

Our Kids...Their Future: Strengthening Pottstown's Children and Families for a Brighter Future

MODERATOR REPORT – Group 3

Barth Elementary School

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Translators: Lupe Hernandez, Maricruz Clemens

Moderator's description of the group:

The group was made up of eight people total: two white English-speaking women, one Spanish-speaking man and five Spanish-speaking women. All of the participants were parents. Due to the small number of English-speakers in the group, participants were asked if they would like to form a Spanish only group and have the two English-speakers move to another group. Participants expressed a unanimous desire to stay together, citing the learning that was taking place. One English-speaker voiced some concern about the pace of discussion and her difficulty following the conversation. She recognized that her frustration must be how the Spanish-speakers always feel and opted to stay to learn more about their experiences. The group listened well to each other. No tensions arose.

Hopes and Fears for their child's education ages, 3 to 9:

Hopes:

- To find good ideas for the kids
- That society will hold youth accountable
- To help youth understand their options beyond high school (as well as to understand the importance of graduating from high school)
- More programs for kids education
- After school programs to help kids with their homework
- Want to thank the teachers for their patience
- Summer program
 - Free or low-cost
- ESL classes for parents and kids
- After school program for Spanish-speakers that focuses on pronunciation (for parents and kids) – pronunciation is important so that kids don't get teased and parents have better access to jobs

Fears:

- Can't help our kids with homework because of the language barrier
- Kids won't continue their education because they don't know about their post-high school options (higher education, tech programs, etc.)

Supports: things people identified as supporting their hopes

- Translators – a participant talked about having translators available in the school district where she used to live. It made a big difference. The group liked the idea of having translators available in the Pottstown School District. The only concern is money.
- Homework help – “If a school requires homework to be done in a certain language then they are required to provide support. You can’t fail a kid because of language.”
- “We need the tools to help our kids.”
- Offer English class for parents
 - Provide child care
 - Don’t require documentation – a lot of parents are excluded if documentation is required
- Offer Spanish classes for parents and students: “I would love to learn Spanish and to have my kids learn Spanish. I want to be able to help.”
- Volunteering in my kid’s classroom: “I appreciate seeing what the teacher is doing. How important their work is.”
- Parents appreciate many of the programs that the Pottstown School District offers:
 - Parent Literacy Night: organized, involves reading to children
 - Head Start and Pre-K Counts are great programs. They prepare kids to succeed in school and teaches important life skills. Kids learn English and literacy.
 - Love and Logic; Guiding Good Choices: good programs, like that they teach you things you can do with your kids
 - NEED: language access
- Parents value connecting with each other.

Barriers : things people identified as leading to their fears or of getting in the way of reaching their hopes

- Language access
- Duration of Summer Camp – the fieldtrips are good, but the limited times are hard
- Time: Have weekend programs that allow parents to be involved outside of work hours
- Several barriers were cited for why parents did not participate in programs more frequently:
 - Not knowing that programs exist
 - NEED: better communication about programs. Would like to receive information via email, library and through the schools
 - Timing (evening or afternoon is best)
 - Lack of childcare

- Lack of Spanish translation: could bilingual parents be engaged to help?
- Need fliers in Spanish
- Need to know further ahead
- Need more teachers or aids.
- Safety is a concern.
- Language access is needed.
- Teaching values and life skills is as important as academics

Final synthesis of qualities, values, characteristics

The group selected the following three ideas as summary for the conversation:

- Language Barrier: keeps parents from being able to support their kids
- Summer Program: parents want a free or low-cost educational summer program
- Continuing Education: even in the early years, it is important for students to be learning about the importance of continuing their education beyond high school