

# Information to Parents

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## Background

Newcomer families face many challenges and have many questions about their new homeland. It is essential that they are well informed and feel confident to make decisions about their child's schooling. The school is a valuable resource for cultural, social, and academic knowledge that can support the newcomer parent and child's integration into Canadian society. Many families recognize that schooling in their home countries is significantly different than the Canadian school system. Initially, the differences may cause frustration, insecurities, and reluctance on the part of the parent to trust that their child is receiving an adequate education. Some parents believe that the less interaction they have with their child's teacher, the better their child is doing academically and socially in school. Schools play a crucial role in ensuring that newcomer families are fully informed in all aspects of their children's education.

### **Strategies to help newcomer students adjust:**

#### *Welcome parents and caregivers*

- Whether or not schools have an open-door policy for their students' families will determine how welcome families feel at the school.

#### *Create an environment that facilitates communication*

- An affective environment that facilitates communication allows families to feel confident and secure when sharing and obtaining information about their children's education.

#### *Emphasize the importance of parents and caregivers having an "active role":*

- Schools need to clearly define the role of parents/caregivers and what expectations schools have for parent involvement.

#### *Bilingual parent volunteers:*

- Schools can survey the linguistic skills of their students' families and solicit volunteers to help newcomers.

#### *Outreach mechanisms:*

- Distribute information that is useful and allows for further communication.
  - translate letters
  - have information nights when parents/caregivers are available and on topics that are of interest to families
  - provide services that are deemed important (e.g., daycare, language and culture classes)

## **Important information that should be conveyed to families**

- Your school's ESL program and its benefits
- Mechanics of the school
- School rules, routines, and behavioural expectations
- Curriculum (homework, assessment, EQAO, course choices)
- Criteria for placing and exiting students
- Clarification of the school's procedures and culture – hidden curriculum
- Provincial testing (EQAO etc.)
- Report cards, study habits, parent-teacher conferences
- Outstanding questions parents/caregivers may have

## A Sample Letter to Parents

The following is an example of a letter that teachers may wish to send home to their students' families. It details information about the school that would be beneficial for a family new to the Canadian education system and unsure about the policies and procedures of their child's school.

### **Important Information for Parents of English Language Learners**

**School Hours: 8:30 a.m. - 3:30 p.m.** There is no student supervision before or after these hours unless your child is participating in the Breakfast Club and/or the Homework Club. You can get information about these programs in the school office.

**We need this important information from you:** your address, home and work phone number, cell number, and an emergency contact number. If you move, or your telephone number changes, you need to give us this new information as soon as possible in case of an emergency.

It is important to **read with and/or to your child at home** in either English or in your native language. Usually, students have homework Mondays-Fridays. If you find this homework is too difficult for your child, it is important that you communicate with your child's teacher by note or phone call. If you require books to support your child's reading, please feel free to visit our school library, and our librarian will be happy to assist you.

Several times during the year, **it is necessary to have a conference with your child's teacher.** If you need a translator, please let your child's teacher know ahead of time. If you need transportation, again, please let your child's teacher know well ahead of the conference, and we will help you find a way to get to school. Parent-teacher conferences are an opportunity for both you and your child's teacher to communicate any academic or personal concerns, questions, and goals.

If you are interested in being a parent volunteer **please contact "Insert name of volunteer contact" at "Insert phone number of volunteer contact"**. These individuals can also give you information about **free adult English classes** held at our school twice a week in the evening.

**Children may bring home books, tapes, tape recorders, and other equipment (games) in order to help them and their families learn English.** We hope you have fun using these materials with your children. Please return them in good condition so your child will be allowed to check out more materials in the future.

Students receive **progress reports several times each year**. You should read these, sign them, and return the envelope to school with your child. If you have a question about your child's progress report please contact your child's teacher to set up a meeting.

**If your child misses school, you must write a note, or call the school at (insert phone number here), explaining the reason** for your child's absence. If your child is late or needs to leave school early, you must sign your child in or out in the office before leaving or returning your child.

At times, your student is going to receive **a letter about vaccinations**. It is important that children have their shots on time or they may be suspended.

**There is a dress code at our school**. This information is in your school handbook.

**Every Tuesday, important information goes home in a special yellow folder**. Parents are expected to read the information, sign whatever is needed, sign and date the folder itself, and return it to the child's teacher. If you need help understanding the information in the folder, **there are bilingual parents who can help you**. Contact your child's teacher for those names and numbers. You may also send a note to the ESL teachers.

**It's important that your child knows your address and phone number (work and home) in case of an emergency, and especially for the bus drivers.**

**We now have Spanish, Mandarin, Italian, Punjabi, and Russian translation equipment for meetings and events** at this school. We hope this will make it better for parents who attend school functions.

**We need to know how your child is to get home in case there is an early school closing due to bad weather**. You will receive the Inclement Weather Form. Please return this to your child's teacher. If you need to find information about early closings, you can watch your local TV channel, radio station, or the school division's website.

