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## **Strengthening Latino Parental Involvement Forming Community-Based Organizations/School Partnership**

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### **Abstract**

Latino community-based organizations (CBOs) represent a natural, yet largely untapped, source of leadership and opportunities to encourage and strengthen Latino parental involvement in American schools. The authors challenge the assumption that Latino parents' lower levels of formal parental involvement indicate a lack of interest in their children's education and argue that traditional methods of involving parents in their children's education are not always effective. Their preliminary findings indicate that parental policy changes and practices are needed to promote genuine collaboration between Latino parents and the schools that their children attend rather than imposing agendas for an "appropriate" one-size-fits-all involvement.

### **Strengthening Latino Parental Involvement: Forming Community-Based Organizations/ School Partnerships**

Research shows that Latinos in the U.S. face significant challenges. Not only are Latinos the fastest growing segment of the U.S. population, but they also have the distinction of being the most undereducated ethnic group with the highest dropout rate. In the past three decades, approximately 30 % of the Latino population ages 16 to 24 have dropped out of school. As of 2000, the dropout rate was 28% (cf. Carger, 1997; Chavkin, 1993; Gibson, 2002; Inger, 1992; McKissack, 1999; National Center for Education Statistics, 2003; Scribner, 1999). While it is true that the educational attainment and academic achievement of Latino students has improved during the past decades, it has not been enough, given America's commitment to reduce and eventually eliminate the persistent gap in academic achievement between minority and disadvantaged students and their white counterparts.

While recognizing that there is no issue of greater importance to the Latino community of the U.S. than the successful education of its children (cf. Gonzalez, 2002), we argue in this

paper that an innovative way to strengthen Latino parental involvement in American schools is to develop community-based organizations (CBOs)/ school partnerships. Perceiving the Latino community as an invigorating force rather than a problem, we discuss the urgent need for American educational institutions to develop new outreach strategies.

The CBO/school partnership model builds upon the growing body of research about parental involvement, which has found that when parents are involved in the education of their children, they do better in school (cf. Ascher, 1988; Baker & Soden, 1998; Chavkin, 1993; Chavkin & Gonzalez, 1995; Epstein, 1996; Floyd, 1998; Hein, 2003; Petersen, 1989; Ramirez, 2003; & Sampson, 2003).

Since expanded parental choices is one of the four pillars of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB), the CBO/school partnership model provides school districts with alternative options to develop, strengthen, and sustain partnerships among parents, schools, and communities.

In this paper we suggest that, given the CBOs' grassroots membership and *neighborhood focus*, they are in a pivotal position to serve as cultural brokers between Latino families and the schools. Drawing on their familiarity with the communities they serve, their knowledge of the factors that may promote or prevent the high academic achievement of Latino students and on their links to community resources, these CBOs provide local families with basic supports that often affect a student's ability to learn and succeed (e.g., nutrition, health care, housing, after school activities, language instruction, and transportation). We contend that the development of effective partnerships between Latino CBOs and local schools, or the strengthening of existing ones, in the long run, can promote academic achievement.

### **Community Based Organizations**

CBOs are private, non-profit grassroots organizations located in and representative of a significant segment of a community. This umbrella term includes a wide range of organizations of various sizes addressing the social, cultural, health, or humanitarian needs of a particular community by providing their clients with an array of specialized or general services.

Public schools that establish partnerships with Latino CBOs can share the vitality of a community and tap into an existing structure that allows free exchange of ideas. Forming Latino CBO/school partnerships is not a new idea. During the past decade, several authors including de la Rosa and Maw (1990), Delgado-Gaitán (1990, 1991), Adger (2000), and Henderson and Mapp (2002) have shown that existing partnerships between CBOs and schools serving culturally and linguistically diverse students play a critical role in supplementing, not replacing, the work done by Parent Teacher Associations (PTAs). CBOs can assist parents—particularly recent immigrants or families with different cultural backgrounds from those traditionally served by U.S. schools—to learn how the American school system works and what are the similarities and differences between the U.S. school system and those from their countries of origins. For example in the U.S., the school year averages 180 days, while in other nations the school year can last up to 240 days. Students are also often in school more hours per day than American students.

