

## ORGANIZE FAMILY NIGHTS BY HOME LANGUAGE

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AKI KUROSE MIDDLE SCHOOL  
SEATTLE, WA

**A**t Aki Kurose Middle School, a major improvement goal is to welcome and engage all students' families at the school and in their children's education. The Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) has a full plan to meet this goal. This group redesigned the school's Family Engagement Literacy Night to meet with families by home language.

Aki Kurose is located in southeast Seattle. The school serves a racially and linguistically diverse population of over 650 students in grades six to eight. About 20% of the students receive English Language Learning services. About half of the families speak languages other than English at home.

Prior family literacy and math nights were organized by grade level. With one bilingual staff member per language, it was not possible to have translators or interpreters for all families across grade levels at the same time. Although parents from all language groups were "present" and seemed to enjoy the Family Nights with their children, many could not fully participate by sharing their ideas or asking questions. It was clear that a redesign was needed to enable all parents to be active partners and communicators in all languages.

Administrators and teachers worked together with the district leader for partnerships to plan the "new" Family Engagement Literacy Night organized by home languages. Parents from different language groups suggested topics that were important to them. Community members added information on Washington's *Speak Your Language* campaign, which is sponsored by One America—a statewide immigrant advocacy organization, and the *Seal of Biliteracy*, which recognizes students with strong bilingual abilities. Bilingual Instruction Assistants (IAs) worked with the ATP and teachers on ways to present and conduct learning activities that were part of each session. Family Literacy Night

was publicized with multi-lingual posters, robo calls, website, Facebook, an information app, and individual calls to families in their home language.

After a warm welcome by the principal, everyone enjoyed dinner in the cafeteria. Then, students, families, and staff went to different classrooms, by language group, to talk about ways to support students in reading and literacy skills. Specific attention was given to the six most common home languages: English, Spanish, Somali, Vietnamese, Tagalog, and Oromo & Amharic (combined group). Parents who spoke other languages joined the group with which they felt most comfortable.

In each classroom, a Bilingual Instructional Assistant led the activity. Story picture books in home languages were checked out from the Seattle Public Library for each group session. A teacher led a fun learning activity for all grades and all languages. Parents and children described a favorite childhood memory and discussed or wrote about it in their home language.

Over 60 students and 50 parents attended. Parents evaluated their experiences. They reported that they felt welcome at the school, presentations were easy to understand, and they could use the ideas from their sessions with their children at home. The result of the redesigned Family Night was that more parents and other family partners were actively engaged in discussions with teachers, interpreters, and other families, and more were actively engaged with their child on the learning activities. One Vietnamese parent captured the views of many others: "This event is much better than last time. We can participate and get help in our own language."

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## FAMILY OUTREACH THROUGH STUDENT AFFINITY GROUPS

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CLEVELAND HIGH SCHOOL  
SEATTLE, WA

TYPE 5

Cleveland High School (CHS) set a goal to increase the engagement of families who were not able to participate in the student-led conferences that were conducted in the fall. A review of data on attendance at Back-to-School Night showed that many families of color were unable to attend. To help these families feel welcome at the school and part of the CHS community, the Family Engagement Action Team (FEAT) organized targeted activities for parents and family members linked to student affinity groups that had strong identities, shared interests, and common goals.

CHS serves about 870 students in 9th through 12th grades. Most students are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch. Some are English Language Learners or Differently-abled. Large percentages of students are Asian- and African-American, and small percentages are Hispanic and white students. Of students who attend CHS for four years, 82% graduate from high school on time. This percentage is going up, but the partnership team and other school leaders knew that the graduation rate will improve even more with age-appropriate family engagement at the school and at home.

The partnership team's mission is to increase family engagement in student learning with activities linked to student success, and by amplifying the voices of historically marginalized families. The team includes students, family members, teachers, administrators, and community partners who meet monthly to discuss students' needs and school programs.

This year, the FEAT scheduled engagement activities with demographic and affinity groups. For example, for Latinx Family Night, 20 family members came together to learn more about how to monitor their students' academic progress. Parents discussed their experiences

as new or long-term immigrants. They learned about how their teens' participation in project-based learning at school was related to options in higher education.

At the Black Family Engagement Brunch, about 65 family members discussed the importance of involvement, role models for students, and how CHS might improve its policies and practices by obtaining more input from African American parents, students, and community members. During a follow-up Chew & Chat, parents spoke about how much their children had grown as members of the CHS community.

Nearly 70 families attended a Filipino Night that included performances by students, families, and community members. During the event, families also learned about the provinces in the Philippines.

At a College Knowledge activity, over 200 students and parents from all backgrounds selected workshops on: (a) exploring college and career options after high school; (b) tips for success on ACT/SAT tests; (c) scholarship information; (d) summer internship opportunities; and (e) how to apply for financial aid.

The group activities conducted at CHS throughout the school year cost about \$3000, paid for by a grant from the Engaging Families in High School (EFIHS) project to improve student and family transitions from middle to high school. Students who were members of the FEAT reported that they gained leadership skills and strengthened their sense of belonging in the CHS community. In this high school, culturally responsive engagement activities are helping to create a more welcoming climate for all partners in education.

