
The facilitator then says “look down” and everyone looks down.
The facilitator then says “look up” and the process continues.
The game continues until there are only two players left.
When there are only two people left, do rock paper scissors to select a winner.
Parent Testimonials

These testimonials share insight into positive relationships between families and schools. It is helpful for participants to hear positive testimonies before discussions on challenges in family-school alliances, as these discussions can create defensiveness among teachers and school staff. It is important to share at least one “positive” and at least one “challenging” role-play, to acknowledge the transformative work of teachers and the powerful potential of family-school alliances while previewing the challenges that will be explored further in the role-plays.

PARENT TESTIMONY #1

Esperanza Vazquez, High School Parent

Grover empezó la escuela con un nivel de lectura muy bajo. Su maestra formó una buena relación con nosotros. Al principio de año escolar, nos invitaron a un desayuno con todos los maestros. Hablamos de cosas sencillas pero esto ayudó mucho en que tengamos una mejor comunicación con las maestras de Grover. Los maestros nos dieron sus teléfonos y correos electrónicos, y nos dijeron que podíamos llamarlos con cualquier preocupación. Muchas veces me llaman la noche antes de clases los sábados, para acordarme que Grover tiene que asistir, o para dejarme saber si no se ha presentado. Hablamos acerca de cómo apoyarlo a que triunfe en sus materias. Como resultado, en dos años Grover estaba leyendo a nivel. Sé que no soy la única madre con este tipo de relación con los maestros de mi hijo.

My son Grover began middle school reading below grade level. His teacher built a good relationship with us. At the beginning of the year, we were invited to a breakfast with all of the teachers. We talked about simple things, but this helped to establish better communication and rapport with Grover’s teachers. The teachers gave us their telephone numbers and emails, and said we could call them with any questions or concerns. Many times they called me the night before Saturday classes to remind me that Grover needed to attend, or to let me know if he had not come. We spoke about how to support him so that he could triumph in his school work. As a result, in two years Grover was reading on grade level. I know I am not the only parent who has a similar relationship with Grover’s teachers!
PARENT TESTIMONY #2

Victor Almanzar, Student

My mom and I arrived here on May 4, 1994. We needed help finding our way around, and not everyone was nice. Since I was little I had problems with speech and when we came to the United States for the first time I still had the same problems. My mother said when she got here, she didn’t know where to go or who to ask for help, that she was afraid she would be laughed at if she reached out. I was in school in the Bronx at PS 114, and around that time I was in a bilingual class, English and Spanish. And the teacher Ms. Garcia when she was giving me lessons and she wanted me to pronounce the words, she noticed that I had trouble. After that, she called my mom and made an appointment with her. When my mom went in and heard her concerns, my mom was so relieved, and finally opened up and shared what she had been seeing for years. Ms. Garcia explained to her how to get speech services for me. She helped us get an evaluation at the school, and then she helped my mom find a specialist for me in Manhattan. And after that I went there every Saturday until I was in middle school. My mom still talks about how she is really grateful for what Ms. Garcia did for us. My mom says, “Ella es una maestra que tiene sentimiento, y que sabe lo que hace.” “She’s a teacher who really has a heart, and knows what she is doing.”
PARENT TESTIMONY #3

Soranyi Encarción, Elementary School Parent

Mi hijo está en el tercer grado. La profesora no habla español y es nueva en la escuela. En la primera conferencia que tuvimos, ella no puso interprete entonces mi hijo tuvo que traducir lo que me decía la maestra. No debería ser así por que si yo le quiero decir algo que mi hijo no sepa entonces? ¿Cómo lo puedo hacer si mi inglés no es perfecto? La conferencia no duró más que tres minutos. Ella solo me dió sus notas y me dijo que todo estaba bien. Yo le pregunté cómo le iba en la clase, y me dijo que todo estaba bien.

Tiene que ver más comunicación para establecer una relación entre padre y maestro. La maestra de mi otro hijo siempre busca la manera de interpretarme todo, porque no sé el idioma. Me envía notas detalladas en español a la casa. Ella me dice que cualquier cosa que yo quiera decírsela, que le mande un email en español y ella buscará la forma de como traducirlo. Entonces me siento más cómoda por la manera que ella me trata.

My son is in the third grade. The teacher doesn’t speak Spanish and is new at the school. In our first parent teacher conference, she didn’t get an interpreter so my son had to translate everything that the teacher told me. It shouldn’t have been that way because what if I wanted to tell her something I don’t want my son to hear? How can I do it if my English isn’t perfect? The conference didn’t last more than three minutes. She only gave me the grades and told me that everything was fine. I asked how my son was doing in his class, and she told me that everything was fine.

There should be more communication to establish a relationship between parents and teachers. The teacher of my other son always looks for a way to interpret for me, since I don’t know English. She sends detailed notes in Spanish home. She tells me that whatever I need to tell her, I should just send her an email in Spanish and she will find a way to translate it. As a result I feel a lot more comfortable because of the way in which she treats me.
Karen Jimenez, Parent

I know that my son is very curious. Ever since he was small he has been like that. He always asks questions. He gets along with all his teachers except one. At the beginning of the year he called me the first time. He told me that my son was not coming to class prepared. So, I bought him the school supplies he needed for class, and a book that he needed. Next he called me to tell me that my son doesn’t do the homework. So I began to help him with his assignment. Next the teacher told me that my son doesn’t pay attention in class, and that he spent the class talking with his friend next to him and that he frequently fell asleep in class. I told my son to go to bed earlier so that he wouldn’t sleep in class. When I went to get my son’s report card with my husband, my son’s teacher called us out in a very rude manner in front of all the other teachers. He began to scold my son saying that he didn’t study, that he didn’t pay attention, that he didn’t take materials that he needed to take. He also scolded me and my husband. So, I told the teacher that maybe it wasn’t my son, that maybe the problem was him, the teacher. For me teachers are not different from parents. We are entrusting them with our great treasures, and they should treat us with respect in return.
PARENT TESTIMONY #5

Abdoulaye Barry, Elementary School Parent

I come from Guinea West Africa. I had a wonderful connection with my daughter’s pre-school teacher, Ms. Roach. She was from Central America, from Honduras, and so she understood where my family is coming from as immigrants. She was a great teacher, and she did a lot for us. My daughter studied with her for a year and a half. At parent teacher conferences, she was very patient with me as I spoke English, little by little, and she understood me. She asked if I only speak to my daughter in English. I said no, that I don’t speak English well and my language is Fulani. She said, “That’s fine,” she said, “continue. She will learn both languages, and it will help her learn how to take on challenges and step up. I had a similar experience 40 years ago. When I came to the US, I only spoke Spanish and my son went to school to learn English. At home, we spoke Spanish. When I met the teacher, the teacher told me “Don’t speak to him in Spanish! That won’t help him learn English quick.” I said no, because I speak only Spanish and I don’t want him to lose my language; we have to find a way for him learn both. It was tough for my son, but at the end he can succeed because he faced both challenges. I helped him with Spanish at home, and at school he focused on English. He did it! Now he’s 40 years old, and he’s doing well and he speaks both languages.” She encouraged me to speak my language at home with my children, and said that will help them a lot. It is important to learn how to face challenges at the beginning of your journey in school.

We thank God because now in my language we have scripts that we can use to write. Now we have our own alphabet that captures all the Fulani sounds. Not all sounds are captured in Latin or Arabic characters, so in the past we had to use multiple alphabets. Following Ms. Roach’s advice, now I can teach it to my kids. It is so important. They ask me to tell them words in our language, and I write to for them and so they can memorize it. It’s important to keep our culture and our language. In this country, I like that we are encouraged to keep our culture even while we learn about the culture here. How can we keep our culture if we don’t keep our language? Americans come to my area in Guinea to learn Fulani, and so why shouldn’t I teach my children? It’s important to learn other cultures, but not to forget yours.
Fatima Gueye, Parent

When my daughter Khadydiatou was at PS 134 in the 4th and 5th grade, she had a wonderful teacher named Ms. Eubanks. She called me all the time to tell me how she was doing, both good things that she did and also when she didn’t do her homework or was having a hard time at school. She didn’t smile too much and so at first I was a little scared of her, but I knew she loved teaching the kids. She laughed and smiled with the kids and was always happy to be with them. She gave them books and told them stories about her teacher and why she wanted to be a teacher too, and my daughter remembered all of the stories and would tell me when she came home. She gave the kids afterschool classes when they were struggling. At the end of the year she organized a celebration in her classroom and gave them trophies and food and prizes for all their hard work. She really knew my daughter well and taught her everything she knew. All teachers should do the same thing.

I had a harder time with my other daughter’s third grade teacher. She yelled at my daughter right at the beginning of the school year when she forgot her homework, and was very aggressive when I came to explain what happened. When the time came for the report cards, I went to meet with her. She told me “She’s not doing well. And her spoken English is not correct. She sounds African. What are you doing at home, are you speaking too much African?” I said “She doesn’t even speak Wolof, my language. I try everything to teach her Wolof, but she speaks English. We speak English together.” The teachers said, “It doesn’t sound good when she speaks in class. She doesn’t speak or write properly.” I told her, “What can I do about that? She speaks English!” I couldn’t even look at her when she was talking about my child that way, and after that I didn’t want to talk to her when I go to pick up my child. I felt blamed, but I know my daughter works hard in school and on her homework, and I just want to work with the teacher. She was nice at the last parent teacher conferences, and told me my daughter was doing good, but that was the only time we spoke after that.
**Use the Think, Pair, Share (see pg. 19 ) strategy to discuss how these experiences shape families engagement in schools.**

- Have you experienced a similar story? How was it similar?
- Do you have a different experience with navigating schooling?

