

Engaging Asian Families for Student Success



June 13, 2015

Minnesota Department of
Education

1500 Highway 36 West
Roseville, MN 55119

Table of Contents

Minnesota Department of Education Work Group 3

Community Partners..... 3

Executive Summary: Engaging Asian Families for Student Success 4

 Letter to Schools..... 5

 Letter to Community Agencies 6

 Agenda 7

 Panel Speakers 8

 Moderator 9

 Panelist..... 9

 World Café..... 12

 World Café: What makes you feel engaged? 12

 Summary 14

Information Sessions..... 15

Resource Tables 16

Participants 17

Event Volunteers..... 18

Evaluation 19

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Dao Xiong, PACER

Pang Yang, English Language teacher, Park Central High School

Chong Lee, Wilder Foundation

Executive Summary: Engaging Asian Families for Student Success

Goal: To bring together parent and community leaders from ethnic Asian communities and Minnesota's schools district to enhance stakeholders' knowledge and resources necessary to help children succeed in school.

Family, school and community engagement in education is an essential strategy for closing the achievement gap. Research supports family engagement as having direct relation to student achievement, yet many families, schools and school districts in Minnesota struggle to integrate this strategy effectively. Family engagement is often segmented within the educational system, creating a disconnect between instructional practice and improvement strategies. This disconnect adds to the confusion and frustration for the families we are hoping to engage

This was the fourth Families for Student Success hosted by the Minnesota Department of Education (MDE), and the first to focus on Minnesota's Asian communities. An internal committee of MDE leadership and education specialists collaborated with an external committee of Asian community partners. Our external committee helped us design and market the event for school district personnel and families from across the state. The internal and external committee member modeled ensured this was a successful and relevant event.

There were 72 participants and twenty committee and volunteers who attended the event. The participants represented educators, parents and community agencies from 17 school districts from across the state. The majority of the participants represented the Hmong community, with Vietnamese, Karen, Cambodian, and Lao communities also represented. Dr. Zha Blong Xiong shared information on the demographics of Asian students and how parents/educator can support Asian students was well received. The interactive conversation with the panel, about what successful family engagement looks like was authentic to the successes and struggles Asian families face. Participants were engaged, throughout the day by excellent speakers that represented the Asian community. Several opportunities were given for participants to share their insight and concerns, which were valuable and informative for all.

Esteemed community leaders spoke about their personal experiences in education, their knowledge of Asian student success and what families and stakeholders can do to support Asian student success and close the achievement gap.

A panel discussion highlighted successful family and community engagement and elicited questions and concerns from participants. Panel members responded with practical tips and approaches that they have had success with.



Listening to stakeholders was critical to the success of the event. A World Café discussion (see page 12) was held in English, Vietnamese, Hmong, Cambodian and Karen to allow participants to share their experiences frustrations and aspirations. Themes that emerged from the World Café discussions will be used to steer future MDE sponsored Family Engagement guidance and events for the Asian community.

Information sessions were provided by representatives from the various community agencies, school and MDE divisions represented in the planning committee to equip the participants with resources.

Letter to Schools



May 18, 2015

Dear Colleague:

I would like to invite you to a very special event designed to support families in ensuring a quality education for their children. On Saturday, June 13, the Minnesota Department of Education (MDE), in collaboration with community partners is sponsoring a conference entitled *Engaging Asian American Families for Student Success*.

This event will bring together parent and community leaders from ethnic Asian communities and Minnesota school district leaders to enhance stakeholders' knowledge and resources necessary to help children succeed in school. The day is intended to build on the existing knowledge and expertise of parent and community leaders. Our hope is that participants will come away with the knowledge, resources and partnerships necessary to more actively engage in their children's education and to encourage others to get involved.

I invite you and members of your team to attend the event as leaders in your district. Mark your calendars to join us on Saturday, June 13 from 9 a.m. – 2 p.m. The event will be held at MDE Conference Center B. Attached to this letter is a Save the Date flyer with a link to registration that you may use to recruit parents and family members for the event.

It is our goal to have multiple communities from around Minnesota represented at this conference, so we hope you can join us for what promises to be a very powerful learning experience for all of us.

If you have any questions about this event, please contact Debra Landvik at debra.landvik@state.mn.us or 651-582-8763.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Brenda Cassellius".

Dr. Brenda Cassellius
Commissioner

Letter to Community Agencies



May 18, 2015

Dear Community Leader:

I am writing to invite you to a very special event designed to support families in ensuring a quality education for their children. On Saturday, June 13, 2015, the Minnesota Department of Education (MDE), in collaboration with the Council on Asian Pacific Minnesotans and community partners will be hosting a conference entitled *Engaging Asian American Families for Student Success*.

