

# BEST PRACTICES IN SCHOOL CLIMATE AND SUPPORT SERVICES FOR ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS

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In the following report, Hanover Research examines strategies outside of the classroom for supporting the academic achievement of English language learners.

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

**Executive Summary and Key Findings .....3**

    Introduction .....3

    Key Findings .....3

**Section I: School Climate Services .....5**

    Promoting Cultural Awareness .....6

    Establishing a Welcoming Environment .....8

    Increasing Parent Engagement .....9

        Connecting With ELL Families .....9

        Communicating Important Information .....11

        Parent Participation .....13

        Parents as Leaders .....14

**Section II: Specialized Staff ..... 15**

    School Social Workers .....15

    Cultural Liaisons .....17

    Bilingual Education Assistants .....19

    Staffing Levels .....20

**Section III: Specialized Staff District Profiles ..... 21**

    Anchorage School District .....21

    Fairfax County Public Schools .....25

    White Bear Lake Area Schools .....28

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY AND KEY FINDINGS

### INTRODUCTION

This report identifies strategies other than those associated with instructional delivery that improve school climate and promote academic achievement among English language learners (ELLs). Through a literature review and an examination of ELL services at other districts, this report will consider best practices associated with school climate services and specialized staffing levels. The report comprises three sections:

- **Section I: School Climate Services** examines strategies, other than those associated with instructional delivery, that promote academic achievement among ELLs. Specifically, this section discusses school- and district-wide strategies such as promoting a positive climate through cultural understanding, establishing a welcoming environment, and increasing family engagement.
- **Section II: Specialized Staff** introduces different types of positions that can support the experience of ELLs. Specific job titles discussed in this section include school social workers, cultural liaisons, and bilingual education assistants.
- **Section III: Specialized Staff District Profiles** provides a brief overview of ELL staffing practices—other than ELL teachers—in three school districts, Anchorage School District, Fairfax County Public Schools, and White Bear Lake Area Schools. These profiles place a particular emphasis on ELL tutors, paraprofessionals and other ELL assistant positions, as well as language and cultural liaisons.

### KEY FINDINGS

- Schools characterized by a positive school climate for ELLs emphasize an **appreciation of students' linguistic and cultural backgrounds and the promotion of family involvement in school operations and communities**. Strong anti-bullying policies, an annual student survey, community meetings, and cultural sensitivity training for all staff members can help ensure a positive school climate for ELLs, as well as for the entire school community.
- **Encouraging parental involvement at school may be particularly difficult for ELL students and their families**. This is because parents with limited English skills may be intimidated by language and cultural barriers in the school community. Administrators and school officials can reach out to these families by making parents of diverse backgrounds feel welcomed and valued in the school community, creating clear channels of two-way communication between home and school including effective, accessible, and reliable translation services, and establishing creative and flexible ways for parents to participate in school activities and serve as leaders regardless of linguistic barriers.
- **Cultural liaisons promote an inclusive and welcoming learning environment for ELLs**. A highly effective cultural liaison is selected based on his or her standing within a community culture group and goes on to help these community members

negotiate the structures of the school system. Cultural liaisons also aid school personnel in better understanding the values and norms of the community. Cultural liaisons are employed in Anchorage School District and White Bear Lake Area Schools, profiled in Section III of this report, while Fairfax County Public Schools employs many part-time “Parent Liaisons” with similar job functions. In several schools the cultural liaison role encompasses a wide range of responsibilities, including:

- Helping families understand the American school system and fill out any school paperwork;
  - Interpreting home-school communications between staff and parents regarding academic and behavior matters;
  - Interpreting for special education assessments, parent meetings, and conferences; and
  - Serving as a resource to school staff about working with students and families from other cultures.
- **Within the education system, Education Assistants play an increasingly important support role in the development of students; this growth is even more prominent among ELL populations, as EAs most commonly assist teachers of underprivileged students.** Their roles expand beyond the traditional understanding of EAs and include helping with discipline, tutoring in reading and content areas, testing, and translating for parents and students with limited English proficiency. Studies indicate that life experiences and cultural diversity are the most beneficial skills they bring into their jobs. In White Bear Lake Area Schools, profiled in Section III of this report, ELL paraprofessionals are specially trained to work with ELL students in the classroom. These paraprofessionals are supervised by classroom teachers and/or ELL certified teachers and serve to “supplement” regular instruction provided by these teachers.
- **Although there is limited research investigating the direct relationship between the efforts of school social workers and student achievement, they are understood to play a vital intersectional role in serving underprivileged students of all types:** immigrants, ELLs, and children of color, as well as students who are disabled, economically disadvantaged, or have experienced abuse. These highly-trained professionals fill a critical need for providing students with mental health, academic, and behavioral support. Districts may hire bilingual social workers in order to more provide more specialized support for ELL students.

## SECTION I: SCHOOL CLIMATE SERVICES

This section provides an overview of literature on how services related to a school's climate can impact ELL achievement. While Hanover was unable to identify research that specifies a quantifiable benchmark for what is considered a positive climate, multiple correlational studies suggest that school climate is linked to academic, social, and behavioral outcomes.

The National School Climate Center (NSCC) identifies five aspects of school climate: safety, teaching and learning, interpersonal relationships, institutional environment, and staff-only concerns. Figure 1.1 lists these aspects and their indicators. While formulating an approach to improving school climate, it is helpful for all stakeholders to address these dimensions.

**Figure 1.1: The 12 Dimensions of School Climate Indicators**

DIMENSIONS	MAJOR INDICATORS
<b>SAFETY</b>	
<b>Rules and Norms</b>	Clearly communicated rules about physical violence; clearly communicated rules about verbal abuse, harassment, and teasing; clear and consistent enforcement and norms for adult intervention.
<b>Sense of Physical Security</b>	Sense that students and adults feel safe from physical harm in the school.
<b>Sense of Social-Emotional Security</b>	Sense that students feel safe from verbal abuse, teasing, and exclusion.
<b>TEACHING AND LEARNING</b>	
<b>Support for Learning</b>	Use of supportive teaching practices, such as: encouragement and constructive feedback; varied opportunities to demonstrate knowledge and skills; support for risk-taking and independent thinking; atmosphere conducive to dialog and questioning; academic challenge; and individual attention.
<b>Social and Civic Learning</b>	Support for the development of social and civic knowledge, skills, and dispositions including: effective listening, conflict resolution, self-reflection and emotional regulation, empathy, personal responsibility, and ethical decision making.
<b>INTERPERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS</b>	
<b>Respect for Diversity</b>	Mutual respect for individual differences (e.g. gender, race, culture, etc.) at all levels of the school—student-student; adult-student; adult-adult and overall norms for tolerance.
<b>Social Support—Adults</b>	Pattern of supportive and caring adult relationships for students, including high expectations for students' success, willingness to listen to students and to get to know them as individuals, and personal concern for students' problems.
<b>Social Support—Students</b>	Pattern of supportive peer relationships for students, including: friendships for socializing, for problems, for academic help, and for new students.
<b>INSTITUTIONAL ENVIRONMENT</b>	
<b>School Connectedness &amp; Engagement</b>	Positive identification with the school and norms for broad participation in school life for students, staff, and families.
<b>Physical Surroundings</b>	Cleanliness, order, and appeal of facilities and adequate resources and materials.

DIMENSIONS	MAJOR INDICATORS
STAFF ONLY	
<b>Leadership</b>	Administration that creates and communicates a clear vision, and is accessible to and supportive of school staff and staff development.
<b>Professional Relationships</b>	Positive attitudes and relationships among school staff that support effectively working and learning together

Source: National School Climate Center<sup>1</sup>

Although literature about the impact of school climate on ELLs is limited, one study on effective schooling for ELLs found that schools characterized by a positive school climate emphasized “**family involvement** in the operation and activities of the school” as well as “**recognizing and valuing the linguistic and cultural background** of students and their families.”<sup>2</sup> The following subsections review both of these themes, as well as additional strategies designed to establish a positive school climate for ELLs, through three main topics: promoting cultural awareness, establishing a welcoming environment, and increasing parent engagement.