**Topics for Future Meetings**

Whatever your group chooses to call it (ex. Parking lot, garden, bike rack, etc.), have a sheet or ongoing list to write down ideas, questions, and topics that come up for future meetings. Often in the course of talking about one topic, really important things surface that need to be addressed, but are not on the current meeting’s agenda. Unless they are urgent/time sensitive, it can really help keep the group on topic to have a space to note them so that they can be incorporated into future meetings.

**Next Steps/ Who, What, When, Priority**

It can be very helpful to keep a sheet where you’re taking notes on any next steps or tasks that are coming out of the session. You can end the meeting by reviewing this sheet and filling in missing details. You can also start subsequent sessions by checking in with the sheet from the previous workshop.
EXAMINING THE ISSUES AND BUILDING ALLIANCES THE ROLE PLAY
Each role-play was developed and written by PAC leaders drawing on their own experiences in neighborhood schools. PAC created these role-plays both to dramatize family experiences for teachers, and to serve as a conversation starter that allows for meaningful reflection and dialogue between educators and parents.

Facilitating the Role-Plays: During the PAC-led trainings, the family facilitator played the role of the mother or father in the role-play, and asked for a volunteer to play the teacher. After the role-play, the family member led a discussion with the teachers in the group. In some of the groups, the participants improvised a new version of the role-play after the discussion in order to experiment with the strategies teachers brainstormed in the style of Forum Theater (See box). The only two exceptions are the Student-Led Conference Role-Play, which began with an explanation of the strategy being modeled, and the final role-play on Creating Welcoming Classrooms, which features two distinct role-plays linked by a set of discussion questions. These role-plays are designed not to dramatize challenges, but to illustrate a powerful moment of alliance-building between families and teachers.

If you prefer, you can show videos of PAC leaders and organizers performing the role-play in place of acting out each scenario. Videos are available on PAC’s YouTube Channel, parentactioncommittee. After each video, have a member of your team facilitate a discussion using the questions provided in this manual.

**THE ROLE-PLAY**

Forum Theater is a form of theater developed in Latin America by Augusto Boal as a method of tackling problems of the lives of ordinary people while applying the theories of Paolo Freire. Considering our scenarios, we offer a method that is inspired by Boal’s work, yet not categorized as forum theater.

The general objective is to evolve a role-play to build a family-school alliance by allowing the protagonist (in this case the teacher or school staff roles) to offer alternatives to the actions presented. Any participant can try out a strategy they brainstormed during group discussions. Usually only one role in the role-play is replaced (the role of school staff).

**Contextualizing the Role-Play:**

For each role-play, we include a few suggested resources to help contextualize the role-play and inspire meaningful discussion. Most of these role-plays have a list of family teaching points developed by PAC leaders. These teaching points are not a script, nor are they an exhaustive list of the themes and topics you can discuss. Rather, they are meant to serve as starting point as you reflect on how to unpack the scenarios with participants, and provide a parent perspective on the challenges explored in each role-play. For certain role-plays we suggest strategies that may be useful to share with participants. You can also refer to the recommended resources for ideas about what to highlight in your discussion.
You can also open each role-play by reading a relevant parent testimony, and close each activity by reviewing the recommended resources. It will be helpful to use the Family School Alliance Assessment at the conclusion of each role-play to guide reflections and next steps.
Role-Play #1: Building Relationships Across Language Barriers

SET UP

The goal of this role-play is to exchange strategies to help new teachers establish effective communication with families and develop alliances in their work, particularly with immigrant families who face significant barriers to participation in their children’s education. First, we are going to share a dialogue where a new teacher makes various assumptions regarding effective communication, and then after the role-play we will analyze it as a group to discuss the impact that the language barrier had on communication and identify strategies that a new teacher can implement to fully engage families who do not speak English.

Possible Introduction:

Share Parent Testimonies #3 (pg. 46) and #7 (pg. 50) that highlight the experience of parents navigating language barriers in school.

Teacher: Good evening. How are you Mrs. Jimenez? Please tell your mother that I have bad news for her tonight.

Daughter: (in Spanish) She says she has very good news for you.

Mother: (in Spanish) Wonderful!

Teacher: (Surprised) Why is she smiling? Tell your mother that you are behaving badly, talking a lot in class, arriving late, not bringing homework, and that you have a Level 1 in literature, which is to say you aren’t reading on grade level.

Daughter (in Spanish): She says I am reading really well.

Mother: (in Spanish) Did she say anything else?

Daughter: (in Spanish) No, only that.

Teacher: A Level 1 means that you are not reading on grade level. Tell your mom you need extra help.

Daughter: (in Spanish) She says I am doing really well.

Mother: (in Spanish) That’s it? Are you telling me the truth? The teacher’s face makes it look like something is wrong.

Teacher: What is your mother saying?

Daughter: (in English) That she is going to help me! I promise I will do my homework, and arrive earlier.
Mother: Good, good.

Teacher: Good, ok.

FAMILY TEACHING POINTS

Some of the themes you can discuss with participants include:

- Interpretation is a civil right. While it is not the responsibility of the individual teacher to obtain an interpreter when a family requests one, it is critical that this request is relayed to the appropriate person in the school. If a parent requests interpretation, they should receive it.

- Even if you can’t speak the language, there are ways to build rapport and show respect to parents. Exchanging a greeting or asking “How are you?” in a family’s native language is a simple but powerful gesture. Knowing the parent’s name, instead of just referring to them as “Alex’s mom” also demonstrates respect.

- While this role-play centers on the experience of a Latino family, many immigrant parents from different cultural backgrounds have had similar experiences. During the training, a West African parent described how this role-play paralleled her own experience in schools, and noted that some families may have limited formal education, making it very hard for them to support their children in the way American teachers expect.

DEBRIEF QUESTIONS

1. What were the challenges in this role-play? What assumptions did the teacher make? How was the teacher feeling?

2. How could this conversation have been improved to facilitate a more constructive conversation about the young person?

3. Have you seen similar conversations at your school? What happened? What did you or other teachers do to provide interpretation and improve communication?

4. What do you do in your schools now to build relationships with immigrant parents? What do you do to help bridge the gap with families who do not speak English?

5. Look back at the Family School Alliance Assessment. What resources and school-wide practices could help teachers in your school community build better relationships with parents from different cultures and class backgrounds?

Resources: See section Communicating across Language Barriers (pg 86), Interpretation Resources (pg 88), Translanguaging (pg. 58)
Role-Play #2: Building Relationships Across Language/ Cultural Barriers

SET UP

Like the previous role-play, this role-play explores the barriers that impact immigrant families’ participation in their school education. While the language barrier is a major factor in this conversation as well, there are other challenges that families face that these role-plays highlight. After the role-play, we will analyze this conversation together to identify strategies to improve the communication between school and family and build an alliance between them.

Possible Introduction:

Parent Testimonies #1 (pg. 44), #3 (pg. 46) and #7 (pg. 50), all of which illustrate the impact of language barriers on parents’ experience of school.

Role-Play:

**Teacher:** Hello. Are you Alex’s mother?

**Mother:** (in Spanish) Yes. Is there translation? I sent a note last week.

**Child:** Yes. She’s my mom. She wants to know if there is a translator.

**Teacher:** No, unfortunately not. But you can translate, right?

**Child:** Yes.

**Teacher:** Tell your mother that she and I have to talk. How come the homework is coming in incomplete? If you don’t do the homework, you won’t learn or pass the exam. You are also very low in reading and I don’t think you are reading at home or practicing English. Tell your mother that she has to help you.

**Child (in Spanish):** She says you need to help me more.

**Mother (in Spanish):** Tell her I don’t speak English. You know we were trying to translate the instructions she sent home on Google Translate but it doesn’t work. You know we also put the math problems on Facebook to see if anyone could explain them to us but no one knew. Ask her what she can do to help us.

**Child (in English):** My mom doesn’t speak English. She wants to know if you can help us.

**Teacher:** Tell her that she has to make sure that you do the homework and that you read. We are doing everything we can in school-- she has to help you at home!
THE ROLE-PLAY

1. What were the challenges in this role-play? What assumptions did the teacher make? How was the teacher feeling?

2. How could this conversation have been improved to facilitate a more constructive conversation about the young person?

3. Have you seen similar conversations at your school? What happened? What did you or other teachers do to provide interpretation and build an alliance with families?

4. What do you do in your schools now to build relationships with immigrant families?

5. What resources could help teachers build better relationships with parents from different culture and class backgrounds?

**Resources:** Communicating Across Language Barriers (pg. 86), Interpretation Resources (pg. 88), Cultural Competence 101 (pg. 94)
TRANSLANGUAGING

What is translanguaging?

