

Metropolitan Area Foreign Student Advisors
February 20, 2009
Meeting hosted by Fairfax County Public Schools
Minutes submitted by Silvia Hoke

10:00 – 11:00 Welcome and Introductions (led by Candice Hindmarch, Baltimore County)

- Fairfax County Public Schools ESOL Assessment process:
- Joanne Chen presented on FCPS intake centers. Skills assessed are English (Oral, Writing, and Reading), and Language 1 Math and Writing
 - L1 Math – grades 1-8 in 32 languages (EAME), where instructional level is determined
 - L1 Writing – prompts in 32 languages, plus an observation to get a sense of writing skills and literacy.
- There were questions regarding promotion policy, placement tests used, transfers between districts, and the re-evaluation of records from other districts.

11:00 – 2:00 General Meeting

A. Ricardo Castaneda from Harrisonburg High School presented on separation and reunification groups. He runs groups every other week for 90 minutes. Below is a summary of his presentation:

Hispanic vs Latino: both are North American terms, and are not used by natives when referring to themselves. What term is used depends on what people prefer to be called. We should be careful not to make assumptions about what ‘they’ want to be called.

Terminology used by Rick:

Hispanic or Latino (interchangeably)

Separation – physical distance

Reunification – process of family members coming back together after separation

Undocumented v illegal – no person is illegal, so undocumented is the best term. It just means that there is no piece of paper describing where people live.

Why do immigrants come to U.S.?

Push/pull factors: There is a Frontier Culture Museum in Stanton, VA, which shows reasons why pioneers traveled across the U.S. They are the same reasons why immigrants travel to the U.S. Pioneers were depicted as ‘heroes’, but immigrants today are seen in a negative light.

Acculturation – The challenge is to maintain what is yours and share it with the new (U.S.) culture. Problems occur due to culture shock, language, discrimination, oppression, breaks in family structure/support systems, and role reversals.

The Hispanic identity can be described as a house: the foundation is religion and family. When one of these foundations is unstable, then the whole house is upset.

Some Latino Cultural values:

Collectivism; simpatia: preference for positive interpersonal relationships characterized by politeness and avoidance of conflict; familismo; marianismo: long-suffering mother and protect daughters at all costs; machismo: rigid patriarchal structure where male should be the provider; respeto: especially for men and elders and those in positions of authority.

Patterns of immigration today and laws passed recently have made it hard for families to arrive together. It is a difficult, long, and expensive process. Because of this, most immigrant families have undergone separation, years of distance, reunification, and acculturation to a new culture and new family.

The separation and reunification group run by Rick at Harrisonburg HS meets once a week. Ideally a parent group would run concurrently, but doesn't always happen. Some activities include:

- Questionnaire – at what age were they separated, who did the children live with, why do you think you were separated at the time, who made the decision, did you have a say, what was most difficult, has your opinion changed as to the reason for the separation, who decided on reunification, did you have a say, rate the experience of reunification from 1 to 10.
- Collages/art work – how does it feel to be an immigrant and/or how it felt to be separated and reunified.

How does separation/reunification affect the mental health of adolescents?

-inability to relate/recognize parents
-loss of surrogate caretaker
-inability to communicate sadness due to fear of being seen as ungrateful or sacrifice
-let down: feel poorer and life is harder here
-having to adapt to minority and lower class status
-still need to negotiate individuation (normal for adolescents) while trying to stay connected to a parent they barely know.
-inability to express feelings, especially for males, who have been socialized to be only happy or angry.

Factors that contribute to the level of trauma:

-ignorance of children's needs by parents
-poor communication patterns
-marianismo: girls in crisis
-unrealistic expectations on both sides after reunification
-having a voice in the decision to separate and reunify
-how children view the reasons for separation

Support for teens:

- support groups
- cultural interpreter
- individual counseling
- understanding the experience: abandonment vs sacrifice
- learning how to be bicultural

Result of the group sessions:

Students have been able to develop a vocabulary to talk about their experiences. It normalizes their trauma and gives them and adult to talk to in the building.

B. Review of charts: Le Hang Phan (Fairfax) provided charts on the British and French school systems and grading scales. No changes were made to the MAFSA Charts.

C. Transcript Evaluation discussion

- Philippines (Tema Encarnación, Anne Arundel County) shared a case from a private school in the Philippines with 7 years of primary school before First Year High School. Please make a note for future reference.
- Haiti – school system changes were passed out
- Fiji – grading scale change made, A=80-100
 - A=80-100
 - B=67-79
 - C=50-64
 - D=0=49
 - No E
- Cameroon grading scale: stays the same as on charts. Use the report card for comments to determine failing grades (9 or 10) if possible.
- Belize – Juana Rivas (Alexandria City) will make changes to chart

D. Next meeting will be hosted by Howard County Public Schools. Date to be determined in May. Please email Candice Hindmarch (Baltimore County) for additions to the agenda.