## PROMOTING CULTURAL AWARENESS

The literature pertaining to the impacts of school climate on experiences for ELLs in particular generally demonstrates that **greater cultural awareness contributes to a more positive school climate**. In other words, multicultural and multilingual appreciation will positively impact not just ELLs, but the entire school community.

A 2013 publication of The Southern Poverty Law Center describes a number of actions that districts can take to establish a positive school climate for students from diverse backgrounds, many of which relate to cultural understanding.<sup>3</sup> Specific actions recommended in the brief include:<sup>4</sup>

- Establishing a “strong and evolving” **anti-bullying policy**, and disseminating it to all staff, students, parents and community members. In addition, the policy should include a section on national-origin-based harassment, and should be printed in multiple languages.
- Administering an **annual student survey on school climate** and using the results to identify and address issues related to harassment.
- Holding **community meetings** to provide information regarding registration and enrollment and to receive input from ELL families and community members.

<sup>1</sup> “The 12 Dimensions of School Climate Measured.” National School Climate Center.

[http://www.schoolclimate.org/programs/documents/dimensions\\_chart\\_pagebars.pdf](http://www.schoolclimate.org/programs/documents/dimensions_chart_pagebars.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> Lehr, C. “Positive School Climate: Information for Educators.” *Helping Children at Home and School II: Handouts for Families and Educators. National Association of School Psychologists*, 2004.

[http://www.nasponline.org/communications/spawareness/schclimate\\_ho.pdf](http://www.nasponline.org/communications/spawareness/schclimate_ho.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> “Found in Translation.” The Southern Poverty Law Center, *Teaching Tolerance*, Spring 2013, p. 33.

[http://www.tolerance.org/sites/default/files/general/Found\\_in\\_Translation.pdf](http://www.tolerance.org/sites/default/files/general/Found_in_Translation.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

Meetings should be held at least twice each year and should have interpreters present.

- Developing **cultural sensitivity training** for all staff and administrators.

In addition, one classroom-based strategy that has been found to promote cultural understanding among students is **cooperative learning**, which allows students to “break down social isolation by integrating student teams across gender, academic ability, and ethnicity.”<sup>5</sup> A number of studies have demonstrated that classroom activities such as “small group work, class discussions, peer tutoring, and cooperative learning activities help to enhance social relationships and school connectedness.”<sup>6</sup> ELLs and other at-risk students can particularly benefit from heterogeneous groupings for these cooperative learning exercises, as studies have found such arrangements to “improve attitudes toward other students and teachers, improve race relations, and improve social relationships for students with disabilities and emotional disorders.”<sup>7</sup>

In addition, cultural awareness on the part of teachers, administrators, and other non-instructional staff is a factor that many scholars point to as a potential contributor to increased achievement of ELLs. Notably, a *lack* of cultural awareness among instructional staff can hinder ELL student performance. As described in a National Education Association (NEA) brief, a “cultural gap between students and their teachers can be a factor in students’ academic performance and contribute to achievement gaps among different student groups.”<sup>8</sup> According to the NEA, there are four essential areas of cultural competence needed for teachers to serve a diverse group of students:<sup>9</sup>

- **Valuing diversity:** Accepting and respecting different cultural backgrounds and customs, different ways of communicating, and different traditions and values.
- **Being culturally self-aware:** Understanding that educators’ own cultures—all of their experiences, background, knowledge, skills, beliefs, values, and interests—shape their sense of who they are, where they fit into their family, school, community, and society, and how they interact with students.

<sup>5</sup> Blum, R. 2005. “A Case for School Connectedness.” *The Adolescent Learner*, 62:7.

<http://www.ascd.org/publications/educational-leadership/apr05/vol62/num07/A-Case-for-School-Connectedness.aspx>

<sup>6</sup> Barker, J., Terry, T., Bridger, R., and Winsor, A. 1997. “Schools as caring communities: A relational approach to school reform.” *School Psychology Review*, 26.; Korinek, L., Walther-Thomas, C., McLaughlin, V., and Williams, B. 1999.

“Creating classroom communities and networks for student support.” *Intervention in School and Clinic*, 35:1.

Retrieved from ProQuest.; Schaps, E. and Solomon, D. 1990. “Schools and classrooms as caring communities.” *Educational Leadership*, 48. As cited by Sulkowski, M., Demaray, M., and Lazarus, P. 2012. “Connecting Students to Schools to Support Their Emotional Well-Being and Academic Success.” *NASP Communiqué*, 40:7.

<http://www.nasponline.org/publications/cq/40/7/connecting-students.aspx>

<sup>7</sup> Korinek et al., Op. cit.; Slavin, R. and Oickle, E. 1981. “Effects of cooperative learning teams on students’ achievement and race relations: Treatment by race interactions.” *Sociology of Education*, 54. As cited by Sulkowski et al., 2012a, Op. cit.

<sup>8</sup> “Promoting Educators’ Cultural Competence to Better Serve Culturally Diverse Students.” National Education Association, 2008, p. 1. [http://www.nea.org/assets/docs/PB13\\_CulturalCompetence08.pdf](http://www.nea.org/assets/docs/PB13_CulturalCompetence08.pdf)

<sup>9</sup> Ibid. (Bulleted points taken verbatim)

- **Understanding the dynamics of cultural interactions:** Knowing that there are many factors that can affect interactions across cultures, including historical cultural experiences and relationships between cultures in a local community.
- **Institutionalizing cultural knowledge and adapting to diversity:** Designing educational services based on an understanding of students' cultures and institutionalizing that knowledge so that educators, and the learning environments they work in, can adapt to and better serve diverse populations.

## ESTABLISHING A WELCOMING ENVIRONMENT

It is important for districts to welcome new students and create an atmosphere of “safety, acceptance, and trust” for ELLs and their families.<sup>10</sup> Even simple gestures such as welcome signs in a student's home language can make a child feel welcome in a new community. Families of ELL students may also benefit from an easy-to-use school reference guide that includes administrator contact information, school schedules, and expectations of students and family members.<sup>11</sup>

ELL students who are also new to the United States may benefit from more intensive programs and services, such as an intake center or bilingual orientation center. These centers serve as initial points of contact for ELL students and their families, and they play an integral role in the education and acculturation of ELL students with high English language needs. Some centers even provide families of ELL students with an orientation to the ELL program, in which the specifics of the program, its benefits, and school policies are explained in detail.<sup>12</sup> The Council of the Great City Schools offers several recommendations for these centers that relate to ELL student and family support:<sup>13</sup>

- Acculturate students into the American way of life and into the American educational system;
- Provide opportunities for peer-to-peer interaction among refugee students and other students through extra-curricular activities and non-academic courses in order to help build language and other skills;
- Offer coordinated translation and interpreting services so that parents and families can communicate with schools, district offices, and social service agencies;

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<sup>10</sup> Campbell, R. “Intake Protocol.” p. 1. Accessed through: “ESL Webinar Handouts Intake Protocol\_Sept 09.doc” link at Edmonton Regional Learning Consortium. [http://www.engagingalllearners.ca/ip/supporting-ell/getting\\_started\\_in\\_esl.php](http://www.engagingalllearners.ca/ip/supporting-ell/getting_started_in_esl.php)

<sup>11</sup> Campbell, R. “Some Basics to Help Parents.” p. 1. Accessed through: “ESL Webinar Handouts Some Basics to Help Parents.doc” link at Edmonton Regional Learning Consortium. [http://www.engagingalllearners.ca/ip/supporting-ell/getting\\_started\\_in\\_esl.php](http://www.engagingalllearners.ca/ip/supporting-ell/getting_started_in_esl.php)

<sup>12</sup> “Sherman Academy, California: Where Parents and Teachers Work Together.” National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition, 2012. [http://www.ncela.us/files/uploads/promising\\_EL/sherman.pdf](http://www.ncela.us/files/uploads/promising_EL/sherman.pdf)

<sup>13</sup> Bullets quoted with slight variation from “Raising the Achievement of English Language Learners in the Seattle Public Schools.” Council of the Great City Schools, Summer 2008, pp. 75-79. [http://cgcs.schoolwires.net/cms/lib/DC00001581/Centricity/Domain/35/Publication%20Docs/Seattle\\_Bilingual.pdf](http://cgcs.schoolwires.net/cms/lib/DC00001581/Centricity/Domain/35/Publication%20Docs/Seattle_Bilingual.pdf)



- Offer adult education classes to help parents learn English and relevant skills, such as accessing student information via the Internet, handling parent-teacher conferences, and communicating concerns to the school and the district; and
- Ensure ongoing collaboration with city, community, and social service organizations to maximize parent access to school services.