Translanguaging refers to the language practices of bilingual people. If you’ve ever been present in the home of a bilingual family, you will notice that many language practices are used. Sometimes the children are speaking one language, and the parents another, even to each other! Often both languages are used to include friends and family members who may not speak one language or the other, and to engage all. If a question is asked, and someone consults Google for the answer, family members write in the search box items in one or another language, and often in both, to compare answers from different sites. In an English-Spanish bilingual home, the television might be tuned into an English-language channel, while the radio may be blasting a Spanish-language show. But if you listen closely to the radio program, you will notice that the call-ins are not always in Spanish. Sometimes they’re in English only, with the radio announcer negotiating the English for the Spanish-speaking audience. But many times, the radio announcer also reflects the language practices of a bilingual speaker, with features of Spanish and English fluidly used to narrate an event, explain a process, inform listeners, or sell a product. Indeed, what is taking place in this bilingual family, their flexible use of their linguistic resources to make meaning of their lives and their complex worlds, is what we call translanguaging.
Role-Play #3 - Responding to Family Concerns

SET UP

The goal of this role-play is to explore strategies for working with families who are frustrated or angry. We know situations like this happen in school all the time, and can be challenging for school staff. However difficult it might be, it’s still important to look for ways to work with frustrated families, and to address their concerns. We’ll be working from a script for the first role-play! After we’ll discuss what happened and walk through some strategies the teacher could have used.

Possible Introduction:

Parent Testimony #4 (pg 47), which illustrates how a history of difficult interactions between schools and families can impact conversations between families and teachers.

Role-Play:

Mother: My child returned home yesterday without his backpack. He told me he left it in the classroom. What happened?

Teacher: What do you mean he left it in the classroom? It’s every child’s responsibility to collect his tools and his backpack when he goes home.

Mother: My son is seven. He’s in the second grade. If he forgets it, I accept that. It happens. But now I am here to find it and you don’t know where it is. How come you don’t know where it is?

Teacher: But I told you it isn’t in the classroom ma’am. Look around, it isn’t here. I can’t do anything else. It is your child’s responsibility.

Mother: That backpack has to turn up because I don’t have money to buy more backpacks and he has to come here with his tools and he sure isn’t carrying them in his hands. I am doing my part by making sure he brings his tools, so you better make sure you find that backpack.
THE ROLE-PLAY

1. What’s happening here? Why did the teacher react the way she did? Why did the mother react the way she did?

2. How might larger structural forces be impacting this interaction? Why is this backpack so important to the mother?

3. How could the teacher have responded differently to turn this confrontation into an opportunity to build a relationship with the mother?

4. What strategies have you used to resolve conflict and confrontation in a way that makes everyone involved feel heard, respected and valued?

5. What are the strategies that you use to build positive relationships with families in times of frustration?

Resources: Tips for Parent Engagement (pg. 90)
(Note: If there more than 10 participants, make these two questions a “turn and talk”. If “turn and talk,” share ideas with larger group after pairs have finished discussion.)

FAMILY TEACHING POINTS

Some points you can mention to the group as they analyze this role-play include:

- This mother is clearly feeling upset and anxious because she does not have the resources to replace the backpack, and cares about sending her son to school prepared and ready to learn. The teacher is responding to this anxiety and frustration, and becoming defensive as a result.

- If the teacher had listened to the mother, acknowledged her concern and helped her brainstorm a solution, this conversation could have been de-escalated and served as an alliance-building opportunity instead of souring the relationship further.

DEBRIEF QUESTIONS
Role-Play #4: Engaging Families in Parent Teacher Conferences

SET UP

The goal of this role-play is to exchange strategies to help new teachers establish good communication with families and develop alliances in their work. This dialogue, drawn from parent experiences, centers on a short parent teacher conference between a new teacher and a mother. While there is no major conflict, this dialogue is meant to open a conversation about how teachers and parents can build alliances by building relationships, and how teachers can be allies and partners to parents in supporting their children’s education. After this role-play, we will analyze it as a group to identify strategies that a new teacher can implement to fully engage families during conferences.

Possible Introduction:

Share testimonies #1 (pg 44), #2 (pg 45) and #3 (pg 46) that describe how strong alliances between families and teachers can benefit student learning.

Role-Play:

**Teacher:** Good afternoon. Are you Nelson’s mom?

**Mother:** Yes, good afternoon Mrs. Smith. A pleasure to meet you. How are you?

**Teacher:** Good, thank you. Thanks for coming to meet with me. Here are Nelson’s grades. I am pleased to tell you that he is doing very well in my class. He is on level in all of his subjects. He’s reading well, has a good grasp on math, and always does his homework. He also behaves well in class.

**Mother:** Very good! But I imagine there must be some area where we could improve. Is there something we could do at home to help him?

**Teacher:** You can always read together, but as I said, he is doing very well. You don’t need to worry.

**Mother:** Yes! I always read with him. But when I help him with homework, I have noticed sometimes that he makes a lot of grammatical mistakes. For example, he doesn’t use the correct verb tense. What can I do to help him?

**Teacher:** Don’t worry, with time he will learn. Can you please sign to show that you have received Nelson’s grades?
FAMILY TEACHING POINTS:

Some of the challenges you may choose to highlight for participants include:

• The teacher didn’t ask the parent’s name.

• She didn’t offer substantive details about the strengths or weaknesses of the student or explain the standards.

• When the parent expressed concern about her child’s writing, the teacher was dismissive, and she didn’t suggest strategies to try at home.

DEBRIEF QUESTIONS

1. What were the challenges in this role-play?
2. What were the expectations of the family in this role-play? How do you think the parent is feeling? Why?
3. What were the expectations of the teacher? How do you think the teacher is feeling? Why?
4. What could the teacher and family member do differently to build a family-school alliance?
5. What strategies do you use in your school to make sure that parent teacher conferences are constructive conversations? How do you explain a student’s progress in a substantive, yet accessible, way?
6. When families ask for resources or advice on how to help their child at home, what do you offer to them? What resources would be useful to you as a teacher to help families support their children’s learning?

Use improvisation in this scenario a second time, this time implementing the strategies suggested by the participants. Ask for a new volunteer to help!

Resources: Tips for Parent Engagement (pg 84), Parent Teacher Conferences: Parent Tips for Teachers (pg 90), Resources for Parents (pg 97)
Role-Play # 5: Student Led Conferences

SET UP

Unlike other role-plays, this scenario explores a best practice in facilitating constructive conversations between teachers, families and students. Open this role-play with a discussion of student-led conferences. Ask the group: Is anyone familiar with this model? Are you doing it in your schools? Then, take a few minutes to review the one-pager on student-led conferences and accompanying Mott Hall Science and Technology Academy Student Reflection Chart (insert page number). If some participants have experience with the model, ask how this framework compares with what they are doing in their school. Finally, ask for volunteers for the role-play, or watch the recorded role-plays.

Samantha: Thank you for coming mom!

Teacher: Let me give you your report card. These are your grades. Take a few minutes to look at it. What do you see? How do your grades compare with your predictions? Take a few minutes to look and then we will start.

Samantha: Ok, I am ready. In math, I am surprised I got that grade. I was hoping to do better.

Teacher: What happened? Why did you think you would do better?

Samantha: I studied for the test! I don’t know what happened!

Teacher: Let me pull your test out of your portfolio. Take a look. What do you think happened?

Student: Looking at it now, I see that maybe I rushed and didn’t read instructions carefully. I made a few silly mistakes.

Teacher: What do you think you need to do differently next time?

Student: Well, it looks like I need to read the instructions more carefully. I also need to check my work to make sure I didn’t make any mistakes. Sometimes I rush on the test.

Teacher: Is there any help you need from me?

Student: Maybe if I have more practice problems I can practice before the test.

Teacher: Sure, is there anything else?
**Student:** Sometimes you do move very quickly through the sample problems in class. It would be helpful to me if we could go step by step so that I can keep up, and keep checking in with the class before you move on to the next concept.

**Teacher:** Sure, I can try to do that more. Can you give me an example so I can be clear on what you mean?

**Samantha:** Last week you showed us how to balance an algebra equation, but I didn’t understand the answer and you had moved on by the time I realized!

**Teacher:** Fair, I will slow down a little. What else?

**Samantha:** Mom, could you just make sure that I do practice problems the night before a test?

**Mom:** Yes, of course. If we do that, I think the concepts will stick better and you won’t have to cram the week before the test.

**Samantha:** Mom, it’s also hard to study when I have to take care of Sarah and do the dishes every night. She runs around a lot and sometimes bothers me when I am trying to do the homework.

**Mom:** Ok, maybe Sarah can sit with our neighbor Ionie for the hour after dinner so you have some quiet time to work. Is that fair?

**Student:** Great, that will help. I see that in history I did much better.

**Teacher:** Why did you think you did better in history?

**Student:** I think I have been participating more after our last meeting. I appreciate that you have been calling on me more so I remember to participate and don’t get comfortable not talking. My participation went up as a result.

**Teacher:** Yes that’s right. You did a much better job of participating in the last few months. So, let’s go over our action plan to help you out. You will try reviewing the notes each night and doing extra practice problems, and will keep up your participation in history. I will give you practice problems before each test so you can practice at home, and I can take a look at them and correct them if you want. Your mom will have your little sister stay with a neighbor and will remind you to study each night and to do practice problems before the test. Does this seem like a good plan?

