

Transforming Early Learning: Educational Equity for Young Latinos



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Transforming Early Learning: Educational Equity for Young Latinos



Mission

To build the power, influence, and leadership of the Latino community through collective action to transform public policies that ensure the well being of our community and society as a whole.

Vision

The Latino Policy Forum envisions societal prosperity, unity, and equity in our nation and in the global community.

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Content

Preface	1
Executive Summary	2
Introduction	5
Characteristics of Young Latino Children and Their Families	8
Foreign-Born Status	8
Socioeconomic Status	9
Education Attainment	10
Latino Family Arrangements	10
Value of Education	11
Civic Engagement Patterns	11
Childcare and Early Education Participation	12
Transforming Early Learning	14
Reach Out to Latino Families	14
Apply Prioritization in the Screening Process	16
Provide a Culturally Relevant Education	18
Develop Linguistically and Culturally Competent ECE Professionals	20
Integrate Parents into the Learning Process	21
Evaluate Children Using Linguistically and Culturally Conscious Methods	23
Easing the Transition of Latinos into Kindergarten	23
Conclusion	25

Preface

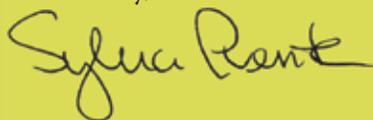
Latino Policy Forum is pleased to present this report, *Transforming Early Learning: Educational Equity for Young Latinos* to address the systemic changes needed to provide Latino children with the early learning opportunities that will lay the foundations for their continued success in the 21st century. This report builds on the early childhood education work that Latino Policy Forum has engaged in over the past two years. In 2006 and 2007, The Forum convened nearly 600 Latino community members from throughout the Chicago region to develop a Latino policy agenda. Out of those conversations, education, and more specifically early childhood education, arose as the top priority. In June 2007, The Forum released the brief, *A Critical Policy Imperative: Making Pre-school Education Work for Latinos*. Since then, Latino Policy Forum has regularly convened an early childhood education workgroup, comprised of Latino-serving early childhood providers; worked closely with advocates and legislators to make the case for procuring capital funds to build facilities in high-need Latino areas; and has participated in the work of various committees of the Illinois Early Learning Council, including staffing the Linguistic and Cultural Diversity Committee.

Transforming Early Learning is another step toward ensuring that all Latino children receive a high quality education. The report highlights the need for broad systemic changes which are responsive to the linguistically and culturally diverse Latino community. As a growing proportion of the population, particularly amongst the youngest sector, the future of Latinos is inextricably intertwined with the social and economic prosperity of the region. Illinois cannot, and will not, prosper if Latino children are left behind.

To fulfill its promise to the children of this state, the standards of quality must reflect the linguistically and culturally diverse children of Illinois. This report considers basic components of early childhood education programs, then explores practices which meet the distinct needs of Latino children. The innovative practices which local providers have developed, provide examples that advocates and policy-makers can promulgate through policy changes.

Latino Policy Forum is committed to achieving education equity for Latino children. We invite your participation in moving forward early childhood programs that provide all our children with the education today that will bring them the success they deserve tomorrow.

Sincerely,



Sylvia Puente

Executive Director



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

OVERVIEW

Transforming Early Learning: Educational Equity for Latino Children, provides insight into the Latino community and early childhood programs. Its focus is on improving efforts to ensure that all Illinois children receive a sound foundation for their education in the 21st century.

Latino children in Illinois must have greater access to early childhood education to reduce the significant achievement gap that exists between them and White children. This gap is certain to become more critical as the Latino student population grows. At the present time, one of every five children in Illinois schools is Latino and the majority, over 90 percent, were born in the United States. This demographic realignment will certainly require realignment in academic preparation. Latino populations want to enter the workforce as prepared as their counterparts to contribute to the success of the wider world they encounter. The region's economic vitality will depend upon it.

This report is intended as a tool for policymakers, education program administrators, funders, and others in the community who are concerned about quality early education for all children. The first section provides a brief socio-demographic profile of young Illinois Latinos and their families. Its purpose is to illustrate the diversity within the community as well as the challenges these children face in receiving high-quality early care and education. The second section gives an in-depth analysis of key issues related to improving services and includes good practices taken from Latino-serving ECE providers.

