

## Effective Communication with Diverse Families

Presented by Steve Zuber,  
Ombudsman  
Office of the Education Ombudsman  
Governor's Office

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### About the Presenter

Steve Zuber, M.Ed. is an Ombudsman in the Office of the Education Ombudsman, a public service agency within the Governor's Office. This office focuses on educating parents and students about the public school system, supporting parent partnerships in education, and resolving conflict between families and schools.

Steve's career includes 10 years as a classroom teacher in a public high school, and 20 years as a high school counselor. Steve then became Education Liaison for Casey Family Programs, a private foster care agency. Steve became an Ombudsman in 2008.

Steve also volunteered on the Yakima County Community Accountability Board for several years.

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### What is The Office of the Education Ombudsman?

- The Office of the Education Ombudsman (OEO) is an agency within the Governor's Office created by the Washington State Legislature in 2006. It is not part of the public education system.
- Our mission is to promote equity in education and the academic success of students attending elementary and secondary public schools in the state of Washington.

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## OEO Services

We Listen. We inform. We help solve problems.

OEO provides services to schools, families and students statewide.

- Informs families, students and others on how to understand and navigate the education system.
- Promotes school-family partnerships for student success.
- Helps resolve issues of concern between families and schools.
- Provides training workshops and presentations to build the capacity of schools and families to work together.
- Makes recommendations to public officials.

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## What do Education Ombudsman do?

- Ombudsman are trained problem-solvers who bring families and educators together to resolve issues focusing on the best interest of the student involved. They have extensive knowledge of the public education system, education laws, policies, conflict resolution techniques, and cultural competency.
- Ombudsman can make recommendations but do not have authority to force schools or school districts to take specific action, terminate school personnel, or remove elected officials from public office.
- Education Ombudsmen are impartial. They do not advocate for any particular individual. Education Ombudsmen advocate for fair and equitable processes that support student academic success.

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## OEO Materials

- Pamphlets:
  - How Does a School District Work
  - Bullying At School
  - A Voice for Everyone
  - Participate in your Child's Education
  - Make the Most of Parent-Teacher Conferences
  - Parent and Student Rights
  - Resolving Conflict with School
- All are available on DVD or on our Web Site
- All are available in multiple languages

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### OEO Manuals

- How to be an Education Advocate
- Discipline in Public Schools
- Basic Education Rights and Opportunities
- Protecting the Education Rights of Students with Disabilities

▪ All are on our DVD and our Web Site and are available in Spanish.

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### How is OEO structured?

- OEO has a Director, 4 Education Ombudsmen, 1 Information and Referral Specialist and 1 Communications Manager. OEO sponsors volunteer service Internships.
- The OEO office is open from 8:00 AM to 5:00 PM Monday – Friday.  
Office of the Education Ombudsman  
Northgate Executive Center 1, Bldg B  
155 NE 100<sup>th</sup> Street, Suite 210  
Seattle, WA 98125-8012

▪ Toll Free number: 1-866-297-2597

▪ Website: [www.waparentslearn.org](http://www.waparentslearn.org)

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### Effective Communication As Practiced by OEO

- The OEO has identified five steps to effective communication and goal achievement with all families.
- Accessible Communication
- Being aware of perspective and skills of the Parent
- Being aware of perspective and skills of the Youth

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▪ OEO definition of goal setting

▪ OEO view of the Methodology utilized in problem solving

\*\*\* Cultural factors determine how each component is realized.

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### Accessible Communication

OEO instituted the following:

- Use of Language Line
- Use of Interpreters
- Translate information materials that are not likely to change. Review material and simplify the language.
  - Forms to sign
  - Laws
  - Brochures and Manuals
  - Contact information
  - Resources in community/ referrals to community
- Signs in reception area and office
- Designation of primary contact person, phone, and office hours

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### Perspective and Skill of the Parent

- Old View -- Part of the problem
- Current view -- Part of the solution
- Basic Premises
  - All families have hopes and dreams for their children.
  - All families have strengths.
  - All families can contribute to a solution.
  - Partnership with the family leads to family empowerment.