Analyzing data on school/community partnerships collected by the Center for Research on Education, Diversity & Excellence (CREDE), Adger (2000) concludes that three types of CBOs often partner with schools to support language minority students. These are: (1) ethnic organizations, (2) CBOs whose only function is a school partnership, and (3) multi-purpose

service organizations. The CBOs examined in this paper fall into the first and third categories described by Adger (2000).

Latino CBOs are the life-blood of Latino communities whose members value family loyalty and share a sense of community. Usually located in the heart of a *barrio*, these CBOs represent Latinos in many of the same ways that national church-affiliated organizations, historic college fraternities/sororities, or national service associations, such as Kiwanis and Elks, represent members of other ethnic groups. Latino CBOs vary by size, budgets, and structure. The majority are formally incorporated and have been granted a tax-exempt status by the Internal Revenue Service. Although many CBOs operate on a shoestring budget, they provide educational, legal, and/or social services to populations in need.

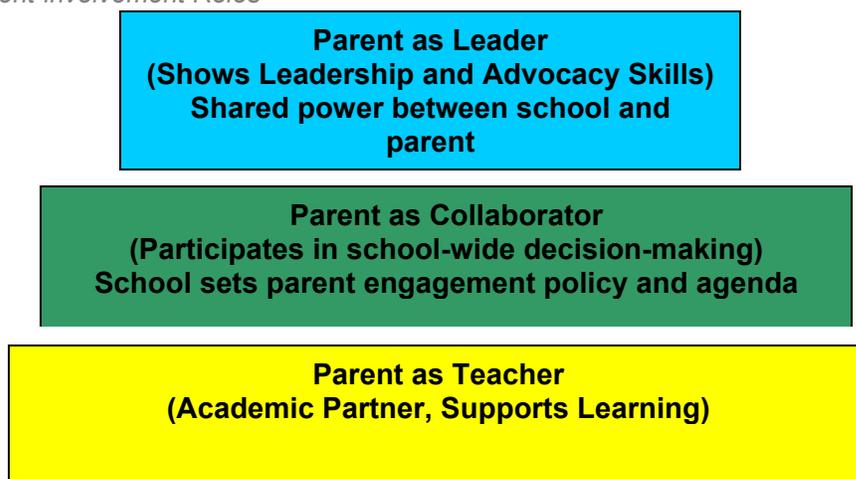
As an example of such Latino CBOs currently engaged in strengthening Latino parental involvement in American schools, we present four multipurpose organizations founded and developed by Latinos for Latinos. They are Chicago's Latino Youth Incorporated, Washington, D.C.'s Calvary Bilingual Multicultural Learning Center (CBMLC), Dallas' Dallas Concilio of Latino Service Organizations, and Denver's Padres Unidos. These four CBOs will be analyzed and discussed below (see pp. 11).

### **Involving Latino Parents**

Parental involvement in the school system is defined, both by the federal government and by private organizations, as the participation of parents in a regular, two-way, and meaningful communication with school officials about academic learning and other school activities. Inspired by Epstein's et al. (2001, 2002) research on parental involvement the National Council of La Raza's Armandina Garza has identified six different types of Latino parent engagement opportunities that CBOs and schools can foster (see Figure 1). The quest for effective Latino parental involvement is not easily accomplished without first understanding the complexity of that involvement, as well as by identifying barriers to it. In this connection, we draw attention to the work of the National Council of La Raza in strengthening Latino education in the U.S.

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Figure 1  
*Types of (Latino) Parent-involvement Roles*



**Parent as Supporter  
(Attends cultural and athletic events)**

**Parent as Parent  
(Parenting skills/Social-emotional support)**

*8 Armandina Garza, National Council of La Raza (NCLR, 2002)*

Since research has identified a strong link between parent involvement and academic achievement, it is important that schools look for non-traditional ways to engage Latino parents who may appear reluctant to get formally involved. This is not an easy task. As Gibson (2002) has pointed out:

... educators frequently identify Latino students and their families as “the problem,” unaware that their own lack of preparedness in working with culturally and linguistically diverse populations is itself a major obstacle and one that needs urgent and sustained attention (p. 244).

However, as Tinker (2002) points out

The reality is that parent involvement must be a collaborative effort. Teachers and administrators need to view parents as integral partners in the academic achievement and well being of their students and seek to create an environment where parent participation is welcomed and utilized (p. ).

