

## Reaching Out to Hmong Families

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*Lincoln Elementary School  
Appleton, Wisconsin*

Lincoln Elementary School serves a diverse population of nearly 400 students from pre-school to sixth grade; 22% of the students are Hmong. The school modified its communication practices to meet the linguistic and cultural differences of these immigrant families. The Americorps VISTA volunteer translated the school's calendar into Hmong and created a Hmong family night to build partnerships with Hmong families.

Lincoln Elementary has always communicated regularly with families through its monthly calendar in the school newsletter. To increase the effectiveness of this practice with non-English speaking families, the VISTA volunteer (who is Hmong, herself) translated the monthly calendar into Hmong. This communication strategy was not perfect, since not all Hmong parents are literate in their native language, but it was a positive step forward.

At the Hmong Family Night, teachers used role plays with parents and children to show how to support learning at home. The role plays promoted checking backpacks, using pictures to read stories, and learning together while watching TV. The ELL teachers, reading specialist, media specialist, and principal talked with the families about the school's expectations of parents and their important role in helping children learn. A parent from the PTA also explained the role of the PTA and encouraged Hmong families to participate.

The VISTA volunteer knew that a family night at school was a new concept for many Hmong families and tried various strategies to bolster attendance. The school first tried sending letters home asking families to suggest times

to schedule a family night. After little response, the VISTA volunteer and a Hmong interpreter tried verbal communication strategies.

After choosing a day and time for the event, teachers gave the students a letter inviting all their families to the Hmong Family Night. The VISTA volunteer explained the event to the students, and answered any questions the children had. The children relayed the letters and information back to their parents. As the event drew closer, the VISTA Volunteer and Hmong interpreter called all Hmong families reminding them of the date and time.

One student said Hmong Family Night was really fun, especially since she got to learn things with her mom. Numerous parents said that the event helped prepare them to help their children in school. They hoped to attend future family nights. Teachers commented that seeing families together helped them understand their students and families better.

The monthly translation of the school's calendar into Hmong helped improve communications between school and home. Hmong families began to communicate with the school, particularly about school-related activities. After Hmong Family Night, participating families came to the school more often and attended other school events. Hmong parents asked questions about fieldtrips, homework, and other school-related concerns. Lincoln Elementary School's efforts to reach out to all families benefited students, teachers, and parents.

*Linda Her, Americorps VISTA Volunteer  
(920) 832-6270*