

HELPING YOUR STUDENT FOSTER A GOOD RELATIONSHIP WITH THE MONTGOMERY COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOL SYSTEM

Non-English Speaking Students in Schools

About 10 percent (12,661) of the total student body in the Montgomery County Public School system is in the ESOL program. These students speak 128 different languages.

Services of the Division of ESOL/Bilingual Programs

The Division has bilingual counselors who are assigned to schools with a significant number of bilingual/ESOL students. They also cover other schools and can be accessed through the Division office. Besides these counselors and the coordinators, the program utilizes interpreters.

The MCPS Parent Services Center (PSC), which is part of the Division, enrolls new students—including language testing for placement—and assists bilingual and non-English speaking parents with school issues. PSC staff can help parents to fill out the forms required to enter a child into the school system. If the school thinks that a child needs special assistance, a bilingual assessment team is formed to work with the parents.

The ESOL program conducts a Parent Resource Training. This 10-week program teaches parents about the school system. A similar program for Chinese-speaking parents is called PALS. PSC is also developing a two-day program for Korean parents.

Cultural Aspects of Parent-School Interactions

Many aspects of the American school system and our culture related to the education experience are very different from the parents' national culture. The PSC staff can help parents to feel comfortable in the school environment.

Our culture encourages and expects parents' involvement, but in other cultures parents and teachers might not interact unless there is a problem; teachers are never questioned, and they are accorded an elevated social status. Parents' ideas about acceptable discipline methods used by teachers may differ from ours. In America it is commonplace for a teacher to call a parent or send a note requesting information or a conversation, but a foreign-born parent might misinterpret such a contact as a sign of a serious problem.

Americans can misconstrue normal practices in other cultures as abuse. Parents from other countries have different ideas about how parents may discipline children. Also, marks on the body left by traditional health treatments (for example, moxibustion or pinching) might be misinterpreted as signs of abuse.

Parents may not be aware that students are forbidden to bring certain items of safety concern to school. School staff or other students might think erroneously that traditional herbs or medicines are illicit drugs.

Meetings with School Staff

Parent-Teacher Conference. Parents can have a parent-teacher conference at any time, not just at the scheduled times. A conference can be for any concern about the child and the school. Schools will provide an interpreter upon the parent's request. Printed information about parent-teacher conferences is available in Chinese and Spanish. Parents can call the ESOL office if they need it in another language.

Emergency Management Team Meeting. Parents can request this type of meeting if they are concerned about their child's progress. The teacher(s), student's counselor, and perhaps other relevant staff will be brought together to discuss the child's situation.

An interpreter is advisable for this type of meeting. Even if the parents know some English, it can be challenging for them to follow an interactive discussion. They may be nervous in a meeting with several staff, too.

Information Resources for Parents and Tutors

MCPS. In addition to general information about the school system, the MCPS website provides information for parents of bilingual/ESOL children. The parents tab is the starting point to find the ESOL resources. MCPS has two main guides for parents. The *Aim High!* series addresses key issues and audiences, and is available in seven foreign languages. *Navigating the System* is a parent guide available in English and other languages. The guides are available from the Division in printed form and can be downloaded from the website. MCPS has several phone call-in lines to provide information and assistance to parents and students.

Head Start. This pre-school program has home visitors. Head Start can give information in the language of the family, and it has a social worker available.

Tips for Parents

Getting Help to Communicate with the Schools

- ***Parents need to request the school staff in advance to arrange for an interpreter*** for parent-teacher conferences and other meetings with school staff. The school makes the request to the ESOL office.
- Parents should be aware that it can take time to set up an interpreter or connect with one of the coordinators who speaks the language, so requests at conference periods need to be made in advance.
- Schools can connect parents to the ESOL office for immediate language assistance if they call the school. Parents can also contact the PSC initially to make this connection.

Communicating in Writing

- If speaking English is a problem for the parent but he or she is comfortable writing in English, the parent can send a letter or note, even a very simple statement, to the school.
- Parents can fax or email a request. An email request can be sent directly to a teacher or other staff for some schools whose websites are linked into the MCPS site.
- The parent can drop off a note for the teacher at the school office or give the child a note to take to the school.

Tutoring for School Students

- The parent needs to ask the school or PTA about after-school tutoring.
- The Chinese-American Parents and Students Association has a tutoring program for school students. Other community groups may also offer similar services.
- The George B. Thomas Sr. Learning Academy, also called Saturday School, offers tutoring for all students.