As researchers from the Intercultural Center for Research in Education (INCRE) (1988) have indicated, most efforts over the past 15 years by the school system to involve Spanish-speaking parents have been unsuccessful. According to INCRE researchers (1998), activities to promote parental involvement usually do not address the needs of Latino parents and even sometimes alienate them, especially those low-income parents and immigrant parents who have not yet mastered English skills. The CBOs mentioned in this paper are endeavoring to close this void.

The lack of formal Latino parent involvement in their children's schools, as Salinas Sosa (1997) notes, may be due to a number of sociocultural and economic factors all of which are not necessarily present at any given moment. For example, this lack of parental involvement may be due either to a dissonance between the beliefs and expectations of Latino parents and those of the school administrators and PTA authorities, to the parents' fear of intimidation of schools where their culture and language are imperfectly understood, or to family illiteracy. Logistical problems (e.g., childcare concerns, financial resources, safety, time, and transportation) and attitudinal difficulties (e.g., communication problems, and anxiety about the ways in which they are being perceived by teachers and administrators) may also deter their visits to school.

Contrary to the expectations of the American educational authorities, in some Latin American countries parental advocacy, as practiced in the U.S., is not only discouraged but also considered disrespectful. As a result, it is not surprising to find that Latino parents who were not educated in the U.S. often continue to believe that it is the school's job to educate children with

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**(Serves school as needed)**

minimal family interference, while the family's job is to nurture students with minimal school interference. Teachers need to develop a greater understanding of these cultural expectations in order to develop effective strategies encouraging both sides to connect and engage. For example, an understanding of the Latino emphasis on personal styles of interaction and of parents' expectations could reduce Latino discomfort with the sort of classroom competition customary in American classrooms as well as the task-oriented style characteristic of many of its mainstream teachers.

The development of a solid partnership between America's public schools and Latino CBOs will help to produce deep changes in the relationships between educators and Latino parents. Encouraging Latino parents to get involved in school activities and to become accepted educational leaders and partners in the transformation of American schools will necessitate an investment in time, energy, and resources. It also requires an understanding of the complexities both of the school systems and of the various Latino subcultures (e.g., Cubans, Mexicans, Puerto Ricans, and Central or South Americans) by all participants. Restructuring schools to ensure that no child is left behind would mean more than mandating standardized testing and would necessitate new facilities and improved technology. It would challenge the educational stakeholders to address the human dimensions of school culture. This human dimension includes not only the school's own unwritten rules, traditions, norms, and expectations, but also the assumptions and cultural backgrounds of the students and parents, especially since a majority of the students will be born of parents from other than European backgrounds, especially Latino.

It is important to point out that the barriers to parental involvement will vary according to the community setting (i.e., rural, urban, or suburban), the length of residency in the U.S. (i.e., U.S.-born, first generation, or immigrant), and the degree of demographic compatibility between families and schools (i.e., socioeconomic status and ethnicity). A sharp distinction needs to be made between U.S.-born Latinos and immigrant Latinos as well as between those Latinos living in different parts of the U.S., such as California, Texas, Miami, Chicago, and New York, in urban or rural areas, and migrant and settled workers. Involving U.S.-born Latino parents may turn out to be an even greater challenge when it involves parents who feel that the U.S. educational system has failed them or has discriminated against them. In contrast to the disenfranchised Latino parents who have lost faith in the American educational system, many recently immigrated Latinos who have come to the U.S. in search of greater educational opportunities for their children often have a naive faith in the U.S. school system. They may believe that the opportunities that exist within the system are not only a certainty for their children, but also that they promise early financial and social success. In contrast, middle-class, white families who have already experienced success in the American educational system are at an advantage since they are more familiar with U.S. cultural assumptions and often possess social and cultural capital that allows them to build easier relationships with teachers who, in turn, represent their own culture to them with more ease and trust (Henderson, 2001; Henderson & Raimondo, 2001).

