



# LATINO FAMILY ENGAGEMENT IN AFTER-SCHOOL PROGRAMS



The National Council of La Raza (NCLR)—the largest national Hispanic civil rights and advocacy organization in the United States—works to improve opportunities for Hispanic Americans. Through its network of nearly 300 affiliated community-based organizations (CBOs), NCLR reaches millions of Hispanics each year in 41 states, Puerto Rico, and the District of Columbia. To achieve its mission, NCLR conducts applied research, policy analysis, and advocacy, providing a Latino perspective in five key areas—assets/investments, civil rights/immigration, education, employment and economic status, and health. In addition, it provides capacity-building assistance to its Affiliates who work at the state and local level to advance opportunities for individuals and families.

Founded in 1968, NCLR is a private, nonprofit, nonpartisan, tax-exempt organization headquartered in Washington, DC. NCLR serves all Hispanic subgroups in all regions of the country and has operations in Atlanta, Chicago, Los Angeles, New York, Phoenix, Sacramento, San Antonio, and San Juan, Puerto Rico.

## Acknowledgments

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## Overview: Latino Youth and After-School Programs

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After-school programs are in an important position to improve the academic achievement of Latino\* youth. Social trends, such as more women entering the workforce and an increase in the number of single-parent households, have led to a greater need for after-school programs. Advocates interested in narrowing the achievement gap view after-school programs as a critical opportunity for youth to gain “21st century skills” – global literacy, problem solving, innovation, and creativity – via supplementary academic support and developmentally rich activities. Through 21st Century Community Learning Centers and supplementary education services, the federal government has played a major role in expanding and improving after-school programs, especially for underserved youth.<sup>1</sup> While such programs have increased, the need for even more resources continues to grow with the nation’s Latino youth.

As the second largest group of students in our nation’s schools, Latino students make up a large percentage of our country’s future workforce. Latinos are disproportionately

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\* The terms "Hispanic" and "Latino" are used interchangeably by the U.S. Census Bureau and throughout this document to refer to persons of Mexican, Puerto Rican, Cuban, Central and South American, Dominican, Spanish, and other Hispanic descent; they may be of any race.

overrepresented among low-income minorities and consequently continue to be gravely underserved by the public education system. For instance, Latino children under the age of five are greatly underrepresented in early education programs; only about 12% of these children attend formal programs at child care centers.<sup>2</sup> Thus, they enter school already at an academic disadvantage and continue to fall further behind with every grade level. In addition, the dropout rate among Latino high school students is the highest in the nation, making the time Hispanic youth spend in school considerably shorter than the time their non-Hispanic peers spend in school.<sup>3</sup> These conditions are exacerbated by additional barriers that Latino youth tend to face, such as issues of acculturation and language difficulties.<sup>4</sup> According to *America's Children: Key National Indicators of Well-Being, 2007*, in 2005, 19% of school-age Hispanic children who spoke another language at home had difficulty with English, compared with about 1% of both school-age non-Hispanic White and Black children.<sup>5</sup>



After-school programs have the potential to help reverse these trends and offer many of this country's Latino youth the opportunity to gain the necessary skills to compete in the 21st century global job market.<sup>6</sup> In spite of the potential opportunities offered by after-school programs, those youth who would benefit most are highly underserved by these programs.<sup>7</sup> A Harvard Family Research project concentrating on youth participation in out-of-school-time activities by ethnic group, reports that in comparison to their more affluent peers, low-income minorities are underrepresented in high numbers in most out-of-school-time activities.<sup>8</sup> Although there was a strong presence of Hispanic participants in tutoring programs, Hispanics were the most underrepresented overall in all types of out-of-school-time activities.<sup>9</sup> According to the *America After 3 PM: A Household Survey on Afterschool in America*, 44% of Hispanic parents without access to an after school program say they would enroll their child in a program if one were available them.<sup>10</sup> Both of these findings indicate that there is demand for after-school programs among Latino parents, but that participation tends to be low.

## Objectives

Recognizing the opportunities that after-school programs hold for disadvantaged students, and in response to barriers and issues described earlier, the National Council of La Raza (NCLR) conducted a national study to examine the landscape of after-school programming for Latino youth. Funded by the Mott Foundation, the survey study had three objectives:

- Gain a greater understanding of the after-school program work currently conducted by Latino-serving organizations.
- Chart out the views and expectations of such programs by Latino parents.
- Inform the work of after-school program providers and help guide the current practices of funders and policy-makers.

