



Success Indicator CC07: The school building(s) has/have a clearly designated visitor entrance (including directional signs, if necessary, provided in multiple languages). (5866)

Overview: Multilingual visitor entrance signs serve two broad functions, establishing the school as a community building and promoting safety. First, a multilingual visitor entrance sign helps make the school seem more welcoming to all students and families and could facilitate parental and community involvement by making the process of visiting more accessible. Second, a multilingual sign creates a safer school by helping ensure that the school's visitor management system functions effectively for all visitors.

Questions: How can multilingual visitor entrance signs contribute to parental involvement and school culture? Why are visitor management systems crucial for promoting school safety? How does a multilingual visitor entrance correspond with a successful visitor management system?

How can multilingual visitor entrance signs contribute to parental involvement?

Parental involvement has a positive influence on a student's academic achievement (Fan & Chen, 2001). "Parents who are more involved in school activities are more likely to have children who are performing well in school. Parental involvement in school activities is also highly related to a teacher's assessment of whether the child was performing to his or her ability" (Stevenson & Baker, 1987, p. 1353). Parental involvement in school related activities, like attending parent-teacher conferences, attending PTA meetings, volunteering in the classroom or at school events, and dropping off and picking up their child up from school, necessitates the parent having to enter the school premises. As security requirements have altered where and how schools permit individuals to enter (e.g. schools use side entries rather than front, or an intercom is used to screen visitors), what had once been a rather straightforward process has become increasingly more complicated. To avoid frustrating or discouraging parents, particularly parents who speak a language other than English, schools must ensure that the schools visiting procedures are clearly presented and understandable.

Having a clearly designated entrance and directions for entry provided in languages spoken by families is an important first step. According to Delgado-Gaitan (2004), when schools perform a series of small acts to show English learners and their families that their native languages are appreciated, the students and parents respond positively. Simply providing signage at the visitor entrance in multiple languages reflective of the diversity of the school community can make students feel welcomed and can encourage parents to become more active in their child's education.

When they possess fewer of the education skills required to participate in their children's schools in traditional ways, parents operate at a disadvantage. But as they learn to understand how the schools work, they can get involved. Instead of operating on the assumption that parental absences translate to not caring, educators need to focus on ways to draw parents into the schools. If we make explicit the multiple ways we value the language,



culture, knowledge, and expertise of the parents in our communities, parents will participate more readily. (Delgado-Gaitan, 2004, p. 61)

Thus, more than simply helping parents get inside the building, a multilingual visitor entrance can help make students and their families feel like a part of the school community. According to Gitlin, Buendía, Crosland, & Doumbia (2003) immigrant families feel welcomed when their cultures are represented at the school.

For families to become active participants in the life of the school, they must first feel welcomed, valued, and connected to each other, to school staff, and to what their children are doing in school. To foster this feeling of welcome, teachers and school faculties can [...] hang parent-friendly signs that direct visitors to the main office [and] post “welcome” signs in every language that the students’ families speak near the main entrance. (Padak & Rasinski, 2010, p. 296)

When the visitor entrance designation is written in languages in addition to English, it sends an indirect message to both the English learners and their families as well as to English speaking students and their families that multiculturalism is valued and every student and parent makes up an integral part of the school community. Making the inclusion and representation of linguistic minority groups the norm in the school community can help make parents and students feel more comfortable approaching the school staff about various concerns or questions related to their schooling experiences, should the need arise (Cummins, Chow, & Schecter, 2006).

Why are visitor management systems crucial for promoting school safety? How does a multilingual visitor entrance correspond with a successful visitor management system?

In any school setting, it is of the utmost importance that all students and school personnel are safe. A properly functioning visitor management system promotes safety (Pendzick & Downs, 2002). Visitor management refers to the processing and tracking of incoming and outgoing visitors from a public or private building. A successful visitor management system within a school is one that keeps a detailed record of who each visitor is, when they enter and leave, why they are visiting, and where they are in the school at any given time.

The visitor entrance sign is an integral part of the visitor management system because it directs visitors where to enter the building. Problems may arise if visitors enter the building through the wrong door. Generally, schools are set up so that the visitors’ entrance is the closest entrance to the reception desk where visitors sign in. In order for a school to be most secure, visitors should sign in immediately so they are accounted for (Hudson, 1999). But if someone enters the building through an improper entrance, they may travel around the school for a few minutes before reaching the reception desk, which means the visitor was unaccounted for a few minutes. In a school setting, that is dangerous and can even lead to legal issues for the school should anything bad happen during those few minutes.

In order to better ensure that visitors know where the proper entrance is, signs should be posted in multiple languages. The school’s leadership team should come up with a list of the native languages spoken by the school’s English learners and their families, and all of these languages should be represented on the visitor entrance sign to maximize compliance with visiting procedures.

References

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