

MULTICULTURAL PARENT PANELS

Resource Guide

For information on additional family resources, contact:

Family Services and Involvement Section

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Fairfax, VA 22031

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For information on the series, contact:

Fairfax Network

4414 Holborn Avenue

Annandale VA 22003

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Deepen your understanding of cultural beliefs, values, and practices by listening to the voices of multicultural parent panelists. This series offers strategies on how to set up panels as a vehicle to increase cultural awareness and how to make schools more responsive to families of diverse backgrounds.

Program 1:

Multicultural Parent Panels in the School Setting

When children move between the worlds of home and school, they navigate two cultures. Panels identify cultural issues that affect family interactions with schools and suggest ways to build bridges between home and school so that both work together to support children.

Program 2:

Raising Children in a Diverse World

Multicultural parent panels help families appreciate the benefits of diversity. Panels explore how to reach out to neighbors of differing backgrounds and how to raise children who value both their own cultures and the cultures of others.

**Multicultural
 Parent Panels:
 A Tool to
 Enhance
 Cultural
 Understanding**

The Multicultural Parent Panel is a program coordinated by Fairfax County Public Schools' Family Services and Involvement Section (FSIS). Panels consist of a selected group of parents who represent various racial, cultural, and ethnic backgrounds. Panelists speak from personal experiences, cultural research, and interactions with families from their cultures. Panels are customized to meet the specific needs of the organization and the audience. Cultures typically represented on these panels include the following: African heritage, Asian heritage, European heritage, Hispanic heritage, and Middle Eastern heritage.

The purpose of the panel is to be a catalyst in enhancing and strengthening school, family, and community partnerships in order to promote higher student achievement. This is done by providing insights into cultural variables—customs, beliefs, traditions, observances, and attitudes—that might influence families' behaviors in relating to the school system and the education of their children.

Since 1990, the panel has made presentations to schools, faith groups, PTAs and PTSAs, businesses, and professional organizations in Virginia and the Washington metropolitan area.

**Panel
 Goal**

To enhance and strengthen school, family, and community partnerships in order to promote higher student achievement.

**Global
 Panel
 Purpose**

- To provide information
- To create a safe environment in which participants can ask questions and find answers to those questions
- To help participants recognize that their experiences may be different from the experiences of others and that when they are different, miscommunication can occur

**School
 Panel
 Purpose**

- To provide insight into the cultural variables that affect parents' approaches to the education of their children
- To provide suggestions (ideas) for school staff members about ways to effectively communicate across cultures and to involve parents and guardians in their children's education
- To provide cultural insights into customs, traditions, beliefs, values, and attitudes that might influence families' behaviors in relating to the school system and the total learning process

**Panel
 Description**

Panels are usually composed of five or six parents who represent various racial, cultural, and ethnic backgrounds. Panels generally last for 1½ hours, including a question-and-answer period.

Topics Often Addressed During the Panel Presentation

Migration

- Introduce yourself.
- What is your ethnic heritage?
- Where do most people of your culture in this vicinity come from?
- For what reasons have people in your culture come to this country?
- Describe your migration experience and those of others from your country.

Child-rearing practices

- Have parents' roles changed since moving to the U.S.?
- What is the hierarchy of authority in the family?
- Are children of different genders treated differently? If so, explain rationale.
- To whom should communication be directed?
- How is discipline defined? Who is responsible if a child misbehaves?
- What behaviors are considered socially unacceptable for children of different ages and sexes?

Beliefs, values, and customs and how they relate to education

- Does the home culture give parents a direct role in their children's education?
- Should written communication be followed by a phone call?
- Should particular forms of address be observed or avoided?
- What nonverbal behaviors (gestures, body language) might be offensive to families in your culture?
- How do customs and observances affect students' and families' school attendance and activities?

Intake Questions for Client Requesting Panel

- What prompted your request for a multicultural panel program?
- What questions, concerns, or issues about diversity would you like the panel to address? Be as specific as you can be.
- What is your school or organization's climate regarding diversity?
- What is the ethnic or racial makeup of your clients and/or the families at your school or in your organization?
- Additional Information (that will help us plan for your program)

Typical Panel Schedule

- (Panels typically take 1½ hours)
- 3-3:15 Presentation Overview (moderator)
 What Is Culture? (moderator)
 Differences in School and Home Cultures (moderator)
 - 3:15-4 Individual Panelist Presentations (7 minutes each)
 - 4-4:30 Questions and Answers (moderator directs questions to appropriate panelist[s])

**Expectations
of a
Multicultural
Parent
Panelist**

Panels usually consist of five panelists and a moderator. Panels are customized to the client's specifications, so some of this information will vary based on those special requests.

- Each panelist will receive a program information sheet including the following information: Location, directions or map to the location, contact person's name and phone number, date and time of the panel, major points to be addressed, information about the audience, and other information that may affect the presentation.
- Each panelist is expected to attend a planning meeting and prepare his or her presentation before the date of the panel. If you are unable to attend the planning meeting, your cultural leader will call you to share updated or additional information from or about the client, to discuss the order and format of the panel, and to review or practice your presentation with you. (This time should be counted as part of the planning and preparation time.)
- Each panelist should arrive no later than 15-30 minutes before the panel's scheduled start time. Give yourself extra time, especially if the panel is scheduled close to rush hour, if it is your first panel, or if it is your first time at the given location.
- Each panelist is given seven minutes in which to present his or her cultural piece. The moderator times each speaker and uses green, yellow, and red tents to indicate the amount of time left. In the beginning, the card will be green. When one minute is left, the yellow card will be displayed. The red tent indicates that time is up, so you need to complete your point or sentence and stop.
- After all panelists have spoken, the audience will have a chance to ask questions of the panelists. The moderator coordinates this and may direct a question to you. Make your answers to the point and as succinct as possible so the audience is given ample time to ask more questions of the panel. The moderator will display the red tent card if your response to a question is taking too much time.
- Whenever possible, the client is urged to schedule a break after the panel presentation so that panelists can chat informally with participants. During this time, participants often ask questions or make comments they did not feel comfortable sharing in the larger group.
- Panelists are asked to stay, and will be paid for, an additional 30 minutes after the presentation to debrief. During this time, in a room or at a location where there is privacy to talk, the moderator directs a discussion of panelists' general perceptions, observations, and thoughts about the panel presentation. In addition, the following questions are addressed:
 1. What did we do well?
 2. How could we have done better?
 3. How was the information received?
 4. Did we meet the objectives for this program?

