



Policy Memorandum: Increase Supports for Parental Engagement to Increase Student Achievement

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Who We Are

We are educators from diverse K-16 settings across the country. In our 37 combined years of serving Latino students and families, our collective work has focused on schools, nonprofits, and postsecondary institutions in Arkansas, Tennessee, and Michigan. Through our work, we serve Latino families, most of them low-income, limited English proficient (LEP), and first-generation college students. Our varied roles provide us with unique insights into family engagement for Latino students.

Background

Currently, the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) requires that districts spend at least 1% of Title I funds on family and parental engagement activities, which we do not believe is enough to meaningfully engage families under “normal” school conditions. Given COVID-19 and the expected years of recovery, this percentage is not enough to adequately support parents, as districts have had to make drastic changes to schooling. Only 1% of funds will not make up for learning loss and the trauma students have experienced during this time. We need a more robust long-term investment in family engagement to ensure that our education system is prepared and resourced to support and engage families for many years to come.

Our Ask

We believe that in order to increase student outcomes for the Latino population, more must be done to engage Latino families. To increase Latino families’ abilities to promote

stronger opportunities and outcomes for students, we recommend the following changes to Title I of ESSA:

- Increase the Title I parent engagement set-aside from 1% to 3%.
- At least half of the allotted 3% of Title I funding cannot be relocated for school-wide initiatives and must be used for the purpose of targeted family engagement efforts that are tailored for eligible Title I families.
- Funds used for staff training must prioritize research-based practices that have shown increased family engagement within diverse communities, with particular attention given to research that addresses the digital divide.
- The current ESSA recommendations on language accessibility must change to a mandatory requirement for translated print, digital, and other communication materials in the top three languages spoken in the school district other than English.

The Need

Latino students have faced long-term inequalities in the education system, from attending schools with lower levels of funding, lower rates of certified teachers, a lack of culturally competent teachers and teachers of color, and less access to advanced course work. Additionally, the current pandemic has forced schools to engage with youth and families virtually, exacerbating long-standing barriers and highlighting the disproportionate impact of the digital divide.¹ Given the barriers families are facing related to digital literacy and beyond, family engagement will be a crucial tool to help close these opportunity gaps—and it will be a proven method for increasing outcomes for students.

- **Latino parents place a high value on education**, but language barriers, understanding of the school system, and ineffective cultural practices on the part of the school often limit the extent to which parents feel capable of being more active participants in their child's academic life.²
- **Latino parents want more communication and support from their schools** when it comes to supporting student outcomes, they are often not sure how to access what they need.³
- **Latino parents' perception of "involvement" is often different from schools' normative understandings**, which is more defined by academic involvement rather than life participation. Based on Latino parents' levels of participation, teachers often assume that Latino parents don't care about their children's education, without understanding their context or knowledge of the school system.⁴

Impact

To ensure that Latinx students do not fall further behind academically under the current crisis and that they have a strong opportunity to excel after the crisis, it is essential that Latinx families have the tools and skills to support their children both in social-emotional development and in response to the increased burdens that parents will face as their children engage with remote learning. There will not be a single solution to supporting family engagement while addressing issues of digital equity, but providing more funding for this critical work will ensure that students, teachers, and parents can experience some of the benefits of effective family and school partnerships.

- **Family engagement can have long-term positive effects on student academics.** Reports have found that when family engagement is intentional and sustained, it has a positive impact on grades, test scores, passing rates, enrollment in higher-level programs, high school graduation, and college attendance.⁵
- **Sustained, learning-based, collaborative programming is most effective in creating a lasting impact on children.** Additional funding would serve to amplify these effects within the Latino community.
- **The sooner we take action, the sooner Latino families and students can benefit.** It takes time to develop the types of meaningful, sustained relationships between families and staff that can foster students' social, emotional, and academic growth.

Endnotes

- 1 Pew Research Center, "53% of Americans Say the Internet Has Been Essential During the COVID-19 Outbreak" (April 30, 2020), <https://www.pewresearch.org/internet/2020/04/30/53-of-americans-say-the-internet-has-been-essential-during-the-covid-19-outbreak/> (accessed January 31, 2021). "What Four Divides Teach About Digital Equity, an Analysis," *Learning.com*, 2020, <https://resources.learning.com/whitepaper/digital-equity>, (accessed January 31, 2021).
- 2 Nancy E. Hill and Kathryn Torres, K., "Negotiating the American Dream: The Paradox of Aspirations and Achievement among Latino Students and Engagement between their Families and Schools," *Journal of Social Issues* 66, no. 1 (2010): 95–112. B. Harry and R. Waterman, "Building Collaboration Between Schools and Parents of English Language Learners: Transcending Barriers, Creating Opportunities. National Institute for Culturally Responsive Educational Systems," *Colorín Colorado*, 2008, <https://www.colorincolorado.org/research/building-collaboration-between-schools-and-parents-english-language-learners-transcending> (accessed January 31, 2021).
- 3 Alice M. L. Quijochó and Annette M. Daoud, "Dispelling Myths about Latino Parent Participation in Schools," *The Educational Forum*, 70, no. 3 (2008): 255-267, DOI: 10.1080/00131720608984901.
- 4 Maria Estela Zarate, *Understanding Latino Parental Involvement in Education: Perceptions, Expectations, and Recommendations* (Los Angeles, California: The Tomás Rivera Policy Institute, University of Southern California, 2008).
- 5 Karen L. Mapp & Paul J. Kuttner, "Partners in Education: A Dual Capacity-Building Framework for Family-School Partnerships." SEDL, (2008) <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED593896.pdf>.