

Padres Comprometidos:

Engaging Latino
Parents for Long-Term
Student Success



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, 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, serving all Hispanic subgroups in all regions of the country. It has regional offices in Chicago, Los Angeles, New York, Phoenix, and San Antonio and state operations throughout the nation.

THE NATIONAL COUNCIL OF LA RAZA AND LATINO PARENT ENGAGEMENT

For the National Council of La Raza (NCLR), engaging Latino parents in their children's schooling is a critical part of education reform. NCLR works with schools and community-based organizations to promote the development of authentic, meaningful relationships with Latino families and to effectively engage parents, school staff, and children—from preschool through high school—as a community. NCLR believes that Latino 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.



“I liked the program because it showed me how to prepare more for my kids’ education and future so they can be successful. It also showed me what I can do to motivate my kids to help them one day become strong people and live good, healthy lives.”

—Anita Hernandez, parent at the Mexican American Unity Council

THE PADRES COMPROMETIDOS PROGRAM

Padres Comprometidos is a parent engagement program whose primary goal is the fostering of a strong connection between schools and parents. To this end, the *Padres Comprometidos* program builds the capacity of Latino parents to acquire the skills they need to effectively engage with schools and play a leading role in preparing their children for college. The program addresses language and culture as assets—rather than obstacles—upon which skills, confidence, and, ultimately, empowerment, are built.

The *Padres Comprometidos* program also addresses a barrier that often compromises the success of any parent engagement program: the role played by the school in the program's implementation. Rather than training parents directly, NCLR builds the capacity of school staff to implement the program, bridging what can be a very wide gap between parents and school personnel.

Padres Comprometidos has also proven to be effective when community-based organizations partner with local schools to implement the program, since program facilitators are often an integral part of the community and a constant and trusted resource for both parents and schools.

The bilingual *Padres Comprometidos* curriculum has been designed to reach, in particular, those parents who are typically not connected to schools or preschools as a result of:

- Linguistic and cultural differences
- Economic background
- Negative perceptions about a school
- Lack of knowledge about how to become involved



“It was a great experience for my mom to find out what I am doing right—it sort of bonded us more than usual. I’m very thankful for this class because now my mom and I are on the same level. You never know, maybe she’ll go back to college—that would be great.”

—Anonymous student testimonial, Mexican American Unity Council

Three editions of the *Padres Comprometidos* curriculum are available: Preschool, Elementary, and Secondary. Each of them was piloted within NCLR's large network of Latino-serving educational institutions—which includes Head Start centers and other preschool programs as well as elementary and secondary schools (including public, charter, and private schools)—and as part of the parent outreach programs run by community-based organizations.

To date, the program has been implemented at over 30 sites in states including Texas, California, New York, Oklahoma, Missouri, Pennsylvania, Tennessee, Wisconsin, New Mexico, and Washington, DC. The parents the program reaches are generally Spanish-speaking, first- and second-generation immigrants who come predominantly from Mexico and Central America.

Key Findings

An independent evaluation found *Padres Comprometidos* to be a highly effective parent engagement curriculum that consistently increased the engagement of Latino parents in schools. Interviews held after the completion of the program revealed a consistent interest from parents in additional program sessions. Some of the key findings from this independent evaluation are listed below.

Changes in Parent Perceptions and Knowledge

- Prior to the program, not all parents expected their children to attend college. After the program, 100% of parents indicated they expected their children to attend college. It is worthy of note that only 14% of the parents who participated in the program had themselves attended college.
- Parents demonstrated an understanding of the steps needed for their children to attend college, including maintaining a high GPA and taking advanced courses in high school, as well as tapping into both federal and local resources to pay for college.



“I enjoyed the classes and found out more information on college courses and what the best route for my child will be. I also appreciate my son much more now that I know how much work it will take for him to reach his goals.”

—Anonymous parent testimonial, Mexican American Unity Council

Parent Relationships with their Children

- Parents learned how to address difficult topics with their children—such as sexuality—which, for many, had been taboos.
- Parents learned alternative ways to relate to their children. Parents of teenagers, for example, no longer expected instant obedience and, instead, learned to listen to their children’s viewpoints.
- Parents learned to listen respectfully so that, in return, they could receive respect from their teens.
- Parents reported spending more time doing homework with their children.

Parent Relationships with Schools

- Principals believed that the program empowered parents to engage in meaningful ways with teachers, counselors, and administrators.
- Principals described how parents had learned the particular “language” of the school, allowing them to ask key questions about their children’s education.
- Parents spent more time at their children’s schools and played a larger role in preparing their children to attend college.
- Parents volunteered more frequently at school and attended a greater number of school events.
- Parents did not wait for teachers to contact them; instead, they called teachers regularly.
- Parents were more likely to get their children involved in academic clubs.



“I learned how to better communicate with my daughter and her school, how the schools receive funds from the government, and what the requirements are to graduate from high school.”

—Anonymous parent evaluation, Conexión Americas

Parent Relationships with Other Parents

- The program helped forge bonds and create a sense of community among parents.
- Parents learned from one another and reported feeling more comfortable when discussing sensitive issues relating to their children.

The success of the *Padres Comprometidos* program has brought about a growing network of parent engagement facilitators and parent engagement advocates—a network NCLR hopes will continue to grow for years to come.



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