**Samantha:** Yes!
Mom: Yes!

Teacher: Great! Thanks so much for coming in. When can we meet again to check in? Maybe in two weeks on a Tuesday afternoon?

Mom: That could work for me. Tuesday is my day off.

Student: Sure no problem

DEBRIEF QUESTIONS

1. What did you think of this conference as opposed to the more traditional model?
2. How did the student take accountability for her progress? The parent? The teacher?
3. Is there anything you would change or improve?
4. What lessons can you take back to apply in your school or classroom?

Resources: Student-Led Conferences One-Pager (pg 63), Mott Hall Science and Technology Student Reflection Form (pg 68)
**Student-Led Conferences**

Student Led Conferences turn the traditional structure of parent-teacher conferences on its head, putting students at the center of the conversation about their own learning.

**The Benefits of Student-Led Conferences**
1. Gives students the opportunity to step up and take accountability for their own learning.

2. Conferences are not accusatory: they are about bringing teachers, parents and students together to establish shared responsibility for student learning.

3. Creates space to celebrate student growth and progress while using student strengths to address challenges.

4. Provides a strong strategy to build trusting and respectful relationships between parents, students and teachers, but not a one-shot deal! Student-led conferences work best when they are just one of many strategies the school uses to engage parents in school.

**Basic Components of Student Led Conferences**
1. A week before the class, students review their grades and complete a form predicting their overall grades in the class. They also do a role-play to prepare for the conference.

2. At the conference, after an introduction by the teacher the student compares their final report card with their predictions. With prompting from the teacher, they analyze why they received their grade.

3. With input from teacher, the student identifies what they need to do to improve and asks for help from the teacher and parents.

4. Parents have time to ask the teacher and student questions.

5. The parents, teacher and student create an action plan based on the next steps the student has identified. The teacher offers supports and resources to the student and parent, and the student and family make a commitment to follow through with their next steps.

6. These agreements serve as the foundation for future conversations between parents and the teacher about the student’s academic progress.
Lessons to take back to my school:
Mott Hall Science Student Reflection Chart

<table>
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<tr>
<th>SUBJECTS</th>
<th>EXPECTED GRADE</th>
<th>ACTUAL GRADE</th>
<th>GAP (IF ANY)</th>
<th>REASONS FOR THE GAP</th>
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Describe two strategies you will use to improve in your growth areas

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Building Family School Alliances for Effective Parent Engagement
Role-Play #6: Homework and the Common Core

SET UP

The goal of this role-play is to discuss ways to support families with homework struggles related to the Common Core and new standards. We have encountered experiences where new curriculum is a dramatically different method from our own experiences in school. This can be challenging not only for families but also school staff. However, as difficult as it might be, it’s still important to look for ways to work with concerned parents, and formulate an understanding of the curriculum.

Possible Introduction: Parent Testimony #1 (pg. 44), which describes the positive alliance between a parent and teacher to bring a student up to grade level.

Teacher: Hello ma’am, thanks for coming to the conference tonight.

Mom: Hello, I’m July. I am John’s mother.

Teacher: Great! I am satisfied with John’s progress in math. He is doing all the homework.

Mom: It is precisely the homework that I would like to discuss with you. John could not solve the math problems on his homework assignments. On the first homework, he especially struggled with problem 12. He didn’t understand the problem, he didn’t know how to begin solving it, and he didn’t know how to explain his answer. (Point to the problem in Sample homework) With the “Common Core Performance Assessment” we didn’t know how to start the problem, and at the end we just guessed the answer. (Point to the problem in Sample Homework) Sometimes we spend as much as an hour and a half doing the math homework, and he gets really frustrated because he is tired. As a mother I want to understand why math is being taught in this way, and what I can do to help him.

Teacher: They have changed the curriculum at the City level. We don’t have control over this, but John has to know how to do these problems for the state exam.

Mom: This is going to be on the test? I studied accounting. I understand very well how to do math. If I could not understand, how can a mother who has not attended school help? How will my eight-year-old be able to understand? How can I help?
FAMILY TEACHING POINTS

Some of the challenges in this role-play include:

• The conference ended without a resolution, even though the mother clearly wanted more support around navigating the Common Core standards.
• Teachers have limited resources to explain Common Core math to parents.
• Given that this student was struggling so much with homework, it seems likely that he wasn’t fully grasping the content in class.

Some of the strategies that teachers at the PAC-led training brainstormed to support parents with homework included:

• Providing model problems, detailed directions and reference sheets for parents.
• Offering family workshops to explain math curriculum
• Compiling lists of interactive Web sites that can make homework topics accessible to parents and students.
• Assigning less homework so teachers can provide meaningful feedback to students.

DEBRIEF QUESTIONS

1. What were the challenges in this role-play?
2. How do you think the mother was feeling? How was the teacher feeling?
3. Have you encountered similar conversations in your school community? How do you address family concerns around homework?
4. Take a look at the homework. What strategies could you share with the parent so she can help her child with this homework? How could you help a parent with less formal education to support their child?
5. How do you explain the Common Core to families in a way that makes the standards accessible?

Resources: Tips for Parent Engagement (pg 89), Parent Teacher Conferences: Parent Tips for Teachers (pg 95), Homework Help Resources (pg 97), Parent Resources (pg 102)
11. MP.7 Use Structure Use the Commutative Property of Multiplication to draw the second array. Complete the multiplication equations.

\[ 7 \times 3 = \_ \quad 3 \times 7 = \_1 \]

12. MP.3 Construct Arguments Scott puts some sports stickers in rows. He makes 6 rows with 5 stickers in each row. If he puts the same number of stickers in 5 equal rows, how many stickers would be in each row? How do you know?

A good math explanation can include words, numbers, and symbols.

There would be 30 stickers in each row.

5 \times 6 = 30

13. Karen arranges 24 star stickers in the array shown below.

What other array could the same number of stickers be arranged in?

\[ 6 \times 4 = \_4 \]

14. Higher Order Thinking Ed arranged some tiles in different arrays. One array has 3 rows with 6 tiles in each row. The other array has 2 rows with 9 tiles in each row. Ed says that he can use the Commutative Property to show that the arrays both have 18 tiles. Is he correct? Explain.

Yes he is correct. Because \(3 \times 6 = 18\) and \(2 \times 9 = 18\).

Common Core Assessment

15. Taylor made these arrays to show the Commutative Property of Multiplication. Is that what the arrays show? Why or why not?

No. It is not. Because the commutative property of multiplication has to be the same product and not round forms.

\[ 3 \times 6 = 18 \quad 4 \times 3 = 12 \]
Role-Play #7 Welcoming Schools in Diverse Communities

SET UP

There is immense diversity within immigrant communities in New York City, and cultural differences between school staff and parents can sometimes be subtle and unexpected. In this group, we will be thinking about best practices for developing an understanding of how to navigate these differences, and how to learn respectfully about the communities that students and families come from, in order to create the conditions for successful partnership between students and families. We’ll hear two role-plays, both of which are drawn from the experiences of West African parents. One illustrates the challenges and misunderstandings that can complicate relationships between parents and teachers. The second illustrates how teachers and parents can successfully navigate cultural differences to be effective allies and partners. We’ll pause between the role-plays for discussion.

Possible Introduction:

Parent Testimonies #5 (pg 51) and #6 (pg 52) which share parents’ positive experiences working with schools that respected and celebrated culture and identity, as well as more difficult experiences working with staff.

Role-Play #1

Teacher: Hi Jula’s mom. Come in, we have a lot to talk about. Jula has not been doing well in school, as you can see in his report card. He is not behaving. He is not listening. He is not reading when he is supposed to. Are you teaching him at home?

Aminata: I didn’t attend school in my country, and neither did my husband. I can’t teach him at home. Sometimes the neighbor helps but if he comes home too late from work he can’t. The afterschool was full too. Where can I get help? Why are his grades so low?

Teacher: Like I said, he doesn’t always listen or behave in school. He doesn’t read and sometimes he doesn’t do his homework. He needs to listen more.

Aminata: Yes I know. People from the office always call me, ask me to come pick him up. I run a daycare, and I can’t always come and get him. At home I explain to him when he does something wrong and he doesn’t do it again. There must be another reason why he is having a hard time.

Teacher: Sometimes I think he doesn’t understand when we speak to him in English. Do you speak to him in two languages at home?
**Aminata:** Yes I speak to him in English and my language, Soninke. More it is my language I speak to them.

**Teacher:** Two languages may be difficult for them. It is difficult for many children to learn more than one; they get confused. Maybe you should just teach him in English so that he learns.

**Aminata:** I am supposed to speak my language to them. I need them to speak my language too. Also, I can speak my language better than English. What am I supposed to do?

**Teacher:** I am sorry, but our time is up now. Please sign the report card to acknowledge you were here. Please try to help Jula with his homework.

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**FAMILY TEACHING POINTS:**

Some of the lessons of this role-play that you should discuss with participants include:

1. **Do value all languages!** Although it is illegal for teachers to instruct parents on what language to speak at home, many immigrant parents have had the experience of being told that their children are confused by learning more than one language, and that they should speak English exclusively with their children. The long term consequences of such advice can be devastating for families, causing both parents and children to feel shame and embarrassment about their native language, and in some cases causing them to abandon the home language altogether. In a hostile political climate for immigrants, teachers can be allies to families by supporting their choice to foster multilingualism in their children. Strong family-school alliances are built on a foundation of respect for children’s cultural identity and language.