## INCREASING PARENT ENGAGEMENT

Successful ELL programs go beyond classroom-based strategies and reach out to the families of ELL students. In addition to language difficulties, ELL students can face an array of family, generational, and cultural challenges that may act as obstacles to their academic performance.<sup>14</sup> The effects of family engagement and school climate are reciprocal: by making an effort to connect with ELL students' families, schools establish a more welcoming school climate, which then leads to increased family involvement and higher student achievement.<sup>15</sup>

Colorín Colorado, an online resource for ELL educators and families supported by the American Federation of Teachers, offers a guide intended to help districts design approaches that foster authentic and lasting engagement with ELL families. The information presented in the guide is organized around six major themes. The following paragraphs review the four themes most relevant to ELL parent engagement and the corresponding key strategies: connecting with ELL families, communicating important information, parent participation, and establishing parents as leaders.<sup>16</sup> Unless otherwise noted, the information in the following subsections is derived from the Colorín Colorado "Guide for Engaging ELL Families."<sup>17</sup>

## CONNECTING WITH ELL FAMILIES

First, administrators should endeavor to connect with the families of ELL students on a personal level. To do so, schools must learn about their students' backgrounds, integrate their cultural traditions into school activities, create a welcoming environment for their families, connect with family members, and show appreciation of students' native languages.

**Learn about your ELL population.** Learning about the background of each ELL student helps establish a foundation for providing appropriate services and programs. Administrators can learn more about ELL students and their families by:

- Asking ELL and bilingual educators to share their knowledge and expertise;

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<sup>14</sup> Hartman, L. "School, Community, and English Language Learners: Intake Center as Pathway to Assimilation." *Connexions*, July 3, 2007. <http://cnx.org/content/m14704/1.1/>

<sup>15</sup> "Involving Hard-to-Reach Parents: Strategies and Resources for Teachers and Administrators." Fairfax County Public Schools. [http://www.fcps.edu/cco/msaoc/pdf/fcp\\_tips\\_web\\_spreads.pdf](http://www.fcps.edu/cco/msaoc/pdf/fcp_tips_web_spreads.pdf)

<sup>16</sup> Breiseth, L., K. Robertson, and S. Lafond. "A Guide for Engaging ELL Families: Twenty Strategies for School Leaders." *Colorín Colorado*, August, 2011, pp. 7-34. <http://www.colorincolorado.org/pdfs/guides/Engaging-ELL-Families.pdf>

<sup>17</sup> Bullets and details in the following subsections created verbatim or paraphrased from: Ibid.

- Identifying resources within the community, such as background information or interpreters;
- Enlisting a staff member, community member, or parent who can act as a liaison for specific groups; and
- Obtaining information directly from families using a home language survey or other questionnaire.

**Integrate cultural traditions of your ELL families throughout the school.** By learning about the cultural traditions of students, schools can create a more welcoming environment and can also incorporate this understanding into better scheduling, classroom opportunities, and communication. Administrators can use their understanding of cultural traditions by:

- Scheduling important school events around major holidays observed by different student populations;
- Informing all staff about major holidays and celebrations and reminding them to be mindful of students who may be observing them (e.g., students who are fasting may be less energetic);
- Encouraging students to share traditions in school assemblies, talent shows, potlucks, and fairs;
- Sharing information about cultural celebrations and holidays with teachers so that they are able to positively support them and incorporate them into lessons; and
- Inviting parents to participate in cultural celebrations at school.

**Create a welcoming environment for ELL families.** Making parents and other family members feel welcome in the school community is an essential factor in parental engagement for all families; however, it is particularly important for immigrant families who may feel intimidated in the school due to language and cultural barriers. In order to make ELL families feel welcomed in the school, administrators can:

- Post signs in multiple languages and ensure that parents know how to enter the building and access school personnel and services;
- Enlist a bilingual morning greeter to welcome students and families each day;
- Include bilingual books in the school library and classrooms;
- Display the maps and flags of your students' native countries; and
- Display a large map in the front lobby where parents can mark their native countries with a pin.

**Make a personal connection with families.** Face-to-face communication with families can be an effective way to build trust between school officials and ELL families. While this type of engagement with parents requires a substantial amount of time and effort, building relationships with families can help school officials better understand the needs and desires

of their schools' diverse community. Administrators can make an effort to build personal connections with families by:

- Holding a back-to-school event or picnic for ELL families in which they have time to meet school leaders, their children's teachers, and school staff;
- Creating a welcome DVD in multiple languages. This may be a student project;
- Providing staff the opportunity to learn some common phrases in ELL families' languages, as well as cultural gestures;
- Visiting the local neighborhoods to meet families;
- Connecting new families with a contact person who speaks their language as soon as they enroll in the school for guidance and information; and
- Creating an "ambassador" program in which students and parents are trained to give tours.

**Show that you value families' native languages.** Research suggests that ELLs learn best when their native language skills are respected and cultivated while learning English. In order to show families that native languages are respected and valued, administrators should consider ways to encourage native language use in the home. Other strategies to promote respect for native languages include:

- Discussing with parents the value of strong native language skills and being bilingual;
- Encouraging parents to read or tell stories to their children in their native language;
- Offering parent sessions, workshops, and classes in parents' native languages;
- Including books in students' native languages in the school and classroom libraries;
- Hiring bilingual staff and recruit bilingual volunteers to the extent possible; and
- Providing training to all staff on why maintaining students' native language is important and how to support students' bilingual development.

## **COMMUNICATING IMPORTANT INFORMATION**

**Find ways to communicate with ELL parents.** Because language can be a significant barrier to communication with ELL families, cultivating two-way communication mechanisms for non-English speaking parents is essential to creating a positive school climate for ELLs. A translation request process that is "formal, steady, and reliable" helps parents feel more at ease interacting with the school. Parents may also be more likely to attend school functions, as they can anticipate being able to understand and participate in such activities when a translator is consistently provided. In order to establish a formal communication process with ELL families, administrators should:

- Ask parents how they prefer to receive communication (phone, e-mail, text message, etc.) and in which language – it may be English;
- Develop an ongoing relationship with community organizations;

- Hire, when possible, staff that matches the linguistic needs of your population; and
- Avoid using translation websites, which are imprecise and often inaccurate.

**Make the enrollment process manageable for ELL parents.** School enrollment can be an overwhelming process for families with limited English skills. As such, it is important to provide families with a reliable translator to ensure that they understand enrollment procedures, the school schedule, school policies and rules, and a number of other details as well as to respond to any questions that families might have before school begins. In order to assist in the enrollment process, administrators should consider the following approaches:

- Bilingual staff: When possible, hire bilingual staff to work in the main office;
- Translated forms: Many of the more general forms are available in other languages from the state education sites, and there may already be some translations available through your district;
- Enrollment night: Schedule an “enrollment night” in which families can learn about the enrollment process and school policies with interpreters on hand;
- School liaisons: Assign each family a school contact who speaks their language and guides them through the enrollment process;
- Welcome centers: Having a centralized ELL welcome/intake center managed by bilingual staff may help streamline enrollment and placement procedures; and
- Welcome kits: Put together a “welcome kit” that includes key information, basic school supplies, and educational activities for your ELL families.

**Make the enrollment process accessible all year long.** While establishing a process to enroll ELL students in the beginning of the school year is important, school officials must keep in mind that new students can enroll at any time. In order to provide the same welcoming, thorough enrollment process for ELL students and families throughout the school year, administrators should:

- Make sure all of the information available for parents and staff at the beginning of the year is accessible throughout the year; and
- Ask parents who enrolled their children after the beginning of previous school years what their experience was like and what could have been improved through a survey or questionnaire.

