Race, Class, and Language: Breaking Barriers to Family Engagement in D.C.

Tellin’ Stories Project of Teaching for Change

TeachingforChange.org/parent-organizing
@teachingchange
#Fam Equity in DC
Teaching for Change provides teachers and parents with the tools to create schools where students learn to read, write, and change the world.

• Publications
• Professional Development
• Parent Power
Tellin’ Stories

School-based Approach

• Build community across race, class, and language
• Gather information and develop skills
• Prioritize concerns
• Take action
• Professional development for teachers and staff

Signature Activities

Family Partners Series
Tellin’ Stories

Dual Capacity-Building Framework for Family-School Partnerships

Source: US Department of Education
Tellin’ Stories

Dual Capacity-Building Framework for Family-School Partnerships

THE CHALLENGE

Lack of opportunities for School/Program Staff to build the capacity for partnerships

Lack of opportunities for Families to build the capacity for partnerships

Ineffective Family–School Partnerships

POLICY AND PROGRAM GOALS

To build and enhance the capacity of staff/families in the “4 C” areas:
- Capabilities (skills and knowledge)
- Connections (networks)
- Cognition (beliefs, values)
- Confidence (self-efficacy)

FAMILY AND STAFF CAPACITY OUTCOMES

School and Program Staff who can
- Honor and recognize families’ funds of knowledge
- Connect family engagement to student learning
- Create welcoming, inviting cultures

Families who can negotiate multiple roles
- Supporters
- Encouragers
- Monitors
- Advocates
- Decision Makers
- Collaborators

Effective Family–School Partnerships
Supporting Student Achievement
& School Improvement
Tellin’ Stories

Dual Capacity-Building Framework for Family-School Partnerships

**The Dual Capacity-Building Framework for Family–School Partnerships**

**THE CHALLENGE**

- Lack of opportunities for School/Program Staff to build the capacity for partnerships
- Ineffective Family-School Partnerships
- Lack of opportunities for Families to build the capacity for partnerships

**OPPORTUNITY CONDITIONS**

**Process Conditions**
- Linked to learning
- Relational
- Development vs. service orientation
- Collaborative

**Organizational Conditions**
- Systemic across the organization
- Integrated: embedded in all programs
- Sustained: with resources and

**FAMILY AND STAFF CAPACITY OUTCOMES**

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**Effective Family–School Partnerships Supporting Student Achievement & School Improvement**
Tellin’ Stories

Program Highlights SY 2014-2015

• 691 individual parents participated in 187 activities at 8 partner schools
• 630 students had a parent lead multicultural literacy activities in their classroom through Roving Readers
• 420 students had a parent advocate for their interests in Parent-Principal Chit Chats
• 375 students had a family member who learned strategies to support their learning directly from the teacher through Grade Level Dialogues
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Breaking Barriers to Family Engagement

Ice Breaker

Find a partner or group of 3, introduce yourselves and discuss (5 min):

• What have you noticed about the dynamics of race, class, and language as DC neighborhoods gentrify?
• How has this affected you and your family?
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Breaking Barriers to Family Engagement

What is happening in DC?

• Economic, housing, and social inequalities are pushing out marginalized families
  • Gentrification and displacement
  • Rapidly changing neighborhoods and schools

D.C.’s Chinatown has only 300 Chinese Americans left — and they’re fighting to stay
“Rich people would never have lived here before. Now they’re trying to buy everything.”
WASHINGTONPOST.COM
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What is happening in DC?

- Without intentional efforts, schools systems reinforce the status quo
- Public schools still serve a majority population of Black, Latino, and low-income families
- As demographics change, parent power shifts
- All families want to support their children’s education
Teaching for Change continues to use the Tellin’ Stories approach and is developing strategies.

Four key strategies we’ll share today:

1. Create a welcoming school community
2. Link to learning
3. Intentionally build relationships across race, class, and language
4. Increase access in schools for marginalized communities
1. Create a Welcoming School Community

What we did

- Parent-Principal Chit Chats at Thomson ES, Brightwood EC, Mt. Rainier ES, Tyler ES, Bruce Monroe ES at Park View, and LaSalle Backus EC
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1. Create a Welcoming School Community

Why this matters

• Lack of opportunities to build community among parents and with school leadership
• Power dynamics in schools discourage participation
• Low-income, Black, Latino and immigrant parents are not engaged as informed and active participants
• Marginalized parents do not feel welcome and respected
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1. Create a Welcoming School Community

What is needed

- Structure and facilitate meetings to be inclusive
- Interpretation
- Parent Coordinators and Parent Centers facilitate relationships and communication
What does a welcoming community look like in a diverse school?
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2. Link to Learning

What we did

• Grade Level Dialogues at Mt. Rainier ES, Thomson ES, and Orr ES
2. Link to Learning

Why this matters

- Many traditional school activities approach parents with a “you need to know this” deficit model
- Families want to partner with teachers but not sure how
- No home/school connection → push out families
2. Link to Learning

What is needed

• Popular education model builds on families’ knowledge, skills, and home cultures

• Professional development for teachers and principals to share information and student progress in engaging ways
Pair and Share

- What can parents and teachers learn from each other to support student learning and growth?
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3. *Intentionally* Build Equitable Relationships Across Race, Class, and Language

**What we did**

- **Listening and Healing Circles** at Powell ES
- **Story Quilting** at LaSalle Backus EC and Bruce Monroe ES at Park View
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3. *Intentionally* Build Equitable Relationships Across Race, Class, and Language

**Why this matters**

- Systemic inequalities affect power dynamics
- Higher income parents’ expectations clash with longtime lower income parents
- Race, class, language and cultural dynamics make it difficult for families to connect
- Common goals for children but different approaches
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3. *Intentionally* Build Equitable Relationships Across Race, Class, and Language

**What is needed**

- Structured support and facilitation for schools and families
- Citywide efforts to develop community-based solutions
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Pair and Share

- What ideas or initiatives do you suggest to support families in bridging race, class and language differences?
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4. Access for Marginalized Families

What we did

• Facilitate an **equitable selection process** for the principal selection panels which united parents at Bruce Monroe ES at Park View and Powell ES

• Support a racially and economically diverse group of parents at Bruce Monroe at Park View who **organized** a “PTU” with teachers
4. Access for Marginalized Families

**Why this matters**

- Leadership of low-income parents is valued less
- Parents with higher education levels have more experience with formal leadership positions and PTA-type organizations
- Unequal access to decision-making power
- Low-income and non-English-speaking parents are more likely to feel discouraged from participating
4. Access for Marginalized Families

What is needed

• Seek out, support, and recognize the leadership of low-income, Black, Latino, and immigrant families
• Invite families to be partners
• Parent Coordinators and Parent Centers facilitate access for families
• Information shared so _all_ families can understand
• Interpretation and institutional support for immigrant families (e.g. Language Access, DCPS Language Acquisition Division)
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Pair and Share

- What does it mean to have parents be decision-making partners in the school?
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What do we do?

Teaching for Change will continue to use the Tellin’ Stories approach and develop strategies.

Four key strategies we shared today:

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4. Increase access in schools for marginalized communities
The Picnic

We brought a rug for sitting on.
Our lunch was in a bag.
The sand was warm. We didn't wear hats or shoes or socks.

Squids came curling up the beach.
The tide was high. It was fun.
Different people had different jobs.

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