One strategy to improve the overall educational achievement of Latino children is by promoting the more active involvement of their parents or guardians in the American public school system. Currently, many of these children do not benefit from their parents' formal engagement. At the same time, over the past decades, many Latino CBOs have successfully built bridges between the U.S. school system and the Latino community and have provided these families with a web of formal and informal connections and supports essential for the improvement of instructional practices (Adger, 2000). Our study is part of an extensive research program designed to learn the effectiveness of these alternative ways to strengthen Latino

parental involvement in U.S. schools by forming CBO/school partnerships.

## Research Questions

Our research questions about the mediating role that CBOs can play are:

1. What role can Latino CBOs play in strengthening Latino parental involvement in American schools?
2. How can Latino CBOs enable disenfranchised Latino parents to increase their involvement in mainstream educational systems?

We are particularly interested in learning how Latino children and families react to the American educational system specifically with respect to individual and family aspirations, self-confidence, family involvement in the educational process, and in the various methods of information sharing as well as other procedures that facilitate the development of partnerships between schools, families, and communities.

## Methodology

### Research Design

In this study we analyzed case studies of Latino community-based organizations that have successfully worked with American public schools to involve families.

We collected descriptive data on four CBOs located in different geographical regions that promote and foster family, school, and community partnerships and which we believe, based on an examination of an extensive number of CBO profiles with similar goals and purposes, constitute a representative sample. Each one of these CBOs was analyzed in six areas that we felt increased the probability of involving Latino families in their children's education as a key element for increasing academic achievement. These areas were: (1) strong family involvement, (2) multiple levels of family involvement, (3) needs-based assessment of students, (4) cultural representation, bicultural/bilingual staff, and community experts, (5) community-based multiservice organizations, and (6) established relationship or partnership with local schools.

## Participant Case Study Profiles

### Latino Youth Incorporated; Chicago, IL

Located in the heart of one of Chicago's poorest communities, *Latino Youth, Inc.* is a comprehensive youth-service organization which has provided quality educational, child welfare, and social services for more than two decades to approximately 2,000 children and their families living in the Pilsen, Little Village, and South Lawndale *barrios* of Chicago's south west side. Concerned leaders and residents in search of solutions to the increasing problems of high school dropouts, drug abuse, and delinquency established Latino Youth, Inc. in 1974. In its strategic plan, Latino Youth identifies its mission as:

... To create opportunities for youth that will enable them to become active-reflective participants who will work toward improving the general condition of

their community. ... to create a climate characterized by high expectations, academic excellence, mutual respect for residents of Pilsen/ Little Village and South Lawndale, and opportunities for youth, ages 6-24, that will enable them to become productive individuals who work towards achieving positive goals to improve their lives, future and community. (Latino Youth, n.d.).

Today Latino Youth offers numerous community programs and wrap-around services designed to help address the many problems which exist in the area. The wrap-around approach (also called holistic, strengths based or individualized), is a model of service that develops plans focusing on the individual strengths and needs of all family members. Wraparound services are community-based, family-focused, and culturally competent. For example, Latino Youth's most long-lived innovative program is an Alternative High School that offers youth who have dropped out of Chicago schools a second chance to obtain a high school diploma. Other community programs include an on-site child care center, a Latino youth/parent/child center, family and group counseling, mentoring services, youth leadership development, an independent study program with the option to obtain a GED, a 24-hour crisis intervention center, emergency housing for runaway youth, drug/alcohol/gang prevention, a college and career development department, job development, and internship opportunities.

Its family involvement efforts and programs target both adult and teenage parents. Through leadership and support of other teenage parents, young mothers learn about child development and parenting strategies, along with the importance of leading a healthy lifestyle as a means to ensure the emotional and physical well-being of themselves and their children.

Through its Family Integration program at six elementary schools, Latino Youth's staff conduct a 29 week program aimed at teaching parental skills, helping parents of school-age children build and strengthen their relationships with school staff, and providing them with opportunities to address a wide range of educational issues. The success and popularity of this program is exemplified by its continued demand both by area schools and parents.

#### Calvary Bilingual Multicultural Learning Center; Washington, DC

Established in 1986, Washington, DC's Calvary Bilingual Multicultural Learning Center (CBMLC) currently serves more than 600 low-income Latino, African-American, and multiethnic children, youth, and families who reside in the Columbia Heights, Shaw, Mt. Pleasant, Petworth and Adams Morgan neighborhoods of the nation's capital. CBMLC's mission is to create a community of learning for children, youth, families, and staff. Over the years of existence, CBMLC's salary has grown both programmatically and physically from a childcare center for 15 children in 1986, to a nationally accredited full-service education and family support entity that meets the needs of its program participants, their families, and community members through its various programs and activities.

