

# RECOMMENDATIONS ON STRENGTHENING PARENT INVOLVEMENT IN THE REAUTHORIZATION OF THE ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION ACT\*

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The purpose of this memorandum is to provide recommendations on strengthening parent involvement and engagement in the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). Parent engagement must be strengthened in order to ensure all children succeed. One of the key roles of ESEA is to ensure children have access to the supports needed to succeed, and the role of the parent in their child's education must be strengthened with reauthorization.

## Overview

I am an educator working in Nashville and I work closely with parents and partners to support student learning and success. I have seen firsthand the impact partnerships have on creating conditions for learning that increase the likelihood of success for all students. Research supports our efforts to provide schools and staff with additional resources and capacity-building in order to engage parents and the community to support student success. Additionally, family and community engagement is one of the five principles of school turnaround.<sup>1</sup> In concert with my work in schools in Metro Nashville Public Schools, I collaborate with the National Council of La Raza (NCLR) in order to increase our capacity to engage Latino parents in their children's schooling. According to a 2009 report from the Pew Hispanic Center, 89% of Latino parents believe college is important for success in life, yet only 40% feel they have the



knowledge to help their children prepare for college.<sup>2</sup> Latino parents, like all parents, can become more effective advocates for their children when they learn how to engage with the school system and gain strategies for navigating their children's stages of development as they progress through their school years. We believe existing policy in No Child Left Behind (NCLB) regarding parent involvement needs to be expanded to achieve parents' desired outcomes.

The U.S. Department of Education released their Dual Capacity Framework for Parent Engagement in 2014. Nashville has successfully implemented this framework for our families, staff, and schools so they may collaborate to support student success. The recommendations of this policy memo are aligned to the Dual Capacity-Building Framework for Family School Partnerships<sup>3</sup> and are built on

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lessons learned in our schools in Nashville. The memo also includes components that provide additional support to schools in order to improve student and family success. These recommendations will not only have a positive impact on Latino student success, but in fact are best practices for supporting all families and students across the country.

### **How can increased parent engagement support Latino student success?**

- **Latinos make up a significant portion of the population.** Nearly one in four (22.3%) of all public school students are Latino.<sup>4</sup>
- **An increase in funding for parent engagement will build on the positive results that are correlated with parent engagement.** Research shows that family and community engagement in schools has a profoundly positive impact on student performance and long-term student and school success. However, in many of our schools with high Latino populations, schools do not partner with families and community agencies in a way that promotes student success. When they do, the funding for these partnerships is inadequate and does not meet the needs of our schools.<sup>5</sup>
- **Latino students are often concentrated in low-performing schools where increased parent engagement could have a significant impact on student achievement and school success.** Latino students, across the country and in both urban and rural settings, often attend low-performing schools that all too often do not provide mechanisms for parents and community-based agencies to support student success. Whether in rural towns, urban areas, or big cities, nonacademic factors—physical health, mental health, safety, family instability, violence, teen pregnancy, homelessness, distress, and other issues—affect Latino students disproportionately and spill into the classroom. These factors affect learning and create challenges beyond what schools can be expected to handle

alone. Our students need effective schools that provide a mechanism for parents and partners to engage students, teachers, and schools. Parents who are able to engage with their child’s school tend to access supports for themselves, which in turn supports student outcomes.<sup>6</sup>

- **Increasing Latino parent engagement in schools serves to reinforce the cultural norm that the family is the center of social and support networks.** Latino students, the fastest-growing population across the country, share unique challenges. Their parents often do not speak English and are not skilled at supporting their student’s learning. However, Latino culture places the family at the center of social and support networks; therefore parents who are able to access, understand, and support their child’s academic goals and aspirations are able to make a profound impact in their child’s future.

### **Capitalizing on and expanding current standards of parent engagement**

NCLB includes basic provisions that purport to increase parental knowledge with the expectation that such information will encourage greater participation from parents. It also contains 1% of Title I funds set aside for parent engagement in schools. However, these provisions set a very low bar for parent engagement and do not reflect current research around how to tie parent engagement to student learning.<sup>7</sup> Some of the current provisions include requirements to hold meetings with parents to inform them of general federal education requirements and parent rights; notifying parents if their child’s school has been identified for school improvement; and notifying parents of their right to request information regarding their child’s teacher. This type of engagement is one-dimensional and one-way and does not reflect parents’ desire to engage in the academic and social growth of their child and in the success of the school.

- Current ESEA language requires states to describe how they will collect and disseminate effective parental involvement

strategies to schools in their state plans to the U.S. Department of Education. The law also requires Title I school districts and schools to have a written parental involvement policy, which must be devised in collaboration with and approved by parents.

- Parents must be included in school support teams intended to assist schools, particularly low-performing schools, in improving academic outcomes. Low-performing schools must develop improvement plans, which must include strategies to enhance parental involvement. In addition, teacher professional development plans must include training in effective parental involvement strategies.
- Under current NCLB law, parents are expected to review state- and district-level report cards on various academic indicators and to hold schools accountable for meeting academic benchmarks. State report cards must include student achievement data that are broken down by different groups, including race, ethnicity, language status, migrant status, disability, and gender. In addition, the report cards must describe the academic objectives for each subgroup of students. Since testing is a major part of NCLB, state report cards must show the percentage of students who are not tested. To ensure that schools do not push out children who may not score well, report cards must also contain information on other indicators of progress and high school graduation rates. District-level report cards have much of this same information, but also must show that schools within the district have been identified for school improvement.
- NCLB contains provisions for parents of English language learners (ELLs) students concerning involvement strategies, notification, and choice. For example, school district plans must include effective outreach to parents of limited English proficient students, and utilize bilingual education funds to provide parents of training so they can become active

participants in their children's education. Parents of ELLs must also receive information about whether the school has met its annual benchmarks, and their right to remove children from or to opt out of bilingual education programs.