2. **Teachers should be cognizant of the formal education levels of families.** There are many families who have university education in their countries of origin. However, not all parents or family members may have received a formal education. Not all parents have basic literacy skills. School staff should be sensitive to this possibility, particularly when a family openly discloses this information.

3. **This parent actually shared several valuable pieces of information about her home life, work, and culture,** including the challenges she faces in supporting her child at home. **It may be helpful to identify the multiple barriers named by the parent,** and brainstorm how a teacher can support this student and his family given the challenges the mother named.
DEBRIEF QUESTIONS

1. What were the challenges in this conversation?
2. What are the teacher’s expectations of the parent? How do you think the teacher is feeling?
3. What are the family member’s expectations of the teacher? How do you think the family member is feeling?
4. How do you think this conversation might have affected the family member? How do you think this family member perceives the teacher?

Take a look at the Family School Alliance Assessment. How do the historical relationships between schools and communities show up in this conversation between the mother and the teacher? What could the teacher have learned about this family and their community from this conversation?

Role-Play #2

Teacher: Hi Mr. Barry, Good afternoon. How are you?

Parent: I'm fine thank you. How is the school year going? Busy, right.

Teacher: (Laughs.) Yes, very busy. Thank you so much for coming in today for parent teacher conferences.

Parent: It is my pleasure to come here and meet you.

Teacher: I really appreciate it! I wanted to talk to you about Fatoumata. She is doing so well and really learning quickly. How do you think she is doing with the transition to school in America? I know she lived in Guinea until she came here this year for third grade.

Parent: So far so good. It is very different here. In Guinea, all the schools teach in French, and so she has had to adapt. But with your help, I think she is doing well.

Teacher: Great, I’m glad to hear that. She told me you speak Fulani at home. Is that right?

Parent: Yes, we want her to learn our language as well, and she won’t learn it anywhere else.

Teacher: That’s so important! I am glad to hear you are helping her learn more than one language, and I am also glad to hear you think the transition is going well. I really want her to feel welcome and comfortable here. You know, I have noticed that during class she is very quiet, and she looks down at her desk a lot, even when I am speaking with her one-on-one or I ask for all eyes on me. I was worried that maybe she didn’t like my class.

Parent: Well, is she doing her work and listening to you when you speak?
Teacher: Yes, she always does the work, she just doesn’t look at me when I talk to her.

Parent: Ok, that’s good to hear. If she was not doing her work and playing and also not listening to you, that would be bad. But in Guinea, we have the practice of bowing our heads with someone who we respect. A teacher is a person who deserves great respect in our culture, and so I think she must have learned that in her school there. I will speak with her and explain that here, it is not disrespectful to look directly at the teacher, so she understands the culture here.

Teacher: Oh, ok, I didn’t know that! Thank you so much for explaining it to me. I will know now that if she doesn’t look at me, it doesn’t mean she’s not paying attention. If she doesn’t feel comfortable looking at me, it’s fine! She will learn little by little, I am sure, as she gets used to school here

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**FAMILY TEACHING POINTS:**

Some of the lessons of this role-play you can highlight with participants include:

1. This teacher made it clear that she wants the student to feel welcome and supported, and was respectful of the time it takes for students to adapt to a new school culture.
2. She also had learned where the student came from, and what language she speaks at home.
3. When she didn’t understand a cultural practice, she asked the parent for more information in a respectful, non-judgmental way.
4. She also knew the parent’s name, and made an effort to build rapport at the outset of the conference.

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**DEBRIEF QUESTIONS**

1. How did this role-play compare with the first? What was different, and why?
2. What did the teacher do to build rapport and make the parent feel welcome?
3. What are your best practices when working with immigrant parents? What do you do to make parents feel welcomed and valued?
4. What do you do to create a classroom that fosters multilingualism and multiculturalism? What resources would be useful for you to continue building a multicultural classroom and school community?

Think back to your Family School Alliance Assessment. Identify some next steps for yourself to learn more about your school community and the cultural identity of your students.

**Resources:** Tips for Parent Engagement (pg 90), Cultural Competence 101 (pg 94), Resources for creating safe and supportive Multicultural Classrooms (pg 95)
FACILITATING DEBRIEF AND SELF REFLECTIONS
Facilitating De-Brief and Reflections

In order to improve each session so that it is most beneficial for participants, it is important to both reflect on the session and have a debrief among co-facilitators.

Co-facilitator Debrief

Immediately following or as soon as possible following the session, co-facilitators should spend some time together reflecting on the process. This debrief should focus specifically on their interactions and also on the overall training.

1. Co-facilitation process
   • How would you describe the dynamics that was created with your co-facilitation?
   • Did any tensions arise in your co-facilitation?
   • What went well with your co-facilitation?
   • What can you improve in regards to your co-facilitation?

Self-Reflection

The self-reflection gives each co-facilitator time to think about the training individually. The self-reflections from each co-facilitator should also be done as soon as possible after the training. These self-reflections should be used to help improve later trainings.

• What do you feel went well? Why?
• What do you think can be improved for next time? Why?
• Did any conversations occur that made you uncomfortable?
• What resources/expertise do you feel could have helped facilitate the training?
• What resources/trainings do you think would be useful for participants?

Framework for Reflecting on Family-School Alliance

As a coordinator, it will be useful to assess the effectiveness and formulate the direction of your program using a variety of tools. Below are two different tools to gather and synthesize feedback.

1. Use the Family School Alliance Assessment to help plan further workshops, committees, study groups, etc.

Compile and analyze responses from all participants. Are there common challenges to address? Is there a need to build knowledge of the history of the community or structural forces that shape family-school relationships?
The hope is for this tool to generate meaningful discussions around effectively engaging families and building family school alliance. The inner oval focuses on individual assumptions and practices in developing family-school alliances. The outer oval focuses on the contextualizing or understanding of broader and historical dynamics informing individual interactions. You may choose to focus conversation on one of the sections or on several.

In reflecting upon your own practice, respond to the following:

1. What practices are you effectively using to develop family school alliances?
2. What are challenges you face in building a family school alliance?
3. What are your questions or assumptions around family school alliances?
4. How can you learn more about the community?

In reflecting upon the school community, respond to the following:

1. What are effective school practices that build community relationships?
2. What is the historical relationship between the school and community?
3. How can your school create a stronger alliance? What specifically do we need?
4. What are the structural forces (policies, laws, -isms) in the community that create obstacles for families?

You can present participant responses through the figure shown below. This graphic serves to highlight the interconnected and embedded influences in the work to strengthen relationships between families and schools.
Family School Alliance Assessment Tool

Reflection on Community Engagement
2. Exit Slips: Have all participants engaged in workshops complete an exit slip. These slips can provide insight into logistical and content related issues you may have overlooked.

Sample Exit Slip:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What worked for you in the workshop?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What feedback do you have for improving this workshop?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What additional questions or needs do you have regarding parent engagement and communication?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Other comments?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**TRAINERS NOTES**

As you facilitate workshops and discussion, it might be useful to find leaders interested in developing family-school alliances. Look for teacher allies, administrative support, and family leaders (such as PTA members). These leaders may be people who advocate for diverse community needs. At the same time, it will be helpful to seek out information regarding educational policies nationwide that influence and shape dynamics between schools and families. The Education Commission of the States is a site that gathers, analyzes, and disseminates information about current and emerging issues in state education policies. ([http://www.ecs.org/](http://www.ecs.org/))
Tips for Parent Engagement

• **DO Build Relationships!** Good communication flows from good relationships. Make an effort to connect with parents early in the year, and learn about their hopes and dreams for their children. Regular phone calls to check in are a great strategy to build trust, as are home visits or one-on-ones at neighborhood coffee shops (not all families will welcome a home visit.) If your school can organize a dinner or Saturday breakfast early in the year to introduce teachers to parents, even better! **Don’t limit your communication to parent teacher conferences!**

• **DO make yourself available!** We know you work hard and that a lot is expected of you. But if a parent asks to speak to you, either address their concern immediately or set a time soon to talk. We’ve heard from many parents who felt ignored, dismissed or shut down by their child’s teacher when they tried to reach out, and simply didn’t bother to try again. When a teacher makes the extra effort to call you or sends a personalized note home, it makes a difference to parents. **Don’t be inaccessible!**

• **DO make phone calls and use creative strategies to outreach to parents!** There’s more than one strategy you can use to communicate with parents. Many schools rely on backpacking flyers home, but that is not the most effective way. Some parents may strongly prefer a phone call, so ask them at the beginning of the year about the best way to communicate with them. You can also use text messages, emails or apps like Class Dojo or Kinvolved for parents with smart phones. Some parents have been known to post questions about their children’s homework on Facebook- what if you created a class Facebook page? **Don’t depend on the backpack!**

• **DO alternate between sharing student strengths and constructive feedback!** Parents have probably heard a lot of complaints over the years about their children, and have been blamed for their children’s struggles in school. These parents will likely mistrust teachers and are not likely to respond positively if they keep hearing complaints. When you do have feedback to share, make sure you provide constructive next steps so that you can work together with the parent to help the student improve. **Don’t be the bearer of bad news!**
• **DO ask parents questions about their children, and listen thoughtfully to their ideas and suggestions!** Building relationships requires listening. In community organizing, organizers conduct one-on-ones with community members to build relationships. At these meetings, organizers listen 70% of the time and only talk 30% to build trust and to learn more about the community members’ interests, ideas and skills. Parents are true experts when it comes to their children. You can learn a lot about their family, their background and the student by listening to them. Ask them how they want to support their child’s education, and what help they need from you to do so. Active listening is also the best strategy to de-escalate difficult situations. Don’t engage in one-way communication!

