

ESL for Parents

*PS 295—The Studio School of Arts and Culture
Brooklyn, New York*

PS 295 and MS 443 are separate, ethnically diverse performing arts schools housed in the same building. Many of the students' recently arrived immigrant families speak languages other than English at home. To help increase parent involvement at the school, PS 295 collaborated with MS 443 to offer a free conversational English class to its parents. The class meets for one hour-long session each week in the shared library.

By having more parents who speak English, PS 295 and MS 443 hope to increase parent involvement and communication with the schools. The administration also hoped that knowledge of English would help parents in other aspects of their lives. Though both PS 295 and MS 443 already have high levels of parent involvement, the schools worried that parents who did not speak English would feel excluded from the school community. Even outside the schools' own goals, administrators knew that teaching English would provide the parents with a valuable life skill.

The PTAs and Parent Coordinators at both schools sponsored the program, with the two principals providing classroom accommodation. A bilingual teacher, whose child attends MS 443, instructs the class entirely in English. On average, 18 parents attend the class each Tuesday morning. They learn English vocabulary and grammar, as well as written skills, such as filling out job applications. In addition to the regular English sessions, the schools offered a mini-class for English-speaking parents to learn Spanish. The program cost

approximately \$30 per class, which the schools split.

The ESL for Parents program has helped increase parent participation and improve school-home communication at the two schools. The PTA reports that more non-English speakers now participate on parent committees. Some members of the class even formed a Bilingual Library Squad that volunteers in the school library while practicing their English skills. PS 295 and MS 443 plan to expand the program next year to accommodate even more parents and make the school community more inclusive than ever.

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