

Marathon County

**Marathon County Hmong Educational Needs Assessment Project
5 Groups Total**

**University of Wisconsin-Marathon County
February 7, 2002**

**Facilitator: Thomas Lee, Minority Affairs Director
Recorder: Debi McGregor, United Way of Marathon County
Participants=26 Total Students=23 Males=16 Females=7
Counselors=3 (older=26-30)**

Specific ages estimated as 19-25-age range-Post Secondary ages

**North Central Technical College
February 8, 2002**

**Facilitator & Recorder: Thomas Lee Minority Affairs Director
Participants=Hmong Adults-11 Total Males=1 Females=10
1 Male=40 yrs 10 Females=20-65 yrs
Under 20 Yrs=0 20-30 Yrs= 2 30-40 Yrs=5 40-55 Yrs=3 55-65
Yrs=1**

(Age determined by the best estimate of facilitator)

**Wausau East High School
February 12, 2002**

**Wausau West High School
February 14, 2002**

**Facilitator: Rita Straub, UWEX Family Living Agent
Recorder/Co-facilitator: Lynne Santangelo, Teacher
No translator necessary for high school students
Participants from Wausau East and West High Schools
9 East -9 West=18 Total Students
Males=7 Total 18 Yrs=4 17 Yrs=2 16 Yrs=1
Females=11 Total 18 Yrs=3 17 Yrs=1 16 Yrs=3 15 Yrs=4
Age self-reported by students**

Hmong Mothers Club

**Wausau Area Mutual Hmong Association
February 20, 2002**

**Facilitator and Recorder: Rita Straub, UWEX Family Living Agent
Co- Translators: Mor Yang & Pang Moua
Participants=16 Total Hmong Adults Male=1 Females=15
Male= 1 35 Yrs=1**

**Females=15 20-30 Yrs=5 30-40 Yrs=3 40-50 Yrs=4 50-60 Yrs=3
Estimated Age by translators, facilitator/recorder.**

QUESTIONS AND PARTICIPANT RESPONSES

1. Please think about your life experiences and how you learn best. How and where would you like to learn in your community?

Education

University of Wisconsin-Marathon County Students (UWMC)

- A setting that provides support and learning environment
- An environment that offers the field of studies
- A place that provides cultural sensitivity is important in learning setting
- An institution that pays special attention or offers special program is helpful in my learning
- Knowledgeable individuals in both mainstream and Hmong cultures to provide the right guidance and directions are helpful
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North Central Technical College Students (NTC)

- I can learn best at home.
- I like to learn at school where I can learn from others. When others ask questions,
- I can learn from the answers to their questions.
- I can learn best by having a good structure with levels to complete (level 1, than 2 and 3) or a book to follow.
- I like to know what to expect. Sometimes we have to read things like a magazine article and I get lost and confused when I don't know what to expect and what to prepare.
- It is good to have an agenda to follow and to know that when we finish step 1 or level 1, we go on to the next step.
- We need a clear agenda of what's expected for the day! Keep classes separate- English, math, and geography. It causes much confusion when you blend or mix classes.
- I would prefer a Hmong teacher for this level of education, but we need someone who speaks English for pronunciation and vocabulary.
- Sometimes need extra help. Individual help (tutor) at home, or someone to work with one student at a time would make things clearer.
- Audio or video resources that help with pronunciation to use outside the classroom.
- Teachers should correct mispronunciations immediately so we know or we will keep saying the wrong words.

Students-High School (HS)

- A fun way-teachers should have energy and enthusiasm.
- Need kind and gentle teachers.
- Weird teachers that know how to teach.

- Challenge younger students to learn more earlier in life.
- Balance a variety of teaching and learning.
- Seminars and conferences.
- Focus groups should be diverse to hear different sides of an issue.
- GOTTACA (organization) says in the future we will discriminate on the basis of knowledge not race.

Hmong Parents (H P)

- English as a second language (ESL) classes to continue for adult Hmong population.
- EIP program offered through Department of Public Instruction is good but no funding to attend.
- Learn Basic English but not too much at a time.
- English is very difficult to learn so some Hmong would like to learn to write in Hmong.
- A teacher is preferred over other forms of learning.
- Learn best by showing and doing="hands on."
- Books using a question and answer format for self-study would be helpful.
- Opportunity to read aloud and have teacher present to correct as they learn and read.
- Adults need help with their homework too.
- Education is a priority in the South East Asian culture for all ages.