THE CHARACTERISTICS OF LATINO CHILDREN AND THEIR FAMILIES IN ILLINOIS

Understanding the socio-demographic characteristics of Latino children and their families is critical to understanding how to best serve them in an educational setting. They bring with them a richness of cultures from over 20 countries. Some families have been in the United States for hundreds of years, while others have only recently arrived. Not all Latino children are English language learners and not all families have foreign-born members. Despite this diversity, there are demographic themes that describe this population in more detail.

Foreign-Born Status

Although the majority of Latino children are U.S. citizens, a significant number have at least one foreign-born parent. Spanish is spoken in about four of five homes in Illinois, and a significant number of these

households are bilingual. Parents are more likely to require communication from the school in Spanish. Language fluency may also have an impact on their ability to help with homework and school projects. Non-English speaking parents, may be unaware of what initiatives are available to them — clearly reducing access for their children's participation in early childhood programs.

Socioeconomic Status

Latino children, on average, are much more likely to live in poverty, have lower household incomes, and have parents who work long hours in physically demanding jobs. Lower incomes of many households may limit a family's ability to make co-payments for early childhood programs. In addition, parents' longer work hours create a need for additional childcare beyond traditional hours and may affect their ability to attend school functions.

Education Attainment

While education is a high priority for Latinos, the level of educational attainment among adults remains relatively low. In 2007, approximately 40 percent of the adult population had less than a high school diploma. On average, mothers without a high school level education had only half as many books in their homes as mothers with at least a high school education.

Only about 11 percent of adult Latinos have a bachelor's degree or higher. This accounts, in certain part, for the fact that the pool of Latinos who are teachers is proportionately small. Institutions of higher education regularly vie for access to the limited number of professors with multicultural backgrounds. This lack of a diverse university faculty has an impact on the preparation of teachers going into the field of early childhood education.

Latino Family Arrangements

Latino children live in larger families than non-Latinos. In 2007 the average family in Illinois had four members, compared to 3.2 for non-Latinos. The majority of children live in two-parent homes. Extended family members can be valuable resources, suggesting the need for comprehensive strategies to engage the whole family.

Value of Education

Education is a top priority for Latinos in Illinois — higher than immigration, housing, and health. Latino parents, like all others, want the best education for their children. If teachers know that most Latinos greatly value education, they may have a better understanding of the children they teach. For example, if teachers know that cultural norms might, out of respect for authority,

prevent a parent from asking questions, the relationship between both might be greatly improved.

Civic Engagement Patterns

Latinos are community oriented and civically engaged. Nearly half in the Chicago region were members of community organizations. Realizing that many are involved in civic endeavors, outreach efforts by providers can target those agencies to engage parents. Latino parents' experience with civic engagement is an asset that can be utilized when developing opportunities for parents.

Childcare and Early Education Participation

Despite common misperceptions about why fewer Latino children are enrolled in center-based ECE programs, some of the deterrents are: availability, limited information about eligibility, high cost, and poor outreach. Awareness and information accessibility might greatly increase Latino participation in these programs.

TRANSFORMING EARLY LEARNING

Some Latino children are English language learners, while others are not. This clearly highlights the complexity of designing a single model that effectively serves the needs of Latino children. At the same time, appropriate linguistic and cultural responsiveness requires that serious attention be paid to Spanish language usage and to the varied cultural background of all families.

Reach Out to Latino Families

Outreach and screening are a crucial part of implementing Preschool for All programs. In 2007, 83 percent of Illinois Latinos spoke a language other than English at home. It becomes important that providers make an effort to reach out to families in their first language. Effective outreach also includes explaining the value of high quality preschool programs and the positive impact these programs can have on children's growth and development. Good practices include:

- Conducting outreach in the home language
- Providing one-on-one contact with families
- Implementing grassroots efforts to connect with the local community
- Partnering with other social services providers
- Communicating the importance of early childhood education programs
- Clarifying eligibility and cost requirements through outreach

Apply Prioritization in the Screening Process

Identifying and serving the most at-risk students generally requires pre-screening and a prioritization of which students should be enrolled students. In addition, the process of determining at-risk criteria can be undermined by the misperception that speaking Spanish at home automatically places a student at risk. The ideal screening system takes into consideration family background and a child's English and native language proficiency. Good practices include:

