

How to resolve exclusion at meetings for ELL Families

When Enlisting an Interpreter to Bridge the Linguistic Barrier. By Leila Kubesch

Schools make the effort to enlist the assistance of a staff or a community member who speaks the language needed to communicate with family members whose language is not English. When expectations to the interpreters are not clarified, the gap widens to include a feeling of exclusion.

Ideally, a professional and effective interpreter serves as an intermediary between school staff and the family members without taking over the meeting. He/she may already know the party, or may be of the same origin. The meeting forum is not appropriate to rekindle an acquaintance or develop a new one. Therefore, the practice of engaging in a personal dialogue should never be accepted.

The purpose of a meeting or conference is to establish a dialogue, develop a rapport and build trust between the school staff and the family members by showing goodwill to inform, share and interact allowing everyone to be engaged. None of these could thrive in an a group setting when one is excluded for any length of time without knowing the end.

Staff members also should not be engaged in personal conversation such as while waiting for someone to show up.



10 STEPS TOWARD MAINTAINING A SUCCESSFUL MEETING

1. Arrange to meet with the interpreter 10 to 15 minutes prior to the meeting. It should not be a blind-date format.
2. Brief the interpreter with concerns, goals and objectives for this meeting and who will be attending.
3. Allow the interpreter to view any documents that need to be interpreted during the conference. This will allow for any questions, if he/she needs to look up any unfamiliar words or to clarify the content.
4. Many interpreters do not know what is expected of them other than to “relay” information from the school to the families.
5. Explain your expectation that the meeting is to inform the families and to offer an interactive conference.
6. Request that the conversation between each party is short enough to allow for an ongoing dialogue.
7. The school administrator needs to sit at the head table. He/she serves to clarify, but also to remind the interpreter if the conversation becomes one-way by asking what was said or what did the parent exactly say.
8. School language contains a lot of jargon. Request that the interpreter explains and not just interpret. For example, a non-English speaking family will not know what IEP or IAT means. Rather than saying the letters using the sounding alphabet of another language, take the time to explain the meaning of abbreviations.
9. Look at or toward the family instead of the direction of the interpreter, unless speaking to him/her.
10. At the end of the meeting, ask them how to say “thank you.” Then say it. It will make them smile and put everyone at ease ending the talk with the positive note.