This event will bring together parents and community leaders from ethnic Asian communities and school districts, and is intended to build on your knowledge and expertise as a community leader. Our hope is that participants will come away with the knowledge, resources and partnerships necessary to more actively engage in their children's education and to encourage others to get involved.

We hope you will be able to attend. Please mark your calendar to join us on June 13, 2015 from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. The conference will be held in MDE Conference Center B. Attached to this letter is a Save the Date flyer with a link to registration that you may use to recruit parents and family members for this event.

It is our goal to have multiple communities from around Minnesota represented at this conference, so we hope you can join us for what promises to be a very powerful learning experience for us and for your community.

If you have any questions about this event, please contact Debra Landvik at debra.landvik@state.mn.us or 651-582-8763.

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A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Brenda Cassellius".

Dr. Brenda Cassellius
Commissioner

Agenda

Engaging Asian Families for Student Success

Time	Activity
8:30 – 9:00	Registration
9:00 – 9:30* Conference Center B Room 15 & 16	Opening and Welcoming Remarks Hue Nguyen, Assistant Commissioner, MDE Sia Her, Executive Director, Council on Asian Pacific Minnesotans
9:30 - 10:15* Conference Center B Room 15 & 16	Engaging Asian American Families for Student Success: What's the Situation, What's Working, and How Can "We" Do It Better? Dr. Zha Blong Xiong, University of Minnesota
10:15 - 11:10* Conference Center B Room 15 & 16	Panel Discussion Successful Family and Community Engagement Facilitator: Sia Her, Council on Asian Pacific Minnesotans Panelists: Sydney Chang, Osseo Public Schools Sam Ouk, Faribault Public Schools Halee Vang, Minneapolis Public Schools Dao Xiong, PACER Center
11:10 – 11:20	Break - Resource Tables Available
11:20 – 12:30 Conference Center A and Conference Center B Various Rooms	World Café Conference Center A Room 1 & 2 Karenni language discussion groups Room 3 & 4 Khmer language discussion groups Room 13 Lao language discussion groups Room 14 Hmong language discussion groups Conference Center B Room 15-16 English language discussion groups Room 18 Karen language discussion groups Room 20 Vietnamese language discussion groups
12:30 -1:00 Conference Center B Room 17	Buffet Lunch: Wung Lee Catering Resources Available: Visit Exhibitor Tables in Hallway
1:00 - 1:30* Conference Center B Room 15 & 16	Engaging Immigrant Families and Communities Dr. Tsewang Ngodup, Faculty Physician, Hennepin County Medical Center
1:40 – 2:30 Conference Center A and Conference Center B Various Rooms	Breakout Sessions Conference Center A Room 1 & 2 Supporting English Learners and Families – Barbara Al Nouri Room 3 & 4 Career Exploration – Chong Thao Room 13 Pre-Kindergarten to Kindergarten Transition – Nikole Logan Room 14 Mental Health and Asian Girls – Mitzi Heath and students Conference Center B Room 15 Bullying: What Parents Want to Know – Dao Xiong Room 16 Supporting Hmong Boys – Sydney Chang Room 18 Get Ready for Higher Education – Tenzin Nordon

Speakers

DR. ZHA BLONG XIONG is an Associate Professor in the Department of Family Social Science at the University of Minnesota. He is the first tenured Hmong professor at a large research university in the country.



Dr. Xiong was born in Laos and came to the United States in 1982 when he was 14 years old without any English. He put over 10,000 hours of studying to earn his college degrees: a B.A. degree from Winona State University in 1991, an M.A. degree in 1997 and a Ph.D. in 2000 in Family Social Science at the University of Minnesota. Dr. Xiong publishes widely on the Hmong and Southeast Asian people living in America. In addition to his teaching and publications, Dr. Xiong also serves on several organizational boards and advisory committees, including the University of Minnesota Senate, the Hmong National Development, the Hmong 18 Council, the Center for Hmong Studies, Noble Academy Charter School, and the *Journal of Southeast Asian American Education and Advancement*.

Dr. Tsewang Ngodup.

Faculty Physician, Department of Family Medicine, HCMC. Medical Director, Golden Living Center Chateau. Vice-Chair, Council on Asian Pacific Minnesotans. Former President, Tibetan American Foundation of Minnesota. Dr. Ngodup worked for Tibetan communities in India as a physician for over a decade and as consultant to the Department of Health, Central Tibetan Administration. Recipient of 2014 Teacher Award.