## Project Components

- Review of literature examining the impact of quality after-school programs on disadvantaged students.
- Survey administered to 85 community-based organizations (CBOs) that offer after-school programs and represent diverse Latino subpopulations.
- Focus groups conducted with after-school program providers and Latino parents in five cities across the United States : Miami, FL; Washington, DC; Los Angeles, CA; Edinburg, TX; and Chicago, IL. Provider focus groups were led in English and parent focus groups were held in Spanish.
- Site visits conducted to five well-established after-school programs with demonstrated success among Latino students over the past decade.
- At the 2007 NCLR Annual Conference, a workshop was held with more than 50 after-school program providers, representing 30 organizations from 15 states.





## Major Themes of Latino Family Engagement in After-School Programs

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- After-School program providers and Latino parents consider programs that promote linguistic and cultural values to be most effective with Latino youth.
- Latino families need more personal outreach strategies that consider their living conditions and the language and cultural barriers they often face.
- Programs that promote a balanced approach between academic support and enrichment will resonate most with Latino families.

## Providers and Latino parents consider programs that promote linguistic and cultural values to be most effective with Latino youth.

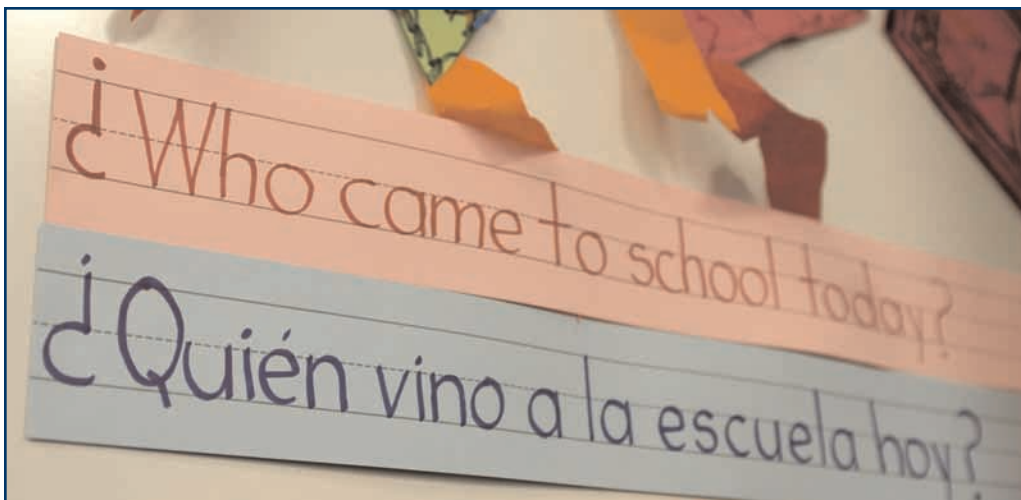
Findings around the needs and views of Latino parents regarding the ability of programs to support cultural diversity were as varied as the diversity that exists within the Latino community. Parent focus groups included a wide range of participants: individuals whose families had inhabited the Rio Grande Valley for more than 400 years and struggled to remember their Spanish; parents who had come to the United States more than ten years ago but had yet to learn English; parents who were comfortable using both languages interchangeably; and new arrivals who were struggling to understand not just the language and culture, but the education system in the United States.

### Language and Culture

- Eighty-two percent of community-based organizations surveyed reported that they offered cultural activities for their after-school participants. Cultural program content included dance classes, flag days, potlucks, and celebrations of *Día de los Muertos*, and Hispanic Heritage and Black History months.
- Parents appreciated the opportunity to help their children prepare a dish, learn a dance, design a costume unique to their culture, or attend a special school celebration. They enjoyed sharing their cultural traditions with their children and were grateful that their children were learning about other cultures.
- Providers emphasized the importance of bilingual services and resources for English language learner students as well as for Latino parents. Eighty percent of after-school programs surveyed have at least one staff member in their programs who is bilingual.
- All focus group participants emphasized that programs dedicated to Latino children should emphasize multiculturalism rather than just Latino culture.

“Centers should not just focus on the Latino existence. They should open up to other cultures... It's not just about arroz con gandules and tacos. I want them to realize there are other cultures out there and celebrate Chinese New Year.”

- Washington DC Provider





## Latino families need more personal outreach strategies that consider their living conditions and the language and cultural barriers they often face.

