Parent Guided Conversations

Why and how CACF recommends holding guided conversations with AAPI families on education

CACF
Coalition For Asian American Children+Families

CACF held a series of parent guided conversations with a diverse group of Asian American parents and families, largely limited English proficient, low-income, and/or immigrant, who regularly interfaced with a range of direct service CBOs. We sought to understand the needs, concerns, hopes, and dreams Asian American parents have regarding their children's education and identify the challenges they face in the New York City public education system. **The majority of parents we spoke to had never taken part in a conversation about education policy or been asked to reflect more formally on their own families' experiences in New York City public schools.**

Why to Hold Conversations: Outcomes

- Families reported enjoying the sessions and shared interest in engaging in similar opportunities
- Families learned they had the power to advocate for rights and changes
- Opportunities for families to make connections with each other - some shared contact information or made plans to reach out again later
- Families expressed their gratitude and appreciation for the CBO they were connected with, demonstrating the impact of the life-affirming services CBOs provide
- Unexpectedly, we also held an intergenerational conversation, which created a unique space for children to hear their families' reflections and affirmations
- CBO staff and advocates collected thoughts, perspectives, and feedback
- Ability to become more inclusive of marginalized families' needs

"This is the first time I'm attending these meetings. I think these meetings should happen more often where parents can express their opinions because now there's not really any channel for us to do it. I want to encourage other parents to join." -Parent

"I enjoyed the session and I hope my mom did too. We should have this more often. Just wanted to say one more thing: Today, I heard my mom saying good things about me, so that was really heart-touching."
- Student supporting their parent & helping with translation

How to Hold Conversations: Tips

- Conduct outreach to public school parents and families (CACF can share templates & best practices)
- Schedule sessions when families may already be meeting with a CBO (e.g. during a weekly ESL class or other workshop to save additional time and work for outreach)
- If possible, arrange in-house interpretation for families to speak in-language with their peers in a familiar setting
- Solicit feedback on questions to confirm language is accessible to families
- Consider utilizing two CBO facilitators to support one another and help ensure families are comfortable in the space
- Incorporate learning opportunities for families to demystify complex topics (e.g. admissions, IEP process, etc.)
- Record sessions with consent or take detailed notes
- Provide compensation for families
- Partner with CACF and involve the DOE

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Sample Questions

Categories and questions were selected in an effort to encourage participants to imagine an ideal school environment for their children, describe a school system they would feel empowered to engage with, and reflect on their own experiences and perspectives to identify what works well and what gaps still exist. We sought to find common ground, cultivate environments where participants felt comfortable sharing openly, and listen to understand, especially given the sometimes contentious nature of education-related discussions.

Questions

Choosing a school:
- What do you look for in a school for your child? What have you looked for in the past?
- How do you pick a school?
- How do you know if a school is "good"?
- What do you like about your children's school?
- What resources does the school provide?

Learning and assessment:
- What do you want your children to learn in school?
- How can you tell if your child is learning?
- What are your thoughts on how your children are assessed in school (grades, test scores, etc.)?
- Some schools use mastery-based grading, instead of traditional grades. This means that students move forward when they show independent mastery of learning goals. These goals are made clear to students at the start, and they receive feedback at each step toward achieving these goals. Some differences between this system and the traditional system are that learning is more individualized, with students being instructed based on their needs, and also that assessment is different from high-stakes tests and is more about growth. Would this kind of system appeal to you? Why or why not?
- Do you think it is important for schools to help children deal with stressors in their lives, or to help them learn about how to make good decisions, how to manage their emotions, and how to form positive relationships?
- Do you think that your children's level of comfort in their school affects their learning and academic progress?

Family engagement:
- How do you view your role in your children's education?
- Do you feel that your school cares about what you think?
- Have you met your children's teachers and/or other staff? If so, did you feel comfortable meeting them? What were they like? If not, why not?
- Do you know about the availability of translation or interpretation at your school?
- Do you get translated communication in your language from your school? Who do you go to if you need an interpreter?

Needs and concerns:
- What is your number one worry when it comes to your children's education?
  - Have you ever expressed your concern(s) to your school? Why or why not?
- What do you really want to see your school do for you and/or your children?
- What are the vital resources and/or services that you need your school to provide? Are they providing those services adequately? If not, why not? What can they do better?

"…I wasn't expecting them to say the things or views they were saying… [these] parents thought real world skills on the side of education were important. It's pretty nice to see that kind of a transition." -Interpreter after observing a conversation