• **DO be sensitive to differences in personal preferences and levels of academic education, and adapt your language and communication strategies accordingly.** Within our community there is a lot of diversity. There are immigrants who attended university in their country of origin, and immigrants who didn’t have the opportunity to attend elementary school. There are professionals, and stay-at-home moms. Levels of formal education and literacy vary; so don’t make assumptions about what they can- and can’t- do. As we explain above, it is important to make an effort to learn about who parents are and where they come from. **Don’t think that one size fits all!**

• **DO give parents strategies to support their children at home!** All parents want their kids to succeed in school, just as all teachers want to see their students flourish. Some may just need some extra help to know how to best help their children. Connect your parents with resources to support students who struggle, and take the time to walk them through the strategies you are using in the classroom. Parents will appreciate your care and concern, and students will see the results. **DON’T forget that parents are teachers too!**

• **DO continue to reach out to all parents even if they aren’t always available, and engage with them from a place of empathy and understanding.** There are very real barriers that prevent parents from fully participating in schools. Some have had bad experiences in the past, and others may avoid government institutions because of their immigration status. Many parents work more than one job to make ends meet, or are struggling to navigate complicated bureaucracies- the medical system, the courts, public assistance and more- to ensure their family’s safety and security. **Don’t assume that parents don’t care!**
Communicating Across Language Barriers:
Tips for working with parents who don’t speak English

• **Use an interpreter** Unless you speak the language yourself, this is non-negotiable. Parents have a right to receive interpretation, and the DOE is required by law to provide interpretation services when requested. Moreover, interpretation is a complex skill, and children should not be expected to translate for their parents or their teachers, especially if their academic performance is the topic of discussion. Schedule parents ahead of time for parent teacher conferences and make arrangements for them to have interpretation. For less common languages like Soninke, Wolof or indigenous Latin American languages like Mixteco or Nahuatl, you may need to request over-the-phone interpretation services. In larger meetings, simultaneous interpretation is infinitely preferable to consecutive. The Interpretation Unit can provide your interpreter with transmitters and receivers so that parents can hear your words translated into their language in real time, while you talk.

• **Use the language skills you have to build rapport** Learning even just a few simple phrases to greet a parent goes a long way towards establishing trust and building rapport. If you are proficient in a language but are uncomfortable explaining academic concepts, say as much as you can in the language but shift to an interpreter if it will help you communicate more clearly.

• **Use formal language when addressing parents** Talk to all parents like you are talking to your parents. Address them as “Mr.” and “Mrs.” unless they give you permission to do otherwise. If you are talking to a Spanish speaker, use the formal usted instead of the informal tú.

• **Look directly at the parent** Even if you are using an interpreter, it is important to speak directly to the parent instead of the interpreter. Parents will see this as a sign of respect, and it will increase their level of trust.

• **Don’t raise your voice** This is elementary, but don’t raise your voice with people who don’t speak English. They won’t be able to understand you any better if you speak loudly, but will probably note your volume.
• **Speak slowly and pause frequently to give the interpreter time to translate word for word**
  As you might imagine, interpretation is extremely difficult, especially if interpreters are trying to capture each word. Help them out by speaking slowly and pausing regularly so they can keep up and get as much information as possible to the parent.

• **Explain acronyms and academic language**
  Some words—particularly academic jargon—are hard to interpret if there is not an equivalent word in the other language. Explain acronyms and other jargon so that the interpreter will be able to communicate as clearly and accurately as possible.

• **Give your interpreter feedback**
  You will probably realize if an interpreter is not doing a good job, or if they are just giving the parent a summary instead of word-for-word interpretation. Feel free to give them feedback about your preference, making it clear that your intent is to build strong relationships with parents. Conversely, they will appreciate being asked for feedback on how you can make it easier for them to do a good job of interpreting.

**Remember, ultimately language is an asset, not a barrier.**

The rich linguistic diversity in the Bronx is one of our greatest assets. There are languages spoken here that are spoken in very few other places in the world. Your students are not English Language Learners: they are bilinguals and trilinguals who have the power to access many different communities and cultures. Interpretation is your window into their world.
Interpretation and Translation Resources

This sample list of interpretation resources was prepared in October 2015. You should check the contact information listed here to make sure nothing has changed before distributing. Many of the resources and organizations identified are Bronx-based: explore your neighborhood to find similar organizations in your school’s community.

Department of Education Resources

- Translation & Interpretation Unit http://schools.nyc.gov/Offices/Translation/default.htm

Interpretation Services

- Caracol Interpreters Cooperative Spanish/English Interpretation and Translation Services
  - Contact for Reserving Services: Miluska Martinez, caracol.interpreters@gmail.com, 787-377-6601

Interpretation Equipment

- Pro Lingo Interpretation transmitters and receivers.
  - Web Site: www.prolingo.com
  - Phone Number: 800-287-9755

Community Organizations

These organizations can connect you with interpreters who speak languages that the DOE does not offer, namely West African languages and Mexican indigenous languages.

- Sauti Yetu
  Multi-issue based community organization that works with African immigrant women and families. While the organization cannot offer interpretation directly, they can offer advice to schools who are interested in strengthening language access and becoming more culturally competent.
  - Web Site: www.sautiyetu.org
  - Phone Number: 718-665-2486

- Mano a Mano Community organization dedicated to celebrating and promoting Mexican culture. Can connect schools and community organizations with speakers of Indigenous languages such as Mixteco.
  - Web Site: www.manoamano.us
  - Phone Number: 212-587-3070
Help with Translation and ELL Service Questions

- Advocates for Children Immigrant Students’ Rights Project Advocacy organization that assists individual families as well as schools obtain necessary services and programs for English Language Learners. AFC has fought for the right to interpretation services for families in schools.
- Website: http://www.advocatesforchildren.org/
- Help Line Number: 866-427-6033

Don’t forget! Parents and community members can be a resource as well! If you cannot get an interpreter, connect parents in your class who speak the same language, and work with the school to identify an English-speaking parent who speaks their language. Or, you can talk to your administration about hiring bilingual school aids who can serve as a bridge between the school and the community. You’ll be building social networks at the same time that you support children and families!
Parent Teacher Conferences
Parent Tips for Teachers!

• **DO make parents feel welcome.** Introduce yourself by name and ask them theirs. Smile and ask about their day. Sit next to them, rather than across from them, so you can show them student work and discuss concerns without making the meeting confrontational.

• **DO start with the positive, not negatives.** Share specific stories about what the child adds to your classroom so that the parent knows you are paying close attention. It is easier to hear feedback if you know it comes from a place of appreciation and support.

• **DO get to know the family through their child.** Asking respectful questions about the student is a great way to build rapport. Ask the parent to share a little about their child, and ask about their hopes and dreams for the student. In turn, give parent space and time to ask questions and share concerns. **DON'T** make assumptions about a family without getting to know them!

• **DO get interpretation!** It’s not only the best way to ensure good communication, it’s the parent’s right. Speak slowly so that interpreter can translate and pause every few sentences so that every word is translated— not a quick summary. Speak directly to the parent rather than the interpreter, and use simple words that are easier to translate.

• **DO be specific about student learning.** Use the conferences to explain standards, avoiding education jargon and breaking your explanation down into simple words accessible to non-educators. Offer concrete examples of student work to show how students are excelling or struggling, explaining exactly what concepts or skills the student has mastered or still needs to develop.

• **DO share strategies with parents!** Offer resources or sample problems that parents can use to help at home. Ask parents what strategies they use that work!

• **DO use homework as a conversation starter.** Homework can be used to explain standards and strategies to parents, as well as a way to identify what skills students are struggling to use independently. **DON’T** get caught up in the homework “blame game.” If a student is not completing homework, ask the parent why their child is struggling and offer resources for where they can get help. At the same time, don’t expect parents to be the child’s primary teacher: if a child cannot complete homework independently, that is good information for you.
• **DO learn from different models of parent teacher conferences**, like student-led conferences or academic parent teacher teams! Try having student explain their progress reports, or share some data about the child’s progress.

• **DO remember that you don’t have to agree about everything to work together.** Even if you and the parent do not agree about everything, you can still treat one another with respect and dignity. Sometimes respectful disagreement is a good opportunity to learn from one another and deepen your understanding of the child and family. If you cannot come to agreement, it is a good idea to set up another meeting with other school staff present to talk through their concerns at greater length.

• **DO build relationships beyond Parent Teacher Conferences.** Parent Teacher Conferences are just one step in a relationship building process. They will go better if you are not meeting the parent for the first time, and if the conference is not the first time you are discussing the child’s progress. Connect with parents at the beginning of the year, either in person or over the phone, to introduce yourself. If you can’t get to everything in one meeting, set up another meeting to continue the conversation.
This sample list of homework help resources was prepared in October 2015. You should check the contact information listed here to make sure nothing has changed before distributing. Many of the resources and organizations identified are Bronx-based: explore your neighborhood to find similar organizations in your school’s community.

