

## 7. INFORMATION FOR FAMILIES AND CAREGIVERS

Ranya Khan: Newcomer parents face many challenges and have many questions about their new homeland. It is essential that they are well-informed and feel confident to make decisions about their child's schooling. The school is a valuable resource for cultural, social and academic knowledge that can support the newcomer parent and child's integration into Canadian society. Many families recognize that schooling in their home countries is significantly different than the Canadian school system. Initially, the differences may cause frustration, insecurities and reluctance on the part of the parent to trust that their child is receiving an adequate education. Schools play a crucial role in ensuring that newcomer families are fully informed in all aspects of their child's education and are empowered as a result of this knowledge.

Mandarin Speaking Parent: So, I think we need to let newcomer parents understand that reading is homework. This is important. Also the children need to be pushed. For example, my daughter is in a gifted class and she has more homework than a usual class. It doesn't mean that she has too much homework to do. She feels that she needs 45 minutes to finish her homework. In this way, the child finds it interesting and she feels busy. Otherwise she would feel bored and would go to the Internet everyday. If you didn't push her, she would feel she had nothing to do. So she would get on the Internet and play video games, it is a waste of time. Therefore, I would give her some additional work to do, for example, some simple math work. My daughter cannot remember the multiplication table. Children in China in grade 4 can memorize the whole multiplication table. Even children at Grade 2 in China memorize the multiplication table. However Grade 4 children here still cannot memorize it.

Educator: They, of course, because the first thing they ask me is "Do they have homework today?" and then I would say, "Yes, we have spelling and we have to try to study spelling words or we have reading, we would like them to practice reading." And they would say, "But I can't help them, because I can't read myself." And so you have to explain to them that children, how children can help themselves.

Educator: Our parents expect a lot of sit-down homework, they want the kids to be sitting and working and writing so if there's any kind of an academic problem or a learning problem, "just give them more homework, just give them more homework," so that seems to be that they want the children to be working by themselves, just writing away.

Russian Speaking Parent: I would like to suggest the following: To start from square one, from where we began. I would like to make a suggestion for the future, so that others get a head start. I would suggest that some seminars be conducted for the newly arrived parents, seminars that would teach about the school system, about what is necessary in order to get into college, into university, what kind of system that is, what's its structure. Because when we come here, most of us don't know this system. I would give credit to anyone who has done their research. That's why we have conflicts with our kids.

Educator: I had called his father at the start of the year and he said his child didn't need special ed, he was going to "work harder!". And I find that with a lot of the immigrant parents they right away say there's nothing wrong with my child, he just needs to work harder. And trying to get

across that he was working hard and it just wasn't happening. So, a teacher came in and often the parents will say "Oh no I don't need an interpreter, I speak English okay." But in those cases where it's really important that I know that you understand I call in an interpreter, but there is a barrier.

Educator: One of the areas that we've had difficulty with the Somalian parents is, for example, the area of special education, not wanting their children tested for special education. But, you know, and the reason being largely because well, "what are you going to do with that information?", somehow that's negatively going to affect my child, and my child is going to end up in a lesser program, or whatever. So we've done a lot of educating with parents and we're now sort of starting to break through that wall because parents are starting to understand, when we say "test your child", we want to test them to help them, to support them.

Russian Speaking Parent: And the child has the opportunity to choose the courses and there is no holistic system. Because of what we are used to we can't even help him, because often times we don't know how to deal with that. We are used to one thing, and we can't really understand the system.

Urdu Speaking Parent: By speaking, I mean that we didn't argue with them. We didn't know about the law here, what it is, how we should express ourselves, how we should behave. In my country, if this had happened we could have even come to blows. But here they said, No, there is nothing here, go to such and such a school. We quietly picked up our bags and left, and went to the other school. Because of this my children suffered a loss in education.

Mandarin Speaking Parent: When the newcomers first arrived, they need some directions. It doesn't mean that you have to tell them every detail. You just tell them the major directions they need to follow. First, if possible, you can give a brief introduction to the newcomers about the schooling here. Maybe the teacher cannot do it, but people like us who have had such experience are very willing to help newcomers. However, we do not know who we should talk to so as to help them. So, at the time if I had had someone like them, the other parents to tell me their experiences, I may have been able to find a shortcut to understand the system. The newcomers have language barriers and also do not have the time. Nor do they have the network.

Educator: And I think schools have a really, really important role, an obligation to provide parents with a forum or ability to gain the knowledge that they need. I don't think schools can make the assumption that parents, especially immigrant parents, have that knowledge. And so I think we have to provide an opportunity for that to happen. I think that's part of our responsibility and part of our role is to put it out there and provide it, whether it is through workshops or newsletters or whatever it may be, but to put it out there and to put it out there in a form that is understandable to parents if there is a language issue then that language issue has to be taken into account whenever you're putting that information out there.

Urdu Speaking Parent: I get to know more about what my children are doing. It comes back to the same thing, that we don't have a curriculum here like they did there. At the beginning of the year we got all these books, and we know what the child is studying, what we have to teach. Here we don't have anything like that. Okay? It's more beneficial for you if you maintain contact

with the teacher, even if you are an old parent. If you have been here for many years, you should not think that if your interaction with the teacher is less that your child is fine. With children, whether they have been here long or not, you must have an interaction with the teacher.