

**Topic: Education**  
(Original plan developed by March 2009 U.S. Cultural Orientation Professional Development Workshop participants in San Diego, CA, and further developed by the Cultural Orientation Resource Center)

**Activity: Navigating the U.S. Public School System**

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<b>Objectives</b>	Participants will become knowledgeable of three or more mechanisms of parent-teacher relations and communications that are customary in U.S. schools.
<b>Lesson Time</b>	3-5 sessions
<b>Materials</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Copies of report cards</li><li>• Grade scales</li><li>• Academic calendar year</li><li>• Attendance sheets</li><li>• Other materials, as relevant in local context (information sheets about schools or community resources, etc.)</li></ul>
<b>Discussion Questions</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Grades and report cards</li><li>• School calendar and attendance</li><li>• School or community resources (tutors, homework clubs, counselors, etc.)</li><li>• Similarities and differences between parent-teacher interaction in participants' home country and in the U.S.</li><li>• Role of teachers and parents regarding discipline</li></ul>
<b>Practice</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. In lecture and Q&amp;A format, show and explain the materials listed above, explain various elements of parent-teacher roles in the U.S., and tell participants about available resources to help with school.</li><li>2. Create a mock classroom which allows parents to familiarize themselves with the school environment.</li><li>3. Have participants role play different situations regarding parent-teacher communication.</li><li>4. Develop case studies about parent-teacher communication, and/or parent-teacher involvement in discipline. Have participants discuss the case studies in small groups.</li><li>5. Bring the large group together and encourage parents to share discussions from their small groups.</li></ol>
<b>Cultural Notes</b>	<p>Cultures often have very different views on parent-teacher interaction and roles than those held by school personnel in the U.S. You will mostly likely find it appropriate to cover these issues not only in class but also with each family directly.</p> <p>In addition, many cultures have different views about discipline procedures and appropriate behavior management. Rather than discussing the “rights” and “wrongs” of</p>

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various practices, it is recommended that you keep the focus on what is legal and considered acceptable in U.S. schools. You may also find it necessary or appropriate to offer participants alternatives to their customary practices of discipline. For additional information and relevant materials on this, refer to the Bridging Refugee Youth and Children's Services Web site ([www.brycs.org](http://www.brycs.org)), including *Raising Children in a New Country: An Illustrated Handbook* (<http://www.brycs.org/documents/RaisingChildren-Handbook.pdf>).

#### Evaluation

1. Ask for feedback from the participants (informally or through a questionnaire) after the sessions have concluded.
2. Conduct an informal survey of teachers who have refugee students to see if communication with parents has improved.

#### Variations

1. Invite a teacher in as a guest speaker for a question-and-answer session.
2. Take a field trip to a local school.