- Screening children in their native language
- Implementing comprehensive and individualized screening procedures
- Providing referrals whenever possible

Provide a Culturally Relevant Education

Providing an educational program that is linguistically and culturally competent is a widely accepted effective strategy for both cognitive and language development. This is true among early childhood educators and is supported by related research. However, how to deliver such an education is a more complicated matter for providers. For many Latinos, a linguistically relevant program will provide native language instruction and support. Relevant programs need to incorporate and respect the value of the native language and culture. Good practices include:

- Becoming familiar with the family's background and culture
- Choosing appropriate and flexible curricula
- Nurturing the native language
- Developing strong child-family-school relationships

Develop Linguistically and Culturally Competent ECE Professionals

Current early childhood certification requirements do not adequately ensure a linguistically and culturally diverse workforce. Working with diverse populations is no longer a phenomenon contained only within urban boundaries. About 80 percent of lead teachers surveyed reported teaching children who were racially or ethnically different from themselves. The suburbanization of the Latino community and their presence in pockets throughout the state command the attention of administrators and policymakers statewide. Now, more than ever before, it becomes critical for qualified early childhood teachers to have expertise in identifying and instructing children with diverse needs. Good practices include:

- Making hiring bilingual staff a priority

- Seeking out and training teachers from the local community
- Providing incentives for staff development
- Linking teachers to professional development options and other resources
- Preparing administrators to work with linguistically and culturally diverse children and their families
- Incorporating practical applications of relevant research

Integrate Parents into the Learning Process

To engage parents in their child's education, providers must cultivate a strong relationship with them. Communication between school and home should be in the home language. Providers find that many parents misunderstand the process of English language acquisition. It is not uncommon for parents to believe it is better to stop speaking to their children in the native language. This practice can have negative long-term consequences on a child's language development, academic performance, and— most important— the parent-child relationship. Good practices include:

- Welcoming parents through orientations
- Implementing an open-door policy
- Communicating in two languages
- Offering parent training opportunities and adult education services
- Encouraging active parent leadership

Evaluate Children Using Linguistically and Culturally Conscious Methods

Evaluations help providers determine appropriate services to meet children's needs. For students who are English language learners, evaluators must be aware

of the child's native language and English language development. When English is used to assess domains of development, it may invalidate the assessment results because of the student's limited language proficiency.

Good practices include:

- Conducting initial assessments in a child's native language
- Creating evaluation teams for each child

Easing the Transition of Latinos into Kindergarten

The preschool experience may be the first exposure a family has to the educational system. This makes it vital to inform families about the process and expectations for kindergarten enrollment. For foreign-born Latino parents, this need is compounded by limited familiarity with the American education system. Good practices include:

- Providing parents with a comprehensive transition plan for each child
- Partnering with the school receiving the children

CONCLUSION

Two central concepts recur throughout this report: First, those providing early childhood education programs need to have an enhanced understanding of the use and role of the Spanish language. Second, there are programs in Latino-serving, community-based organizations that have successful strategies that can be replicated throughout the state of Illinois. Latino Policy Forum highlights some of these strategies so that all those interested in these important issues can work together to implement the most effective recommendations for ensuring that Latino children enter school ready to learn and to be successful.



Introduction

Early education is vital to all children. High-quality early childhood programs contribute to improved school readiness, higher academic achievement, lower dropout rates, higher graduation rates and higher rates of college attendance.¹ Illinois is a leader in the movement to improve early learning opportunities for all children. Yet, as access increases and quality standards improve, Latino² children continue to lag behind in school readiness, and subsequently in academic achievement.³ Greater access for Latinos will reduce the significant achievement gap that exists. This gap is certain to become more critical as the Latino population grows.

Effectively addressing the needs of Latino children requires a deliberate and well-informed process of institutional adaptation. Transforming early learning is necessary to ensure that all of Illinois' children are provided with a solid foundation for a 21st century education.