Education: General comments and anecdotal information from facilitator(s) and recorders:

An overwhelming majority of students and adults prefer a teacher instead of "high tech" forms of learning including seminars, conferences, videotapes audiotapes and any other. They learn best with professional, well-trained, highly motivated, enthusiastic, energetic teachers who are gentle and kind. "We want a good teacher in the classroom" was echoed by a number of participants regardless of age or stage in life.

Students and adults identified the need to recognize individual learning styles and patterns and make several options available. Adults want and need to continue to learn English but don't want to be overwhelmed with information causing an "overload." The need for "hands on" learning is helpful. Assistance with homework is needed. Learning to read English continues to be a challenge and some adults want to try learning to write in Hmong because they feel it may be easier to learn than English.

The participation by both students and adults was very positive. They appreciated the opportunity to participate in the focus groups.

2. What challenges and issues are you seeing in your local Hmong Community?

Community Wide Challenges & Issues

University of Wisconsin-Marathon County Students

- Diets - parents eat traditional foods, many times, children do not like eating traditional foods
- Clothing is an issue among children and parents because parents do not understand the new styles and continued changes of the society
- Some parents are over protective of their children

North Central Technical College Students

- Combining family, work and school is hard, sometimes impossible. (Many examples were given that included lack of childcare, working shifts, both parents working.)
- Diet and nutrition, due to having three different groups within the family. Often the elderly family members prefer to eat traditional Hmong food, the children want American food and fast food and the parents are trying to get everyone fed!

High School Students

- Too much violence.
- Too much ignorance about each other's cultures.
- Too much hatred and stereotyping.
- Lack of communication between South East Asian and other cultures.
- Funding for inclusiveness. (Training and activities related to teaching)
- Caucasians don't listen and pay attention because they feel Hmong got special attention.
- Younger generation doesn't have an opportunity to learn the culture because parents are so busy and kids are leaning toward technology and friends.
- Lack of communication between parents and kids and across generations.
- Hmong Culture is dying because young and those born in U.S. don't know about it.
- Teasing within the culture is a concern.
- Struggle to keep Hmong Culture Alive-no opportunity to learn about it because no record (written) history of culture.
- Need more translators and multi-language trained professionals.

Hmong Parents

- "Brain Drain" of young college and university educated South East Asians to larger cities (Minneapolis, Minnesota) where jobs are more available and salaries are higher. Some may come back to area for a few years but usually leave eventually.

- Concern for job security especially in one income families.
- Concern and fear of no employment or length of layoffs.

Parenting/Family Issues & Concerns

University of Wisconsin Marathon County

- Parents need to be educated about the benefits of the extra-curricular activities
- Parents don't trust their children to participate in after school activities
- Parents have different ideas for the future of their sons as compared to daughters. For example, parents want sons to be doctors and daughters to be teachers
- Parents need to be educated about all different career choices.
- Hmong students do not receive much help from parents home, because most of the parents could not read and write
- Communication - parents could not speak English and many students could not speak Hmong fluently
- Some Hmong parents could not afford to pay for their children's high education because the low wages that they earn
- Hmong have many children and could not support financially
- They want to maintain the Hmong cultures and traditions
- There is a big gap between the parents and children because the younger generation is losing interest in their own culture
- Youth spend more time on television than with their parents
- Extra-curricular activities:
 - Some parents are against these after school activities, which hinder the social and leadership skills of the their children
 - Children want to join extra-curricular activities, but parents do not allow them

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- Husband and wife work different shift and take turns looking after the children. No time to do their own studies. Any time away from work must be spent caring for the children and helping them with their schoolwork.
- Sometimes I cannot attend my classes because my work does not allow it. One week I work during the day, one week I work at night (swing shift) so sometimes I just cannot go to school all the time. This is a problem and I miss important lessons.
 - How can we get to more school, work and take care of our families?
 - Parents are not able to help children with homework.
 - (Expressed a number of times)
 - We cannot afford to pay for lunch at school. Some parents have to pay, some don't.
 - What about costs for college??? I have a child at UW Stevens Point and I am on SSI. I surely cannot afford to pay that tuition, but my child is smart enough to get more education.
 - The biggest problem between parents and children is due to the language differences.