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Partnership effective if:

- Parents feels confident that they have the ability to help.
- Parents feel invited and comfortable with the staff.
- Parents have clear definition of their role and responsibility, which is based on their cultural identity.
- Parents have clear explanation of the issue/problem.
- Parents are listened to.
- Parents contribute to and are part of the solution.

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### Perspective and Skill of the Youth

- Youth is seen not a solitary object, separate from all others. Not independent, but interdependent.
- Youth is seen as a member of a community that includes family, schools and available resources and programs.
- Youth is seen as not a subject of the process but as a contributor to the process.

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### How OEO approaches Goal-Setting

- How do we define the goal of our work.

Solve a paperwork necessity?  
Clear one more case off the book?

Versus

Goals that are achievable.  
Goals that offer a chance for a permanent solution.  
Goals that offer a learning opportunity for the youth and for the family.  
Goals that lead to no repeat.

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### How OEO conducts the Process

- The process is one of guidance, encouragement, support.
  - ❖ Some direction is provided by policy/procedure, by RCW, or by data entry requirements.
  - ❖ Process is seen as a joint venture, involving youth and family and school.
  - ❖ Listening is a key element.
  - ❖ Allowing all to contribute in the process of seeking a solution or ending.
  - ❖ Each party has a responsibility and a role.
  - ❖ Each party signs the agreement.

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### How was OEO able to achieve these capabilities?

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1. Time was provided for trainings
  - Cultural competence
  - Family as partner
  - Conflict resolution
2. Financial resources were available
  - for training costs
  - for printing costs
  - for Language Line costs

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- **3. School and agency forums were held**
  - Learn all sides of issues
  - Able to share OEO objectives, processes, and materials
  - Time and resources to allow for forums
  
- **4. Community forums**
  - Learn community issues
  - Able to share OEO objectives, processes, and materials
  - Time and resources to allow for forums

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### What is Cultural Competence?

- To be culturally competent does not mean that you have to be an authority in the values and beliefs of every culture. What it means is that you hold a deep respect for cultural differences and are eager to learn and willing to accept that there are many ways of viewing the world.

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### The Cultural Iceberg

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 **What is cultural competence?**

**Three Stages of Cultural Competence**

- Awareness
- Personal Reflection
- Knowledge and Skills

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**The Role of Adult Relationships with Latino Youth**

Adapted from  
Michael E. Woolley, Ph.D.  
The Prevention Researcher, Volume 163 (3)  
September, 2009  
Pages 9 -12

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- 1. "Social interactions are even more important and influential for students from non-dominant race or ethnicity groups."
- 2. "Research has shown supportive adults as effective in reducing achievement gaps" among youth of color. This is called Social Capital.
- 3. "It is not just how adults in the lives of youth interact with those youth, but also how those adults interact with each other."

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### Traditional Latino Family Values

- **Familismo** – strong family ties, individual family members place family needs above their own. Source of social capital.
- **Respeto** – Youth raised to value interpersonal relationships, respect for elders and the roles they serve. “Research shows when school staff show respect for Latino parents, parent involvement increases, which leads to improved school performance. Mutual respect between all adults creates social capital for youth.”

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- **Educacion** -- “Non-academic aspects of education are considered just as important as academic education. Parents at center of educacion, while school is at center of education. Parents need and want to be part of the educacion process.”

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### Implications

- 1. “Take time and effort to establish the kind of relationship in which social capital can be provided.”
- 2. “Communicate positive expectations – in a context of a future that is attractive to the youth.”
- 3. “Put on the press – pointing out the importance of success and to work hard”

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Discussion

What works for you?

What will not work for you?

If you can make it work, what are the payoffs?

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Thank you.

For questions, materials, resources,  
please contact me at

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206.729.3214/ 1-866-297-2597

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