

**INVOLVEMENT
WITH SCHOOLS**

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THEME This workshop examines parents' rights to be involved in school and reminds the group that they have a right to know what goes on in the school which affects their children.

FACILITATOR PREPARATION

Prior to conducting this workshop, the facilitator should:

- ✓ Read:
 - Facilitator's Manual
 - Reading Materials provided for this workshop
- ✓ Gather:
 - Flipchart
 - Magic markers
 - Chairs
- ✓ Do:
 - Set chairs in a circle

WORKSHOP TIMELINE

ACTIVITY A:	Introductions	10 minutes
ACTIVITY B:	Icebreaker Exercise: Quiz questions on Parents' Rights	10 minutes
ACTIVITY C:	Guided Discussion: Parents Rights to be Involved in School	45 minutes
ACTIVITY D:	Case Study: Carolina Pérez and the Special Education Class	40 minutes
ACTIVITY E:	Wrap-up	<u>15 minutes</u>
	Total Time	120 minutes (2 hours)

ACTIVITY A INTRODUCTIONS

TIME LIMIT  10 minutes

- OBJECTIVES**
group
- To welcome the group back and introduce new members to the group
 - To provide an overview of the workshop and how it will be conducted
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**FACILITATOR
DIRECTIONS**


1. Welcome everyone back who attended the last workshop. Welcome new members to the group and have them say something about themselves if they feel comfortable doing so. Then, have group members briefly introduce themselves to the new parents.
2. Announce that new group members should get in touch with a person who attended the previous workshops in order to get copies of the reading materials provided.
3. Answer any questions which were not answered at the last workshop.
4. Provide an overview of the workshop and how it will be conducted. Your overview may contain the following:

"The purpose of today's workshop is to examine the rights parents have to know what goes on in the school. To help us examine these rights, we will be doing three exercises--an icebreaker exercise, a guided discussion/case study, and a case study exercise."

ACTIVITY B ICEBREAKER EXERCISE

TIME LIMIT  10 minutes

OBJECTIVES ▪ To ascertain what the group feels about their rights to be involved in their children's education.

PREPARATION  Before the workshop begins, write down on the flipchart some "true and false" statements about parents' rights in the school (see paragraph #2 below for some suggestions).

FACILITATOR DIRECTIONS


1. Advise the group that this is an **icebreaker exercise**. Have a group member who attended the last workshop explain what an **icebreaker exercise** is meant to accomplish. Once the person is finished, you may want to fill in anything that was left out.
2. Display the list of "true and false" statements about parents' rights in the schools you wrote down on the flipchart. Some ideas are:
 - *Parents have the right to visit their child's school and classroom.*
 - *Parents have the right to have individual conferences with the teacher many times a year.*
 - *Parents have the right to know the experience of their child's teachers and principal.*
 - *Parents have the right to know if their child is absent or suspended.*
 - *Parents do not have the right to interfere if the school decides to place a child in special education classes.*

Ask the group to decide whether each statement is either true or false and encourage them to explain why. The group should have fun with these statements!

ACTIVITY C GUIDED DISCUSSION: PARENTS' RIGHTS TO BE INVOLVED IN THE SCHOOLS

TIME LIMIT  45 minutes

OBJECTIVE ■ To identify parents' rights in the schools

PREPARATION  Make sufficient copies of the Reading Material for this workshop entitled "**What are My Rights to be Involved in the School?**" to hand out to the group at the end of the workshop


FACILITATOR DIRECTIONS

1. Advise the group that this exercise will be a **guided discussion/case study**. Have a group member explain what a **guided discussion exercise** is meant to do. This will reinforce what the group has already learned.
2. Advise the group that **case studies** are not necessarily just about "other people". Groups can create **case studies** from situations they have experienced themselves.
3. Ask one or two members of the group to describe an experience where they felt they exercised their rights to be involved in their child's school.
 - What happened?
 - Were they happy with the outcome?
 - If not, what would they do differently next time?
4. Discuss with the group some of the rights they have to be involved in school including the right to:
 - **visit or call the school and ask questions about school policies, what your child is being taught, the experience of the teachers and principal, etc.**
 - **look at all records about your child which are kept by the school**
 - **have individual conferences with the teachers**
 - **request a translator if you need one**