- The children speak English better and often speak it at home. Adults do not speak English at home. Extra strain when children must translate for school, doctor, etc.
- I cannot study at home. The children are also trying to do school work and I have to help them. I am very tired when I am finished caring for the children.

High School Students:

- Hmong parental control of children varies.
- Hmong expectations are that boys should have short hair and girls have long hair.
- In Thailand and Laos, children accessed the world through their parents but in the U.S. the roles are reversed and children have a heavy responsibility. More interpreters are needed.
- Younger kids need to be kept busy with after-school activities so they don't smoke, get in gangs and cause trouble.
- Even if parents allow kids to join activities, they may not be able to find friends with like interests to go along so they are not the only Hmong kid there.
- Too much "play time" with all the technology.
- Children need to volunteer to work and participate in mixed cultural/race groups.
- Hmong culture discourages participation in extra curricular activities and volunteer work if it interferes with duties at home. This can be a problem when students need to list accomplishments on scholarship applications. Parents need to learn that larger community involvement is also important.
- Hmong parents want an education for their kids but need to understand that education involves more than just classes.
- Parents don't have info to help their kids decide on careers. The university can help to get information about careers to adults/parents.
- Parents need to know about school activities.
- Trust their kids if they are good, not judge them by their hairstyles, clothes, etc.
- Try to learn.
- Learn about other cultures.
- Get involved with kids' activities and community.
- Clubs/groups for parents including different cultures.

Hmong Parents

- Hmong elders and parents don't have time because they are too busy providing (working) for the family.

Diversity/Cultural Issues

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- Children want to learn about their cultures, but they sometimes are intimidated by their parents

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- Sometimes learning depends on the teacher's mood. If the teacher is in a bad mood it makes it more difficult to learn. Both teachers and students need more patience.
- English is a difficult language to learn.
- We need someone who can translate questions back to the teacher.
- It would be better to have a class that just focuses on oral English lessons first. Then written language, but keep them separate. It is hard to do both at the same time.
- I don't know what's out there that could learn about. What else is provided?
- ESL is VERY helpful. We need more years of help with the language, though. We have good teachers, but we need more. There aren't enough teachers.

High School Students

- Little (information) in school and community activities that address culture, diversity, violence issues.
- Diversity not well promoted at my high school.
- Racial barriers between cultures related to lack of communication between teachers and students.
- Teachers don't ask questions equally of all cultures.
- People including students and teachers; pay more attention to their own culture and lack interest in Hmong culture, history and background.
- Textbooks and other sources don't give Hmong involvement in Vietnam War and identify their other contributions.
- Hmong kids sometimes feel they have to prove themselves that they are looked down on by Caucasian students but Hmong students appreciate education more.
- Some teachers don't have high expectations of Hmong students.
- Hmong should be accepted as a foreign language by colleges.
- Classes for teaching Hmong language and literacy in schools open to all kids.
- More non-citizen scholarships available because some students are not citizens.
- University needs to communicate and provide to Hmong parents information about career options with details for both parents and children to understand.
- Hmong culture conflicts with university culture.
- Teach/offer Hmong language for interested general public .
- Hmong students feel "alone" when they join-difficult to get friends.

Business

University of Wisconsin-Marathon County Students

- They carry limited merchandises
- They sell the similar items (Asian groceries products)
- Customer services can be improved
- Capitol is an issue for many of the small business owners
- Promotion - do not see many advertising about their businesses
- Education and training for Hmong families

- XMore financial aide
- XMore work-study options for students
- XParents expect older children to help with income and care of younger siblings

North Central Technical College Students

- Biggest problem is the language barrier. Hmong businesses cannot reach out to other markets.
- We don't always understand the rules and regulations.
- Need capital to start business.
- In order to be successful we need training, technical support from schools, community and government.
- We need to be knowledgeable and often need special training.
- Language is always a problem.

High School Students

- Businesses need to hire more bi-lingual workers.

Hmong Parents

- A real fear that unemployment benefits will be running out.
- Need assistance when unemployed to access services at job center. Some are unaware or do not understand community resources and how to access.
- Embarrassed to go to the job center more than one time.
- Concern for having "maxed out" services and have no money to pay.
- Local business and community needs to provide education and increase language skills of parents.
- Parents have problems getting childcare.