Reaching Out to Culturally Diverse Families

Here are some successful strategies for involving culturally diverse families:

Knowledge about American Schools	Offer meetings for small groups of parents to share basic information. Even parents born in this country need information about the options that schools offer. They may not be familiar with what is available in U.S. schools.
Language Differences	Whenever possible, offer translations of written material and interpreters for meetings. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some parents may prefer verbal communications to written communications. Talk with them over the phone or in person. • Identify staff members and parents who speak the major languages in your school. Set up phone trees within language groups to encourage attendance at school events. • If your school is interested in helping parents learn English, let them know about the classes offered in your community. Your school can also sponsor English classes at your site.
Pictures, Photos, Displays	Make sure your halls celebrate the cultures of all the families in your schools. Consider using flags, displays of artifacts, and photos to send an inclusive message. Make sure the fliers you send to parents use pictures of people that look like them.
Greetings	Acknowledge parents who visit school with a nod, a smile, or a “hello.” Use a friendly tone when answering the telephone and respond promptly to requests for information.
Family-to-Family Connections	Identify leaders from cultural groups who are familiar with the school. Link them to new families. They can contact families, answer questions, and accompany family members to school events.
Cultural Resources in Your School and Community	Use resources within your school to reach out to families, including parent liaisons and bilingual staff members. Make connections with groups to which parents belong. Examples include places of worship, community centers, and cultural groups.
Holidays	Make a note of major holidays for the groups in your school. Invite parents to share holiday traditions. Avoid scheduling tests and major events at times when children may miss school for holiday observances.
Clothing and Food	Offer a range of food choices at school events to respect dietary restrictions. Help to foster an atmosphere of acceptance for children and parents who dress according to cultural or religious guidelines.

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Multicultural Parent Panel Evaluation Form

Location: _____
Date: _____

	Poor	Needs Improvement	Average	Very Good	Excellent
Knowledge of Subject	1	2	3	4	5
Presentation Skills	1	2	3	4	5
Interaction With Participants	1	2	3	4	5
Usefulness of Handouts	1	2	3	4	5

What part of the program or class did you find **most** helpful?

What part of the program or class did you find **least** helpful?

How could this program or the handouts be improved?

Was the room comfortable and appropriate for this program or class? Yes No

Was the publicity adequate and timely? Yes No

I will use what I learned here to:

As I leave this presentation, I find myself thinking:

What additional topics would be of interest to you?

Please use the back for additional comments.

Suggested Resources

Books

All the Colors We Are: The Story of How We Get Our Skin Color

By Katie Kissinger (Redleaf Press, 1994)

Written in both English and Spanish, illustrated with beautiful photographs, this children's book explains how melanin protects human beings from the sun and produces different skin tones. Includes activities teachers or parents can do with children to explore and affirm differences.

American Islam: Growing Up Muslim in America

By Richard Wormser (Walker, 1994)

Muslim teenagers speak out about everyday concerns—family, school, and relationships—revealing how they maintain their identity and adapt their religious and cultural traditions to fit into American society. Includes a historical overview of Islam, the basic tenets of the Quran, and a section on Islam in the African American community.

The Anti-Defamation League's Hate Hurts: How Children Learn and Unlearn Prejudice

By Caryl Stern-LaRosa and Ellen Hofheimer Bettman (Scholastic, 2000)

Part one describes how children learn about differences from birth through the teen years. It explores the questions, "Why do people hate?" and "What can we do about hate?" Part two gives suggested responses to children's questions about differences and prejudices. Part three presents strategies for combating hate in schools and the media, including the Internet.

Debunking the Middle-Class Myth: Why Diverse Schools Are Good for All Kids

By Eileen Gale Kugler (Scarecrow Press, 2002)

The author explores myths and realities about diverse schools. She describes how students flourish academically and socially in diverse schools, expanding their understanding of people with values, beliefs, and experiences different from their own.

Raising the Rainbow Generation: Teaching Children to Be Successful in a Multicultural Society

By Darlene Powell Hopson and Derek S. Hopson (Fireside, 1993)

Two clinical psychologists show how to combat bias and promote positive attitudes toward people of all races and backgrounds. Includes 11 folktales from different cultures.

A White Teacher Talks About Race

By Julie Landsman (Scarecrow Press, 2001)

Veteran teacher Julie Landsman leads the reader through a day of teaching and reflection about her work with high school students from a variety of cultures. Her stories and observations challenge readers to think about how race, power, and privilege affect the lives of students and teachers.

Web Site

Tolerance.Org (www.tolerance.org)

Includes daily news about groups and individuals working for tolerance, guidebooks for adult and youth activists, entertaining and educational games for young children, and innovative tests to help uncover hidden biases.