

School Psychology in Illinois

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Bilingual/Bicultural Workgroup

Conrad Fischer Elementary School Demonstrates Home-School Collaboration with Series of Bilingual Parent Workshops

By Tamara Salamon

Conrad Fischer Elementary School's parent liaison, Eréndira Loza-Navarro, in conjunction with its principal, Jane Bailey, reached out to their community's Spanish speaking parents by organizing and developing a series of workshops to teach them about the American education system. The purpose of the bilingual workshops was to help Spanish speaking parents by giving them strategies and advice on how to help their child have academic success. Conrad Fischer Elementary School is part of Elmhurst District 205, a unit district serving kindergarten to grade 12. Fischer is a diverse elementary school that serves 488 students that consists of 31% White, 4% Black, 53% Hispanic, 9% Asian, 1% Native Hawaiian, and 2% Multi-racial. Of the aforementioned students, 59% are from low-income households. Only 58.4% of Conrad Fischer Elementary School students met or exceeded standards across all sections of the state test in 2013.

Ms. Loza-Navarro, who also works at Metropolitan Family Services, gathered teacher volunteers and met weekly to design the series of workshops. Six workshops were held in December and January, addressing the following topics: Introduction to the education system; practical strategies for studying; explanation of materials, tests, and interventions; routines to help kids at home; healthy habits, nutrition, and positive reinforcement; and a trip to the Bensenville Public Library. Meetings were held from 6 P.M. to 8 P.M. on a Wednesday or Thursday night in Fischer library. On average, 25 families attended each session. Child care was provided by high school volunteers, refreshments were donated by local businesses, raffles were held each workshop where parents could win books, and transportation was provided by the school. Also, each child was given a donated box of school supplies to use at home.

The first workshop started with a video of Loudres Ferrer, who is a motivational speaker that experienced the struggles of being an immigrant and, as a result, had a different culture and language than the school system that her children attended. Following the video, teachers led small groups of parents in sharing reflections and addressing questions, such as: What are your dreams for your family?; What are your obstacles in achieving your goals?; Why is the parent role so important?; What would be helpful to learn?; and What do you want help with? In the second

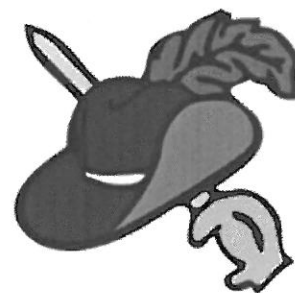
part of the workshop, two parents of Fischer teachers volunteered to speak to the group of parents about their experiences, both positive and negative, with the American school system and their immigration stories.

The second workshop first addressed the question, "What are some strategies one can use to navigate the American school system?" It

then moved into answering how the typical American school system is structured at Conrad Fischer Elementary School. Through discussion, teacher volunteers asked parents how they currently are part of their children's school experience and how they would like to take a part in their children's education in the future. One strategy that was explained and modeled with families was how to make a daily routine or schedule at home for their children. Then parents worked in small groups, led by a teacher, in creating their own routines, writing them on chart paper. Lastly, select parents shared how their routines were adapted to fit their personal household.

The third workshop focused on explaining the typical school day schedule, subjects students learn, and specials they go to. Parents rotated through teacher presentations on Math, Science, Social Studies, and Literacy/Writing. The special education team addressed tests, grades, and interventions. As the school psychologist, I explained the Response to Intervention (RTI) process as part of the intervention discussion.

The fourth workshop focused on developing home routines that work. To introduce this idea, teachers performed skits to the parents demonstrating bad and good routines. Following each skit, parents talked in small groups about what they saw and how it is similar or different to what happens in their homes. The teachers then led a discussion on how parents could make effective morning and afternoon/evening



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routines for their children by giving examples and then asking parents to write their own. Teachers provided a list of the order of activities a child could follow.

The fifth workshop was led by the DuPage Department of Health. A Spanish speaking nutritionist presented to the parents about the importance of healthy foods, which included a discussion of good and bad food choices, disclosure of the amount of sugar in foods, and an activity where parents learned how to read food labels. To conclude the workshop, teachers and parents ate together, trying new healthier options as part of a potluck meal.

The final workshop was held at the Bensenville Public Library to inform parents of public resources available to them in the community. Parents and children were shown how to use the computers, sign up for classes or events, register for a library card, and how to read with their children at home. The majority of parents indicated at the first workshop that they wanted to learn English, so the concluding session at the library was a fitting way to give them the opportunity to learn an invaluable skill.

The importance of educating parents is vital to student success. A partnership is built between home and school when the school community makes the extra effort to teach parents about the public school expectations. It is imperative to keep in mind that communication with our Spanish speaking parents is not only knowing their language, but understanding their culture, background experiences, and current life situation, all of which our staff does a fabulous job of learning about and accommodating. Conrad Fischer Elementary School continues to prides itself on its Spirit, reflected in its mascot.