Building Bridges not Barriers:
Inviting Chuukese Family Involvement in Hawaii Schools

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Abstract

We investigated aspects of family involvement in education specific to Chuukese immigrants from the Federated States of Micronesia (FSM) in Hawaii schools. Examination of family involvement research indicated that traditional forms of parental involvement do not apply to many Pacific Islanders. We interviewed nine students and four parents in Hawaii about differences between schools in Hawaii and Chuuk, aspects of schooling in Hawaii that facilitated or interfered with adjustment and suggestions about ways to increase Chuukese family involvement in their children’s education. Respondents described many differences between schools in Hawaii and Chuuk, including availability of instructional materials, different expectations for teachers and students, lack of English language instruction in Chuuk, and variable reading background or preparation. Students and parents described barriers to adjustment to Hawaii schools, including limited English proficiency, peer pressure, teachers’ negative expectations or prejudice about Micronesian students, and ethnic conflicts. They made suggestions to facilitate involvement, including providing more opportunities for sports clubs for Micronesian students, opportunities for Micronesian students to share about their culture with students from other ethnic groups, and providing translators at parent-teacher meetings.