Visiting Classroom

- Parents may observe their child's class(es) by prior arrangement.

Meeting with School Staff

- If an emergency comes up and the parents can't come at the appointment time, they should call the school to inform the attendees.
- An appointment with a teacher can be made before or after school on weekdays. Weekend or evening times are not possible. If there are unusual circumstances and the parents cannot get to the school during normal hours, the ESL office may be able to arrange a home visit to help parents.
- A play area for a small child can be set up in the conference room with advance notice.
- The ESOL staff may be able to assist with transportation arrangements, if parents bring up this need in advance. Perhaps the parent can arrange for someone take her to the meeting. MCPS arranges transport for Individual Education Plan (IEP) meetings, also called special education.
- The parent can tape-record the conference with school staff and listen to the tape later.

How LCMC Tutors Can Help Parents

- Tutors can give relevant information provided here to their students.
- Tutors can explain the procedures described here.
- Tutors may contact the ESOL office and request counseling for their student family.
- Tutors can help the parent obtain the guides of the ESOL/Bilingual Division via the Internet.
- Tutors can help the parent prepare a child for Head Start or first grade by teaching common school expressions (examples: sit down, stand up, be quiet; I have to go to the bathroom).
- Tutors can role-play how to ask questions in a parent-teacher conference, and what answers the teacher might give.
- Tutors can help the parent write a note requesting a parent-teacher conference or informing the teacher of anything else.
- Tutors can encourage their students to let the school know of any situation that may be affecting a child's performance or attendance.

Useful Resources and Contact Information

MCPS Website	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Web address: http://www.mcps.k12.md.us • Sections on 'bilingual' programs and parents • Some information in other languages (Spanish, French, Chinese, Vietnamese, and Korean) • Guides to download in multiple languages • Click on the section tab for parents, or go to the 'index of topics' and choose the 'bilingual' option
Parent Guides	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Navigating the System</i> • <i>Aim High!</i> series guides • Multiple languages (Spanish, French, Chinese, Vietnamese, Korean) • Available in printed form, or downloaded from the website
Videos	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Videotapes about the school system can be obtained from the PSC • Available in several languages
Local (Cable) TV	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Our Schools Today</i> has programs in different languages • Channels 33 and 34 (cable) and webcast • MCPS website has a link to the cable channel for further information
MCPS Call Center	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • (301) 309-6277 • Parent information available in Spanish, Cambodian, Korean, Vietnamese, Chinese, and French
Call-in Lines	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • MCPS Call Center offers phone help to parents in English and Spanish • MCPS parent information message lines in six languages • Details on MCPS website
MCPS Asian Hotline	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • (301) 230-5436
MCPS Hispanic Hotline	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • (301) 230-3073
MCPS Homework Hotline Live (Cable Channel 52)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • (301) 279-3234
George B. Thomas, Sr. Learning Academy, Inc.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Free tutoring for all students on Saturday mornings • Held at various schools (check MCPS website)
Chinese-American Parents and Students Association	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Web address: http://www.capsatutoring.org • One-on-one tutoring of school students on Saturday mornings • Small groups of adults for ESL tutoring, also on Saturday mornings
Chinese Cultural and Community Service Center	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Web address: http://www.ccacc-dc.org
Gilchrist Center	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Services include: ESL, citizenship and civics classes, basic legal assistance, informational seminars, information and referral services • Educational programs on culture, cultural competency, intercultural relations • Events

Parent Service Center
 Division of ESOL/Bilingual Programs
 Montgomery County Public Schools
 Rocking Horse Road Center
 4910 Macon Road
 Rockville, MD 20852
 (301) 230-0670

Maria V. Medina, Parent Specialist (Hispanic)
 Carol Pan Chen, Parent Specialist (Chinese)
 Yvette Laureano, Parent Community Coordinator
 Tuyet Tran (Vietnamese)
 Angela Kim (Korean)
 Aggie Alvez, Communications Office (for videotapes)

Chinese-American Parents and Students Association
 (CAPSA)
 Robert Frost Middle School
 9201 Scott Drive
 Rockville, MD 20850

Brigitta Dai (301) 294-2329
 Betty Ho (301) 251-9280

Charles W. Gilchrist Center for Cultural Diversity
 11319 Elkin Street
 Wheaton, MD 20902
 (240) 777-4940
 &
 12900 Middlebrook Road
 Germantown, MD 20874
 (240) 777-6950