1. BridgeUp at Grand Concourse Library
   - College readiness and homework help for students in 8th grade and up.
   - Hours: 3 PM – Library closing (5:30 or 6:30).
   - Contact: Ronnie, (718) 583-6611
   - Address: 155 E 173rd St, Bronx, NY 10457

2. New York Public Library Enrichment Zones
   - Daily support with homework assignments, personalized tutoring, fun computer programs in math and reading.
   - Hours: two to four days per week, Monday – Thursday, for three hours a day.
   - Bronx Locations:
     - **Highbridge Library**: 78 West 158th Street, Bronx, NY 10452. Contact Katherine Reeves, katherinereeves@nypl.org, 718-293-7800
     - **Mott Haven Library**: 321 East 140th Street, Bronx, NY, 10452. Contact: Angela Jesselli, angelajesselli@nypl.org, 718-655-4878
     - **Francis Martin Library**: 2150 University Avenue, Bronx, NY 10453. Contact: Rene Ventura, reneventura@nypl.org, 718-295-5287
     - **Jerome Park Library**: 118 Eames Place, Bronx, NY 10468. Contact: Darisa Alcantara, darisalcantara@nypl.org, 718-549-8200
     - **Hunts Point Library**: 877 Southern Boulevard, Bronx, NY 10459. Contact: Rebecca Darugar, rebeccadarugar@nypl.org, 347-277-9865
     - **Baychester Library**: 2049 Asch Loop North, Bronx, NY 10475. Contact Chiara Grenaway, chiaragrenaway@nypl.org, 347-697-9909

3. Directions For Our Youth
   - Homework help and enrichment programs
   - Bronx Locations:
     - **Butler Community Center**: 1368 Webster Avenue, Bronx, NY 10456. Contact Kristen Wagner, kwagner@dfoy.org, 646-599-0776 (cell) or 718-303-8997 (office)
     - **Beacon/TASC @ New Venture Academy 219**: 3630 Third Avenue, Bronx, NY 10456. Contact Julia Smith, jsmitx@dfoy.org, 718-293-4344

4. Directions For Our Youth
   - Homework help and tutoring in addition to community services for the Bronx Mexican community on Monday, Wednesday and Friday, 4 - 8 PM. Waitlist for tutoring.
   - Location:
     - 601 Melrose Avenue Bronx, NY 10455. For questions about education programming call 646-469-8838

5. Dial-A-Teacher
   - Homework help line for elementary and middle school students, run by classroom teachers
   - Language spoken: Bengali, Chinese (Mandarin, Cantonese and Fakanese), English, French, Haitian-Creole, Russian, Slovak and Spanish
   - Hours: Monday – Thursday, 4 – 7 PM
   - 212-777-3380

6. Khan Academy
   - Online, free academic help with math, literacy and more https://www.khanacademy.org/
   - Also available in Spanish: https://es.khanacademy.org/

There are very limited free homework help services in the Bronx, and many of these services have a long waitlist. At New Settlement, we have found that many times the best resources can be found in your own community: a retiree down the block who has worked as a paraprofessional, a neighbor who attended school in your home country and speaks your language, or a college student studying to become a teacher. Start looking for help within your own networks and you may be surprised!
Ayuda con la tarea después de La escuela

   - Preparación para la universidad y ayuda con la tarea para estudiantes en el 8 grado y la secundaria.
   - Horas: 3 PM – Cierra de la biblioteca (5:30 or 6:30).
   - Contacto: Ronnie, (718) 583-6611
   - Dirección: 155 E 173rd St, Bronx, NY 10457

2. Zonas de enriquecimiento de la biblioteca pública
   - Apoyo diario con tarea, tutorial, programas de computadora en matemáticas y lectura.
   - Horas: dos a cuatro días semanales, Lunes a Jueves, para tres horas cada día.
   - Sitios en el Bronx:
     o Biblioteca de Highbridge: 78 West 168th Street, Bronx, NY 10452. Llame a Katherine Reeves, katherinereeses@nypl.org, 718-293-7800
     o Biblioteca de Mott Haven: 321 East 140th Street, Bronx, NY, 10454. Llame a Angela Jesselli, angelajesselli@nypl.org, 718-655-4878
     o Biblioteca de Francis Martin: 2150 University Avenue, Bronx, NY 10453. Llame a Rene Ventura, reneventura@nypl.org, 718-295-5287
     o Biblioteca de Jerome Park: 118 Eames Place, Bronx, NY 10468. Llame a Darisa Alcantara, darisaalcantara@nypl.org, 718-549-8200
     o Biblioteca de Hunts Point: 877 Southern Boulevard, Bronx, NY 10459. Llame a Rebecca Darugar, rebeccadarugar@nypl.org, 347-277-9865
     o Biblioteca de Baychester: 2049 Asch Loop North, Bronx, NY 10475. Llame a Chiara Grenaway, chiargrenaway@nypl.org, 347-697-9909

3. Directions For Our Youth
   - Ayuda con la tarea y programas de enriquecimiento
   - Sitios en el Bronx:
     o Centro Comunitario de Butler: 1368 Webster Avenue, Bronx, NY 10456. Llame a Kristen Wagner, kwagner@dfoy.org, 646-599-0776 (cell) or 718-303-8997 (oficina)
     o Beacon/TASC en New Venture Academy 219: 3630 Third Avenue, Bronx, NY 10456. Llame a Julia Smith, jsmith@dfoy.org, 718-293-4344

4. MASA NY
   - Ayuda con la tarea y tutorial además servicios comunitarios para la comunidad Mexicana del Bronx el lunes, miercoles y viernes, 4 – 8 PM. Listado de espera para la tutoria.
   - Sitios en el Bronx:
     o 601 Melrose Avenue Bronx, NY 10455. Para preguntas sobre progrmas educativos llama a 646-469-8838

5. Dial-A-Teacher (Llame a maestro)
   - Línea de ayuda con la tarea para estudiantes de la escuela primaria y la escuela intermedia, manejada por maestros.
   - Se habla español
   - Horas: Lunes – Jueves, 4 – 7 PM
     o 212-777-3380

6. Khan Academy
   - Ayuda gratuita en línea con las matemáticas, la lectura, y mas.
   - https://es.khanacademy.org/

Hay muy pocos servicios gratuitos de tutoria en el Bronx, y la mayoría tienen un listado de espera muy largo. En New Settlement, hemos encontrado que se puede encontrar los mejores servicios en su propia comunidad: un jubilada en su edificio quién ha trabajado en una escuela, un vecino que asistió a la escuela en su país natal y habla su idioma, o un estudiante universitario para ser maestro.
¡Empiece su-búsqueda en su propia comunidad!
Cultural Competence 101

- **Do be understanding of different cultural values and practices.** In different cultures, seemingly simple things are interpreted in very different ways. For example, in many West African communities, making eye contact with an elder or respected person is considered rude. Meanwhile, in American culture, NOT making eye contact is considered rude. If a child is not making eye contact with you or doing something else you do not understand, respectfully ask the parent to clarify. Don’t be too judgmental, and assume good intentions while you make an effort to understand each child better.

- **Do value all languages in your classroom.** In the long run, it is a benefit to kids to learn more than one language. Early in life is the best time for children to learn multiple languages. If children learn not only English but also their family's language, it teaches them to understand and appreciate other cultures, and to feel pride in their identity. Be sensitive to the many cultures and languages in your classroom. Some parents have had the experience of being told by school staff not to speak their language to their child at home. The unintended consequence is that families and students may stop trying to learn a second language, thinking that it will affect a child’s ability to learn English.

- **Do include and acknowledge other cultural traditions in your classroom.** Some schools have annual cultural celebrations, which is undeniably a good thing. But you can go beyond holidays, clothing and food. Look for ways to integrate literature about other communities and traditions into your classroom, and create supportive spaces for students to share their culture, religion and traditions.

- **Do change your communication strategies based on what parents want.** To have better communication, you need to be creative. In some communities, parents prefer phone calls. Ask parents at the beginning of the year how they want you to communicate with them.

- **Do be humble and respectful when asking questions about culture.** Parents can be your teachers to better understand your students and where they come from, so that you can help them do better in school. Build relationships intentionally, and when you have questions or things you don’t understand, ask parents to explain more as sensitively as you can so that your questions are not misinterpreted as judgment.

- **Do find common ground.** When building relationships with parents who, on the surface, may seem very different from you, look for things that you share to build trust and connection. If nothing else, you share an interest in students’ success. If you come from an immigrant family or were the first in your family to attend college, you can learn from your own experience, and think about how you can be an ally to the family. For example, one West African parent remembers how a Latina teacher told him the importance of teaching his children his own language, remembering her experience of coming to the United States and fighting to make sure her son learned Spanish.
Resources for Creating Safe and Supportive Multicultural Classrooms

Books


• Lee, Enid, Menkart, Deborah and Okazawa-Rey, Margo, eds. *Beyond Heroes and Holidays: A Practical Guide to K-12 Multicultural, Anti-Racist Education and Staff Development*. Washington, DC: Teaching for Change, 1998. An interdisciplinary guide for teachers, administrators, students, and parents. Through lessons and readings, it explores examples of how educators, staff, students, and parents can work together to transform the curriculum, rather than simply adding to current frameworks. The guide also goes beyond the classroom to address issues such as tracking, parent/school relations, and language policies. There are readings and activities for pre- and in-service staff development.


