

Increasing Diverse and Equitable Alliances (IDEA)



Update
Fall 2021

Background

In December 2020, we received a \$15,000 grant from the Southern Minnesota Initiative Foundation (SMIF) for Increasing Diverse and Equitable Alliances (IDEA), a project with an overall goal of increasing engagement between Winona Area Public Schools and families of immigrant and refugee populations.



Who is involved?

- Ann Riebel, Director of Community Education
- Karla Winter, Director of Learning and Teaching
- Dr. Annette K. Freiheit, Superintendent
- John Casper, Communications Coordinator
- Project FINE

What do we hope to accomplish?

- Better educational outcomes for all students
- Adapt communication strategies and develop programs to better meet family needs
- Tap into the lived experience of others to increase the cultural competency of our students, staff and administrators

How do we do it?

- Facilitated listening sessions
- Professional development/cultural competency training offered by Project FINE
- Continue to build relationships with the families we meet
- Repeat (continuous improvement)

Listening sessions

- Six sessions total
- Separated by language and age group
 - Early Childhood
 - Elementary
 - Middle/high school
- Held at Goodview Elementary
 - WAPS School Nutrition provided a meal
 - NHS students provided babysitting services

What did we learn?

- In a word: Tons
- Every family has the same hopes, same dreams and the same concerns
- But at the same time, there are different perspectives

Common themes

- We are doing some things well
- Families want their children to remain in the classroom as much as possible
- Intake process needs to be more culturally aware and sensitive, especially with Hmong families
- Concerns with busing (safety, bullying, trust)
- Relationships are a proactive measure

Staff shoutout: Lizz Hall

What might we need?

- Family engagement specialist could assist with relationship building
- Onboarding process for all new staff
- More information in a comfortable language
- More listening sessions with other populations

What did they say?

“We need to educate our kids to respect each other. You don’t have to like each other, but respect each other.”

“The biggest thing I want as a parent for my kids is to work on their interactive skills and their socializing skills. And enjoy it. That’s my main priority.”

What did they say?

“Our kids, if they don’t know something, they don’t answer. They look around. That doesn’t mean that they don’t know the language. .. If a Hmong child doesn’t answer the question, he is viewed as not knowing the language. A white child is viewed as not knowing the answer.”

What did they say?

“If you want to help someone, there shouldn’t be a substitute. There should be an addition. If they need help in English, don’t take them out of the English class to get them help in English. If you need more, have it after class.”

“Every kid is different. Even though your kids have siblings, every single kid has different personalities. Different characters.”

What did they say?

“I also want to thank you for taking the time and allowing us to express our feelings. We’ve been here four years and this is the first time that we have had this exchange. You should do it with more people.”