

Florence HECTOR

Parent of Dual Language Learners

Cambridge, MA Public Schools

Good Morning Everyone, my name is Florence Hector from Cambridge, MA. I was born and raised in Haiti.

I am a single mother of two children, Stephen 19, sophomore at UMASS Dartmouth and Christy 16, 12th grade Community Charter School of Cambridge.

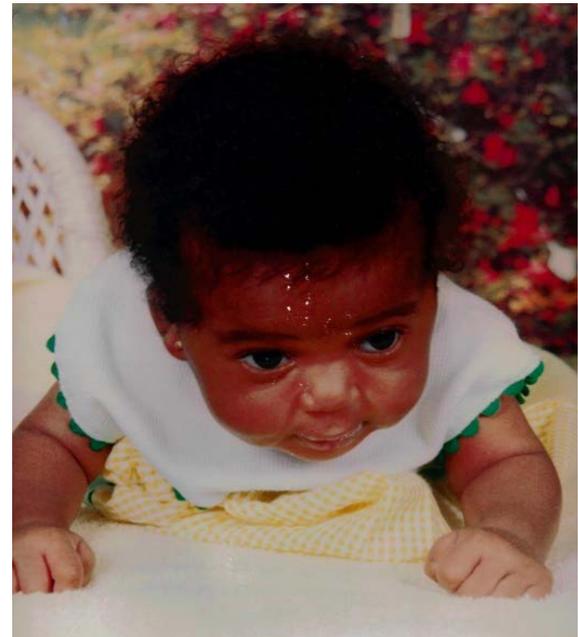




Twelve years ago we emigrated from Haiti to the U.S. I was not sure what my next step would be; I knew how to read English but I couldn't speak it at all. I was explaining to my friend how happy I would be to take some English classes. He took me to the Community Learning Center in Cambridge, Ma. After the interview, they put me in the priority list, because my daughter was 3 years old at this time; and a parent with young kids needs by necessity to learn how to speak English.

What languages did you and others speak to your children and why?

- At the beginning, we spoke French and Haitian Creole because nine of every ten Haitians spoke only Creole, which was the everyday language for the entire population. About one in ten also spoke French.



What languages were used at home around academic subjects, including book reading?

After I realized that there was some confusion about them trying to speak all the languages, they became a little shy. I decided to speak English only even if I have to use short sentences and gestures.

At what age was your child introduced to English? How did you and others distribute time spent talking in your first language and second language?

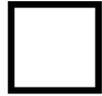
- My son was 6 and my daughter 3, when they were first introduced to English
- Monday to Friday, they left home at 7 AM to go to school. And they went to the Community Arts Center. CAC is open after school weekdays from 2 to 6PM and from 8AM to 6PM during snow days, school vacation weeks and summer.
- And then from 6 to 7 it changed to Tutoring Plus, which provides academic support to Cambridge students. Basically they only had a couple hours of listening or talking in their first language
- Because they spent so much time in English, English became their primary language.

Who did the talking in each language, how much, and why did you decide on that?

The children didn't take long to speak English, but now I am the one who still doesn't speak perfectly.

So I decided to speak a mix of English, Creole, and French. Sometimes they kids laugh at my mixed language, but when we go to Haiti, they have no choice and they learn to communicate to communicate with their family and friends in Creole. And my son Stephen is taking French in college.





What strategies did you use to support your child's learning English?

- My son had a tutor for writing and reading
- We read a lot of books,
- we watched cartoons together,
- and we had some family fun times by playing games or puzzles on the computer
- On weekends, we had fun trips to the library, museums, etc.
- Summer reading program organized by the Cambridge Public Library
- Bible study at Church on Sunday morning.

Challenges and benefits: What do you see as the benefits and challenges to raising a DLL child?

- The more time they spent listening to English or any language the more rapidly they speak
- The diversity of language is a strength.
- As a challenge, sometimes I pushed too hard for them to learn English and they became shy because it was a lot for them. I started to use more English with them at home, so we would all learn together.
- Parental involvement is a key for child success because it allows parents to meet with the teacher and get useful information to help your child.

How did schools encourage, counsel, and/or support your participation in the education of your children? What kinds of activities have you and/or your children participated in school that helped you engage with the education of your children?

- Banneker school communicated with parents and encouraged them to become actively involved in the classroom.
- Observation day, one parent can be sitting in the class for 30 minutes or 1 hour. This make you and your child be more comfortable with the teacher.
- Around the world club was for student and family, we organized potluck dinner. We all spoke English but were from different countries.



What community programs did you and/or your children participate in that helped support your children's education?

- They went to Work Force (Education supports—including on-site homework centers and one-on-one tutoring for younger students—that promotes academic growth)
- They helped at the Food Pantry
- Snow clearing help for elderly
- Clean the Charles River
- DIY Media Program
- MIT Leadership Program
- internships in Cambridge
- Mayor's summer work program
- Robotic Club
- Volunteer at Cambridge Festival, Breast Cancer Walk, etc.

