

Family Cultural Math Nights

*Wing Luke Elementary School
Seattle, Washington*

While good communication is an issue in many schools, it presents an even greater challenge at Wing Luke Elementary because the students speak more than 15 different native languages. With mathematics as the common denominator, school staff undertook four Family Cultural Math Nights. These get-togethers gave families the opportunity to learn about the school's math curriculum from teachers and speak to other parents who share their native tongue.

Math teachers, working with the staff of Wing Luke's ELL department, designed the program for these math nights. School newsletters and specific invitations went home with students, inviting parents in many languages.

School staff members grouped parents by language. "We met with the families with the topic of math in mind, but the goal for the evenings was that parents would talk among themselves with their own ethnic/language group about math and any needs they perceived in the area of math instruction," said the principal. The school brought in translators so that the different groups could communicate.

The teachers learned that they needed to give the families time to talk among themselves after the formal presentations covering the math program for grades K–5. "We wanted to fill all silences and that was not necessary once the families engaged with each other," said the principal. "Our job was to listen and record their concerns and ideas." The teachers also learned what the parents wanted. More

substantive homework and a calendar of math content for the year topped their list.

After the math nights, teachers reported that their students had more enthusiasm for homework and completed more assignments. The approximately 60 parents who attended said they were excited about having their concerns heard, and they enjoyed getting to know other parents. The events also meshed with the larger school goals of increasing family involvement and learning from parents how to better serve their students.

Wing Luke plans to repeat the activity, using more and different math assignments. Staff members also plan to create a Map of Math Content, as the parents requested, so they can follow the path of their child's math instruction during the school year.

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