Panelists

Moderator



Sia Her is the Executive Director of the Council on Asian Pacific Minnesotans, a state agency that advises the Governor and the Legislature on issues of importance to the Asian Pacific community in Minnesota. She graduated from Como Park Sr. High in Saint Paul and holds a master's degree in public policy from the Hubert H. Humphrey Institute of Public Affairs and a bachelor's degree in political science from Macalester College.

Sia Her

Panelists



Sydney Chang is currently an Equity Specialist/Licensed School Counselor at Osseo Area School. She graduated with an M.S., School Counseling, as well as a B.S., Community Education and Policy from the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. Sydney is a first generation college graduate. She has over 16 years of experiences working in the K-12 school system as a Bilingual Specialist, Career Specialist, Cultural Liaison, and Equity Specialist/School Counselor. Sydney has served many leadership roles in the district advisory teams and committees. Her dedication to the Hmong community and to help every student succeed has won a Fulbright Scholar Study Abroad to Thailand and Laos (2004), JAG National award in 2009, Parent Leadership Award (2010), and Leaders of Today, Leaders of Tomorrow Award, and Most Outstanding Leadership Award (2014).

Sydney Chang



Sambath Ouk

Sambath his family are Cambodian refugees. They immigrated to Rochester MN in 1982. Sambath grew up in a large Cambodian community in Rochester. Most of his friends were Cambodians. School was hard because of the language and even more importantly cultural barriers. His parents tried to be as involved as they can be. However, money and earning a living wage made it very difficult for them to be a part of his education. He went to college with the help of his teachers. In 2003, he received a BA in French and Education. In 2005, he received an English as a Second Language teaching license and taught in different school districts for 5 years before becoming the English Learner Coordinator of Rochester Public Schools in 2010. He currently works as the EL Coordinator in the Faribault School District. One of his most important accomplishments has been to open Heritage Language schools in both Rochester and Faribault so that parents and students can be involved with each other's growth and integration in their local communities.



Halee Vang

Halee Vang graduated from the Minneapolis Public Schools' Aspiring Transformational Principal's Academy in Spring of 2014. Prior to serving in her current role as Principal of Hmong International Academy, she had worked as a teacher and teacher leader for the past 14 years in the Minneapolis Schools. Halee is a passionate equity leader who seeks to transform current educational practices in order to ensure equitable outcomes for all students regardless of race, class, gender or sexual orientation. Halee is a Ph.D. candidate in Organizational Leadership, Policy, and Development at the University of Minnesota. She obtained M.A. from the University of New York at New Paltz in Special Education with emphasis on migrant education and her B.A. from Hamline University in English with a minor in elementary education.

Dao Xiong, a parent advocate at PACER Center for 23 years, provides information and resources for Asian American families of children with or without a disability about their rights and responsibility for their child's learning through workshop, personal assistance and written materials. Dao came to the United States as a refugee 36 years ago and is a parent of 7 adult children from 27 to 36 years of age with extensive involvement in school setting. He has a daughter with a mild cognitive developmental delay and a son with a bipolar disorder. He also participates with many organizations as advisory role.



Dao Xiong



World Café

The World Café is a method through which strategic conversations can occur about “questions that matter” with a diverse group of people. There were several Cafés going simultaneously with tables that were inviting, with table clothes, large sheets of paper for doodling, markers, play dough and toys for participants. Each table had a Table Host assigned to it. [Visit the World Café website.](#)

Table hosts facilitated the discussions, elicited and recorded participants' responses to the question. After 15 minutes participants were invited to travel to a different table with different people and respond to a second question. Once participants contributed to discussions about both questions, the facilitator asked each table host to report to the large group the major themes that were shared. The note taker recorded all the responses and submitted them to the committee.



World Café: What makes you feel engaged?

The first round of conversations centered on the question, “What is working well in your schools, communities and families that makes you feel engaged? What are the successes?” As World Café participants discussed this question the following themes and components emerged:

1. A welcoming school environment
2. Trust
3. Communication
4. Parent/family representation

5. Collaboration
6. Interpreters and
7. Learning the skills needed to function effectively in the schools

In addition, participants indemnified individual and group action they believed contributed to the successes. And overarching success appears to be families' experiences with the school environment itself. Four components of what might be called a "welcoming school environment" include trust, communication, a parent/family representation, and collaboration.

