

## 2. LANGUAGE

Antoinette Gagné: It seems natural that the most common barrier immigrants and their children face in regards to establishing themselves in Canada is that of language and culture. These barriers carry through in all areas of a newcomer's life, including that of school. However, it is well documented that in order for any child to succeed in school parental involvement is vital. As a result, teachers of immigrant children, as well as the newcomer parents themselves, no matter where they are from, find language as well as the newcomer parents themselves no matter where they are from find that language can become a challenge when it comes to parents taking part in the school system.

Somali Speaking Parent #1: When we were in Somalia and when we came to Canada, especially in the early days of our arrival the parents did not know the language there was a big barrier between them and the teachers. It might happen that the teacher wants to share some mistakes with you that your child has done, so you go to the teacher and you will not understand what the teacher wants to convey to you, or the child becomes the interpreter. So language barriers were the most difficult problems that we faced.

Somali Speaking Parent #2: When we came here we were not all at the same level - some of us knew different languages and cultures. Parents who were educated and could understand the teacher might establish a better relationship with the teacher, although that might not mean that they are better parents. If they are good parents who would like their children to get a good education and also would like to establish a good relationship with the teacher, they might not get the chance to establish a good relationship with the teacher because of a lack of language skills. Language is the key to establishing a relationship between the parents and teachers.

Educator : I think the biggest barrier is language, you know. And if you don't have someone in the school, like we're fairly fortunate here, but in some schools where there's nobody all day who can speak the same language as this parent, it must be awful for them, you know, even to ask a basic question. You know, I think that that must be the number one barrier for them, and maybe having more parent nights where you've got staff or an administrator and someone who speaks the language of the predominant group in your school, to have, you know, question and answer periods where if they have questions they can ask them, they can tell them a little bit about the school, about the board, give them the information in their own language. There's a tremendous cost every time we send out a newsletter because we get it translated into all different languages, but that, I mean, costs the school quite a bit to get that done every time, but it's really important. I think that that's the biggest barrier. I think that once you can communicate with them they're great.

Arabic Speaking Parent: As a parent, well, in my opinion, language is the basis for communication and the basis for understanding among different societies. And language means

allowing the other to listen to your opinions and reply or react to it. My personal opinion could be very modest, but in my opinion Canadian teachers are also multicultural, not only the families, but the teachers themselves are part of a family. So that is why I say that if a parent arrives and can't speak the language but at least definitely can say he is Arabic or Punjabi or Indian, then maybe inside the school if there isn't a teacher who could speak the language they should bring a translator or at least a volunteer. I myself put my name at the local school to translate for those who need it for all Arabs. Any newcomer, I would try as much as possible to translate what he wants to say.

Educator: When our resources we were very fortunate to have books that parents can share or that grandparents, because here in this school we have a lot of grandparents that are caregivers for the children, so they could go to the library and get books that are in both languages and they can read that book to that child.