Serving families of different races, cultures, and languages, CBMLC offers a wide variety of programs and services that families of different backgrounds bring to their learning center. These include infant/toddler care (i.e., ages three months to two years); a full-day, year-round bilingual pre-school (i.e., ages two to five); school-age/youth development enrichment activities (e.g., after school and academic support); a network of support for first-time parents; family literacy programs which trains volunteer tutors to partner with elementary and middle school students and their parents for one-on-one reading and mathematics; multidisciplinary arts (e.g., visual, performing, literary, and media arts); a networked learning center, which provides communitywide technology access; and the community and a Community and Family Development Institute (CFDI) (CBMLC, n.d.).

Created in 1999, CFDI provides and coordinates delivery of supportive social services to approximately 600 families with family counseling opportunities, social service referrals, and health screening opportunities. By working along with and supporting the traditional programs within CBMLC that serve children and youth, the Family Institute closed CBMLC's circle by providing a wide array of services and support to all family members.

CBMLC is highly committed to increasing parental involvement in education. On average, every year it offers 24 parent workshops aimed at helping parents and youth to understand and navigate their way through the educational systems in the District of Columbia and increase communication with the DC Public School system. CFDI also sponsors monthly parents' association meetings and provides mentoring and tutorial services to approximately 100 school-age children.

Currently, the CBMLC wraparound services include, but are not limited to, home visitations for young mothers; an infant-toddler center; a bilingual early childhood program; a before/after school and summer school-age program that offers tutoring; homework help; leadership training and college prep work, art activities including poetry, drama, music, dance, chess, fine arts, photography, videography, computer-generated art, and technology instruction; and through their Professional Development Institute, the organization also offers a Child Development Associate credential.

#### Dallas Concilio of Latino Service Organization, TX

The Dallas Concilio is a nonprofit organization that serves as an umbrella organization for groups addressing the various needs of the Latino community in the greater Dallas community. In its 22<sup>nd</sup> year, the Dallas Concilio's efforts and programs directly and indirectly serve over 10,000 individuals who are predominately Latinos (cf. Dallas Concilio, n.d.).

Dallas Concilio's Parent Institute for Quality Education (PIQE) was created to promote family involvement in a child's educational process by developing and strengthening working partnerships between families, schools, and the local community. Modeled after the Parent Institute for Quality Education in California, the Dallas Concilio's parental involvement program gives parents the tools and knowledge needed to take a participatory role in assisting in their child's educational success. For example, in 2002 PIQE offered a nine-week parent-involvement program to over 124 parents with children enrolled in Dallas's James Bowie Elementary School.

#### *Padres Unidos*; Denver, CO

*Padres Unidos* (Parents United) came together about 11 years ago as a group of concerned and disenfranchised Denver parents who were ready for an institutional change in their children's education. They developed an organization focused on educational equity and

justice for all students. Its main goal is to decrease student drop-out/push-out rates, achieve educational reforms, and track Latino and Black students on their way to college.

*Padres Unidos'* guiding principle is that "education is a right, not a privilege." Its mission is to promote quality education for all children through institutional reform and community control of the schools.

Through its various programs, *Padres Unidos* assists families and minority students to analyze conditions, create solutions, and develop strategies that result in implementing institutional change and reform. For example, through its Parent Leadership Program, guardians and parents develop the skills to challenge the educational system and organize community-advocacy groups for all children. Its Parent Advocacy Assistance Program, another one of its family-support programs, provides mediation and translation services, parent training/workshops, and information and referral services. *Padres Unidos* has also opened the nation's first dual-language/Montessori elementary school in Denver for low-income, inner city, Spanish-speaking children. Its leadership works closely with a number of organizations and initiatives including the Advancement Project, National Council of La Raza (NCLA), National Association of Bilingual Education (NABE), Tenants and Workers Support Committee, and Parent Immigrant Committee to close the academic achievement gap and decrease the dropout rate.