Café participants expressed trust in the staff not just blaming the parents in the schools. Some viewed this due to teachers being "well intended" and understanding of their needs, although they did not believe being "well intended" didn't equate" to student progress. Other participants described the cultural celebrations as being valued.

Another key component of a successful school environment was said to be communication on the parts of both families and educators. Having bilingual staff was critical to the families, in order to have someone to communicate with and ask questions. Again, some participants viewed this as a problem, while other suggested it is a matter of differing communication styles and infrequency of communication.

The third component of the environment is parent/family representation. A few participants appreciated that more minority educators and even Asian "principals" were present in their child's school. Every participant said that the school environment should be welcoming.

Collaboration, the fourth component is clearly a function of the first three: trusting relationships, productive communication, and representation are necessary for a school environment to foster collaboration.

Café participants discussed the success of programs that increased their knowledge and skills. These types of programs were where families learned how the school system worked and benefited from understanding the in's and out's was mentioned. Transportation, food and child care were provided and "they made education fun". Hosting the workshops in English and the home language helped families overcome shyness. Afterschool family literacy programs were appreciated. The importance of the school reaching out to non-English speaking families and making them feel welcome in the school was critical for all English Learning (EL) families.



World Café: Solutions to challenges

The second round of conversations centered on the question, “What are concrete ways to get past the challenges and get to solutions?” As World Café participants discussed this question, the following themes emerged:

1. Building trusting relationships,
2. Communication,
3. Representation in leadership and
4. Cultural awareness.

Café participants expressed a vested interest in their desire for college and career readiness for their student/s as a means of the solution to many of community concerns. “Intentionally connecting students to higher education institutions/job training” would provide opportunities for their student. This could be accomplished by school staff inviting parents to attend sessions on what courses their student should take to prepare them for post-secondary education, visiting colleges and having from their community share their experiences were found valuable.

Summary

World Café participants drew on their personal knowledge and experience, spoke honestly with each other, and opened their hearts and minds to consider the experiences and opinions of others. In doing so, it became evident that there are some practices that are working to assist Asian families in supporting their students’ education. That is not to negate the many ongoing challenges which the café participants provided possible solutions for. If these solutions were to be adopted by districts, engagement would increase and would be characterized by:

1. A district priority to support family involvement.
2. A welcoming school environment that offers trust, communication, representation, and collaboration.
3. Sufficient resources to ensure family access to educators, school events, and assistance.
4. New opportunities for information (e.g., parent nights for parents on how to support their student, sessions on how the school system and how to maneuver it, parent’s sharing their stories, preparing for college/career workshops).
5. Improved student performance.



Information Sessions

College/Career Readiness/Exploration, Presenter: Chong Thao

Career Development is a process. It needs to be implemented at an early age and driven by a step by step process. This session will provide some needed baseline information that will assist a parent/guardian with their child's career and academic advancement.

How can parents/communities/schools support young Hmong boys' academics? Presenter, Sydney Chang and Peng Yang

Exciting and ongoing research into the brains of boys and girls is showing us that boys and girls are different from the day they are born. This workshop will explore boys and how their brains develop and ways that parents and teachers can understand their needs and be able to support them as they prepare for and enter school.

Get Ready for Higher Education, Presenter, Tensin Nordon

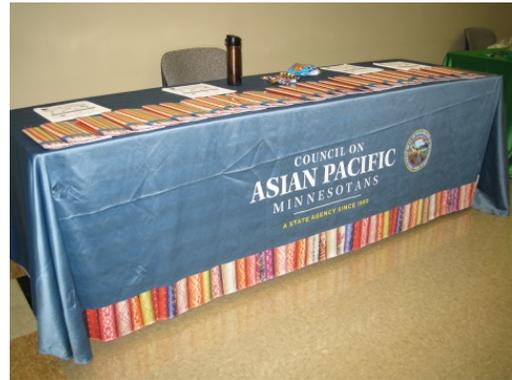
Exploring post-secondary options can be daunting. This session will inform participants what they can do to prepare their student/s for post-secondary education and provide questions for them to ask when considering their options.

Mental Health and Asian Girls, Presenters, Mitzi Heath and students

Growing-up in the United States Asian girls can face special challenges. This session will provide insight into those challenges and information along with resources on how to support young Asian girls.

