

Virtual Town Hall Meeting: Supporting the ESOL community during the pandemic

Notes: Saturday, May 9, 2020

Welcome!

Greg Wickersham, President of GATESOL: Introduction

Elizabeth Webb, Secretary of GATESOL: Moderator

Went over meeting norms, showed slide of GATESOL Executive Board members

Guest Panel Introduction:

Nury Castillo Crawford: GCPS Director of Academic Support

- Goal is to empower parents, engage in family of schools, taking on the role in Gwinnett schools, as a former EL, she shares from her own experiences
- GCPS Community-based Mentoring Program – identify students who would like to participate as well as network with community-based agencies and organizations to recruit adults who want to serve as mentors. Another role involves providing support for other district programs and initiatives that are designed to promote academic rigor for identified students.
- <https://publish.gwinnett.k12.ga.us/gcps/home/public/about/school-improvement/content/leadership-and-operations/mentoring/community-based-mentoring>

Leticia Benavides: Parent Liaison Rome City Schools

- 5 year liaison with Hispanic community - help enroll children in school, provide resources for families in homework, meetings, etc.
- Any needs that families may have can contact and receive support

Michele Fierro: Post Release Coordinator for El Refugio Ministries; <https://www.elfugiostewart.org/>

- Current Role as coordinator is to provide immigrant families with local and nationwide resources they encounter during immigration and detention
- El Refugio opened a hospitality house offering meals and lodging at no cost. Offer friendship and support to the loved ones of immigrants and asylum seekers who are detained.

Julie Goldberg: EL Success Coordinator Dekalb County Schools

- Role in county and local level in 2 high schools
- Goal is to support refugee and immigrant families, support students with individual and group counseling to be successful in graduation and beyond

Focus Question: What are the most pressing needs that you are seeing? How are you meeting those needs?

Nury:

Challenges: communication and resources available for our families, translation for these resources, lack of wifi, food. We worry as educators about inequities, children losing a lot of learning, the gaps that students may have had will increase

Solutions:

Food: For 68 schools, buses are going on their route and delivering food. The county has connected with different community organizations to meet the needs of families for food, clothing, etc.

Communication: Have an open communication with parents so that resources can be provided and communicated well. Has used What's App to communicate with families.

Resources: Latin Community Fund – map in English and Spanish – has every resource in the state of GA and has info in Spanish and English

Technology: Chromebooks and internet devices checked out to students

Digital Learning Updates – There have been 4 digital learning updates for the community. This is a newsletter with information, teacher hours, how to access technology, how to pick up items from schools, how grades work, graduation as a district, kindergarten registration - all compiled into one document for parents. Educators have jumped on board trying to translate all this information within a week in several languages to give access to this information for parents to support their kids.

Michelle:

Challenges: Families having trouble accessing food and school materials, Issues with technology

Solutions:

Being multilingual and multicultural in their approach of helping families, being present

Hotline: Created for any help needed – includes anything from food, help paying utilities, how to fill out a form for unemployment or immigration, etc. Frontline volunteers managing the hotline get information and pass it along to a communications person who continues that contact

Direct Mail: Sent via mail family care packages tailored for their area code – any basic essentials, art supplies, school supplies, support for immigration processes. All customized information based on their area (multiple states) and needs

Being collaborators: Be there for families in immigration detention facilities, helping children who are often asked to translate for their families, help with paperwork

Support of the Community: able to buy gift cards to be able to buy groceries, connect with school districts to get food. Embrace local and national help

Julie:

Challenges: communication with parents and students, access to resources. Families are going through so many stressors – trying to get students to sign on but this is not the top priority. It is hard to establish connections because we aren't in the building to see our students

Example: A family asked if it was okay to give their information to a local organization. They were very anxious about doing this even though they really needed help. Consider moments like those when it is okay to share information.

Solutions:

Teachers: Relying on teachers to be the first alert - to check in or communicate concerns about students so that counselors can take hold and try to find out how to support students.

Example: heard from teacher, got in touch with student, student didn't know to do work. Found out mother was ill with Covid-19, every person in the family was quarantined separately, dad unemployed for 2 weeks. This is where establishing a connection is so important.

Phone calls: Reach out to parents by phone – what do you need? How can we help?

3 way calls – when calling organizations or on behalf of someone to facilitate resources, invite them too whether it be parents or students – it builds advocacy, all parties know information and it's an example of how to navigate that situation

Community Group Townhalls: people getting together to share resources. It is a way to stay connected with these organizations.

Local organizations: use for help in providing emergency rent, advice in an unemployment application follow up, etc.

Maintain relationships!!! Use what you built before. Use that foundation. Ask these questions: How are you? What is your barrier? What can I do to support?

Question: How do you establish this trust with families?