**Provide opportunities for parents to learn more about important topics.** Families who are new to the United States have a lot to learn about the U.S. education system, including how to track their child’s progress, standardized testing practices, programs like special education and gifted and talented programs, and the college application process, among other features. In order to help families learn more about these topics, administrators should consider:

- Offering parents the opportunity to attend workshops in their native language about a variety of education topics; and
- Enlisting staff members, parents, volunteers, and community partners to help organize and run these workshops.

## *PARENT PARTICIPATION*

**Look for ways that ELL parents can help with children's schoolwork.** While ELL parents might not feel that they are capable of helping their children with schoolwork, parental engagement in academics is an important factor in school success. In order to promote parental participation, administrators can encourage ELL parents to:

- Provide a place where children can do their homework and ask their children to tell them about what they learned each day;
- Keep in regular contact with a teacher or staff member about their child's progress; and
- Learn more about homework help programs through before- and after-school programs and the public library.

**Look for ways that ELL parents can participate and volunteer.** Making sure that ELL parents know about volunteer activities—and making them feel comfortable enough to get involved—is essential to engaging parents at school. Administrators can support ELL parent volunteer efforts by:

- Inviting parents to speak with their child's class about their native country, a hobby, or their job;
- Encouraging parents to volunteer in the classroom, main office, lunchroom, or library;
- Finding out what your parents' skills and hobbies are, and look for ways to draw on their talents; and
- Finding ways to bring ELL and non-ELL families together.

**Think creatively about parent engagement.** Parents from different cultural backgrounds may not participate in their child's education in the same ways as other parents in the school; however, parents from all cultural backgrounds tend to care deeply about their child's education. In order to better understand parents' needs and establish new avenues for parental involvement, administrators should consider:

- Forming small focus groups with ELL parents and an interpreter and ask how they define their role in their child's education; concerns, priorities, and hopes for their child; what kinds of events they would be interested in attending.

**Consider alternative schedules, locations, and kinds of events.** Flexible scheduling and alternative locations for school meetings and events may allow a greater portion of families

to be involved, including ELLs. Administrators should consider options to make attendance at school events easier and less threatening for ELL families, including:

- Visiting your students' neighborhoods;
- Giving parents a few different options for meeting times based on teacher availability;
- Collaborating with apartment complex managers to make a recreation room available for families; and
- Contacting parents' employers about parent schedules or holding conferences closer to parents' workplaces.

**Look for the successes.** In order to support the ongoing efforts to involve ELL parents and family members, administrators should make an effort to recognize the strengths of the ELL community and, when necessary, to meet education-related needs in the community as recognized. In order to support ELL students' success at home and school, administrators should:

- Learn what you can about your ELLs' routines (which will vary tremendously), including the responsibilities they have in their families; and
- Find out whether these responsibilities impact students' school work or health and brainstorm some ideas with staff members about possible solutions.

## *PARENTS AS LEADERS*

**Encourage ELL parents to take on leadership roles.** ELL parents are often underrepresented in parent leadership roles. Supporting ELL parents as leaders in the school community not only builds confidence among ELL parents regarding their ability to engage at school, but also allows ELL parents the opportunity to put forth solutions that may work for their community. In order to support parents in leadership roles, administrators should consider:

- Ensuring that ELL parents are represented in the PTA and advisory groups; and
- Encouraging parents to attend and speak up at school board meetings, even with an interpreter.

**Make parent leadership sustainable.** Although parent leadership may falter as students transition to new schools, administrators can support sustained parent leadership among ELL families by:

- Forming a panel of ELL parents to address questions and concerns;
- Designating parent leaders in each language group to engage other parents; and
- Asking current parent leaders to help recruit and mentor new parent leaders.

## SECTION II: SPECIALIZED STAFF

This section reviews different types of specialized staff that can improve the academic experience for ELLs, including school social workers, cultural liaisons, and bilingual education assistants. Content in this section maintains a focus on ELLs when possible; however, it also addresses how these topics relate to the broader student population.

A team-based support system is a critical approach to ensuring that initiatives effectively help ELLs. As districts and their schools consider how to best meet the needs of ELLs, it is essential that efforts be enacted in a consistent and systemic way. Without this institution-wide backing, even the most promising of support initiatives may be thwarted by misunderstandings that they are unsustainable or ephemeral.

Judy Rance-Roney, expert in ELL instructional theory, recommends that schools create **cross-disciplinary school-wide teams** in order to guarantee that ELLs have access to the all of their school's resources. These teams may consist of "ELL specialists, content-area teachers who teach English language learners, counselors who specialize in the needs of ELLs, key school administrators, and other staff."<sup>18</sup> They should act in **planning, executing, and monitoring** capacities in order to align curriculum, design cross-content projects, address student concerns, and monitor student progress. Examples of specific types of staff are discussed in the following subsections.

### SCHOOL SOCIAL WORKERS

School-based social workers play a vital role in serving a diverse student population, including students of a variety of ethnic, linguistic, and national backgrounds, as well as those who are disabled, economically disadvantaged, or have experienced a history of abuse. The National Association of Social Workers estimates that thousands of social workers serve students each year across the United States, with considerable variability between districts: while some social workers maintain manageable caseloads, "other districts have a social worker to student ratio of as much as 1:400."<sup>19</sup> A substantial amount of available literature regarding social workers centers on their ability to address students' mental health needs.

The role of the school social worker as outlined in the School Social Work Association of America's (SSWAA) School Social Work National Practice Model includes:<sup>20</sup>

- Delivering evidence-based education, behavior, and mental health services

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> "School Social Work Advocacy." National Association of Social Workers. <http://www.naswdc.org/advocacy/school/>

<sup>20</sup> Bullets adapted nearly verbatim from: "School Social Workers' Role in Addressing Students' Mental Health Needs and Increasing Academic Achievement." School Social Work Association of America, p. 1. <http://c.ymcdn.com/sites/www.sswaa.org/resource/resmgr/imported/Role%20of%20School%20Social%20Worker.pdf>

- Promoting a school climate and culture conducive to student learning and teaching excellence
- Maximizing access to school-based and community-based resources

Additionally, the SSWAA identifies several important aspects of the qualities and capabilities of school social workers, outlined below:<sup>21</sup>

- **Highly-Trained and Qualified:** They must have special expertise in understanding family and community systems and linking students and their families with community services essential to promote student success. (Master's degrees in social work are typically required.)
- **Critically Needed:** 18 to 20 percent of students have mental health issues significant enough to impact their academic and social development. Students with untreated mental health issues may develop more significant problems which can greatly impact their educational experience and result in poor educational outcomes and possibly dropping out of school.
- **Supports a Multi-tiered System of Supports (MTSS):** The most effective way to implement integrated services that support school safety and student learning is through a school-wide multi-tiered system of supports (MTSS).
- **Can Integrate Services through Collaboration and a Multi-Disciplinary Approach:** Rather than viewing safe schools as a targeted outcome for a separate program or plan developed by the school building principal alone, an effective model seeks to integrate all services for students and families by framing the necessary behavioral, mental health, and social services within the context of school culture and learning.

To supplement the gap in research surrounding social workers and ELLs, Hanover searched for examples of bilingual school social workers. The investigation revealed that The Equity Project (TEP) Charter School in New York City employs bilingual school social workers; as of 2011, this school had two such staff members for its 480 total students and was searching for a third bilingual social worker.<sup>22</sup> These specialists are matched with a student cohort and move with that group through their middle school careers.<sup>23</sup> The job description states that candidates need only to have proficiency in Spanish, and it does not indicate that there is a particular emphasis on cultural literacy. Figure 2.1 provides an overview of the responsibilities and qualifications of their ideal candidates.

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<sup>21</sup> Adapted from: Ibid., pp. 1-2.

<sup>22</sup> "The Equity Project (TEP) Charter School: Bilingual (Spanish/English) Social Worker Job Description." TEP Charter School. <http://www.tepcharter.org/TEP-Social-Worker-Job-Description.pdf>

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.