## Results/Discussion

Latino CBOs are in a key position to act as a bridge between the American public school system and the growing Latino community given their expertise in building partnerships among grassroots organizations, community groups, and hard-to-reach, high-risk groups. Located in the *barrios* in which they provide services, the bilingual/bicultural leadership and staff of these CBOs often share knowledge of the clients' culture. Such sharing allows Latino families to take advantage of various wraparound services that aim to meet their diverse needs while at the same time developing the required knowledge, attitudes, skills, and behaviors to participate actively in the American educational system. These services are usually delivered in a familiar language and cultural context, and provide Latino families with the information and skills needed to support their children's academic and social development.

Latino CBOs often serve as a safe haven for those parents who feel unwelcome when they step into what they often describe as the foreign world of their children's schools. These CBOs have helped to demystify the workings of the American public school system, informing minority parents of their rights and responsibilities, and building skills that increase their sense of efficacy. When analyzed, the four Latino CBOs had at least half or more of the following elements in common:

- **Strong Family Involvement Focus.** All four CBOs had established a mission, goals, and/or objectives that they sought to accomplish when engaging families. Family involvement was either the central focus or a strong focal point within the organization's mission or goals. In accordance with the parental involvement definition of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, their program(s) and approach(es) sought to engage parents on a regular, on-going, and long-term basis.
- **Multiple Levels of Family Involvement.** These CBOs often seek to engage families at different levels, such as involving parents as social-emotional and academic supporters who attend cultural and athletic events, recruiting parents as volunteers who serve their schools as needed, enlisting parents as academic partners who help

their children learn at home, and training parents to become educational advocates and community leaders. It is important to point out that parental leadership skills are developed both directly through real-world experience such as organizing and negotiating with stakeholders for education reform, and indirectly through the opportunities offered to parents for personal and professional growth (i.e. computer classes, GED, early care and childhood certification, etc.).

- Needs-based Program. All four of these CBOs conduct a needs assessment with parents on which to base their programs, parental workshops, and services. Staff did not assume that they knew what information, skills or tools Latino parents would benefit from nor did they try to implement a one-size-fits-all program. In many cases, they surveyed other key individuals (i.e., school principals, teachers, counselors, and community members) to include their perspectives as part of their needs assessments.
- Cultural Representation, Bilingual Staff, and Community Experts. A significant number of the CBOs' staff members are bilingual/bicultural persons fluent in Spanish and English who reside in the community they serve. They are considered by the local residents as community experts who bring a more in-depth insider's understanding of the issues and needs faced by families and their representative organizations.
- Community-Based Multi-Service Organization. Latino families tend to gravitate towards CBOs for their accessibility, flexible hours, and additional services that lie beyond school's traditional methods and capacity. These four CBOs are rooted in the center of their communities and each offers a wide range of social, educational, health, employment, and referral services that are not only appealing but essential to Latinos.
- Established Relationship or Partnership with Local Schools. The four CBOs have successfully established some form of relationship, whether through an informal or formal partnership with the K-12 schools attended by their clients' children. Services include after-school programs, tutoring, mentoring, leadership development, and other educational and age-appropriate social programs (e.g., gangs and pregnancy prevention for secondary school students).

### Overcoming Commonly Cited Obstacles

Most Latino families would like to be more involved in their children's education. However, they face a number of obstacles and barriers to parental involvement many of which are beyond their immediate control. At the top of the list of obstacles to Latino family involvement is a cultural mismatch between the private sphere of the home and the public sphere of the schools. Staffed with individuals that not only live in the community, but share the same cultural and linguistic background of the families they serve, CBOs are better equipped than schools to overcome commonly cited barriers. CBOs are more successful in involving parents because they provide flexible hours, bilingual personnel, culturally-relevant, wraparound services, courses and programs for all family members (e.g., ESL, computer training, and GED classes), and have the ability to work with all educational stakeholders.

CBOs need also to work with school personnel. At a minimum, they need to introduce their parent-involvement goals, program, or parent session/training needs at an all-staff meeting. Optimally, CBO staff would work with the school principal on setting family involvement goals jointly with the teaching staff. Together, schools and CBOs should explore what works and what challenges they are faced with to create a plan that will strengthen their parent-involvement practices and programs. CBO staff can also provide professional development focused on the students' culture and history to help promote a greater sense of acceptance and

respect between families and teachers. As teachers gain a greater understanding of families and students culture, they should be encouraged to incorporate it into the curriculum as a means of supporting the cultural values (respect for elders, the role grandparents play, respect for other people's property, hard work, etc) that Latino parents instill in their children.

