



Parental Involvement in NYC Schools: Using Latino Families Cultural Strengths to Enhance Academic Achievement

The familial strengths of Latino culture create a wide opportunity for NYC public schools to enhance Latino parental involvement and therefore increase the academic achievement of NYC's growing Latino community. Latino students are a significant population in NYC schools, with 38.9% of students identifying as Latino and nearly 68% of all English Language Learners (ELLs) coming from Spanish speaking homes.^{1 2} This large representation makes it imperative to address the educational success of Latino students and ensure these students a higher educational attainment. According to recent statistics, New York City Latino students trail behind their White peers in almost all academic measurements. One way to increase the achievement of Latino students is to increase parental involvement amongst Latinos, especially ELL and immigrant parents. Research has proven that parental involvement is a key indicator of academic achievement, along with other factors.³ Like all parents, Latino parents want their children to succeed in school but the barriers are arduous, and even the most determined parents may find school involvement out of arms reach.

What is Parental Involvement?

Parental involvement can be defined as the following:

- Parental involvement in the home (i.e. talking about educational subjects, helping with homework, reading to the child, managing the child's time)⁴
- Parental involvement at school (i.e. attending a Parent-Teacher conference, volunteering at school activities, attending school activities)⁵

Barriers for Latino Parents

Parental involvement takes on different shapes, and many parents believe they are involved in their child's education by helping their child at home. However, research has shown that the school system often views parental involvement differently; measuring parental involvement as the number of times a parent is engaged with the school.⁶ Many Latino parents **want** to become involved with their child's school but language, education, logistics and a lack of culturally competent school personnel become barriers. In NYC, many Latino parents are ELLs, and not enough schools are equipped to meet their linguistic needs, which can create linguistic barriers between parents and the

school. Navigating through the public school system is burdensome especially when many Latino parents face the stressors of poverty, low educational attainment, and often times work during non-traditional hours.

Looking Forward

Currently, the Federal, State and City governments have created policies to increase parental involvement in schools. On the Federal and State level, Title I schools are required to have parental involvement policies that are inclusive to children with ELL parents (80% of NYC schools receive Title 1 funding).⁷ On the City level, Mayor Michael Bloomberg and Chancellor Joel Klein created the Chancellor Regulation A-663 that requires schools to provide meaningful opportunities for ELL parents to participate in schools.⁸ In addition, the NYC Department of Education (DOE) created the Office for Family Engagement and Advocacy with positions such as District Family Advocates and Parent Advocates, but unfortunately even with these positions many ELL and immigrant parents still feel apprehensive approaching and speaking to school officials.⁹ The design and intent for increasing parental involvement exists but NYC public schools need to be more proactive and culturally sensitive in creating partnerships with Latino parents to make them feel more welcome in the school setting.

The Committee for Hispanic Children and Families, Inc. recommends:

1. *NYC-DOE monitor the outreach conducted by the Office for Family Engagement and Advocacy, with special attention to ensuring the outreach is linguistically and culturally meaningful, as well as welcoming to Latino parents.*
2. *The Office for Family Engagement and Advocacy create workshops that familiarize parents with the public school system and the meaning and importance of parental involvement in the schools. Each school should respect cultural values by incorporating heritage, language, history and other cultural strengths of the Latino community in parental involvement activities.*
3. *Create opportunities for parents who work non-traditional hours to get involved and also incorporate extended family in the description of parental involvement.*
4. *Schools become more responsive and sensitive to the needs of families and communities by serving as a “one stop” location that provides a variety of human services and educational components, such as family literacy programs.*

¹ The University of the State of New York/ NYSED (2006) as cited in Citizens Committee for Children on New York, Inc. (2008) *Keeping Track of New York City's Children*. New York, New York

² New York City Department of Education. (2008). *New York City's English Language Learners: Demographics*. New York, NY.

³ Lee, J.S. & Bowen, N.K. (2006) Parent involvement, cultural capital, and the achievement gap among elementary school children. *American Educational Research Journal*, 43(2), pp. 193-218

⁴ Jeynes, W.H. (2003). A meta-analysis: The effects of parental involvement in minority children's academic achievement. *Education and Urban Society*, 35(2), pp. 202-218

⁵ Ibid

⁶ Ibid

⁷ Advocates for Children of New York. (March, 2009) *Our Children our Schools: A Blueprint for creating partnerships between Immigrant families and New York City Public Schools*. New York, New York

⁸ Ibid

⁹ Ibid