Resource Tables

1. [Council on Asian Pacific Minnesotans](#): Angelina Nguyen
2. [Office of Higher Education-Get Ready](#): Chang Vang
3. [PACER](#): Dao Xiong
4. [St. Paul Public Library](#): Phasoua Vang
5. [Special Education, Dispute Resolution](#): Marikay Litza
6. [MNSure](#): Soua Her
7. [ARC](#): Mai Chang
8. [St Paul Promise Neighborhood](#): Chong Lee
9. [Minnesota Department of Education](#): Wayne Kuklinski
10. [Hmong American Partnership](#)



School districts that were represented

Districts
Apple Valley Public School District
Bloomington Public School District
Brooklyn Center Public School District
Brooklyn Park Public School District
South Washington County Public School District
Faribault Public School District
Forest Lake Public School District
Mankato Public School District
Marshall Public School District
Minneapolis Public School District
Osseo Public School District
Robbinsdale Public School District
Roseville Public School District
Saint Paul Public School District
Wayzata Public School District

- 72 total
- Approximately 20 staff and committee members
- Majority Hmong, but Vietnamese, Karen, Cambodian, Lao communities represented
- 11 resource tables



Event Volunteers



Evaluation

General: (Disagree = 1, Agree = 5)

Category	1	2	3	4	5
I learned new things	1	1	2	6	5
I'm inspired to be more engaged as a stakeholder.	1	0	1	6	7
I'm glad I attended the forum	0	0	0	5	10



Comments are quoted from the evaluations.

What did you like about this conference?

- Hearing from community leaders about their experiences.
- So amazing with so many resources and opportunity for me to take back to my community as an interpreter (Cambodian). I am so appreciative of information I received.
- Network with others working towards this goal.
- Lots of opportunities for student /parent voice.
- Great small discussions.
- Bringing all Asian communities together. Unfortunately not enough representation from all Asian communities, mostly Hmong.
- I enjoyed the panel discussion – particularly hearing the personal narratives of the panelists.
- I liked hearing about this topic from different perspectives.
- Attending to see what was said.
- Life stories – individual perspectives within Asian community. Food. Showing of communities.
- Audience engagement was great.
- Different perspectives/voices from other ethnic groups.
- Questions and answers from audience and panel.
- Learn why we do well or not so good in education.

- The conference included personal and academic related issues, words etc. The two combined shows dedication, passionate needs to solve or find a solution to concerns and allows all to speak openly.



What did you learn at this conference that you will do?

- Give back to my community more. Outreach to other Asian communities. Outreach to other Asian communities.
- Take with I learned today and connect with my community.
- Re-examine the data from my district.
- Network better, more confident working with students.
- I learned that my ethnic identity affects me in more ways than I thought before. Therefore, I will strive to preserve my cultural heritage through giving back to the community when I grow up.
- I will work closely with our parent coordinator to find ways to engage more parents in our schools and community.
- Enforce more involvement to engage parents in education.
- Diverse family needs – try to think more carefully when developing programing to meet needs.
- Have parents /students play essential role in parent meetings instead of just being invited to the meetings.
- The presentations from Dr. Blong and Dr. Xiong.
- Get involved more with your kid’s education and activities.
- The most important “thin” I learned or picked up on is to involve all by finding a common value to connect all bodies to be one or work towards.



What would you like to learn more about?

- Resources available from MDE for community organizations and parents.
- More info on legislative meeting regarding all the issue.
- Instead of meeting together to discuss, let's do something more proactive. Let's take some action.
- Where is /are the positive engagement + student successes happening and what is different in these schools?
 - It will be important for us to be mindful that counter stories are represented – example! The image of the little boy studying on a chair – may show a cramped environment, but also shows a great importance put towards education by that family even though there wasn't much study space for that young child.
 - The food was fantastic! Thank you so much for the meal.
- Supporting English learners.
- What the next steps are?
- I would like to learn more about how I can get involved in communities that I am not currently a part of. A lot of great organizations are out there and I would like to help!
- I would like to learn more about issues facing Hmong students and parents.
- How the department can be more involved with parents?
- Programing – what the community thinks about our programing and ways we can better meet needs.
- More Asian cultural information with engaging families.
- Issues within different Asian community.
- I wish I could learn or know this early. Hope this message gets to the young couples that have very young kids.
- I would like to learn more about how to engage parents especially those new to our country.
- I would like to teach more about how to engage parents especially those new our country.



Other:

- Allow more time for Q & A please.
- Thank you for allowing parents to come to these important events.
- More time for Q &A. Staying on time and starting on time.
- Would like more time for audience engagement, share stories.
- Need more of these engaging Asian families for student success.
- It is a very helpful conference!
- How can I present /use the materials, information or guidance given/presented today at my school?

