

## **NATIONAL COUNCIL OF LA RAZA UNIVERSAL PRESCHOOL POLICY PRIORITIES**

The National Council of La Raza (NCLR) believes that the surging interest and investment in early childhood education (ECE) programs among policy-makers is a promising development with strong potential to improve outcomes for Latino children. However, we remain concerned that the Latino voice is often missing from the debate on how to shape ECE systems and design effective early childhood programs. Latino children are the fastest-growing segment of the U.S. child population. Moreover, Latino and English language learner (ELL) children represent those likely to participate in and benefit from ECE programs. Currently, nearly 20% of U.S. children under age five are Latino, and in Head Start nearly one-third (28%) of participants are ELLs. Therefore, it is critical that public policies give meaningful consideration to the unique needs of Latinos and ELLs. Moreover, absent a focus on these children, efforts to reform our nation's education system via investments in preschool programs will miss the mark entirely. Thus, as states increasingly expand and enhance preschool services, policy-makers must address access and quality issues for Latinos and ELLs. To this end, NCLR recommends the following:

### **Promote access to universal preschool (UPK) for Latino and English language learner children by:**

- ▲ Including an outreach strategy, which targets Latino, immigrant, ELL, and geographically isolated families.
- ▲ Prioritizing UPK implementation to school districts with underserved neighborhoods that have a high proportion of schools with the lowest Academic Performance Index (API) rankings.
- ▲ Ensuring that UPK programs are full-day, or at a minimum are linked to ECE services for the full day, and available to parents with nontraditional work schedules.

### **Support culturally- and linguistically-appropriate high-quality services by:**

- ▲ Ensuring that the curriculum and assessment tools used in the UPK program are not only developmentally appropriate, but also available in primary languages and culturally sensitive to the needs of the children.
- ▲ Allowing for a mixed delivery system of UPK services for Latino and ELL children (public/private, center-based, and home-based), which leverages the expertise of community-based organizations to provide and expand UPK services, as well as training and technical assistance.
- ▲ Increasing the pool of highly-qualified bilingual teachers and personnel with expertise in working with Latinos and ELLs by including a bilingual ECE teachers career ladder program.
- ▲ Requiring parent involvement and meaningful parent participation in UPK governance functions, in order to enhance parents' capacity as advocates for their children's development.
- ▲ Ensuring that UPK parent activities and materials are culturally sensitive and provided in their primary language.
- ▲ Establishing an ongoing system for monitoring the supply and demand of UPK throughout the state (according to regions, ethnicity, socioeconomic factors, etc.), and for linking and disseminating current ECE research on Latino and ELL issues.
- ▲ Ensuring the opportunity for community-based sector involvement by making resources available for facility renovation and/or acquisition, with priority to underserved neighborhoods.