- Comes from working at building that relationship. Really the teachers build it in their classrooms and I rely on my colleagues to refer students. Then I go into the classroom and students see me (works at 2 HS). Because the teacher is trusted and I am seen throughout the school, it is easy to work with students on a daily basis

Leticia:

Challenges: Parents, especially in the Hispanic community, generally have a lack of knowledge of technology. It is hard to help their children. Have limited access to wifi, no computers

Solutions:

Connect with free or \$10 internet

Food – stores in the area, names and phone numbers of local stores, the stores will create a basket for families to pick up

Constant and consistent communication: Unfortunately cannot do home visits like usual, relying on technology families do have like a cellphone. Thinking of ways around. Parents don't know how to send assignments, take a picture and send to me and I will send to teachers

Additional comment from participants:

“Pictures are great documents for student's work! Pictures do not require knowledge of a language!”
“It allows the person or student to provide their own interpretation of the photo.”

Try to help the best you can: meetings with parents on how to use the school LMS system, how to connect with teachers, coach them on how and what to do – how to send an email, how to set up wifi, basic technology skills – go over step by step. Contact teachers for help and have them contact home as well. Could do a 3-way call and translate. Parents can also call by phone to ask questions, collaborate with teachers this way.

Questions and discussion from participants, panelists, and GATESOL members

Q1: How many deportations have occurred with your students and families in Fall and Spring?

- We have experienced a higher percentage of deportation and an accelerated deportation process.
- According to Athens Immigrant Rights Coalition, in the Clarke County School district there were 65 deportations between August and March. We thought that they had stopped and another one occurred recently.

Q2: Why is this happening?

- It is happening exponentially at an alarming rate with pandemic and happening every single day, world wide
- We were seeing releases mid-April, seeing less and less deportation. There was going to be a mass release this Spring but it ended up being a mass deportation instead
- Organizations have seen an increased volume of calls from families after this

Q3: What is the reason people are being deported? Is it that they are in the country illegally, or have they committed crimes?

- The short answer is that deportation is related to a person's immigration status. Immigration courts are separate from criminal courts. A criminal offense might be a factor in the immigration judge's decision, but in general, most people deported have not committed a crime or have committed only a very minor offense, such as a traffic offense. It also varies by region. The immigration courts in Georgia are notoriously strict compared to other courts throughout the country. I am not aware of a list of people who have been deported. ICE has a locator website where you can find out if someone is detained and which detention center they are in.
- <https://locator.ice.gov/odls/#/index>

Q4: How would you advise educators on how to meet the needs of families that a member has been deported? What are the needs above the norm?

The Situation

- It is unfortunate and adds stress to the family structure. One of the biggest stressors for children is having a family member removed
- Remember the toll this takes on families, students had to drop out and go to work to support income the family had when member was removed

Example: A heart-breaking story of a family with 4 children whose mom just died of cancer. The students were performing low academically. Once contacted it was about being a shoulder to cry on and connecting with home therapists

Example situation: A student over 18 is pending deportation, had to drop out of school because worried of safety in getting to and from school or staying in one place too long.

The Needs

- This causes a need for mental health, education and developmental resources, regional and local support
- Will need support from counselors to help alleviate. Children of all ages are not able to calibrate these emotions; we have to support them. Our children are asking - What will happen next? Am I going to be taken away? Other members of my family?
- A call to all educators - Help families develop skills; these families are resilient. We've so many strive beyond the challenges to succeed in their academic performance and graduate. We are tasked with what's doing what's best for our children
- Use all the resources Georgia has to offer

The Solutions

- Many families do have these issues. We can help by comforting and helping them – home visits, virtual meetings, working together with the whole family
- Act of being present is so powerful in supporting our families
- We have to think about trauma informed care and teaching. Each journey is different and children have different experiences and levels of trauma
- Look at it with cultural sensitivity, establish relationships, being intentional in listening to what's happening
- Be a good role model for our communities
- Remember, these are children, - have heart, these kids have feelings like our own families
- Help people build that bridge and develop empathy, helping understand these are children
- Support families in jail, working parents, walking alongside our parents

Q5: What resource do you recommend for families facing job loss and financial insecurities?

- Latino Community Fund - <https://lcfgeorgia.org> - to access bilingual services and information, map of nearby resources
- Georgia - Food Pantries: www.foodpantries.org/st/georgia OR 888-976-2232 text "findfood" or "comida" to identify the three closest food pantries. It will text you and ask you for a zipcode
- Catholic Charities Atlanta - <https://catholiccharitiesatlanta.org/> Free Immigration Services
- Asian Americans Advancing Justice - <https://www.advancingjustice-aajc.org/>
- Immigrant Hope Atlanta - <https://www.immigranthope.org/location/atlanta-georgia/>
- Inspiritus - formerly Lutheran Services - <https://weinspirit.org/>
- GA asylum network 404-572-2607
- pro bono partnership Atlanta 404-618-0900 for nonprofits
- Georgia Hope Therapies- <https://gahope.org/>
- Athens Immigrant Rights Coalition - <https://www.athensimmigrantrights.org/>
- Georgia Justice Project <https://www.gjp.org/> - provides loads of support migrant families who need legal services and other support for their families
- Latin American Association – take anyone
- Ser Familia – <https://serfamilia.org/referrals/>
- Local newspaper, local news channel, sites often have embedded local resources
- calling 211 – United Way - <https://www.unitedwayatlanta.org/need-help/> (also an app), also has local funded agencies - <https://www.unitedwayatlanta.org/for-non-profits/>, <https://www.unitedwayatlanta.org/agency-partners/>
- Public library, websites, many offering free internet in parking lot
- El Refugio - <https://www.erefugiostewart.org/> If requested, translators happy to help
- International Rescue Committee - <https://www.rescue.org/>
- Local churches – gathered donations, many churches hold food and clothing for families
- GoFundMe, Facebook, DonorsChoose.org and other fundraising sites
- Local county organizations like <https://www.cherokeefocus.org/>

Q6: How can we encourage our community and school boards to monitor, be aware, and be more educated about the deportation process of our shared families?

