

Enhancing Communication With Spanish-Speaking Families

Helpful Tips and Key Phrases

When educators are more aware of the culture of the parents and children they serve, they learn more about how their students learn, and in turn, open the doors of communication for parents. Successful schools share key practices for positive parent engagement. They develop two-way communication among teachers, parents, and the community. They recognize, respect, and are committed to addressing families' needs while bridging cultural differences.

Communication is the first step toward bridging the gap. Schools must establish communication methods. Use parent liaisons to bridge the gap; provide interpreters and professional development for teachers on culture and Spanish language. Interpreters may not always be available, but schools can create a welcoming environment by preparing office staff and teachers with common Spanish phrases that can assist a non-English speaking parent. We affirm parental involvement just by making the attempt to communicate in a family's native tongue.

Sensitivity to cultural and communication issues can enhance the quality of education for all students. Unfamiliarity with cultural communication differences can lead to misinterpretation, misunderstanding and unintentional insult. When interacting with students and parents with limited English proficiency:

- Understand that a limitation in English proficiency is in no way a reflection of the level of intellectual functioning. In fact, a Hispanic family may speak an indigenous language as a first language, Spanish as a second language, and English as a third language. The limited ability to speak the language of the dominant culture has no bearing on the ability to communicate effectively in the language of origin.

- Understand that English language learners may not be literate in their language of origin.
- Shake hands and smile – body language means a lot.
- Remember that in the Hispanic culture they do not always look you in the eyes – this is a form of respect.
- Acknowledge the presence of a parent who is waiting and let them know what to expect.
- Listen actively and empathetically; try to put yourself in the other person's shoes.
- Send all information home in the parents' language, when possible.
- Include Hispanic parents in school activities and planning.
- Inform parents of all available resources, written in Spanish, to support student success.
- Be sure parents are aware of school policies. This may help with student attendance.
- Employ the services of a competent interpreter. Be sure that the interpreter knows educational language and terminologies in Spanish.

Spanish is phonetic, so it is easy to pronounce the letters in a word. There is a 1:1 correspondence between the letter and the sound. Each Spanish vowel has one sound. What is important is not the perfect pronunciation of the words. It is the effort and the attempt to communicate that will be appreciated and welcoming.

See the reverse side for a list of common phrases that will help you bridge the communication gap.



English	Spanish	Phonetic translation
Good Morning	Buenos Días	bway-nohss dee-ahss
Good Afternoon	Buenos Tardes	bway-nohss tar-dayss
Have a good day	Tenga un buen día	taynga oon bwayn dee-a
How can I help you?	¿Como le puedo ayudar?	koh-moe lay pway-doe a-jew dahr?
What's your name?	¿Como te llamas?	koh-moe tay jah-mahss?
Do you have a meeting or appointment with someone?	¿Tienes una reunión o cita con alguien?	Tee-enus oona ray-you-knee-own oh seeta cone ahl-gee-en?
With whom?	¿Con quien?	cone key-yen?
Who?	¿Quién?	Key-yen?
Who would you like to speak with?	¿Quien quieres hablar con?	Key-en key-ay-res ah-blahr cone?
Do you need to speak with the principal?	¿Necesita hablar con el principal o directora?	Nay-say-see-ta ah-blahr cone ehl preen-si-pal oh dee-rek-tora?
Do you need an interpreter?	¿Necesita un intérprete?	Nay-say-see-ta oon en-tay-prey-tay?
I am getting the assistance of an interpreter.	Voy a buscar la ayuda de un intérprete.	Voy ah boo-scar lah ay-jew-da day oon en-tay-prey-tay.
The interpreter will be here...	El intérprete llega...	Ehl en-tay-prey-tay jay-ga...
in five minutes	en cinco minutos	n seen-ko mee-new-toes
half an hour	media hora	may-deea orra
one hour	una hora	oona orra
Can you wait?	¿Puedes esperar?	Pway-days es-pay-rar?
If not can you come back and when?	¿Si no puedes esperar, puedes regresar y cuando?	See noh pway-days es-pay-rar, pway-days ray-gray-sar e kwan-doe?
Please sit down we are looking for an interpreter.	Porfavor de sentarse, le estamos buscando un intérprete.	Pour-fal-vor day sen-tar-say, lay ay-stah-mos boo-scan-doe oon en-tay-prey-tay.
The interpreter is not available today.	El intérprete no puede llegar hoy.	Ehl en-tay-prey-tay noh pway-day jay-gar oy
When can you come back so that we can ensure that an interpreter will be present?	¿Cuando puedes volver para asegurarnos que el intérprete este presente?	Kuan-doe pway-days vour-verr parra ass-ay-gew-rar-nosay kay ehl en-tay-prey-tay es-tay prey-sen-tay?
We will be with you in a moment.	Estará con usted en unos momentos.	Es-tay-rra cone ew-sted n oon-nosay moe-men-toes.
What is the name and grade of your child?	¿Que es el nombre y nivel de grado de su niño/a niña?	Kay ehss ehl nohm-bray ee knee-vehl day grah-doe day sue-knee-nyoh o knee-nyah?
What is the name of your child's teacher?	¿Que es el nombre de la maestra de su niño/a niña?	Kay ehss ehl nohm-bray day lah ma-ehss-trra day sue knee-nyoh o knee-nyah?
Does your child receive special education services?	¿Su niño/a niña recibe educación especial?	Sue knee-nyoh oh knee-nyah rey-see-bay ay-due-ka-see-oon ehss-pey-see-al?
Does your child have an IEP?	¿Tiene su niño/a niña un IEP?	Tee-a-nay sue knee-nyoh oh knee-nyah oon IEP?
We will be with you in five to ten minutes.	Estaremos con usted entre cinco o diez minutos.	Ehss-ta-ray-moes cone ew-sted ntray seen-ko oh dee-es me-new-toes.
We are awaiting a return call from the interpreter.	Estamos esperando la llamada del intérprete.	Ehss-ta-moes es-pair-an-doe lah ja-mah-da dehl en-tay-prey-tay.
The interpreter is on the way.	El intérprete esta en camino.	Ehl en-tey-prey-tay ehss-ta en ka-me-noh.