Discussion on benefits from agencies included the following:

- Prefer grocery store food vouchers instead of "day old" bakery products.
- Feel they get oldest and least desirable food items at food pantries.

Elderly Concerns

University of Wisconsin-Marathon County Students

- Problems of communication between elders and youth
- Youth have a lack of respect for their elders
- Elders expect youth to learn more English (setting very high expectation for youth)
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- People who are 55 or older, with a language barrier cannot get jobs. They have no medical assistance, no money to care for themselves. If they think about all of this, they just want to close their eyes and stop breathing.

- For some elderly, who have no immediate family, there is no one to look after them. They need transportation, help communicating, and support. With little or no income they have great difficulty. They also do not feel like they are part of the community.
- Some elderly are homesick, lonely and alone. If they cannot drive or do not have a driver's license they cannot go about. Their children are often out working and taking care of their own family and there is no one to take their places. Depression is a problem and the language barrier plays a very big part.
- Depression and isolation are problems for the elderly. Some have been here 10 years and haven't even been around the city.
- Older Hmong have never had formal education and the learning process is difficult. I feel old and learning a new language is very hard. Written and oral language lessons should be separated for easier learning. Maybe some people need to only learn to speak English.

High School Students

- People 60 years and over can't change, too hard core.
- Recognize that South East Asian Adults will remain more traditional.

Hmong Parents

- Elderly Hmong need "in-home" care related to daily living: medications, cooking, cleaning, shopping, etc.
- Disabled person receives less money when spouse works so wonder why spouse should work.
- Do not understand health care costs, appointments, time being billed for, very little time with medical professional. It appears money not patient care is the top priority in health care. Don't understand and/or get no feedback from medical doctor.

Childcare

University of Wisconsin Marathon County

- Not enough child care for Hmong families
- Hmong families generally have too many children
- Parents are not comfortable to allow strangers to look after their children
- Child care cost is high and some families are not able to afford
- Family members help with child care (Grandparents)

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- Childcare is a big issue. Service is based on income of the family. With two wages, one goes completely to cover costs of childcare and the family doesn't have enough money to live on. Low wages do not provide enough to support the family.
- When you can't afford childcare, the oldest children have to care for the younger children. Or other family members.

Hmong Parents

- Prefer relatives to provide childcare so would like better ways for them to get trained.
- Don't understand cost variation in different types of childcare and how cost per age of child is determined.
- Some trained Hmong childcare providers do not have child to care for due to some people being laid off from work.

Housing

University of Wisconsin Marathon County

- X Housing discrimination is still an issue in the Hmong community
- X It is hard to find a place that can accommodate Hmong family because the size of the family
- X Hmong families have very little knowledge about landlord and tenant law

North Central Technical College*(Much animated discussion on this topic)*

- Not enough housing for big families that we can afford. Often the owners don't want to rent to us.
- If we buy a house, property taxes are so high!
- Sometimes we can find a big enough house but when we can afford it many things are broken or damaged.
- We buy a home, pay taxes. Go to work, pay tax. By things, pay tax. Then when our children go to school, we have to pay for their lunch-why are they doing this to us? Welcome to America!
- The rich people look for things for the poor people to pay for.

Health Care Issues

University of Wisconsin Marathon County

- Hmong families do not have good insurance coverage: dental, vision, etc....
- Some Hmong families could no afford health insurance
- Hmong families do not have sufficient health care
- Parents do not trust doctors and elderly people do not have good insurance coverage
- Check up bills are too expensive and Hmong families can not afford
- Medication is also expensive

North Central Technical College

- Health problems like heart, diabetes are made worse because the elderly cannot go outside and get exercise. Limited physical activity.