**Figure 2.1: Bilingual (Spanish/English) Social Worker Job Description**

AREA	DESCRIPTION
<b>Responsibilities</b>	
<b>Mental Health &amp; Counseling Services</b>	(a) Provides regular counseling to students and families in need of social and emotional support (b) Coordinates the delivery of mental health and family services at community-based organizations for students and families requiring outside services
<b>Prevention Programming</b>	(a) Creates programs for students and families to promote emotional and mental health
<b>Crisis Management</b>	(a) Responds to day-to-day issues and unanticipated student crises at TEP during the course of a school day
<b>Organizes Special Education Services</b>	(a) Serves as TEP's primary liaison to the NYC Committee on Special Education (CSE) (b) Works closely with TEP's Special Education teachers to maximize the impact of TEP's Special Education program
<b>Qualifications</b>	
<b>Experience</b>	(a) Significant experience as a Social Worker/School Psychologist, preferably in a middle school setting
<b>Skills &amp; Knowledge</b>	(a) Working knowledge of the instructional and social needs of students at risk and students with disabilities (b) Understanding of community health organization structures and operations (c) Ability to design and implement in-school prevention programming according to current best practices (d) Proficiency in Spanish required
<b>Education</b>	(a) Master's degree in social work or related human services field required
<b>Personal Attributes</b>	
<b>Interpersonal</b>	(a) Exhibits strong leadership, interpersonal and communication skills (b) Treats others with respect, regardless of gender, race, sexual orientation, background, or ability
<b>Work Ethic</b>	(a) Sets the highest standard of excellence for himself/herself (b) Enjoys the challenge of, and works well in, a dynamic, fast-paced environment (c) Works well in a collaborative, team-oriented work environment
<b>Philosophy</b>	(a) Adheres to the belief that all students can learn given the appropriate supports (b) Is committed to the vision and philosophy of the TEP organization
<b>Character</b>	(a) Is committed to acting with honesty and integrity in all matters involving TEP students, parents, staff, and community members

Source: The Equity Project Charter School<sup>24</sup>

## CULTURAL LIAISONS

Based on Hanover's research, cultural liaisons focus on serving multicultural members of their school's community at an interpersonal level. The National Staff Development Council's publication, *Learning Forward*, offers the following definition: "A cultural liaison is someone who has standing within a community culture group and is willing to serve as a link between the community and the school. A cultural liaison helps school personnel better

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

understand the values and norms of the community and helps community members negotiate the structures of the school system.”<sup>25</sup>

More specifically, a cultural liaison’s duties may involve any of the following:<sup>26</sup>

- Helping families understand the American school system;
- Helping families fill out school paperwork such as forms for school registration, immunizations, Free & Reduced Lunch, transportation, scholarships, and more;
- Interpreting home-school communications between staff and parents regarding academic and behavior matters;
- Interpreting for early childhood screenings, special education assessments, parent meetings, and conferences;
- Encouraging bilingual families to participate in parent-teacher conferences and attending those conferences to interpret for families; and
- Serving as a resource to school staff about working with students and families from other cultures

The following spotlight provides an example of how a cultural liaison is used within a Minnesota district.



### Spotlight: Roseville Area School District (Roseville, Minnesota)

**Roseville Area School District**, located in Roseville, Minnesota serves a student population of 7,182 who speak a total of 47 different languages. Like other schools they have enlisted cultural liaisons to bridge cultural and linguistic differences. Cultural liaisons are centrally stationed in a community center and are accessible staff or parents at any time. While they direct the majority of their focus towards ELLs and their families, they also serve as a resource for faculty and staff. Their responsibilities include:

- Helping families understand the American school system and help them fill out any school paperwork.
- Interpreting home-school communications between staff and parents regarding academic and behavior matters.
- Interpreting for special education assessments, parent meetings, and conferences.
- Serving as a resource to school staff about working with students and families from other cultures.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>25</sup> Garza, M.L. “Cultural Liaisons Serve As Bridge between Community and School.” Learning Forward, 32:5. October 2011. <http://learningforward.org/docs/october-2011/nelson325.pdf?sfvrsn=2>

<sup>26</sup> Bullets quoted with slight verbatim from: “Accessing Interpreters and Translators.” Roseville Area Schools. <http://www.isd623.org/our-district/education-services/educational-equity/cultural-liaisons-resources>

<sup>27</sup> Taken verbatim from: “Accessing Interpreters and Translators.” Roseville Area Schools. <http://www.isd623.org/our-district/education-services/educational-equity/cultural-liaisons-resources>

## BILINGUAL EDUCATION ASSISTANTS

Education Assistants (EAs) play an increasingly important support role in the development of students. EAs are also commonly referred to as paraeducators, instructional assistants, and paraprofessional educators, among other terms. Over the past several years, their instructional responsibilities have expanded from simply relieving teachers of administrative work. Many EAs now interact with students in the classroom and their presence helps maximize students' face-time with instructors. Bilingual EAs in particular are increasingly viewed as a promising approach to filling the shortage of teachers for ELL students. As early as 1996, there were over 450,000 general EAs working in the U.S. education system to alleviate shortages for critical areas of need, including special education and bilingual education.<sup>28</sup>

Research interest in the rise of bilingual EAs peaked in the 1990's and early 2000's. A 1990 study involving 18,000 teaching assistants in Los Angeles Unified School District exposed the wide scope of their work. Nearly 75 percent of the EAs devoted time to their routine responsibilities (i.e., duplicating materials) but at least 50 percent also reported that their tasks stretched beyond traditional roles and included **helping with discipline, tutoring in reading and content areas, testing, and translating for parents and students with limited English proficiency.**<sup>29</sup>

In their 2000 article, "Bilingual Paraeducators," researchers Ashbaker and Morgan noted that EAs are increasingly drawn from local minority groups, a trend that is promising for "the linguistic and cultural diversity of the school and its personnel, and provides more culturally appropriate support for students."<sup>30</sup> Their findings advised education leaders on how best to combat the job strain (i.e., chaotic schedules, responsibilities distributed among multiple schools, and inadequate supervision and communication links) that EAs typically experience. In the following year, a report by the same researchers investigated the degree to which the education may be overly reliant on paraprofessionals and the negative ramifications associated with their incorrect use. Finally, a 2008 study in the *Journal of Poverty* on EAs in multicultural urban settings suggested that "**life experiences and cultural diversity**" are the most beneficial skills they brought into their jobs.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Ashbaker, B and J. Morgan. "Bilingual Paraeducators: What We Can Learn from Rosa." National Association of Secondary School Principals Bulletin, 84:612, January 2000, pp. 53-56.  
<http://bul.sagepub.com/content/84/612/53.abstract>

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Abbate-Vaughn, J. "Paraprofessionals Left Behind? Urban Paraprofessionals' Beliefs about Their Work in the Midst of NCLB." *Journal of Poverty*, 2008, 11:4, pp. 143-164.  
<http://65.54.113.26/Publication/37343180/paraprofessionals-left-behind-urban-paraprofessionals-beliefs-about-their-work-in-the-midst-of>

## STAFFING LEVELS

While Hanover was unable to identify any research on ideal staffing levels or student-to-staff ratios, a 2008 report from the Council of the Great Schools sheds light on the issue – particularly with regard to what staffing figures are deemed *inadequate*. The Council, which has performed 150 similar analyses for over 50 other districts, was commissioned by Seattle Public Schools to perform a critical review of the district’s services and programs for ELLs.<sup>32</sup> The report examines three indicators related to staffing: dispersion of staff with specific language proficiency across schools, the ratio of ELL teachers to instructional assistants, and student-to-staff ratios.

