



School Launches Initiative to Increase Involvement of Non-English Speaking Families

The following story was submitted to the School Community Network by the principal of Allen Elementary, Siloam Springs, AK.

The face of volunteering has changed at Allen Elementary in Siloam Springs, Arkansas. As a direct result of our School Community Network self-assessment (Family Engagement Tool), one of our new focuses has been on increasing family engagement among our non-English speaking families. A starting point for this new focus was the creation of a Hispanic Parent Focus Group. This group met to identify roadblocks to participation among non-English speaking families in the school. The focus group found several factors preventing family engagement within this subpopulation including: language and cultural barriers; fear; lack of understanding of the need for family engagement; and lack of support, empowerment, and training.



Information from our Focus Group led to several successful ideas to improve Spanish-speaking family engagement. As part of the strategy to engage Spanish-speaking families as partners in their children's education, Focus Group members asked for t-shirts with the school logo that said "Ask me about volunteering" in Spanish. These shirts were worn during parent-teacher conferences as Focus Group members manned a table in the school foyer promoting volunteerism in the school. At the table, a colorful pictorial display in Spanish showed parents several ways in which they could become involved at the school. Focus Group members greeted parents as they arrived and invited them to attend an upcoming volunteer training session held in Spanish. The Spanish-speaking Focus Group members felt empowered by this process and were very enthusiastic as they shared with other Spanish-speaking families how they could work to support the school, teachers, and students. Focus group members also suggested topics for upcoming parent training sessions and activities. While these small steps are just a beginning, our focus on improvement is strong, and we now have more voices and new faces in our quest for student success through family engagement.



School Community Network Resource Spotlight



Building Block: Education

Resource: Parent and Community Volunteers

Too often family volunteers are seen only in a support role related to fundraising. While fundraising is important to schools especially in times of financial constraints, this narrow focus limits the number of opportunities to connect families to other families and families to schools. Volunteers can be a significant force in helping schools carry their improvement goals forward. When properly enlisted, trained, and encouraged, parent and community volunteers will start to connect to each other to build a strong network that supports the school's efforts and become united with school staff in the purpose of educating children.

The presence of volunteers in the school communicates support of the school's work and as beneficiaries of this support, students realize the importance of their own education through the commitment of those who support it. The School Community Network Resource Menu offers tools and tips for recruiting and training volunteers along with [this video](#) that testifies to the importance of family and community volunteers.

The **School Community Network's Family Engagement Tool (FET)** is an online family engagement program developed by the Academic Development Institute and is part of the suite of services offered through the School Community Network. The Building Blocks referenced are the framework components common to School Community Network programs, and the resources described are available to subscribers of any of the School Community Network programs. For more information visit our website, www.schoolcommunitynetwork.org.