This report is intended as a tool for policymakers, education program administrators, funders, and others in the community who are concerned about quality early education. It illustrates the diversity within the Latino community, as well as the challenges that young Latino children face in obtaining high-quality early care and education. It also provides an in-depth analysis of key issues for improving services to Latino children and their families and includes good practices taken from Latino-serving ECE providers. The report is divided into two sections:

Section I provides a brief socio-demographic profile of Illinois Latino children and their families, including:

- foreign born status
- socioeconomic status
- educational attainment

- family living arrangements
- the importance of education
- civic engagement
- childcare and early education participation

Section II provides an in-depth analysis of key early education issues and includes good practices used by ECE providers. These issues are:

- effective outreach and screening
- providing a culturally relevant education
- developing linguistically and culturally competent ECE professionals
- integrating parents into the learning process
- evaluating children using linguistically and culturally appropriate methods
- easing the transition of Latinos into kindergarten

WHY INSTITUTIONAL ADAPTATION IS CRITICAL TO THE REGION

Incorporating Latino needs into the early childhood education system is critical for Illinois. The State General Assembly has determined that providing high quality early childhood programs for all children is an important investment, "...ensuring [young children] are well prepared to succeed in school and in life."⁴ Early childhood education is designed to prepare all children to become productive members of society. If any children fall behind, meeting this goal is compromised. A significant achievement gap exists between Latino and white children, even in the initial years of schooling.⁵ Not only does educational equity require effective policies, but the successful participation of Latino children in early childhood education programs is imperative, because Latinos are becoming an increasingly large proportion of the population.

In 2007, Latinos made up nearly 15 percent of the total population in Illinois and 14.2 percent of the Illinois workforce. By 2008, approximately one of every

1 National Association for the Education of Young Children website: www.naeyc.org.

2 For Census 2000, American Community Survey: People who identify with the terms Hispanic or Latino are those who classify themselves in one of the specific Hispanic or Latino categories listed on the Census 2000 or ACS questionnaire – Mexican, Puerto Rican, or Cuban – as well as those who indicate that they are other Spanish, Hispanic, or Latino. ...People who identify their origin as Spanish, Hispanic, or Latino may be of any race. *Hispanic or Latino Origin*, U.S. Census Glossary, available at http://factfinder.census.gov/home/en/epss/glossary_h.html.

3 *Para Nuestros Niños* (National Task Force on Early Childhood Education for Hispanics, March 2007) 30,32.

4 *Preschool for All: A Primer for Providers*, (Illinois State Board of Education).

5 An analysis of the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study shows that Latinos achieved lower levels of reading and math in every socioeconomic category. Eugene E. Garcia, et al., *Early Childhood Education of Hispanics in the United States*, (October 2005).

five school children was Latino.⁶ The future of the state and its Latino population are inextricably intertwined. A Latino population that is well prepared to enter the workforce is vital to the successful economic future of Illinois and all its residents.

Educational equity requires effective policies. It becomes even more imperative that policies include the successful participation of Latino children in early childhood education programs because of their increasing numbers within the general population.

EARLY CHILDHOOD PROGRAMS IN ILLINOIS

Early childhood care and education options in Illinois create a broad-based, complex system and include: a wide variety of providers, multiple funding streams, many unique program designs, and several distinct physical site choices.

Programs and funding sources generally distinguish between two categories. Birth-to-three programs usually focus on helping families support their child's early development.⁷ Three-to-five programs include preschool and pre-kindergarten. Care settings vary: from care by a parent, home-based care, or, to the more formal center-based care.⁸

Center-based programs are provided by schools, nonprofit community-based organizations and for-profit businesses. Programs can be funded privately—by families or community and faith-based organizations. Philanthropists and local, state or federal governments also provide revenues.

A wide range of publicly funded early care and education programs are available: Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP)⁹ subsidies, Head Start,¹⁰ the State Pre-kindergarten Program for Children at Risk of Academic Failure (State Pre-K), and Preschool for All (established in 2006 to expand State Pre-K), are the most prominent publicly funded early care and education programs serving three- and four-year-olds in Illinois.¹¹ Preschool

A Latino population that is well prepared to enter the workforce is vital to the economic future of Illinois.

for All (PFA) and State Pre-K are funded through the Illinois Early Childhood Block Grant Program.

Head Start, PFA and State Pre-K have strict educational requirements for providers; CCAP uses state and federal funds and does not have educational requirements. When PSA is fully implemented, it will provide funding for universal, optional preschool for all three- and four-year-olds in the state.

Although this report focuses on the requirements of the Illinois Early Childhood Block Grant and on the programs it funds, the issues identified apply to other preschool programs as well. While the requirements of PFA and State Pre-K are technically different, they share many of the same statutory and regulatory components.¹² Most of the issues raised herein are relevant to a wide array of educational programs.