## Recommendations

### **Increase minimum funding for parent involvement from Title I, Part A from 1% to 3%.**

The reauthorization of ESEA will encourage state and local governments to create policies on instruction, curriculum and assessment, teacher evaluation, and measures for school performance. Schools will require additional resources in order to level the playing field for parents by sharing relevant information with them and creating opportunities for parent-generated solutions to student and school performance. Investing in parent outreach, training, advocacy, and leadership will yield sustainable efforts to promote educational equity. The additional funding will allow schools to create a standardized set of practices that foster family, school, and community partnership to support an individual child's strengths and address needs. The funding will cover the costs of essential capacity-building for parents and staff and hiring trained parent and community engagement coordinators that facilitate results-focused partnerships, integrate school and community resources around student needs, and engage families in their child's education.

### **Require teacher and administrative preservice programs, and districts and schools must provide training on research-based practices and professional development around family and community engagement and cultural competency.**

ESEA should require that teacher training programs funded under the legislation (beginning with early childhood programs) provide district administrators, teachers, principals, and other school personnel ongoing professional development to explicitly address all aspects of student achievement and growth, including cognitive, nonacademic, social, emotional, physical, and mental health,

as well as civic development and to work in partnership with families and community.<sup>8</sup>

**Incentivize schools and districts to partner with community-based organizations to support family and community engagement.**

One of the biggest challenges in education lies in the disparities—based on race and class—is children’s access to the resources and opportunities that promote learning. Reauthorization of ESEA should seek to incentivize schools and districts to partner with community-based organizations that offer needed health services, enrichment, and supports for students and families. These partnerships can occur with little or no cost to schools or districts, and can expand services and supports to students and families. Many community-based agencies are deeply rooted in the communities where they serve, and their staff, often highly skilled and culturally competent, can provide crucial connections between the school, families, and the community.

## Conclusion

Parent engagement was woven into the fabric of NCLB, which has been instrumental in ensuring parents are informed about policies and programs at the school level. Throughout the past 13 years of NCLB we have learned that parent engagement in schools is a shared responsibility that happens across the span of a child’s education, and in multiple settings. Congress must make clear its intent that schools and communities work together to support our students. By expanding the amount of funds set aside for parent and community engagement, schools can foster school-based partnerships with community based organizations; train parent and community engagement coordinators; offer comprehensive and culturally responsive programs for parents; and provide professional development for teachers, principals, and other school personnel on best practices around increasing student achievement through parent and community engagement.

This model of offering a full complement of services and programming at the school site creates conditions for learning that lead to measurable improvements in the lives of children and families, schools, districts, and communities. I appreciate the opportunity to provide our comments and thank you for considering our views. I look forward to discussing this memorandum with you at your convenience.

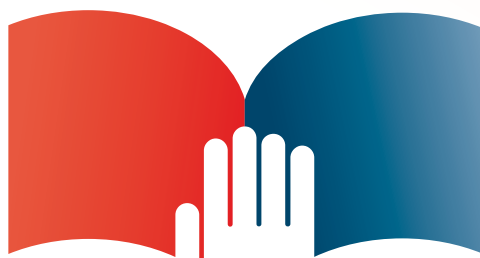
I welcome the opportunity to work with Congress to ensure that a reauthorized ESEA accomplishes our shared goals. Please contact me at [gini@conamericas.com](mailto:gini@conamericas.com) or (615) 714-7043 if you would like further information or to set up a meeting to continue the conversation.

## Endnotes

- 1 Anthony S. Bryk, et al., *Organizing schools for improvement: Lessons from Chicago* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009).
- 2 Paul Taylor, et al., *Between Two Worlds: How Young Latinos Come of Age in America* (Washington, DC: Pew Hispanic Center, 2009).
- 3 SEDL and the U.S. Department of Education, Partners in Education: A Dual Capacity-Building Framework for Family-School Partnerships (Austin, TX: U.S. Department of Education, 2013) <http://www2.ed.gov/documents/family-community/partners-education.pdf>.
- 4 U.S. Census Bureau, "The Hispanic Population in the United States: 2011," *Hispanic Origin*. Washington, DC, 2011, <http://www.census.gov/population/hispanic/data/2011.html>.
- 5 Richard Fry and Mark Hugo Lopez, *Hispanic Student Enrollments Reach New Highs in 2011* (Washington, DC: Pew Hispanic Center, 2012) <http://www.pewhispanic.org/2012/08/20/hispanic-student-enrollments-reach-new-highs-in-2011>.
- 6 Alice M. L. Quijoch and Annette M. Daoud, "Dispelling Myths about Latino Parent Participation in Schools," *The Educational Forum* 70, no. 3 (2006).
- 7 Joyce L. Epstein, *School, Family, and Community Partnerships: Preparing Educators and Improving Schools* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press 2001).
- 8 Linda Darling-Hammond, *Powerful Teacher Education: Lessons from Exemplary Programs* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 2012).







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