1. What are some of the best ideas you have found for working with diverse parent groups?

Frequently mentioned ideas:

- Essentials for parent meetings: food, child care, and transportation if possible
- Host events to get parents into the school in a fun and nonthreatening way
- Increase attendance by featuring student performances
- Have interpreters at all events and conferences
- Have a Parent Coordinator/Parent Liaison on staff
- Flexible times and locations for meetings
- Try home visits
- Listen—don’t make assumptions
- Try to fight parents’ preconceived notions of how the school may view them
- Personal invitations are important (individual phone calls)

“All parents love their children. Always work with them with that in mind. Go out of your way to accommodate times to meet with them and/or return their calls. Ask them for information at the beginning of the school year as to what their expectations are for their child. Make positive parent phone calls and/or send positive notes home throughout the year. Include parents in any Student Assistance Team meetings about their child and build their support role into the action plan. Parent support for learning has no economic boundaries. All parents want their children to succeed in school.”

Wilbraham, MA

“Our ELL staff members assist our ELL parents in hosting a multicultural lunch for our teaching staff ... where we experience delicious dishes from many countries. (We have representation of about 13 different languages within our ELL program.) We host a "Make and Take" for our ELL parents during which they hear a presentation on how to help their children with academics and are given the opportunity to make flash cards, folder learning centers, etc. We use internal funding to prepare "homework boxes" for each family containing supplies needed for various homework projects as well as a few learning games, books, etc. Our Multicultural Committee is responsible for sharing facts about various holidays from other cultures on the morning show. We hold Family Reading Nights, Family Science Nights, Social Studies Encampment Night ... during which all of our parents can interact with other parents in the community. For religious holidays where fasting is encouraged, we have arranged for students who are fasting to spend their "lunch" time in the media center reading or volunteering in another classroom so they do not have to go to the cafeteria.”

Tampa, FL

“Hosting an "International Family Night," to which families bring a dish to share from the country of origin. We provide pizza. We also have stations for them to go to: The Photo Station—take a family picture. The Map Station—put a pin on your country of origin. Planning for the Future Station—what families need and would like to see in the future to help them acculturate and/or support their child’s education. The Holiday Station—tell us what you celebrate. Finally The Directory Station—a place to sign up with your name, address, etc. so families can connect with families who speak the same language.”

Algonquin, IL

* A summary of results from a June 2008 survey of approximately 30,000 members of the National Association of Elementary School Principals.
“Many parents respond to personal invitations to come into the school. There are cultures who do not walk in and say “Here I am!” They are respectful ... and waiting to be invited.”

Woodstock, IL

“Listen more, speak less”

Perris, CA

“We hire a community outreach clerk, conduct meetings in Spanish and translate or interpret to English rather than vice versa, introduce ourselves to business folks in our immediate area, go to ... where many of our students live to do homework club and tutoring, as well as meet with parents for conferences who can’t make it to our school.”

Denver, CO

2. What are some important resources you would recommend to help other school leaders work effectively with diverse parent groups?

Frequently mentioned resources:
- Ruby Payne (mentioned 48 times)
- PTA (mentioned 65 times in various contexts; 29 as PTO)
- NAESP library (mentioned 12 times)
- Joyce Epstein (mentioned 11 times)
- *Cultural Proficiency: A Manual for School Leaders* by Randall B. Lindsey (mentioned 5 times)
- Love and Logic Press (www.loveandlogic.com) (mentioned 5 times)
- *Beyond the Bake Sale* by Anne Henderson (mentioned 5 times)
- Geneva Gay (mentioned 3 times)
- General cultural associations/community organizations

“Get out of the books and get to know your families! The last thing my families want is for me to spout more ‘book sense’ at them! Open hearts, minds, and doors and get to know PEOPLE!”

Danville, VA

3. What has been the single biggest obstacle you have faced while working with diversity among your parents? If you have overcome it, how did you do so?

Most frequent responses:
- Language barrier
- Making parents feel welcome and comfortable at school
- Getting parents to trust the school
- Time and money
- Getting parents to show up
- Finding times/places that all parents can meet
- Disagreement over discipline

Other responses:
- Providing transportation to events
- Scheduling enough activities for busy parents to get involved without adding to their stress
- Helping some parent groups understand procedures for emergency situations
- Lack of understanding of cultural differences (independent of language differences)
- Single parents, same-sex parents, children raised by grandparents, age differences in parent groups
- Lack of time to develop personal relationships with individual parents
- Prejudice within parent community, conflicts between minority subgroups
• Getting dads involved
• Misinterpretations in translation
• Getting diverse parents to take leadership roles
• Parents’ different levels of education
• Students who move a lot
• Parent apathy
• Lack of support from the district level
• Poverty

“The majority of children are not minority and achieve at least proficient if not advance so teachers think our school does just fine. Next year, we will focus Professional Development on meeting the needs of every single child in a diverse subgroup.”

Michigan

“Making the connection with parents who are simply in survival mode.”

“Changing the mindset that everything negative that happens to them is because of their race or SES.”

“Our biggest obstacle has been helping all families feel comfortable. For some parents, a formal school setting is foreign to them, not having had a formal education of their own. For others, education is supposed to be separate from home. The expectation that we have in U.S. schools of parent involvement is a foreign concept for some families. Reaching out to each individual family rather than the usual “you all come” type invitations has been well received by our families and has brought them into the school.”

4. What has been the biggest opportunity or benefit you have personally seen resulting from today’s parent diversity, and why?

Frequent responses:
• Increased parent engagement
• Better communication
• Broadening horizons, new perspectives, cultural awareness, tolerance
• It’s a diverse world—diverse schools prepare students for that

“Deeper understanding and tolerance of other groups—from children and, more importantly, adults.”

“We are stronger because of our diversity. We are providing many different opportunities for all children because of our diversity. I am a ... believer that prejudice is learned, not inherent.”

“The more diversity there is, the less difference we find among people and families. Most parents want their children to have a great education AND they are doing the best they know how to obtain it.”

Terre Haute, IN

“The Dual Language classes in this district are booming! There is a waiting list a mile long to be in the program. This means that parents and the community see the value of diversity and learning the language and culture of others.”

Woodstock, IL

“Being given the opportunity to work with the children of other people by far has been the most rewarding opportunity for me. Empowering the kids to serve as liaison between the school and the home has worked well because their comfort level with my staff and me has been unwavering. The students know that we care and they in turn articulate that to their families.”

Washington, D.C.