For the first indicator, the Council of the Great City Schools criticized Seattle Public Schools for having instructional staff members who “are widely dispersed across the school system, creating uneven service levels and transportation costs.” In particular, all of the staff with proficiency in Somali and Vietnamese serve different schools (27 and 36 schools, respectively), so each school has just one staff member proficient in these languages.<sup>33</sup>

Looking next at the ratio of ELL teachers to instructional assistants, the Council describes one school as being “closely balanced” for having 3.4 FTE bilingual teachers and 3.1 FTE instructional assistants. Meanwhile, another school is *not* found to be balanced with one FTE bilingual teacher and five FTE instructional assistants.<sup>34</sup>

With regard to the overall student-to-teacher ratio, the Council found the district’s ratios of 70:1 at the elementary level and 45:1 in secondary schools to “represent **inadequate numbers of bilingual education teachers for the number of English language learners**.” The report further criticizes the high ratios, explaining that they “force the district to rely on its instructional assistants for instructional delivery, which they are not really prepared to do. The system also **overburdens both bilingual education and general education teachers**. The team could find no basis in the research for having a ratio this high.”<sup>35</sup> Finally, the Council recommended that the district “modify” the existing ratio of one instructional assistant for every 28 ELLs.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> “Raising the Achievement of English Language Learners in the Seattle Public Schools.” Op. cit., p. 5.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., pp. 10-11.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., p. 11.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., p. 39.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., p. 71.

## SECTION III: SPECIALIZED STAFF DISTRICT PROFILES

In order to further investigate district practices surrounding specialized staffing for ELLs, the following subsections profile three school districts:

- Anchorage School District in Alaska;
- Fairfax County Public Schools in Virginia; and
- White Bear Lake Area Schools in Minnesota.

### ANCHORAGE SCHOOL DISTRICT

Anchorage School District (ASD) in Anchorage, Alaska enrolls 48,790 students as of academic year 2012-2013, including 5,654 ELLs who comprise 11.6 percent of the student population.<sup>37</sup> According to the district website, students in the English Language Learner Program (ELLP) speak 91 different languages. Currently, the ELLP employs approximately 200 ELL staff members throughout the district.<sup>38</sup>

According to the district's most recent "ELL Plan of Service," which outlines the district's strategy and resources to support ELL students, ASD employs a number of staff members in support of ELLs, including Parent Liaison Support Teachers and Language and Cultural Liaisons. These employees are responsible for helping ELL students and their families, particularly recently resettled refugees, navigate the school system and access needed resources as well as supporting teachers and schools to meet the needs of these students and interact with families across cultural boundaries in a positive manner. The available information suggests that Parent Liaison Support Teachers are licensed educators, while Language and Cultural Liaisons need not be certified teachers. Ultimately, both positions serve to build trusting relationships between home and school for the district's ELL students.<sup>39</sup> Figure 3.1 on the following page displays the job responsibilities of Parent Liaison Support Teachers and Language and Cultural Liaisons.

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<sup>37</sup> National Center for Education Statistics. <http://nces.ed.gov/ccd/districtsearch/>

<sup>38</sup> "English Language Learners Program." Anchorage School District. <http://www.asdk12.org/depts/ell/>

<sup>39</sup> "ELL Plan of Service." Anchorage School District, 2014, pp. 17-18. <http://www.asdk12.org/forms/uploads/POSw-Attach.pdf>

**Figure 3.1: ASD K-12 ELL Support Staff Responsibilities**

PARENT LIAISON SUPPORT TEACHERS	LANGUAGE & CULTURAL LIAISONS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Meet with newly arrived families after resettlement intake process has begun</li> <li>•Share “A Day in School” video with families</li> <li>•Explain and complete all school registration paperwork for incoming students, including meal benefit form</li> <li>•Coordinate with such agencies as Catholic Social Services (CSS) for purchase and distribution of school supplies</li> <li>•Arrange for English Language assessments for middle and high school students before registering for classes</li> <li>•Accompany students and families to school sites to meet teachers/building staff and tour building</li> <li>•Work with school nurses/CSS to ensure that immunizations are current</li> <li>•Work with school nurses to keep families and CSS aware of any health concerns</li> <li>•Assist refugee and other newly arrived LEP students/families in accessing after-school opportunities for students at all grade levels</li> <li>•Coordinate transportation support for after-school activities</li> <li>•Arrange and facilitate classes for refugee and newly arrived LEP parents covering basic information/protocol relating to the public school system</li> <li>•Inform partners such as CSS of ASD-offered adult ESL classes available in the community, including refugee adults.</li> <li>•Provide support for students when possible</li> <li>•Support teachers/administrators/district personnel as they interact with refugee other newly arrived LEP students and families</li> <li>•Facilitate effective communication between district personnel and refugee/newly arrived LEP students/families using interpreters/interpreter services/translation services when necessary</li> <li>•Facilitate professional development for district personnel working with refugee and newly arrived students/families</li> <li>•Continually work to foster healthy, trusting relationships between refugee/newly arrive LEP students/families and the district</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Provide support to families with children attending schools in the following ways: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Provide information to parents regarding opportunities for involvement in school-initiated programs and activities</li> <li>•When applicable, provide parents with information about community social service agencies, organizations and resources from which they can benefit such as Catholic Social Services, Red Cross, Salvation Army, Anchorage Literacy Project and Nine Star, etc</li> </ul> </li> <li>•Help parents understand their rights as outlined through the Elementary and Secondary Education Act regarding information about their child’s learning and opportunities to be involved in decision-making around Title I funding</li> <li>•Provide information about preschool opportunities, oral language and early literacy development, health screenings, Child Check, Even Start, Parents as Teachers Program, etc. for parents of young children</li> <li>•Build capacity for continuing effective parent involvement with culturally diverse families</li> <li>•Provide support and information to schools about the cultural backgrounds of the students and families with whom they are working to include but not limited to the following: Training teachers and staff to raise awareness and understanding of the beliefs, values and the realities of day-to-day life for many of the families in their schools</li> <li>•Assist families in articulating their questions and concerns to school personnel</li> <li>•Assist teachers, administrators and staff in communicating with families about school issues</li> <li>•Build capacity for ongoing communication, trust and understanding between families and the school</li> <li>•Effectively present information and respond to questions from peers, supervisor, parents and the school community</li> </ul>

Source: Anchorage Public Schools<sup>40</sup>

<sup>40</sup> Figure created verbatim from: Ibid., pp. 17-18.

In addition to Language and Cultural Liaisons and Parent Liaison Support Teachers, ASD also employs a number of grade level-specific staff members at the elementary and secondary level. Figure 3.2 below displays the responsibilities of ELL Specialists and ELL Tutors at the elementary level. The responsibilities of Specialists and Tutors at the secondary level are nearly identical to those at the elementary level, except high school and middle school ELL Specialists do not collect data to monitor student progress.<sup>41</sup>

**Figure 3.2: ASD Elementary ELL Support Staff**

ELL SPECIALISTS	ELL TUTORS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>•Provide technical and instructional support for all elementary ELL staff as needed</li><li>•Coordinate and assist with identification and assessments of ELL students and provide training for identification and assessments of ELL students</li><li>•May provide direct instruction to a limited number of students on a regular basis</li><li>•Facilitate and provide staff development specifically for ELL staff, as well as district staff as needed and/or requested</li><li>•Represent the ELL program on elementary level curriculum committees</li><li>•Input required data into ASD database, such as initial identification, schedule, accommodations, etc.</li><li>•Make observations and suggestions for the type of service needed for ELL students</li><li>•Act as a consultant when issues arise that involve ELL students who are referred for testing by the Special Educational Department</li><li>•Collect data to monitor students’ progress</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>•Provide instructional assistance and skills support to ELL students to help them become proficient in both social instructional language and core content area language in the domains of listening, speaking, reading and writing</li><li>•Assist resource teacher and ELL staff in gathering paperwork for program data and record keeping</li><li>•Administer identification tools and assessments as directed</li><li>•Provide language interpreter services as needed</li><li>•Collaborate with and assist the classroom teacher in determining instructional needs and individual learning plans for ELL students</li><li>•Act as liaison between the school, parents and community</li></ul>

Source: Anchorage Public Schools<sup>42</sup>

While staffing levels are not completely consistent across the district, ASD provides information about the total number of ELL tutors at the elementary and secondary level and the average number of students per tutor (see Figure 3.3 on the following page). The district employs 91.5 FTE tutors at the elementary level, each supporting an average of 34 students. At the secondary level, the district employs one tutor for its Newcomer’s Program for students who arrive in the district at the secondary level with little prior English language and/or academic experience, in addition to 38 regular secondary tutors supporting an average of 51 students each.<sup>43</sup>

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., pp. 16-19.

