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## Ways to Improve Engagement of Migrant and Refugee Families in Your School



### Why engage with families?

Family involvement and interest in children's education improves student confidence, their attitude to learning and their academic outcomes. There is increasing evidence that family involvement in education is the main indicator for children's success at school, and that this is particularly true for children who come from low income families, whose parents have low levels of education, and families of refugee and migrant backgrounds.<sup>1</sup> School involvement however, can be a complex and daunting process for refugee and migrant families who may have experienced a very different education system and set of expectations.

#### 1 Enrolment

Start as you intend to go on. Make sure that your enrolment procedures are clear, open, friendly, safe and thorough.



#### 2 Welcome

Have welcome signs visible in the main community languages at the school, particularly in the reception area.



#### 3 Pick-up and drop off

School (and Early Learning Centre) pick-up and drop-off times are a great way to utilise incidental communication opportunities, to build trust and let families know what is going on at school for the day, week or month.

#### 5 Interpreters and translated material

Make sure that you let families know that the school can contact them in their preferred language. Families can also initiate the booking by asking the school to book an interpreter via LanguageLoop in their preferred language. Include this information at enrolment and make it regularly accessible in newsletters and highly visible in the administration area.



#### 4 Parent teacher interviews

The importance of, and reasons behind parent teacher interviews need to be explicit and preferably explained in each family's preferred language. Engaging an interpreter is even more important for the actual parent teacher interviews. You should allocate at least twice as much time as standard interviews to allow for interpreting and avoid being rushed.



Schools can help build trust and partnerships with families and students when they explicitly go out of their way to contact families with positive news in between official communications. This can be done via text message which can be easily translated or phone calls or email.



#### 6 Positive communications

Consider arranging training in cultural awareness and responsiveness for all school staff, for example CMY's Culturally Responsive Practice training. This will provide a foundation for good practice when engaging with families from all cultural backgrounds.



#### 7 Professional development for staff

1. Barker, B., & Harris, D. (2020). *Parent and Family Engagement: An Implementation Guide for School Communities*. Canberra: ARACY

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## School calendars

Plan ahead for cultural and social events to include your families. Take into consideration that some times of the day, week or year are more challenging or busy than others. Examples include observing Ramadan or preparing for Diwali. Sensitive include cultural events into your planning for the school year. Let them be opportunities for everyone to learn about cultures. Include families in the organising and running of such events if you can.

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## Multicultural Education Aids and bicultural workers

These roles are vitally important in communications and building trust with families, especially at the start of their journey with the school. Make sure they are included in planning, feedback and events as they will have invaluable knowledge of communities. MEAs can help to build schools' capacity to engage with families from refugee and migrant backgrounds, however it should not be solely their responsibility. Good engagement requires a collective effort and it is important for all school staff to be involved.

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## Social events

Organise social events that encourage community groups to attend the school. They could be run or facilitated by other families from the community, run by students, involve food, have an educational focus. Taking into account siblings and extended family members should increase attendance. Include interpreters, Multicultural Education Aides (MEAs) and bicultural workers in the planning stage and during the events. National events such as Refugee Week and Harmony Day are two such examples.

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## Feedback

Seek specific feedback from families of refugee and migrant students about what would be helpful for them and involve them in creating resources or programs for new families. Don't forget to ask students what they think their families would appreciate and engage them in helping to make those ideas happen.

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## Buddy systems don't just have to be for students

Just as students benefit from having another student support their transition into school, consider pairing a new family with a 'buddy' family upon enrolment.

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## Volunteering opportunities

Some parents have time to come into the school and help out but might not know about activities or skills they can share. Make sure these are shown explicitly and invitations to help out are personal and in preferred languages. Family evenings or forums are a good platform to engage families and discuss volunteering opportunities. Have interpreters available for best outcomes.

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## Home support

Demonstrate and provide opportunities for families to support their child's education at home. This may not mean helping with homework directly. Family engagement with learning at home may be through practical support, guidance, or other incidental learning opportunities such as cooking and shopping for groceries. Click [here](#) for an infographic to share with your families on this topic.

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## Expertise

Make time to discover the skills, knowledge and experience of families of refugee and migrant students and consider ways to include them in programs of expertise.

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## Trusted support

If your school can be supportive in other areas such as directing families to get help and information from Councils (or read their bills for example) the school can become a trusted source of information. This will benefit your communications with families as well as student outcomes. You can also refer families to settlement [support](#).