The strategies, approaches, and programs to recruit and engage families in their children's education used by the CBOs in these four case studies are highly effective. Depending on their programs' goals, and to some extent the state of education in the neighborhood schools, CBOs engage families at different levels, ranging from parenting skills to leadership and advocacy. These CBOs are in a pivotal position to bring school personnel and Latino parents together. They offer on-going sessions on a variety of non-academic and educational topics that seek to inform parents about their rights in the school system and build the necessary skills to best support and guide their children at home and at school. For example, the staff of District of Columbia's CBMLC works collaboratively on family involvement issues with the staff of 12 area schools and also makes a concerted effort to align their after school programs to the schools' curricula. Dallas' Concilio nine-week parent-involvement seminars are the result of collaborative work between Latino leaders and school personnel. These seminars take place at local schools with the school principal welcoming the parents and, towards the end, engaging in a dialogue with participating parents about school-related concerns identified by the parents.

The ultimate objective of the CBOs is to organize the *barrio* to reform poorly performing schools that fail to meet the needs of certain student populations (i.e. children of color, immigrants, and disabled children). Although developing leadership and gaining advocacy skills may have proven to be an indirect influence as a result of the information and training these CBOs offered, Padres Unidos' (Denver) mission and framework are aimed at mobilizing students and parents to demand school-based and institutional changes. The overarching goal is to ensure the students' right to quality education and not the lip service that is often offered. All CBOs promote a sense of collaboration to help foster a productive relationship between parents, schools, and community. In the case of Padres Unidos, when parents were faced with resistance from those in power they legitimately resorted to opposition. That organized opposition was considered a necessary precursor to the dismantling of the unfair treatment of minority students and the rejection of the impoverished education they receive.

### Final Thoughts

Over the past decades, research has systematically demonstrated that family and community involvement in education of their children is a powerful influence on student achievement. The NCLB Act of 2001 acknowledges the vital role that parents play in the education of their children and *options for parents* is one of the four pillars of this legislation. Section 1118 of the NCLB Act requires all school districts in the U.S. receiving Title I, Part A funds to provide equal involvement opportunities for all parents, including those who speak limited English, are disabled, or parents of migratory children, to execute programs, activities, and events that enable parents to get involved; and, to make a strong effort to communicate with and get feedback from parents who want to be involved in the programs, activities, and events directed towards parent involvement (NCLB, 2002).

Similarly, we also realize that jumping on the bandwagon of enhanced options for parental involvement will not solve all poor academic performance. Where students do need help, often they come from families and a home life that are not supportive of education. Some

may also need to work from an early age to add to the family income, such as English language learners or developmentally challenged. Increased access to the education process will mean little if parents are not interested in the school system, other than, it's the teacher's job to educate my kid, and not mine. This attitude is not so uncommon as you would like to think. Every school district is required to develop a parent-involvement program and to distribute the plan to the parents (NCLB, 2002).

Strengthening Latino parental involvement, particularly of non-native English-speaking, low-income parents, who often face a wide range of cultural, language, and transportation constraints, requires the American educational system not only to understand and address these barriers, but also to develop and effectively use non-traditional outreach mechanisms that already exist in the local communities. Furthermore, in the specific case of low-income Latino families, parental involvement, as Castillo-Kickbusch (2003) highlights, means family involvement, given the growing numbers of grandparents, aunts, uncles, and friends who have taken over the parenting role of others' children. Therefore, increased access to the education process as mandated by NCLB will mean little if Latino parents and their families are unaware of how American school systems operate, the expectations that school authorities have, or the flexible and diverse opportunities that schools are not offering the families interested in participating.

This study challenges us to bring together the usually separate worlds of schools and Latino community-based organizations. Future research should include process and outcome measures with more precise indicators of the performance and impact that Latino CBOs can have in the education of Latino children. If society is really committed to closing the minority achievement gap and ensuring that Latino children are academically successful, then schools must be open to working with CBOs as a means of facilitating Latino parental involvement.

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