In addition to the general applicability of many of the Block Grant program components, PFA and State Pre-K merit specific attention because they are among the most successful state-sponsored, universal preschool programs in the country.¹³ In 2007, Illinois ranked number one nationally in access to preschool programs for three-year-olds and twelfth in access for four-year-olds. During the next year, the state saw an increase in enrollment of 28 percent for three-year-olds and 13 percent for four-year-olds. Illinois preschool programs also met nine of ten quality standards set by the National Institute for Early Education Research.

Collaborations among early childhood care programs are an important factor in providing quality service. They make it possible for families to access the level of services they need.¹⁴ PFA has become a central piece of the collaborative care received by many Illinois children. (PFA was intended to "...supplement, not supplant, funds received from any other source."¹⁵)

6 Latinos represented 19.9% of the Illinois elementary student body and 22.8% of the state's first graders. *Interactive Illinois Report Card: About Students – Race/Ethnicity*, Northern Illinois University, available at <http://iirc.niu.edu/State.aspx>; *School Enrollment by Grade/Gender/Ethnicity*, Illinois State Board of Education, http://www.isbe.net/research/htmls/fall_housing.htm.

7 *Illinois Birth to Three Program Standards and Quality Indicators & Resource Guide*, (Illinois State Board of Education), 1, available at http://www.isbe.state.il.us/earlychi/pdf/03_standards_intro.pdf (last accessed February 12, 2009).

8 Home-based care refers to care in the child's home or care in the child care provider's home. Formal or center-based care refers to care in a child care center, preschool, nursery school, kindergarten, Head Start or Early Start program. *Child Care and Early Education in Illinois: the Choices Parents Make* (Illinois Action for Children, February 2008), 13.

9 CCAP is a subsidy program administered by the Illinois Department of Human Services. For more information visit: <http://www.dhs.state.il.us>.

10 Head Start is a national program that promotes school readiness by enhancing the social and cognitive development of children through the provision of educational, health, nutritional, social and other services to enrolled children and families. <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/ohs/>

11 *Preschool for All: A Primer for Providers* (Illinois State Board of Education).

12 The Illinois State Board of Education administrative regulations specify the outreach, screening and other requirements that new and expanding programs must include in their application. The regulations specify that continuing programs receiving funding prior to 06/07 must also discuss requirements specified for new PFA programs. [23 IAC 235.20, 23 IAC 235.60] Programs in the City of Chicago receive ECEB funding through a separate appropriation that follows different administrative procedures. Request for Proposals: *Preschool for All Children Ages 3 to 5 Years: 08* (Illinois State Board of Education, February 2007), 1, available at http://www.isbe.net/earlychi/pdf/preschool_RFP_08.pdf

13 *The State of Preschool 2007* (National Institute for Early Education Research, 2007), 18, 19, 20, 56.

14 *Child Care & Early Education in Illinois: the Choices Parents Make* (Illinois Action for Children, February 2008), 3. (available through <http://www.actforchildren.org>)

15 105 ILCS 5/2-3.71(a)(1)

PFA provides funding for a minimum of 2.5 hours of instruction per day, but encourages collaboration with other programs.¹⁶ A child's participation in home-based care, CCAP, Head Start or privately-paid care does not preclude participating in PFA. Many center-based programs combine various funding sources to provide a free or low-cost full-day program. For example, by combining PFA with childcare subsidies, a child in an eight-hour program is guaranteed at least 2.5 hours of daily instruction from a certified teacher.

Focusing on programs funded by Preschool for All, this report addresses some of the practical issues involved in integrating Latino families into traditional early childhood programs. The first section provides background on the families, including demographic trends and cultural characteristics, and suggests various ways in which these factors influence early childhood. The second section reviews typical components of early childhood programs, identifies relevant PFA requirements, discusses ways programs may be adapted to integrate Latino children, and provides examples of relevant practices that providers have found to be effective.

This report is intended as a tool for policymakers, early childhood education program administrators, funders, and others in the community who want to develop strategies to improve early childhood education practices and ensure the ultimate success of Latino families and children. Legislative and administrative state-level policy changes can provide the guidance, impetus and resources to enable providers throughout the state to make necessary changes in their programs.

