



SESSION 6: Education

OBJECTIVES

1. To give both adults and school-age clients an overview of the U.S. educational system.
2. To give students an understanding of U.S. school environment and teacher expectations.
3. To give parents an understanding of their responsibilities in relation to their children's education.

WHAT YOU WILL NEED:

Flip chart
Markers
Example Report Card
"Somali Bantu Resettlement: Background Information" (attachment 17)
Copies of "A Teacher's Guide to Religion in the Public Schools" (attachment 18)
Copies of "A Parent's Guide to Religion in the Public Schools" (attachment 19)
"Classroom Simulation" (attachment 20)
You Can Talk to Your Child's School video (optional)
You Can Help Your Child in School video (optional)

HOW TO DO IT

NOTE to CO Facilitator

Include children as participants in this session. Discuss with your clients' school the possibility of arranging a mentorship program for Somali Bantu students, with classmates, community members or teachers acting as mentors. Also discuss the possibility of having a Somali Bantu community member acting as a liaison in the school for Somali Bantu students. Distribute copies of "Somali Bantu Resettlement: Background Information" (attachment 17) to the teacher, as well as "A Teacher's Guide to Religion in the Public Schools" (attachment 18) and a list of the resources included in "Resources: Session 6: Education."

DISCUSSION

- Discuss, using the following questions:
What are schools like in Somalia/Kenya?
Do students/parents have a lot of interaction with the schoolteacher?
What subjects are taught in Somalia/Kenya?
Do boys and girls attend school in Somalia/Kenya?
Do you place a high value on education?
What do you know about education in the United States?

TYPES OF SCHOOLS

- Give clients a copy of “A Guide to your Children’s School”
- Explain that public education is free from kindergarten to twelfth grade, although parents must pay for school supplies, lunch, school trips, and other incidental costs.

Review some of the different kinds of schools in the United States:

Pre-school (ages 3 to 4, optional)

Kindergarten (age 5)

Elementary School (age 6 to 11)

Middle School (age 12 to 13)

High School (age 14 to 17)

(Age categories are estimations; they will vary from district to district). Some schools also offer before and after school programs, and summer school.

GED Classes: In many communities there are classes to help adults study for the General Education Development (GED) test. A GED certificate acts as a high school diploma.

College/University: Students may continue to study after graduating from high school. There are both private and public colleges and universities in the United States, and students may apply for scholarships and loans to help pay for tuition.

ENROLLMENT

- Explain that your clients will attend a meeting at the school to enroll their children. School administration will record information about the clients and the children.
- Explain that all children entering U.S. schools must have a physical examination and certain immunizations. It is important that parents retain vaccination documentation and other health records.

TRANSPORTATION

- Explain to your clients that children who live close to their school usually walk to school. Children that do not live within walking distance generally ride a bus or take public transportation.

SCHOOL DAY/SCHOOL YEAR

- Explain that school often begins in late August or early September, and ends in early June. The school day is usually between five and a half and seven hours long. Schools usually break for approximately two weeks in winter, and students will also have national holidays off.

WHAT TEACHERS EXPECT OF THEIR STUDENTS

- Discuss possible cultural differences between schools in Somalia and Kenya and schools in the United States. Education in the United States places a lot of emphasis on problem solving, whereas many countries place more emphasis on rote learning. Identify some other possible differences.

- Explain that there may be hundreds or even thousands of students in a school. School may seem overwhelming to a new student. Middle school and high school may seem especially chaotic, where halls are crowded and loud, bells ring on and off, and students shift to a new classroom at the end of every class period. However, every student has a set schedule, and a place to be during each period of the day, and your school-age clients will soon learn their schedule. Explain that bells usually signal a move from one period, or classroom, to another. Also discuss the following guidelines that apply at most schools:

Be on time: It is very important to arrive at school on time. If a student is late, they may receive some sort of penalty. If there is an emergency, and a student is going to arrive late to school, the parent should call the school or send a note.

Raise your hand before you speak: Teachers in the United States generally expect students to raise their hands before they speak in a classroom setting.

Ask for permission before you leave the classroom: If a student wishes to leave the classroom during the class period, a teacher will usually expect the student to ask for permission. The student may need to take a hall pass from the classroom with them.

Complete your homework: A teacher may assign homework – this is an assignment that the student completes at home, and returns to the teacher on a certain day. It is important for a student to complete their homework, as it will affect their grade.

SCHOOL AND RELIGION

- Give clients a copy of “A Parent’s Guide to Religion” (attachment 19).
- Discuss religion in school. The first amendment of the U.S. Constitution gives everyone in the United States the right to practice their religion. Public schools are to protect the religious liberty rights of all students.

Clients’ children may pray in school, as long as they do not leave regularly scheduled classes to do so and are not disruptive. Girls are generally permitted to wear headscarves in school – if a school has a “no head coverings” policy, parents may request an exemption on grounds of conscience. Parents may also request that their children are excused from school for Muslim holidays, and schools will generally try to accommodate these requests.

If parents wish their children to follow a *halaal* (prepared according to Muslim dietary restrictions) diet at school, they may wish to speak with school faculty to determine if the school is able to provide *halaal* food. During the month of Ramadan students who are fasting may need signed permission from their parents to leave the cafeteria (Muslims fast during the month of Ramadan from sunrise to sunset).

In many schools, children change into a gym uniform in the locker room before gym class. Your school-age clients or their parents may feel uncomfortable with wearing shorts or changing in front of their classmates. Parents may wish to speak to school administration about having their children wear modest clothing during gym, and changing in a separate room. Parents may also wish to request that their children participate in less strenuous exercise during Ramadan.

PARENT INVOLVEMENT

- Explain to clients that parent involvement in their children’s education is strongly encouraged in the United States. Parent involvement results in higher grades and test scores, higher graduation rates, and greater enrollment in college and university.

Discuss ways for your clients to involve themselves in their children’s education. These ways may include:

Meet your child’s teacher: Either attend parent-teacher conferences at the school, or schedule your own meeting. If you do not speak English, have an interpreter accompany you. Have specific questions for the teacher. Let the teacher know about your child’s specific strengths and interests. Also, give the teacher your contact information.

Join the PTA or other parent group: Many schools have a Parent Teacher Association (PTA) or another group for parents – joining this group is an excellent way of staying actively involved in your child’s education.

Discuss your child’s school day and homework daily: When your children come home from school, ask them about their day. What did they learn? Ask them about any homework assignments.

Develop a consistent daily routine and time for studying and homework: Homework not only helps your child to learn, but it also affects their grade. Make sure that your child has the space and time to do their homework in the evening.

- Discuss report cards, using the sample report card. Students will receive report cards from their schools at regular intervals, two to four times per year. Schools may use the following grading system:

A (Excellent)

B (Good)

C (Average, Fair)

D (Poor, Pass)

F (Failure)

Some schools use a pass/fail system of grading. Children will receive a grade for each of their classes. Teachers may also provide other useful comments about a child’s progress in class.

It is important for clients to read report cards and to discuss the grades with their children, congratulating them for work well done, and offering help with the classes that they are not doing well in. If the clients see that their child is not doing well in a class, they should contact the teacher to discuss what you can do to assist your child with this subject.

- Simulate a classroom experience (attachment 20) (optional).

VIDEO

- Show the videos, *You Can Talk to Your Child’s School* and *You Can Help Your Child in School* (optional).