### Home visits

- Many Latino parents, especially recent immigrants, mistrust or fear educational institutions and non-Latino community-based organizations. Thus, to ensure that all those needing services were reached, home visits were necessary.
- Home visits were particularly important for providers in the Rio Grande Valley who often travel door to door offering services.
- Home visits need to be done by someone who can consistently build relationships with families and who speaks their language (community involvement specialists).

### Community partners

- Latino families are more comfortable approaching staff in community-based organizations than they are approaching teachers and administrators in the schools. Parents shared examples of how programs had supported them either with direct services for their families or with information and referral.
- School-led, school-based, and community-based programs all can benefit from community partners and the support services they are able to provide to enhance the effectiveness and reach of an after-school program's specific activities.

“ We’ve done the traditional flyers and radio announcements, but we’ve found that in the community we serve, the most effective tool is going and speaking to people in their environment – in their comfort zone. ”

- Rio Grande Valley Provider

### Wrap-Around Services Are Essential for Latino Families.



In our survey of community-based organizations, we found that after-school programs offer not only traditional homework help time and free play time, they also offer services like counseling, nutrition and fitness workshops, and prevention programs. Seventy-one percent of survey respondents reported also offering services for parents ranging from parenting classes to financial literacy and computer programs.

## Family Engagement

Although both providers and parents recognize the benefits of family engagement in programs, there remain challenges and barriers to fully implement this vision and approach throughout programs.

- Survey findings showed that provider efforts to engage more parents in their programs are centered on organizing annual family events, such as parent nights, talent shows, end of year performances by the kids, and cultural celebrations.
- Parents appreciated the opportunity to spend time with their children while attending Capoeira lessons, or nutrition and fitness workshops. In several Latino community-based organizations, parents proudly talked about their Consejo de Padres (parent council) which helps reach out to other parents to get them involved as volunteers and in planning special events.



### What do Latino Parents Expect from After-School Programs?

- In addition to mandatory homework time, reading, and academic support, Latino parents said the following were the benefits of after-school programs: “They help my child become a better person”; “My child is safe”; and “My child is not home eating and watching television.”
- Parents expressed some frustration with high staff turnover in programs and the large staff-to-student ratios. Although parents acknowledged the lack of funding in programs, they generally wanted their children to be exposed to caring staff.

## Programs that promote a balanced approach between academic support and enrichment will resonate most with Latino families.

One of the most interesting findings from the focus groups was the disparity between how parents viewed what should be the priority of the after-school program – academic support, especially homework help – and what providers viewed as important, which is youth development and the opportunity to experience activities that youth are not exposed to in school. All of the organizations that participated in the focus groups and 64% of survey respondents offered both components.

PROVIDERS	PARENTS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>■ Providers interviewed expressed some frustration with the occasional tension experienced with Latino parents when their children did not have all homework completed by the time they got home.</li><li>■ Providers viewed their role as needing to ensure that students be involved in a more balanced curriculum that includes sports, life skills, and other enrichment activities.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>■ Latino parents rely on after-school programs to support them with the academic needs of their children. Language barriers, limited educational backgrounds, and multiple job obligations make it difficult for many Latino parents to help their children with homework.</li><li>■ Latino parents did not undervalue positive development activities; they just gave priority to academics.</li></ul>





## Other Findings

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The following section captures observations about after-school programs which are not unique to the Latino community, but that still impact after-school programming for Latino students. This section also identifies themes that may merit further investigation.

### The Need for More Sustainable Funding

The need to grow and diversify funding ranked first among all organizations that participated in the survey. Most programs were patched together with a mix of public funds and private foundation and corporate dollars. The funding concern was generally connected to other programmatic needs, such as the recruitment and retention of quality staff, the availability of transportation, and the ability to provide affordable summer programs.

## Recruitment and Retention of Quality Staff

- Providers in the focus groups described difficulties experienced in offering enough incentives to retain staff, especially part-time staff.
- Providers emphasized the importance of hiring staff who were rooted in the community, either by hiring among former program participants or among other members from the local community.
- Providers from programs operated by public schools or programs run by the city were not as concerned about retention issues. School staff in Miami and Washington, DC discussed the higher salaries and more comprehensive benefits package they offered in comparison to some CBO programs. Programs run by the schools usually use teachers to staff their after-school programs. They do run the risk that their teachers will be tired and less energized during the afternoon hours and therefore less creative in their approaches to engaging participants.
- Forty-nine percent of respondents cited lack of professional development opportunities as a major barrier to retaining quality staff.