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MULTICULTURAL AWARENESS

## 9TH GRADE HIGH SCHOOL SUCCESS FAMILY ACTIVITIES

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RAINIER BEACH HIGH SCHOOL  
SEATTLE, WA

**R**ainier Beach High School's partnership team is working to increase family engagement to smooth 9th graders' transition to high school. The team knows that families make the transition from middle to high school *with* their children, but many parents are not sure they are welcome as partners at the high school level. Further, the transition to high school is a process that continues until students' promotion to grade 10. Family engagement remains an important source of support for students through high school.

Rainier Beach is a racially and culturally diverse high school of about 700 students, most of whom are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch. The partnership team, teachers, and administrators planned a series of activities for the families of 9th graders during the 2018-19 school year to support student success. This included an initial orientation, 1st quarter parent-teacher-student conferences, and 3rd quarter conferences. A school goal called for at least 90% of students at each grade level to earn the requisite credits for promotion to the next grade and 24 credits for on-time graduation.

The Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) used robo calls, advisory class announcements, 9th grade e-newsletters, and advisors' phone calls home to promote parents' attendance at the three main family engagement activities. Teachers of 9th grade students managed the logistics of the meetings by setting the agendas, organizing space, and interacting with families. Community members also hosted tables to provide information to families about their programs, summer school, health services, college/career field trips, and scholarships. The district's Bilingual Instructional Assistance program served as interpreters for families, as needed.

At 9th grade Family Orientation Night, each family received a folder with information on school programs and people to contact. Everyone enjoyed a dinner of Mexican food. The principal and vice principal welcomed families and encouraged parents to remain engaged at school and at home throughout their child's high school career.

Dinner tables were set by language (i.e., English, Spanish, Somali, Vietnamese, and Chinese) for families to meet and talk with each other. Then, families were assigned color-coded groups to cycle through four stations on (a) the school's counseling, restorative justice, social emotional support services; (b) how to help students graduate from high school on time; (c) how to use the online parent portal (Source/Schoology) for information on their child's attendance, grades, and missing assignments; and (d) the school's International Baccalaureate (IB) program and how to become an IB student.

The school used a grant focused on family engagement at the transition to high school to cover costs of the family meetings. More than 100 family members and 50 students attended. Later in the year at the 1st- and 3rd- quarter parent, student, and teacher conferences, attendees continued to discuss the importance of on-going school, family, and community partnerships to sustain students' good attendance, behavior, and course performance.

At the Finish Strong 3rd Quarter Conferences, staff prepared a BINGO game based on ways that teachers, parents, and students can communicate about students' progress and success. Teachers reported that more students passed their courses after the early intervention (1st quarter) conferences, and that the full sequence of events made teachers and families more able and willing to connect with each other.

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## FAMILY TOOLKIT: 8TH TO 9TH GRADE TRANSITION

SEATTLE PUBLIC SCHOOLS  
SEATTLE, WA

DISTRICT LEADERSHIP

Research shows that if students have good attendance and pass their courses in grade 9, they are more likely to graduate from high school on time. This means that a successful transition from middle to high school is especially important for setting 9th grade students on a path to success. It also is important for middle and high schools to recognize that when students transition to the 9th grade, their families transition with them. However, studies indicate that many parents and family partners are poorly prepared for the transition to high school and for continued engagement in their child's education.

District leaders in Seattle are working to ensure a smooth transition to high school for all students and their families. They developed a toolkit for parents as part of a grant with Johns Hopkins University—*Engaging Families in High School Success (EFIHS)*. The goals of this project are to increase outreach to engage more and different families in students' transition to high school, with the long-term goal of encouraging on-going partnerships to improve or maintain student attendance, achievement, and on-time graduation.

The *Transition and Beyond Family Toolkit* has three purposes. First, increase the capacity of middle and high school educators and partnership teams to provide useful information to enable families to support their students as they transition from the middle grades to high school. Second, provide clear information for parents to know and guide their 9th graders about the importance of good attendance, studying and passing courses to gain credits required for on-time graduation. Third, make the information accessible to families in English and six of the most widely-spoken languages in the district—Spanish, Somali, Chinese, Vietnamese,

Amharic, and Tigrigna.

Seattle Public Schools (SPS), a large urban district, includes students and families who speak over 140 languages and dialects at home. Although the district is pleased with a graduation rate of 82%, leaders know that the percentage of graduates is lower for students of color, with special needs, and who are English Learners. The district leaders found that families at different middle and high schools received different information about the transition to high school. Not all information was translated for families who do not speak or read English. These facts influenced the design and content of the *Toolkit*.

District leaders worked together on the *Toolkit*, including staff in the Partnership, College and Career Readiness, Communications, Advanced Learning, English Language Learners, Special Education, and Assessments Departments. They also connected with teachers and administrators from middle and high schools for their ideas. Families of children in SPS provided ideas and feedback about the content of the *Toolkit*, as did the Principal Investigator for the grant at Johns Hopkins.

The *8th to 9th Grade Transition and Beyond Family Toolkit* includes information for families on language and social support services in high schools, important school events for parents, a graduation requirements checklist, strategies for supporting homework completion, and tools and services for students with special needs. The district distributed electronic copies of the *Toolkit* to the 24 middle and high schools that participated in the EFIHS project. The information also will be shared with community organizations that work with non-English-speaking families, and posted on the district website.

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