



english for **NEW
BOSTONIANS**

Community/School Partnerships and the Successful Parent ESOL Class

This document is intended for both community ESOL providers who want to set up parent ESOL classes, and for K-12 schools wishing to offer parent ESOL classes, connect parents to ESOL classes, and/or integrate parent ESOL classes with the daily life of their school.

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WHAT DOES A SUCCESSFUL PARENT ESOL CLASS LOOK LIKE?

A successful parent ESOL class has three goals: To teach English language skills, to deepen parents' understanding of and engagement in their children's learning, and to help parents become more familiar with and active in the school their children attend. Teaching materials reflect this goal; the lessons are contextualized around schooling, parenting, and community resources which will enrich family learning and family success.

The most successful parent ESOL classes are those that are closely connected to a given school. Whether or not the class is physically located in the school, it is best when the school views the class as serving its parents and helping to meet its needs to more successfully engage parents. As one principal wrote in a letter to her staff on the occasion of Thanksgiving, *"The Family School is an important program...and we should let parents and staff of the Family School know how much we also are thankful for them, their work and their program. Engaged parents are happy parents."*

WHAT HAPPENS TO PARENTS WHO PARTICIPATE IN THESE CLASSES?

The effects of successful parent ESOL classes go far beyond improvements in the parents' English skills and last beyond the time the parents spend in classes. Parents read more to their children, beginning at a far younger age than previously, and are more effective helping their children with homework. They use the library regularly and recognize it as a valuable resource for the whole family. They understand school policies better and talk to their children's teachers more often. They feel less isolated and more confident about resolving problems that come up in school. They take greater advantage of extracurricular programs for children offered by the school.

Even after they have left a class, high percentages of parents continue to attend other parent events the school offers, and many take on school leadership roles. Additionally, they continue to use community and cultural resources they became aware of during the class. As one parent wrote: *"All of these things I have been learning make me change the way I take care of my children. Now I can say that I am a better person and a better Mom. That makes me feel proud because I feel that I am a good example for my children."*

SETTING UP THE PROGRAM

- A Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) or Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) should be in place, signed by the ESOL provider and the school principal. It should outline roles and responsibilities, including who is responsible for parent recruitment; who is providing space and how it is to be shared; and teacher access to supplies, computers and copy machines. It is good to review the MOA/MOU annually and revise it if needed. This allows both partners a way to evaluate the success of the partnership.

- There should be a staff person designated by the ESOL provider to be the liaison with the school. The job would entail establishing a presence in the school and assisting with the integration of the class into the life of the school. Ideally this is the same person the agency has designated to be responsible for parent registration and recruitment.
- There should be someone designated by the school principal to be the school-based point person for the class. This might be the principal him or herself, but in larger schools especially, the principal may be too busy. The job would entail regular information-sharing meetings with the parent ESOL staff, assistance with parent recruitment, and help with logistical issues. Ideally this would be someone who works full time in the school, coordinating other external programs or as a parent outreach coordinator.
- The ESOL provider school liaison should participate regularly in at least one school-wide forum—for example the School Site Council or the Parent Council.
- The Parent ESOL class should have a mail box in the school office for messages from parents and copies of flyers and notices the school is sending home to parents.

MAINTAINING THE COMMUNITY/SCHOOL CONNECTION

- Present the program during the all-staff meetings held in each school before students return in September.
- Have a designated bulletin board in the school to display parent work.
- Have monthly information sharing meetings between the ESOL provider, the school's point person for the parent ESOL class, and the ESOL teacher.
- Share information with the principal on a regular basis about what parents in the class are doing and what they are learning about how to support their children's education.
- Tie curriculum closely to the school calendar. For example, do activities on teacher/parent conferences in the parent ESOL class as teachers begin to schedule these conferences. Go over language and concepts in the school report cards before the school distributes them.
- Invite a variety of school personnel into the class as speakers. For example, the school nurse could speak to parents about how to decide if a child needs to stay home, or a kindergarten teacher could describe what parents can teach their children at home before they start school. The principal could use the class as a "Meet the Principal" forum.
- If a school event for parents is scheduled during class time, for example, an open house, book fair, or parent workshop, cancel the class, require parents to attend the event, and create assignments related to the event.
- Volunteer the class to help on school initiatives. Because parents are already gathered regularly as a group, they easily can become a focus group, fill out a needed survey, pilot materials, or meet with school visitors. They could also do the background checks ahead of time as a group which would make them readily available as field trip chaperones.

- Encourage class participants to attend other school events for parents, such as parent council meetings, and have them report back to their classmates.
- Encourage class participants to participate in city-wide BPS events, such as Parents University, the Showcase of Schools, or community meetings to explain the new school choice system. Give parents the opportunity to report back to their classmates.
- Create classroom activities which bring parents to the school, or, if the class is already located in the school, out of their classroom. Examples could include structured classroom observations, deducing what students are studying from displayed student work, having a tour, doing a reading buddy activity with kindergarten students. Such activities need to be arranged ahead of time with the school's designated point person for the class.
- Have parents reach out to their children's teachers to express thanks and appreciation. For example, they can write holiday cards for the teachers or thank you cards during Teacher Appreciation Week.

A valuable resource for teachers of parent ESOL classes is the curriculum produced by English for New Bostonians in 2013, entitled ESOL for Parents and Caregivers Curriculum. The curriculum gives ESOL teachers background materials, lessons and activities designed to help immigrant parents learn English and become more effectively involved in their children's education. While some of the information is Boston-specific, much can be used in any locale. It is available to download for free on the English for New Bostonians website, www.englishfornewbostonians.org.