ACTIVITY D CASE STUDY: CAROLINA PÉREZ AND THE SPECIAL CLASS

TIME LIMIT  20 minutes

OBJECTIVES
 ■ To review parents' rights with respect to their children's placement in special education

PREPARATION  Make sufficient copies of the Reading Material for this workshop entitled "Special Rights for Special Education" to hand out to the group at the end of the workshop

FACILITATOR DIRECTIONS

1. Advise the group that this is another "case study." Make certain that the group understands what a case study is meant to accomplish. If not, have a group member explain. Once the group member is finished, you may want to fill in anything that was left out.
2. Tell the group a short story (no more than 5 minutes). It should not be read, but told, and should contain the following elements:

A few months ago, Carolina Pérez' principal and her counselor called her parents to a meeting at the school, and told them that Carolina, who struggles through her classes, scored poorly on a diagnostic test. They suggested Carolina take a test to find out if she had any kind of special problems.

Sr. and Sra. Pérez gave written permission, and Carolina took the test. Now the school officials want Carolina taken out of her regular classroom for half the day and put into a special class. Sr. Pérez thinks a major part of her problem is that she was taken out of bilingual classes too early, and, if she could do better in English, she could do all right.

3. Once the story has been completed, have the group answer "yes" or "no" to these questions:

Do the Pérez' have a right to request that she be given another type of test? (Yes.)

- *Do the Pérez' really have a say in whether their daughter should be put into a special class? (Yes.)*
- *Do they have a say in whether Carolina should be put back into her bilingual class (Yes.)*

The Pérez' have all the rights listed and more.

4. Discuss with the group their rights with respect to placement of their child in special classes. Your discussion may contain the following:

"A child's teacher must talk with the child's parents before the school can make a decision to place a child in a special class or hold them back for a year. Parents have the right to ask for help for a child who is not doing well in school. And the law states that a child must understand what is going on in class, and that a student has a right to a bilingual or English as a Second Language class if necessary."

ACTIVITY E WRAP-UP

TIME LIMIT  15 minutes

- OBJECTIVES**
- To summarize lessons learned
 - To invite group members to attend the next workshop
 - To announce/schedule the next workshop
 - To obtain feedback

FACILITATOR DIRECTIONS

1. Have a group member explain what a "wrap-up" is meant to accomplish. Once the group member is finished, you may want to fill in anything that was left out.
2. Summarize accomplishments of the workshop. Ask the group what they learned. Be sure to include:
 - *Parents' rights to be involved in their children's education*
 - *Parents' rights with respect to their children's placement in special education classes.*
3. Invite the group to participate in all workshops. Announce that the next workshop will focus on "**Organizing Parent Networks.**"
4. Announce (or collectively schedule) the next workshop date, time and place. Be sure to advise group members of the method by which everyone will be contacted to confirm their attendance.
5. Provide members with copies of the Reading Materials for this workshop entitled "**What are My Rights to be Involved in the School?**" and "**Special Rights for Special Education.**"

READING MATERIAL FOR WORKSHOP SEVEN

What Are My Rights to Be Involved in the School?

Do you care about your child's future? Of course you do! Do you know if the education your child is receiving is good enough to ensure a successful future? Maybe not.

As a parent, you have the right to be involved in your child's education. This means that you have the right to know what's going on at school, and you have the right to work for changes so he/she will have the best education possible.

Perhaps you don't feel too comfortable going into your child's school and talking with his/her teachers. The following information was written to help you feel more confident by letting you know what you can legally expect from the school. The law is on your side, so get involved in your child's education!

