

Hands-On ELL Parenting Enrichment

Every school must overcome its own set of challenges for students to achieve academic success, and Arcadia Elementary School is no exception. Two of our community's greatest barriers are an increasingly high language gap and a 94 percent poverty rate. Arcadia has one of the highest Hispanic populations of any other school in South Carolina, with total enrollment reaching 65 percent. Our staff recognized our need to provide additional resources not only for our students, but for our parents as well.

With full support from our staff, administration, and school board, we began two programs to empower our parents and community. First, the H.O.P.E. (Hands-On Parenting Enrichment) Esperanza class meets Wednesday afternoons. There, parents work on English skills in our computer lab with Rosetta Stone. (They are also given login credentials to use on school computers to learn anytime.) Then, four trained teachers lead parents through strategically planned English lessons: a "parenting skill of the week" discussion and a Q&A session about how parents can help their children succeed. Dinner is provided for parents and students as part of our universal free dinner program, which already serves 300 students enrolled in our afterschool program. At the end of each year, we have a small "graduation" for successful parents, and we give them a bag of books to read with their children.

We also launched the Arcadia Adult Learning Center, a partnership with the Spartanburg Adult Learning Center. There, we offer free English classes and general education classes two nights a week for any community member, with free childcare from both paid staff and volunteers. We now have 188 adults enrolled, with a waiting list of 25, in eight classes, including a GED preparatory class. Among participants, eight different language groups are represented, including Spanish, Portuguese, French, Lao, Russian, Thai, Chinese, and Vietnamese. We particularly wanted to involve more fathers. The evening timeslot allowed more of them to attend, and now 30 percent of the participants are male.

Each of these programs is a win-win. They help our parents and community members learn English and computer skills. The home/school relationships that have been cultivated are tremendously meaningful. Our children see their parents and neighbors improving themselves by learning and serving as great role models for school success. Last, the parent programs help our community, because our residents have the identity of being a part of a "village."

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development, as many teachers may not be aware that they are telegraphing negative messages about middle schools. As the principal, you should bring this to their attention and challenge assumptions teachers may have about middle school experiences.

It is vital that the receiving faculty have information about English learners who are making the transition from elementary school to middle school—specifically, information related to language proficiency and the types of support that have worked for that student in the past. In many school districts, teachers or an English learner program coordinator create a summary worksheet so that the middle school staff have information right away about the student, in case the student files take some time to arrive at the school.

Personal Growth

A final aspect of continuous improvement shouldn't be overlooked: your own. Principals are often expected to be providers of information, but it is essential for you to renew your own fund of knowledge, as well. *The School Leader's Guide to English Learners* (2012), our book, contains a self-study and reflection guide designed to prompt your thinking and encourage conversation with various stakeholders about the current status of your school.

Although the complexities of teaching English learners can be daunting, it is well worth the investment. So many of the children and families in our schools have endured hardships in order to make a better life. Education is essential. 

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ensure that students are well prepared for their early adolescent learning experiences.

One of the easiest ways to alleviate the basic concerns that all students have about the transition to middle school (or high school, if you lead a middle school) is to organize a tour. Provide students with an opportunity to visit the school, find the bathroom and office, and see the classrooms and students. In addition, invite a diverse group of former elementary school students now in middle school to visit your school's classrooms and answer ques-

tions. In addition, hold parent informational sessions. Explain to parents that children are often afraid of middle school and that the family should discuss, with pride, the increasing responsibility that this transition entails.

Another powerful way to ensure that English learning students are prepared for middle school is for teachers to hold and communicate realistic expectations for those years. Teachers who say, "Just wait until you get to middle school to see how much work you have to do," make it sound scary and threatening. This is a great topic for faculty