“You are going to get hugs and kisses and you are also going to get kicked and bitten, but the bottom line is that you have to really enjoy working with children to stick around.”

- Rio Grande Valley Provider

## Transportation

- Only 38% of respondents reported offering some type of transportation for their program participants.
- Across most discussion groups, parents noted that a lack of transportation to and from after-school programs was a major barrier to enrolling their children.
- Since school-based programs already have after-school participants on school grounds, the issue of transportation is eliminated.

## Summer Programs

Both providers and parents discussed the difficulties that families face when looking for quality programs during the summer. Parents, particularly single mothers, in the focus groups noted how difficult it was to find affordable summer programs and shared the difficulty of having to leave their children alone in the house all summer long while they were at work.

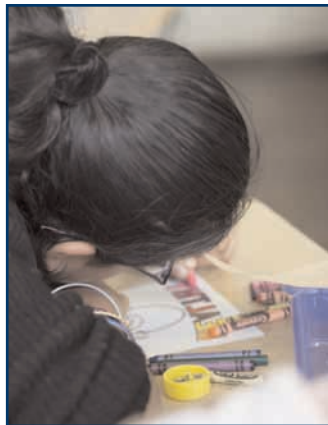
## Funders and the Quality of Programs

When addressing funding sources, the providers that participated in the focus groups and the providers we talked to during site visits, often stressed the influence that funders have on a program's quality.

- In the Miami focus group, most of the after-school programs were fully or partially dependent on the Children's Trust, a tax-based funding source for education programs for Miami Dade's youth. Providers in Miami talked about the positive effects of this steady funding source and pointed out that getting this funding is tied to preserving certain quality indicators in their programs.
- During the New York City site visit, providers asserted that the After-School Corporation (TASC) – a nonprofit organization that funds and supports after-school programs in the state of New York- plays an important role in their programs' sustainability as well in those of other programs in the state.

## Considerations for the Future

- The unique needs of disabled Latino children came up during some of the focus groups. Providers in Miami were the only ones that mentioned being equipped to serve disabled Latino children. They advertise and provide outreach to parents to raise awareness about their services. They noted that families often faced not only language and cultural barriers that prevent them from seeking appropriate support for their children, but also cultural stigmas and guilt that they may have caused their child's disability through their actions.
- The effect of recent Immigration and Customs Enforcement raids in communities with large numbers of Latino families in the wake of the recent immigration debate, and the impact on after-school programs that may face having children left in a program by a family that has been detained.





## Conclusion

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This study of Latino family engagement in after-school programs only examined programs in areas that had a high concentration of Latinos. It is therefore difficult to conclude if the experiences of Latino parents living in emerging Latino communities would be similar. Overall, we believe the themes of bilingual staff; diverse opportunities for family engagement; programs that embrace multiculturalism and promote diverse cultural traditions; and a balanced approach between academic support and enrichment are key components that would resonate in all Latino communities.

## Notes

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1. After-School Alliance, *America After 3 PM: A Household Survey on Afterschool in America* (Washington, DC: After-School Alliance, 2004); C. Wimer, Suzanne Bouffard, Pia Corongan, Eric Dearing, Sandra Simpkins, Priscilla Little, and Heather Weiss, *What Are Kids Getting Into These Days? Demographic Differences in Youth Out-of-School-Time Participation* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Family Research Project, 2005).
2. Miriam Calderon, *Buenos Principios: Latino Children in the Earliest Years of Life* (Washington, DC: National Council of La Raza [NCLR], 2007).
3. Adriana Kohler and Melissa Lazarin, *Hispanic Education in the United States* (Washington, DC: NCLR, 2007).
4. Ibid.
5. Federal Interagency Forum on Child and Family Statistics, *America's Children: Key National Indicators of Well-Being, 2007* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 2007).
6. Time and Learning After-School Task Force, *A New Day for Learning* (Washington, DC: Collaborative Communications Group, 2007).
7. *America After 3 PM ; What Are Kids Getting;* and California Tomorrow, *Pursuing the Promise: Addressing Equity, Access, and Diversity in After-School and Youth Programs* (Oakland, CA: California Tomorrow, 2003).
8. *What Are Kids Getting.*
9. Ibid.
10. *America After 3PM*