<sup>42</sup> Figure created verbatim from: Ibid., pp. 16-17.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., p. 28.

**Figure 3.3: ASD ELL Staffing Levels and Average Caseload**

ELLP CERTIFIED POSITIONS	RANGE OF CASELOADS	AVERAGE # OF STUDENTS PER TUTOR	# OF GENERAL FUNDED TUTORS
Elementary ELL tutors	6-55	34:1	91.5
Secondary newcomers' tutors	69	-	1
Secondary ELL tutors	17-86	51:1	38

Source: Anchorage School District<sup>44</sup>

In addition to maintaining a specialized ELL staff, ASD takes a number of actions to promote parent and community involvement through the ELLP. The “ELL Plan of Service” states:

Participation by parents at each local school will be encouraged. Parents will be invited to actively participate in each school's parent organization, semi-annual parent/teacher conferences, district sponsored cultural events, various committees and task forces, other advisory groups, and through public commentary at public school board meetings throughout the year.<sup>45</sup>

In order to support parent participation at such events, ASD principals and supervisors may request a language interpreter for school events through the ELLP website.<sup>46</sup>

ELLP staff members, including Language and Cultural Liaisons, Parent Liaisons, and other support staff, are responsible for conducting outreach to ELL families and participating in activities that promote family engagement, including offering ESL classes for families and providing translated copies of school documents and other materials.<sup>47</sup> A complete list of parental and community engagement activities and the designated responsible staff members is displayed in Figure 3.4 below.

**Figure 3.4: ELLP Parent and Community Engagement Activities**

ACTIVITY	RESPONSIBLE STAFF
Translation of district documents so parents can access information	ELLP staff: supervisor, specialists, teachers, tutors, Language & Cultural Liaisons, ASD Communications Department
English as a second language classes for parents of ELL students  PASSport to Success classes for parents of ELL students – providing vital information to parents on how to work with teachers, and help their children organize, study, and be successful with school work	ELLP staff: supervisor, specialists, teachers, tutors, Language & Cultural Liaisons
Ability of parents and staff to request interpreters for various school related events and meetings, such as registration and parent/teacher conferences	ELLP staff: supervisor, specialists, teachers, tutors, Language & Cultural Liaisons, Language Interpreter Center, Catholic Social Services, Optimal Phone Interpreters

<sup>44</sup> Figure created verbatim from: Ibid., p. 28.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., p. 33.

<sup>46</sup> “English Language Learners Program.” Anchorage School District.  
<http://www.asdk12.org/depts/ELL/interpreters.asp>

<sup>47</sup> “ELL Plan of Service,” Op. cit., p. 33.



ACTIVITY	RESPONSIBLE STAFF
ESEA – information about child’s learning, opportunities to be involved in decision-making around Title I funding	Language & Cultural Liaisons, Parent Liaisons, Title I, ESEA Federal Programs Executive Director
Phone based native language messages for school/community events to encourage family knowledge/involvement	Schools, ELLP, ASD Communications
Videos in other languages	ELLP

Source: Anchorage Public Schools<sup>48</sup>

## FAIRFAX COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Fairfax County Public Schools (FCPS) is a large, suburban school district that enrolls 180,616 students as of academic year 2012-2013. Approximately 36,049, or 20 percent of FCPS students, are ELLs.<sup>49</sup>

In support of the district’s ELL and low-income students, FCPS’s Family and School Partnerships Office within the Department of Communications and Community Outreach employs Parent Liaisons (PLs). PLs are “part-time, hourly FCPS employees who represent a variety of cultures, languages, and ethnicities.”<sup>50</sup> In particular, PLs are charged with “involving families that may not traditionally take part in school activities and events.”<sup>51</sup> PLs are responsible for building relationships between schools, families, and communities by:<sup>52</sup>

- Providing families with information about FCPS and community resources;
- Helping teachers and administrators communicate with parents in timely and effective ways;
- Planning and organizing activities to facilitate communication such as small meetings, conferences, and workshops; and
- Participating in community and civic activities.

According to the Parent Liaison Program website, PLs are hired by individual principals to support parental and community engagement within the school community.<sup>53</sup> The program is funded in each school based on students’ demographic make-up as well as the number of ELL students and students eligible for free or reduced price lunch.<sup>54</sup> In 2013, the district reported a total of 172 parent liaisons across 167 schools, including 150 PLs at the elementary level, 34 PLs at the middle school level, and 49 at the high school level.<sup>55</sup>

<sup>48</sup> Figure created verbatim from: Ibid., p. 33.

<sup>49</sup> National Center for Education Statistics, Op. cit.

<sup>50</sup> “Parent Liaison Program Fact Sheet.” Fairfax County Public Schools.  
<http://www.fcps.edu/ccofam/documents/6PLFactSheet3-2013.pdf>

<sup>51</sup> “Parent Liaison Program.” Fairfax County Public Schools. <http://www.fcps.edu/ccofam/parentliaison.shtml>

<sup>52</sup> “Parent Liaison Program Fact Sheet,” Op. cit.

<sup>53</sup> “Parent Liaison Program,” Op. cit.

<sup>54</sup> “Parent Liaison Program Fact Sheet,” Op. cit.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

PLs are chosen based on a number of qualifications, the most important of which is successful prior experience “working with people.” Other qualifications include a high school diploma or equivalent and five years of experience doing work “with adults and with school and community activities and programs.” Although translation is not one of the primary PL responsibilities, bilingual PLs are required to complete the FCPS Language Services assessment to demonstrate competency in both English and their native language.<sup>56</sup>

FCPS provides orientation and ongoing training for PLs, including twelve or more trainings per year on such topics as:<sup>57</sup>

- The Parent Liaison’s Role in FCPS: Programs, Policies, and Politics;
- Helping Families Identify Needs and Locate Community Resources;
- What Families Need to Know About Deportation and Detention;
- Understanding Parents in Poverty: Improving the School-Home Connection;
- Engaging Immigrant Parents in Schools: Stages of Parent Involvement; and
- Cultural Competency: Reaching Out to All Families.

During academic year 2013-2014, the Parent Liaison Program offered 58 one-on-one orientations for new PLs as well as 13 parent liaisons training sessions. Most PLs attended more than one training session, resulting in a total training attendance of 459.<sup>58</sup>

In addition to the PL program, the Family and School Partnerships Office also offers “Multicultural Programs” designed to “enhance understanding of cultural backgrounds of families in Fairfax County.”<sup>59</sup> One of the main program offerings is a series of Multicultural Panels, offered to schools, businesses, and community groups. The panels include community members of various backgrounds, including those of African, Asian, European, Hispanic, and Middle Eastern heritage, who discuss topics such as cultural perspectives on child rearing and educational issues. Beyond Multicultural Panels, the Multicultural Programs staff members are available to meet with schools “who seek to connect to families from particular cultural groups” by providing recommendations regarding parental engagement strategies.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> “Fairfax County School Board Operational Expectations and Monitoring Report.” Fairfax County Public Schools, December 2014, p. 2. <http://www.fcps.edu/schlbld/docs/monitoring%20reports/2014-2015/TCSMonitoringReport12-8-14.pdf>

<sup>59</sup> “Multicultural Programs.” Fairfax County Public Schools. <http://www.fcps.edu/ccofam/programs/multiculture.shtml>

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.



## Spotlight: Herndon High School (Fairfax County Public Schools)

In *Principal Leadership*, the National Association of Secondary School Principals recognized FCPS's Herndon High School as an example of a school that "honors, respects, and values diversity in theory and in practice and where teaching and learning are made relevant and meaningful to students of various cultures."<sup>61</sup> Herndon High School serves a very large student population (2,266 students) that is culturally and economically diverse.<sup>62</sup>

More specifically, in order to help create a culturally responsive school setting, Herndon High School provides an inclusive range of programmatic offerings, which include the following:

- **Elective courses**, such as "Combating Intolerance," were designed to help students from diverse backgrounds get along.
- **Peer mediation** to allow students from diverse backgrounds an opportunity to talk about potentially divisive issues
- **Student clubs** that help large groups of students retain cultural identity (e.g., Muslim Student Society). Also there was a greater openness to starting new clubs that reflect the student body
- **Parent liaisons** who are paid to work with families who would not otherwise have a traditional involvement with the school
- **Minority parent committee** that organizes evenings for minority parents to come to school in smaller groups and learn about the college admissions process, SAT prep classes, scholarship and grant opportunities, and so forth
- Letters sent home and phone contact with parents from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds to ensure a good turnout at parent meetings. Telephone trees in multiple languages
- Open communication with students
- **Quarterly focus groups** with ELL students from each grade level and their administrator to obtain feedback on how school is going for them and what specific things can be improved or changed
- Establishment of a Hispanic PTSA with business discussion and programs in Spanish
- Initiation of a "challenge" program to invite promising students to enroll in honors and Advanced Placement classes.<sup>63</sup>

<sup>61</sup> Klotz, M. B. "Culturally Competent Schools: Guidelines for Secondary School Principals." National Association of Secondary School Principals, *Principal Leadership Magazine*, March, 2006.

<http://www.nasponline.org/resources/principals/Culturally%20Competent%20Schools%20NASSP.pdf>

<sup>62</sup> [1] "Total Enrollment for Herndon High 2011-12." U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. <http://nces.ed.gov/ccd/elsi/quickFacts.aspx>

[2] "Fairfax County Public Schools 2010-2011 School Improvement Plan: Herndon High School." Fairfax County Public Schools. <http://www.fcps.edu/HerndonHS/about/pdf/SIP2010-11.pdf>

<sup>63</sup> Klotz, Op. cit., p. 12. (Bulleted points quoted with slight variation)

## WHITE BEAR LAKE AREA SCHOOLS

White Bear Lake Area Schools (WBLAS) in White Bear Lake, Minnesota, enrolls approximately 8,231 students as of academic year 2012-2013, including 343 (4.2 percent) ELL students.<sup>64</sup> In addition to “EL licensed” teachers, WBLAS employs several staff members to support ELLs, including:<sup>65</sup>

- Support staff (cultural liaisons, social workers, guidance counselors, and nurses) to provide resources to ELL students and families; and
- Paraprofessionals, who are used in limited ways to support the direct instruction provided by licensed teachers.

Most support staff that contribute to the ELL program, including social workers and guidance counselors, are not solely responsible for ELL students and therefore are not required to be bilingual.<sup>66</sup> Cultural liaisons, however, are a critical part of the support effort for ELL students and families. WBLAS is part a member of the East Metro Integration District (EMID), a “10-district collaborative that supports voluntary integration among urban and suburban public schools in the East Metro Twin Cities area.”<sup>67</sup> EMID is funded by the state of Minnesota to support the Minnesota Desegregation Rule.<sup>68</sup> As part of the integration effort, WBLAS employs four cultural liaisons within its office of Equity and Integration, three of whom are bilingual cultural liaisons to the Latino and Hmong communities.<sup>69</sup> The role of the cultural liaison is to “serve as a bridge: student-to-student, student-to-school, student-to-school-to-family, and family-to-community” and to “build long-term relationships with our culturally diverse families resulting in more parent involvement and student success.”<sup>70</sup>

The three bilingual cultural liaisons are fluent in one of two languages—Spanish or Hmong—and are “in contact with the students, families, and staff on a daily basis.”<sup>71</sup> The ELL Program uses the bilingual liaisons to promote parental and community engagement at school and

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<sup>64</sup> National Center for Education Statistics, Op. cit.

<sup>65</sup> “English Learner Program Description.” White Bear Lake Area Schools, March 2012, p. 3.  
<http://www.whitebear.k12.mn.us/Files/specialservices/el%20program%20description%20for%20wbl.4.4.12.pdf>

<sup>66</sup> [1] “School Social Worker.” White Bear Lake Area Schools.  
<http://www.whitebear.k12.mn.us/pdfs/humanresorces/special%20services/school%20social%20worker.pdf>  
[2] “Licensed School Nurse.” White Bear Lake Area Schools.  
<http://www.whitebear.k12.mn.us/pdfs/humanresorces/special%20services/licensed%20school%20nurse.pdf>  
[3] “School Guidance Counselor.” White Bear Lake Area Schools.  
<http://www.whitebear.k12.mn.us/pdfs/humanresorces/teaching%20and%20learning/student%20guidance%20counselor.pdf>

<sup>67</sup> “East Metro Integration District (EMID).” White Bear Lake Area Schools.  
<http://www.whitebear.k12.mn.us/academics/EMID.asp>

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

<sup>69</sup> “Cultural Liaisons.” White Bear Lake Area Schools. <http://www.whitebear.k12.mn.us/academics/Cultural-Liaisons.asp>

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

<sup>71</sup> “English Learner Program Description.” White Bear Lake Area Schools, March 2012, p. 13.  
<http://www.whitebear.k12.mn.us/Files/specialservices/el%20program%20description%20for%20wbl.4.4.12.pdf>

ensure that school officials are able to communicate with families in a positive and effective way.<sup>72</sup> Accordingly, the liaison responsibilities include to:<sup>73</sup>

- Bridge communication and cultural understanding; resolve concerns student to student, student to school, and school to family;
- Help families fill out school paperwork: school registration, immunizations, free & reduced lunch, transportation, scholarships, Targeted Services, summer school, etc.;
- Act as a resource for staff and provide advocacy for students and families;
- Work to create culturally specific clubs, character building activities, community building activities, service learning projects and cross-cultural events;
- Serve as an interpreter between parents and school personnel;
- Prepare translations of school communications as requested;
- Conduct home and school visits to explain school policy and instructional goals to families;
- Visit students and help them connect with the school and community;
- Partner with ESL and Special Education staff as needed; and
- Other duties as assigned.

While cultural liaisons are available to assist school staff and parents throughout the school year, their responsibilities are generally limited to academic issues, translation, and interpretation. Although cultural liaisons often work to support individual students, they are not responsible for tutoring students, completing the work of other staff members beyond translation of messages, or interpreting for non-academic events.<sup>74</sup>

ELL paraprofessionals are responsible for tutoring ELL students in the mainstream classroom.<sup>75</sup> However, these staff members are meant to “supplement classroom or EL teacher instruction but not to replace it.”<sup>76</sup> Instead, paraprofessionals are under the supervision of ELL or classroom teachers and are responsible for supporting teachers, rather than designing content. Additionally, ELL paraprofessionals are required to participate in ongoing professional development related to instructing ELL students.<sup>77</sup> While the district does not provide specific requirements for ELL paraprofessionals, general employment responsibilities for the paraprofessional position include the following activities:<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> Ibid., p. 16.

<sup>73</sup> Bullets taken verbatim from: “Cultural Liaisons,” Op. cit.

<sup>74</sup> “Cultural Liaison Services.” White Bear Lake Area Schools.  
<http://www.whitebear.k12.mn.us/pdfs/liaisonpriorities.pdf>

<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

<sup>76</sup> “English Learner Program Description,” Op. cit., p. 14.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., p. 14.

<sup>78</sup> Bullets verbatim from: “Paraprofessional.” White Bear Lake Area Schools.  
<http://www.whitebear.k12.mn.us/pdfs/humanresources/teaching%20and%20learning/paraprofessional.pdf>

- Provides supplemental instruction for students; encourages and motivates students to complete assignments.
- Assists Teacher(s) in performing specific duties as assigned, or undertaking specialized tasks;
- Works with individuals or small groups reinforcing material introduced by the Teacher;
- Completes required records and forms under the supervision of the Teacher;
- Assists with group activities;
- Guides independent study and other work assigned by the Teacher;
- Monitors student behavior and advises Teacher on student issues;
- Interprets needs for attendance issues, teacher concerns about students and parent questions;
- Participates in meetings, in-service training programs and workshops as required;
- Assists the Teacher in setting up and tearing down classroom before and after special events; and
- Performs other duties as assigned.

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