## Annotated Bibliography

Bassoff, T. (n.d.) How-to: adjust your teaching styles for students in ESL/Bilingual classrooms. Teachers Network. Retrieved January 13, 2007, from <http://teachersnetwork.org/ntol/howto/eslclass/eslparents.htm>

**How-To: Adjust Your Teaching Styles for English Language Learners (ELL) in ESL/Bilingual Classrooms**  
**Note this is different from the title attached to the url above.**  
**Should it be changed? (Ted)**

This short article highlights the importance of involving ESL parents in the classroom as well as strategies that can be implemented to do so. Bassoff also provides some further resources to consult for hands-on activities in the classroom that help with a community outreach approach.

Beykont, Z. (Editor). (2002). *The power of culture: Teaching across language difference*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Publishing Group.

This book is a compilation of writings and research done by several scholars. Aimed toward concerned teachers, administrators, and policy makers, their contributions address three main issues: educational reforms and language minority students, successful teaching across language difference, and preparing teachers to teach across language differences.

Cummins, J. (2001). *Negotiating Identities: Education for empowerment in a diverse society* (2<sup>nd</sup> Edition). Los Angeles, CA: California Association for Bilingual Education.

In *Negotiating Identities*, University of Toronto professor Jim Cummins addresses several issues of cultural and linguistic diversity in classrooms. He also goes on to provide strategies for teachers to employ in these diverse environments to help students achieve greater social and academic success.

Fitzpatrick, F. (1987). *Multilingual matters: The open door*. Exeter: Short Run Press.

*Multilingual Matters* is a case study investigating young South Asian ESL students. In addition to the findings of the study, the community context, educational/school context, teaching & learning processes, and the language education of young bilingual children are discussed.

Fulton, J. M., Golden, L., Smallwood, B. A., & Savage, K. L. (nd). *Parenting for academic success: A curriculum for families learning English*. National Center

Family Literacy. Delta-Systems Co., Inc. <http://www.delta-systems.com/proddetail.cfm?cat=1&toc=91&stoc=0&pronum=3372>

*Parenting for Academic Success: A Curriculum for Families Learning English* is a 12–unit curriculum designed for parents who are non–native speakers of English. Its goals are two–fold: 1) to develop the English language skills of parents and 2) to increase the ability of parents to support the language and literacy development of their children in kindergarten through grade three. The curriculum has two components—a set of *Parent Workbooks* for all 12 units and a comprehensive *Teacher’s Resource Manual*.

Houk, F. (2005). *Supporting English language learners: A guide for teachers and administrators*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

*Supporting English Language Learners* is a guide designed for teachers and administrators that provides instruction for how to meet English language learners’ needs. Houk gives hands-on teaching ideas and outlines underlying themes behind successful English language learner programs. Specific sections are devoted to classroom matters, advocacy, and creating a context for working with other staff and building home-school partnerships.

Ministry of Education. (2002). *Ontario Curriculum Unit Planner: ESL/ELD Companion*. Queen’s Printer for Ontario. Retrieved January 11, 2007 from <http://www.ocup.org/resources/documents/companions/esleld2002.pdf>

This is an online version of the ESL/ELD curriculum document designed for Ontario teachers. It outlines terminology, gives a background for ESL/ELD teaching, and covers several issues newcomer students and families face when arriving in Ontario. In addition to providing strategies for effective program delivery, the roles of the school, teacher, and parent are also highlighted.

People for Education. (2005). *Tips for parents: High school courses and choices*. Retrieved January 6, 2007 from <http://www.peopleforeducation.com/resources/tipsheets/English.pdf>

This question and answer sheet is available in several different languages. It is designed to inform parents of students in Ontario high schools about how to assist their children with academic and career planning.

Richards, J. (1994). *Educating second language children: The whole child, the whole curriculum, the whole community*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.

*Educating Second Language Children* is based on the work of leading researchers in elementary education. Going beyond classroom instruction,

Richards addresses the role of the school, family, and community and how important they are in terms of newcomer students and a successful education.

Scarcella, R. (1990). *Teaching language minority students in the multicultural classroom*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.

This text is a general guide for teaching ESL students. Designed for teachers, administrators, and anyone working with English language learners in all grades, Scarcella's text provides strategies to use in the classroom and covers a wide variety of issues, including maximizing minority parent participation in schools.

## **Summary of the DVD Chapter**

**The DVD chapter on information for parents addresses the following topics:**

- Parents' concerns about how well informed they are about their children's education
- Parents' views on accessibility to information regarding their children's school and education
- Schools' responses and attempts to inform parents
- Parents' frustrations with miscommunication and lack of information regarding their children's schooling
- Parents' expectations and assumptions regarding Canadian education
- Differences in curriculum, teaching, assessment
- Schools' roles and responsibilities to provide parents with information
- Strategies and success stories for helping parents understand the Canadian school system and their children's education

### **Questions to consider before viewing**

- What information is essential for parents to make an informed choice about their children's education?
- How might relationships between educators and parents be the same or different outside of Canada?
- How might relationships between educators and students be the same or different outside of Canada?
- What information should teachers have about their students or students' families in order to provide a meaningful educational environment?

### **Questions to consider after viewing**

- What were the major areas of concern highlighted by parents and educators in this segment?
- How can information be more easily and reliably distributed to newcomer parents regarding these aspects of their children's education?