

# Title: Bridging the gap between schools and language minority families

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## Questions we'll tackle together

1. Why is it important for schools and families to communicate & partner?
2. Why is it difficult to develop effective communication and cooperation between schools and language minority families?
3. What can teachers and schools do to improve these connections?

## My conclusion

Perhaps the most important thing teachers & schools can do to improve their work with language minority families is to work to become equal partner with language minority families...in other words, to seek two-way communication, learning, and influence.

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- “thirty years of research make it clear: parents and families are pivotal to children’s learning” (U. S. Department of Education, 1995).

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There is evidence that parent involvement improves

- students’ academic achievement and lowers students’ drop out rates (Flaxman & Inger, 1991).
- rates of homework completion and high school graduation (U. S. Department of Education, 1997).
- absenteeism rates (Epstein and Sheldon, 2002).

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<b>2) Communicating.</b>	
<b>3) Volunteering.</b>	
<b>4) Learning at home.</b>	
<b>5) Decision making.</b>	

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<b>5) Decision making.</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• PTO (governance), parents on committees</li> <li>• Surveys home</li> </ul>

Why is it difficult to develop effective communication and cooperation between schools and language minority families?

Mainstream expectations vs. reality for some language minority families

<b>Recommended practices</b>	Challenges for some language minority families
<b>1) Parenting.</b>	Cultural expectations (re: parents, teachers, school, children, aims of education)
<b>2) Communicating.</b>	Financial/economic/resource constraints
<b>3) Volunteering.</b>	Personal comfort in schools & w/ mainstream U.S. professionals
<b>4) Learning at home.</b>	Language
<b>5) Decision making.</b>	

## Disconnect in parenting style

Valdes (1996) saw “respeto”

- Not bothering adults when busy
- Not speaking out of turn
- Not boasting or demanding attention
- Supporting success of family—taking responsibility for helping younger siblings

## Disconnect in parenting style

- “schools often tell parents what they must do” resulting in “a negative perception that the school is demanding and not family friendly”

--Trumbull et. al, 2001, p. 12

## Disconnection re: Communication

- Preferences for how to communicate
- Appropriate ways to begin relationships
- What should be communicated/valued

Teachers can misunderstand  
Parents can misunderstand

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## Disconnection in communicating... ex. of underlying value conflict

- Care and concern for the group, family, or peers vs
- Individual academic achievement

Whose values and concerns win? How to include both?

## Disconnection in volunteering

- Parent/family experience w/ schooling, cultural capital
- Resource constraints
- Comfort w/ students, teachers, school

## Disconnection re: learning at home

- Wide variety of learning activities occur in all sorts of homes, and diverse families care deeply about education, but in different ways.
- What does it mean to be well-educated?
- What is parents role in this process?

## Disconnection re: decision-making

Differences in comfort & experience with

- Joining with fellow—but unknown—citizens in civic organizations...
- PTA/PTO...
- group decision-making and authority

What can teachers and schools  
do to improve these  
connections?

### Answering from research

- General school-family practices supported by some research
- Research on school-family partnership with explicit focus on culturally and linguistically diverse families more anecdotal

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## My conclusion

Perhaps the most important thing teachers & schools can do to improve their work with language minority families is to work to become equal partner with language minority families...in other words, to seek two-way communication, learning, and influence.

The Hope: Overcoming “culture of deficit/poverty”, knowing and building trust across divides of language, class, and culture → real partnership, coordinated efforts, learning by all involved.