Web Sites

• *Colorín Colorado*. Operated by the American Federation of Teachers, this Web site includes a range of resources—some in multiple languages—for teachers and parents on working with English Language Learners. While there is a strong focus on Latino communities, the site does include book lists that highlight cultural traditions from Ramadan to the Refugee Experience. http://www.colorincolorado.org

• *Facing History and Ourselves*. This exhaustive online library includes lesson plans and multimedia resource collections ranging from Race in America, Global Immigration and Anti-Semitism and Religious Intolerance. https://www.facinghistory.org/

• *Teaching for Change*. This online Web site includes a wealth of resources on multicultural, anti-racist education, including book lists, guidelines for developing curriculum, and collections of articles and resources on topics ranging from Civil Rights to Central America. There are two particularly helpful articles on teaching about Africa in the classroom: http://www.tfcbooks.org/best-recommended/africa-teaching and https://www.teachingforchange.org/i-didnt-know-there-were-cities-in-africa
• **Rethinking Schools.** Rethinking Schools is a nonprofit publisher and advocacy organization dedicated to sustaining and strengthening public education through social justice teaching and education activism. Our magazine, books, and other resources promote equity and racial justice in the classroom. We encourage grassroots efforts in our schools and communities to enhance the learning and well being of our children, and to build broad democratic movements for social and environmental justice.  
  http://www.rethinkingschools.org/index.shtml  
  https://www.teachingforchange.org/i-didnt-know-there-were-cities-in-africa

**Anti-Islamophobia Curriculum**

• Developed by the Middle East Institute at Columbia University, (Re)embracing Diversity in New York City Public Schools: Outreach for Muslim Sensitivity combines a information about Islam and Muslims with interactive classroom activities that foster the critical importance of tolerance and respect for ethnic and religious diversity. The curriculum is downloadable either in its entirety or as individual lesson plans depending on students’ needs or interests: http://www.mei.columbia.edu/research.shtml

• This is Where I Need to Be: Oral Histories of Muslim Youth in NYC is a collection of oral history narratives from the lives of ordinary Muslim youth as told by Muslim youth. Trained in the methods of oral history at Teachers College, Columbia University, a dozen Muslim teenagers set out to document stories from the real-life experiences and feelings of their Muslim peers in public high schools. The collection of 23 oral histories can be accessed online: http://www.lulu.com/shop/student-press-initiative/this-is-where-i-need-to-be-oral-histories-of-muslim-youth-in-nyc/ebook/product-17485088.html. There is an accompanying curriculum guide as well: http://www.lulu.com/shop/student-press-initiative/print-curriculum-guide-for-this-is-where-i-need-to-be/paperback/product-15109171.html
Resources for Parents

National PTA Guides to Student Success: The National PTA Web Site includes information on the Common Core Standards, Special Education, and more.
http://www.pta.org/parents/content.cfm?ItemNumber=2583&navItemNumber=3363
http://www.pta.org/parents/content.cfm?ItemNumber=2583&navItemNumber=3363

Colorín Colorado: Colorín Colorado offers everything from book and activity lists to guides to reading with your children from early childhood through middle school.
http://www.colorincolorado.org/reading-tip-sheets-parents
http://www.colorincolorado.org/reading-tip-sheets-parents
http://www.colorincolorado.org/reading-tip-sheets-parents

Advocates for Children: The Web site for this NYC-based advocacy group includes resources on parents’ rights on issues ranging from school discipline to public school choice, and special education to English Language Learners.
http://www.advocatesforchildren.org/get_help/guides_and_resources

Include NYC: The Web site for the federally funded parent center for Manhattan and the Bronx offers extensive information on all aspects of special education and parenting a child with special needs.
https://www.includenyc.org/resources/learning-and-school
Book and Reading Suggestions

Harvard Family Research Project
- An essential- and exhaustive- online library of academic research on best practices in family engagement, including a regular newsletter for educators.
- http://www.hfrp.org/family-involvement/publications-resources

  - A practical, hands-on guide to parent engagement in schools.

  - A sensitive profile of the groundbreaking Parent Mentor program in Chicago.

  - A thoughtful meditation on the relationships between teachers and parents through the lens of the parent-teacher conference.

Warren, Mark; Mapp, Karen; and the Community Organizing and School Reform Project. A Match on Dry Grass: Community Organizing as a Catalyst for School Reform. New York: Oxford University Press, 2011.
  - An academic study of parent and student organizing for educational justice across the country.
About the Authors

July Alcantara is the mother of Nelson, Rances and Marvin Martinez. Nelson and Rances are students at P.S. 294 in the Bronx. She is originally from the Dominican Republic and holds an undergraduate degree in accounting. Nelson and Rances dream of becoming great baseball players.

Nieves Capellan is a home health aid and a grandmother of a seventh grader at Mott Hall III. Her dream for her grandson is for him to finish school successfully.

Atasi Das is an educator activist with organizing experience in rural southern Vermont and Bangalore, India. She is currently a doctoral student in the Urban Education Program at The Graduate Center- CUNY. She has over five years experience working in elementary schools and in teacher education. She is interested in broadening and conceptualizing pedagogies and theories in the area of critical numeracy in a larger struggle for a just world.

Oumou Diame is the mother of four children, two of whom live in New York. Her grandson attends P.S. 294 and her son attends I.S. 117. She is from West Africa and speaks French.

Emma Hulse was the Lead Organizer at the New Settlement Parent Action Committee from 2012-2016. At PAC, she organized with parents to bring the New Teacher Center to District 9 to reduce new teacher turnover and supported the creation of the curriculum for the parent-led trainings for new teacher mentors. She dreams that all children attend empowering schools where their love of learning is cultivated and families are full stakeholders in their children’s education.

Karen Jimenez has three sons in public school in New York City. Her parents’ work as teachers in Mexico inspires her own activism. She hopes that her children can choose their own paths in life and have the strength to never give up.

Fatoumata Kaba is from originally from Guinea in West Africa but now lives in the Bronx. She is married and the mother of four wonderful children (Karamo, Fanta, Aicha and DJ Kaba). Her job is taking care of her children and enjoying spending time with them.

Ionie Latham is from Jamaica. She is the mother of four kids and five grandchildren, one of whom attends school in the Bronx. Ionie has been a member of PAC for almost 20 years. She dreams that her granddaughter, Anaya, will finish high school and college, and achieve her career goal of becoming a lawyer.

(Continued next page)
Josephine Ofili is the mother of student at NEST+M High School in New York. She is currently the Bronx Borough President Appointee for the Community Education Council for District 9. Ms. Ofili lives by African proverb “it takes a village to raise a child.” She believes that there must be a team effort among principals, teachers, parents and students. This relationship must be collaborative and inclusive. These are all our children and we must all take responsibility in helping to shape our school communities regardless of race and social, economic, cultural, or language barriers. She will go the extra mile to ensure that the diversity of the school population, with its many backgrounds, cultures, religions and languages is taken into account.

Rosemary Ofili is a longtime PAC leader. Rosemary has no children, but she has several nieces and nephews who she is very close to and who have attended or are currently attending NYC public schools. Rosemary strongly believes that quality education for all children is a right not a privilege, and that the more we invest in our children the brighter their future and the stronger our community will be. We must collectively advocate for all our children. We the parents, teachers and students must work together to help children become the best that they can be. Rosemary’s dream is that children will come to school each day feeling excited and passionate about learning in an environment that nurtures the whole child and prepares them in reading, math, science and technology so they can be globally competitive.

Arlene Powell is a mother of two children, one of whom graduated from high school in New York City. Her youngest son, Signori, attends P.S. 294 in the Bronx. Arlene is an active parent at her child’s school, and an advocate for children with special needs. Before becoming a full-time mom, she worked as a geriatric nurse. Her dream for her children is that they will attend college and achieve success in life.

Fatou Sabally is the mother of Hawa and Khaddijah Kalleh. She is an immigrant from West Africa and works as a home health aide. Her dream for her daughters is that they will excel in their education and grow up to be fruitful members of society.

LaToya Strong is an educator activist. She is a former New York City public school science teacher, a doctoral student at The Graduate Center-CUNY and a member of the New York Collective of Radical Educators.

Esperanza Vazquez is the proud mother of Grover, a high school student at M.S./H.S. 327, and Alex, a junior at City College. She immigrated from Mexico with the goal of seeing her sons get an excellent education, but she thinks of the USA as her new home and works with other parent leaders in PAC to fight for a shared vision of educational equity. She says, “my dream is not only for my children, but all children who live in my community. My dream is to change policy and culture to break the boundaries that Latino and African-American youth face.”
Other parent and community leaders who contributed to the creation of the curriculum and manual include Victor Almanzar, Abdoulaye Barry, Soranyi Encarción, Ana Maria García, Amanda Gonzalez, Fatima Gueye, Aminata Jawara, Alonda Myers, Alicia Toscano, and Aicha Zampaligre.

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Notes: