

June 22, 2016



“G” is for Gentrification: Breaking Barriers to Family Engagement in Gentrifying Schools

TeachingforChange.org/parent-organizing

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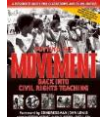
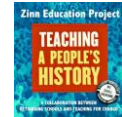
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Teaching for Change



Teaching for Change provides teachers and parents with the tools to create schools where students learn to read, write, and change the world.

- Publications
- Professional Development
- Parent Power



Tellin' Stories



Parent Organizing

- Build community
- Gather information and develop skills
- Prioritize concerns
- Take action

Professional development and coaching

Signature Activities



Breaking Barriers to Family Engagement in Gentrifying Schools



Agenda

- Welcome and Ice breaker
- Context for DC and gentrification
- Schools context
- Emerging themes (What is happening?)
- 5 key strategies (What do we do?)
- Questions
- Closing

Breaking Barriers to Family Engagement in Gentrifying Schools



Ice Breaker

Find a partner or group of 3, introduce yourselves and discuss (5 min):

- Why did you choose to come to this session? What do you hope to get from it?
- How has gentrification impacted you, your family or those that you work with?

Breaking Barriers to Family Engagement in Gentrifying Schools



What is happening in DC?

- Economic, housing, and social inequalities are pushing out marginalized families
 - Gentrification and displacement
- Public schools still serve a majority population of Black, Latino, and low-income families
- As neighborhood demographics change, higher income and white families enroll in public schools
- All families want to support their children's education - expressions of support vary



What do we mean by "gentrification?"

A general term for the development of urban communities to attract wealthier people, causing increases in rents and property values, and changing the character and culture of the community to reflect the new market of wealthier residents. Gentrification often means the displacement of poor residents and neighborhood businesses by wealthier outsiders.



Schools of Focus (DCPS)

- Bruce Monroe Elementary at Park View
- Powell Elementary
- Thomson Elementary



Schools of Focus (DCPS)

- Bruce Monroe Elementary at ParkView
78% Latino, 19% Black, 2% White - 62% ELL
- Powell Elementary
82 % Latino, 11% Black, 5% White - 55% ELL
- Thomson Elementary
57% Latino, 18% Black, 3% White, 19% Asian - 52% ELL



Emerging themes from research* and practice

- I. Parent power is shifting
- II. Historical memory is important
- III. Communication – across language, culture, race, class – plays a significant role

*Dr. Esa Syeed and Chy McGhee

Emerging themes

I. Parent Power Shifting

- Higher income and white parents often get the attention of administration and can utilize their privilege for their agenda
- Higher income parents and white parents often create new venues and structures of power
- Parents of color and low income families are pushed out of school decision making processes and procedures

Emerging themes

I. Parent Power Shifting



"When asked whether the principal treats all parents fairly the parent answered no and then said, "They (higher income parents) have their books and their experience and they're in a higher social position where as I might not have that level of education but what I do have is lived experience... What I view as humility they view as ignorance."

*Emerging themes***II. Historical memory**

- Assumptions are made about the school's ability, possibility, and structure without full analysis, understanding, or historical context
- There is no shared history for parent organizing/ organizations
- White parents and higher income parents give themselves credit for gains seen in the year they were there, with no history

*Emerging themes***II. Historical memory**

“So I don't think [higher income parents] understand that the school wouldn't be here, not because of the failure to communicate, but the school wouldn't be here if not for the Spanish-speaking families.”

*Emerging themes***III. Communication**

- Majority of events and communications are in English
- Cultural communication norms separate families
- Schools welcome the communication norms of parents who are white, higher income, and/or have advanced degrees
- Those with power create the channels of communication and respect for that communication

*Emerging themes***III. Communication**

“For me, language is the big issue.”

“They [higher income parents] don't bring food.”

“I think sometimes when the white parents come in there is that privilege thing. “We know more than you do. They just think they have the answer. I think that is appalling – you go into a situation with, ‘I wonder what's here? I wonder how I can help?’ ...Where is your mindset? Where is your heart? Are you looking for faults, a list of things you can come in tomorrow and send an email and tell people how you think it should be done?”

Emerging themes from research and practice

- I. Parent power is shifting
- II. Historical memory is important
- III. Communication – across language, culture, race, class – plays a significant role

What do we do?

Five key strategies we'll share today:

1. Create a welcoming school community
2. Link to learning
3. Intentionally build relationships across race, class, and language
4. Increase access in schools for marginalized communities
5. Find points of intervention for race, class & equity conversations

Pair and Share

- What does a welcoming community look like in a diverse school?



I. Create a Welcoming School Community

What we did

- Parent-Principal Chit Chats
- Coaching for principals
- Support for Parent Coordinators



I. Create a Welcoming School Community

Why this matters

- Lack of opportunities to build community among parents and with school leadership
- Power dynamics in schools discourage participation
- Low-income, Black, Latino and immigrant parents are not approached as informed and active participants
- Marginalized parents do not feel welcome and respected



I. Create a Welcoming School Community

What is needed

- Structure and facilitate meetings to be inclusive
- Interpretation
- Parent Coordinators and Parent Centers facilitate relationships and communication



2. Link to Learning

What we did

- Grade Level Dialogues
- Academic Classroom Visits
- Roving Readers
- Parent-Principal Chit Chats
- Academic Workshops



2. Link to Learning

Why this matters

- Many traditional school activities approach parents with a "you need to do this" deficit model
- Families want to partner with teachers but not sure how
- No home/school connection → push out families



2. Link to Learning

What is needed

- Popular education model builds on families' knowledge, skills, and home cultures
- Professional development for teachers and principals to share information and student progress in engaging ways



3. Intentionally Build Relationships Across Race, Class, and Language

What we did

- Community building at parent meetings
- Listening and Healing Circles
- Principal and parent leader interventions
- Support a diverse group of parent leaders at BMPV to form a "PTU"



3. Intentionally Build Relationships Across Race, Class, and Language

Sample Listening Circle

Longtime Parents	PTO Parents
<p><i>Issue: Not respecting school demographics, "rescuing" Powell</i></p> <p>1. "I think (the PTO parents) forget about the demographics of the school. Many parents aren't on email, and don't do conference calls. And some of the higher income parents act like "We're here! You guys don't know HOW to do things." They connect economic status with intelligence. It's always that WE'RE the ones who don't understand, but we don't need to be rescued. Powell does not need to be rescued."</p>	<p><i>Issue: Availability to participate at school</i></p> <p>2. "I'm a single parent and I have a 40+ hours per week job. Every time I'm at the school, I have to take leave without pay. I feel judged when I'm not here for the morning meetings and I don't like that. When I first came, I couldn't understand why there were coffees during the work day. That was judgmental to me and it is a source of frustration. To be able to convey that would be good."</p>

3. Intentionally Build Relationships Across Race, Class, and Language

Why this matters

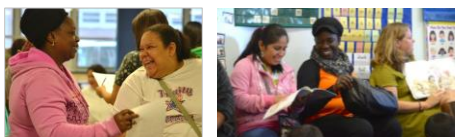
- Systemic inequalities affect power dynamics
- Higher income parents' expectations clash with longtime lower income parents
- Race, class, language and cultural dynamics make it difficult for families to connect
- Build respect and community
- Common goals for children but different approaches



3. Intentionally Build Relationships Across Race, Class, and Language

What is needed

- Structured support and facilitation for schools and families
- Citywide efforts to develop community-based solutions
- Equity and respect as intentional goals



4. Increase Access for Marginalized Families

What we did

- Increase language access (interpretation and meeting support)
- Teacher and principal coaching on sharing data and information with families
- Facilitate an equitable process for electing parents to the principal selection panels, which united parents at BMPV and Powell



4. Increase Access for Marginalized Families

Why this matters

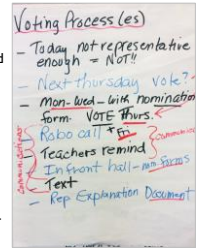
- Leadership of low-income parents is valued less
- Parents with higher education levels have more experience with formal leadership positions and PTA-type organizations
- Unequal access to decision-making power
- Low-income and non-English-speaking parents are more likely to feel discouraged from participating



4. Increase Access for Marginalized Families

What is needed

- Seek out, support, and recognize the leadership of low-income, Black, Latino, and immigrant families
- Invite families to be partners
- Parent Coordinators and Parent Centers facilitate access for families
- Information shared so all families can understand
- Interpretation and institutional support for immigrant families (e.g. Language Access)



Pair and Share

- What does it mean to have parents be decision-making partners in the school?



5. Identify points of intervention for race, class, and equity conversations

What we did

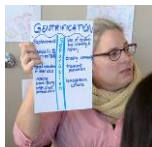
- BMPV – targeted PTU meetings and the principal
- Powell – targeted the principal and Parent Coordinator
- Thomson – targeted the principal and PTA leaders
- Race and equity PD series



5. Identify points of intervention for race, class, and equity conversations

Why this matters

- Disparities in power and privilege outside of the school do come into the school – without intentional work, schools will maintain the status quo
- Upfront conversations allow for acknowledgement and actual work towards changing systemic issues
- Teachers, admin, and staff see/feel effects of gentrification and are interested in race and equity PD
- Responsive to school communities



5. Identify points of intervention for race, class, and equity conversations

What is needed

- Professional development and common language around race, class, and equity
- District leadership to listen, acknowledge issues, and support schools in finding points of intervention
- Support for principals and administrators to explore solutions with parents, staff, and community partners



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