First off, you may be wondering: Why should I get involved? Don't teachers go to college just to learn how to deal with children? Don't they know more than anyone about teaching your child? Well, it's true that teachers play a big role in your child's education. But you, as a parent, know more about your child than anyone else! All the experts say that children do the best in school when parents and teachers work together as a team. Furthermore, as a Hispanic parent, you not only know your own child better than the teacher does, you also know your culture better. You can be a valuable resource for your child's teacher as he or she tries to understand your child's background. You can also be a strong advocate for your child's heritage if you think the teacher doesn't understand Hispanics.

Other reasons why you have the right to be involved in the school include:

Public schools are supported by your tax dollars. You elect the school board, and teachers and principals are accountable to them. The public school system was organized to serve the community, especially children and their parents. A school needs to be open and responsive to the needs of the community it serves.

What are your rights as an involved parent?

The most important right your family has is the right for your child to go to school. Even if the family members are not legal residents in this country, all children have the right to a free and appropriate public education.

As a parent, you have a right to all kinds of information about your child's school experience.

You can call or visit the school and ask all of the following questions:

- What examinations and shots are required for my child to enter school?
- What happens if she gets sick at school?
- What should I do if she is sick and can't attend school?
- Will the school tell me if she is absent?
- How many days can she miss or be late without a penalty?
- What happens if she acts up at school?
- What are the reasons ("grounds") and the steps that must be followed ("procedures") for suspension from school?
- Who makes the school rules? The principal? The teacher? The school board? Is it state legislation?
- What can I do if I disagree with school rules and policies?
- What and how is my child being taught? What courses is she taking?
- What books and other materials are used?
- What is the background and experience of her teachers and principal?
- What is the calendar for the school year (dates of parent/teacher conferences, holidays, report cards, etc.)?
- What does she have to do to get a good grade in a class?
- What classes are required for graduation? Is homework mandatory?

You also have the right to look at school documents and meet with school personnel such as teachers, the principal, and the school board. You have the right to:

- Look at all records kept by the school about your child. You have the right to challenge information in those records that is wrong or that you think is an invasion of your family's privacy.
- Visit the school and your child's classroom. First you need to call the school office to make arrangements and set up a time with the classroom teacher. However, you have the right to see your child's teacher and the school principal without "red tape" and delay.
- Have individual conferences with the teacher several times a year. These conferences should be held in private. You have the right to request a translator if you would like one. The time for the conferences should be convenient to both you and the teacher, and be held at home if it is the only way both of you can meet.
- Organize and participate in parent organizations. You and your parent group also have the right to attend and speak at school board meetings.

READING MATERIAL FOR WORKSHOP SEVEN

Special Rights for Special Education

The law says children have the right to an appropriate education. This means that if your child isn't learning in a regular classroom, he/she has the right to receive special help.

You have the right to ask that your child be tested to see if he/she needs special help. You also have the right to refuse to have your child tested. It's good to talk with the school about the best way to help your child.

You also have the right to have your child tested again by someone from outside the school if you disagree with the school's results.

The school must involve you in developing the special plan for your child, called an Individualized Education Program, to meet his/her needs.

The school must have your written permission to put your child in a special class.

Anytime you disagree with any decision the school makes about the education of your child, you have the right to ask for a "hearing" (a meeting) to challenge them. This process can be a little complicated, and you may want to ask someone from your parent group or a community agency to help you through it.

You have the right to participate in decisions about your child's education.

Your child's teachers need to talk with you before they make a decision like putting your child in a special class or holding him/her back for a year. You can also appeal any decisions made that you don't agree with. This means you can ask for a formal meeting with school personnel where you both will present reasons for making a decision about your child. Since this process can be confusing, it is good to ask your parent group or a local community agency for help in preparing your case.

You have the right to ask for help for your child if your child is not doing well at school. This is where working as a team with the teacher can be especially helpful. You and the teacher together can think of new ways to help your child.

Finally, remember the law says your child has a right to understand what is going on in his/her class. This means your child has the right to bilingual or English as a Second Language classes if he/she needs them. As you can see from these examples, when it comes to your rights to get involved in your child's school, the only right you don't have is the right to remain silent!