- Tell administrators this is happening
- Where possible, locate numbers and facts.
- Gather stories – It is important to hear about these detentions for families all over the globe so that families can get help
- Focus on the loss of family structure – increased stressors means our students may be acting out and have low academic performance. Losing a loved one by removal destroys family cohesion, the children’s support systems are out of place and our children are more aware of what’s going on because they are at home
- We must have this in mind – we can create awareness and understanding of feelings and needs
- Consider also cultural clashes in home versus school – 2 very different cultures – that itself can create issues. For example, parents may not want to be intrusive and disturb teachers. How can we change this systemically?

- Know and consider that families may not engage – literacy, technological, culturally reserved regarding being intrusive
- As districts, we need to think about how to relieve these stressors during summer – no activities, no camps like usual.
- Think ahead about how to formulate a plan to help students this Fall too
- Look out for support in community for fundraising, establish business partners

Q7: Is the US DoE working on any plans with funding from ESSA to support students? Plans for federal support in summer?

- CARES Act will provide funding to districts. Districts experiencing very large revenue shortage (14%)
- Local district ideas:
 - o Gwinnett county – strategizing on how to provide summer resources, virtual summer classes
 - o DeKalb – online support for ESOL students, especially those transitioning from newcomer center to high school, community groups (IRC) virtual high school summer camp as they shift online
 - o Rome – continuing food distribution
 - o Cobb – summer Lit camp, 2 weeks, ESOL coteachers to ensure students can access content
 - o Cherokee – summer school virtual classes with ESOL coteachers, partnerships with Must Ministries to ensure food delivery to families

Q8: How do we support our families in the summer? What would you say is of paramount importance as working to strive to meet the needs of our families for May, June, July?

- ELs also identified as SpEd are potentially eligible for ESY (extended school year) funds.
- Take care of yourself, find your tribe, we cannot support our families without our own needs and family support being met
- This will not be resolved soon – It’s not a sprint; be okay with not meeting your goals 100%.
- Find someone to cry with and vent with, find those friends through this challenging work
- Hispanic mentoring program (part of middle school REACH program). A guide on how to jump start your own Hispanic Mentoring program – will be available in fall, can reach out to Nury to get that info (nury.crawford@gcpsk12.org)
- Summer camps moved online, double-check students have devices (students can pick up or will be mailed). Offer rewards like pizza delivered to house. This adds self-esteem. Additional lessons on personal care and other life lessons. This is free for students.

Additional comment from participant: “Love the idea of food as work incentives for working on line during the summer. It answers a need!”

- Updating students and reaching out to families – summer jobs, opportunities through the school, everything for graduation and informing seniors what this might look like and how to celebrate with them

- So inspired by invested teachers = be present, be mindful, be aware, thank yourselves for pouring into the children in barriers beyond classroom walls!

Looking to the Future: This generation will be resilient!

Book information and resources: Nury Castillo Crawford is a published author and shares her experiences as an EL student through her writing.

3,585 Miles to be an American Girl and *Sofia & Vivi: Big Sister* are the two bilingual children's books. Sofia is also compare and contrast book like Peru/US.

Plant the Seeds Well...Expect Wonders and *Siembra la semilla...Cosecha maravillas* are the parent empowerment books. They contain information for parents on how to maneuver the system – steps on how to get the information you need like if you don't hear back from the teacher, how to politely ask an AP

If you're interested in any you can order via www.1010Publishing.com they are bilingual in English and Spanish. If you mention this presentation I will send you a little extra gift as a thank you.

Upcoming GATESOL conference - Dr. Jennifer Pendergrass, Conference Chair

The conference will be held on October 29th and 30th. It has been moved to a virtual platform and the registration fee has lowered. We will have an amazing keynote speaker, panelists, networking opportunities, exhibitors and educators speaking to their experiences.

The call for proposals is still open – we would love to have people speak to their experiences in engaging students!

For additional conference information: go to <http://gatesol.org/page-1863651>

Become a member of GATESOL! Greg Wickersham, GATESOL President

GATESOL membership - \$30 – Go to <http://gatesol.org/page-845251>

Benefits – part of professional community, grants for travel and classroom resources, awards, newsletter

Randomly chosen winners of books by author Nury Castillo Crawford: Shelly Vincent; Sandy Goodroe; Tung Hoang; Patsy Kraj

Closings: Thank you, be safe, and Happy Mother's Day!