

#4 CREATE A SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT THAT IS WELCOMING TO LATINO FAMILIES

We cannot overemphasize how important it is to create a welcoming school. Here are some small, but important, suggestions for a school to make itself more welcoming:

- Include a broader range of religious imagery than that which might currently adorn the lobby, hallways, and walls, such as a picture of Our Lady of Guadalupe.
- Hire a front-office worker who is bilingual.
- Be sure that the front-office staff person is personable, someone who knows how to engage people and likes that part of her/his job.
- Create Spanish-language versions of all registration forms and information.
- Don't forget your online, digital presence: websites should include information in Spanish, including the marketing messages that have been prepared.
- At open houses with Latino families, consider serving foods of the culture along with the traditional refreshments like donuts and juice.
- Devise a system to follow up with every Latino parent who calls or stops by the school office to inquire about the school.
- Hang welcoming signs in Spanish on the school's bulletin board or on the school marquee.
- At a first meeting with a family, get to know them without jumping first to "bottom line" data and details. Discuss financial matters when asked.
- Be sure that the inclusive culture of the school is reflected in the composition of the school board and committees. Invite parents and local Latino community leaders to serve the school community in various capacities. Make sure that they have a genuine sense of ownership.

- Learn to say at least a few words and phrases in Spanish. Full command of the Spanish language is not necessary to begin connecting with the Latino culture, but it is helpful to be able to begin a conversation or offer a greeting in Spanish.

Learn a few Spanish words and phrases now! There are many websites and books which will help you, for example:

- Rocket Languages
- Essential Spanish Phrase Book for Teachers
- Ed2Go

Do your best to identify someone who can serve as an informal cultural mentor, on whom you can rely for candid feedback, suggestions, and advice as you get to know more Latino families and work to engage them in your school community.