School Issues

(Expressed emphatically and at great length worth noting the following concerns for a number of those in parents group)

Hmong Parents

- Middle schools offer dances for children and they are attending without parents permission and parents are not sure children are going to dance or somewhere else
- Middle & high school students cause conflict between parents and children related to school dances and other involvement.
- Unsupervised break time or study hall for students-children needs supervision. Some parents are concerned because they think their students get in trouble during those times by leaving school or participating in activities of their own choice which may lead to “risky behaviors.”
- Fear that Hmong teachers’ aides do not interpret everything and children are being falsely accused of stealing.
- Some schools do not have Hmong staff and do not have a way for parents to communicate with teachers.
- No Hmong interpreters during parent-teacher conferences.
- University system needs a Hmong staff member to explain and interpret scholarships, grants and financial aide details.
- Funding for low to moderate-income family children to attend university.
- Accuracy problems with computerized roll call at one of the Wausau High Schools. Parent’s check and child at school but school calls to inform parent that child is absent. Schools need to know where students are during the school day.
- Parents feel children need closer supervision in school to avoid issues of tobacco use, second hand smoke for younger children and older youth are poor examples for younger children.
- Fear that Hmong children get falsely accused because of language barriers and some interpreters do not provide complete translation.

Summary-Facilitator, recorder and interpreters: These parents shared a lot of concern for school family issues related to language and cultural barriers and differences. Parents fear the worst when they don’t understand and cannot communicate with their children and teachers. They questions if some information may be lost in the communication and translation.

3. **What has successfully worked for your local Hmong community in the past to address these challenges and issues?** (Item in parenthesis addresses specific issue.)

High School Students

- Parents being more strict. (Violence)
- UNO Club in High School promotes diversity and breaks down barriers between social groups. (Ignorance)

- Clubs to promote diversity and to avoid stereotyping, promote communication, interaction and education. (Hatred & stereotyping)
- Being nice to everyone regardless of culture. “Golden Rule” treat others, as you want to be treated.
- Cultural parade in the community.
- Minorities, sociology classes should be a graduation requirement. (Diversity not promoted)
- Culture Day or Week,
- Cooking across cultures.
- Café idea with art, music and food to promote various cultures.
- Recognize that prejudice varies from person to person.
- Invite “Multico” group from Madison for a performance for all students and all schools.
- Upward Bound Program in schools.
- EIP Program at Wausau East High School.
- ESL (English as Second Language) Programs.
- Begin diversity education at a younger age.
- Media could be used to encourage and educate about diversity.
- Need more professionals trained in diversity.
- Students fear retaliation for reporting racism-need a safe place to report.
- Should hold a citywide festival of nations in this county.

Hmong Parents

- Assistance with children’s homework because parents can’t help. Currently provided at Salvation Army, Boys and Girls Club and Neighbors Place.
- Use local television stations to provide a Hmong language daily brief of the news. In Wausau ask Fox 55 to consider because Hmong adults do not understand news of the day both local and national.

General Comments from several participants and generally agreed by high school age participants.

Issues to be aware of are: prejudices goes both ways between majority and minority populations and varies from person to person. Adults in the South East Asian community are more prejudiced against and suspicious of the majority population than the youth including more traditional and resistant to change.

The Hmong parents group appreciates what the United States does for them in the schools, social services and all other agencies and organizations. Especially for their children that are born in the U.S. and are citizens.

4. What would be the best way for you to receive or participate in such educational programs? (No comments from the UWMC & NTC in this category.)

High School Students

- Breaking through to literacy program is now in 6 schools in Wausau. Could be expanded with more funding. It great that is for all students.
- The Hmong Radio station.
- Newsletters sent home in Hmong.
- Classes for elders-Neighbor's Place.
- Audio tapes for citizenship in Hmong
- Reach the parents first about sports and clubs.
- Written information in Hmong is helpful to some parents.

Students feel this may help:

- Mailings to home address label "Important" so parents will know they need to read or have someone read to them.
- Documentary for use with parents about a Hmong student's life explaining all sorts of school related things.

Hmong Parents

- Continue programs listed above that are working.
- UWMC needs more options for programs to obtain a 4-year degree so students can continue to live at home due to lower cost. May help to decrease "brain drain" if students are educated in home community.
- A need for evening programs for Hmong adults who want to get a 4-year degree. law, nursing, and other programs.

5. Additional comments from all groups:

- People should be judged by personality and action, not appearance.
 - People are afraid, shy or lack confidence to reach across barriers.
 - People from different groups should sit down with a teacher or referee and discuss concerns and negative feelings.
 - Stop being bystanders-become involved in stopping prejudice and promoting understanding.
 - Some people make fun of ESL and yet they shouldn't.
 - We all need to work together-students, parents, and schools
-