This report uses a Latino lens to focus on preschool programs for three- and four-year-olds. Integration, however, is a two-way process of adaptation: institutions as well as families must adapt. Families encounter an overwhelmingly intricate institutional bureaucracy when they seek out early childhood programs. Understanding how the system works, changing behavior to comply with requirements, and balancing obligations and resources are adaptations that Latino families are already making. But it is only by working together that families and providers will truly streamline the integration process.

It is the practice of Latino Policy Forum to convene stakeholders who can cooperatively develop policy recommendations. The report can serve as a springboard for those policy discussions. It does not address the issue of access to early childhood education programs— a critical issue which Latino Policy Forum will address in a future report.

¹⁶ *Preschool for All: A Primer for Providers* (Illinois State Board of Education), available at http://www.isbe.state.il.us/earlychi/preschool/preschool_for_all.pdf



Characteristics of Young Latino Children and Their Families

The following section identifies some of the characteristics common to many Latinos that affect early childhood education. Latino families bring with them a richness of cultures from over 20 countries. Some have been in the United States for hundreds of years, while others have only recently arrived. Not all children are English language learners and not all families have foreign-born members. Within the community there is much diversity, but there are certain common characteristics that have an impact on early childhood programs and are important to examine. When there is a better understanding of the choices made by Latino families, early childhood program administrators, staff and policymakers can more effectively meet their needs. Otherwise, commonly held myths and misunderstandings based on stereotypes can prevent Latino families from receiving the services their children need.

FOREIGN-BORN STATUS

Immigration plays a significant role in the Latino community. Most of the 667,904 Latino children in Illinois are U.S. citizens;¹⁷ however, a significant number have at least one foreign-born parent who speaks no English or does not speak English well.¹⁸ Spanish is spoken in about four out of five Latino homes in Illinois, and a significant number of these households are bilingual. In addition, even though the majority of children may speak English well or very well, most will still converse in their first language— Spanish— the language in which they are most comfortable.

¹⁷ According to the 2007 American Community Survey, 91.5 percent of Latino children were U.S. citizens.

¹⁸ According to the 2007 American Community Survey, approximately 61 percent of Latino adults are foreign-born.

AZUCENA

Portrait of a Young Latina

The Latino children of Illinois have many faces and many stories. Statistics and enrollment patterns are nothing more than a clustering of this rich variety into a numerical average. No lone example, no single common experience can portray the broad range of circumstances that these children face. Keeping in mind at least one of those many stories helps preserve a focused perspective as we move forward. Meet Azucena.

Azucena is four years old. She was born and raised in Illinois. She lives with both of her parents and an older brother. Her parents are from Guerrero, Mexico. Her father, Guillermo, was brought to Illinois when he was seven years old. Her mother, Maricarmen, came when she was 17 years old, after graduating from preparatoria. Her father speaks English very well, but her mother is the one who conducts most of the family's business. When Maricarmen came to Illinois, she did not attend high school because she had already finished school in Mexico. She began working in a factory, on a rotating schedule. She enrolled in English classes, but was frustrated with her progress because her work schedule required her to miss too many classes. Guillermo spoke only Spanish when he came to Illinois. The school he attended did not have a bilingual program or any Spanish speaking staff, and so he was put into a classroom with only English speakers. He still remembers being yelled at for speaking Spanish. He has been very conscious about instilling in his children pride about their heritage and their language, and speaks Spanish to his children at home. Guillermo's older brother, however, does not want his children to go through what he went through, and only speaks to them in English.

The Impact on Early Childhood Education

A clear understanding of immigration trends among Latinos should inform the decision-making process of education and social service providers. Children with foreign-born parents are more likely to be English Language Learners and will require nurturing of their native language to successfully learn English.¹⁹ Parents are more likely to require communication from providers in Spanish. A limited fluency in English can also affect a parent's ability to help with reading or other school projects in English.²⁰

Many foreign-born parents have the educational system of their home countries as a point of reference; it is often very different than the U.S. educational system. U.S. classroom practice and pedagogical approaches may be unfamiliar to them. Similarly, foreign-born parents are more likely to be unfamiliar with the social service system and with the complex eligibility requirements for various early childhood programs.²¹ Eligibility differs among programs like Head Start, and state-funded programs like Preschool for All and State Pre-K. This

SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS

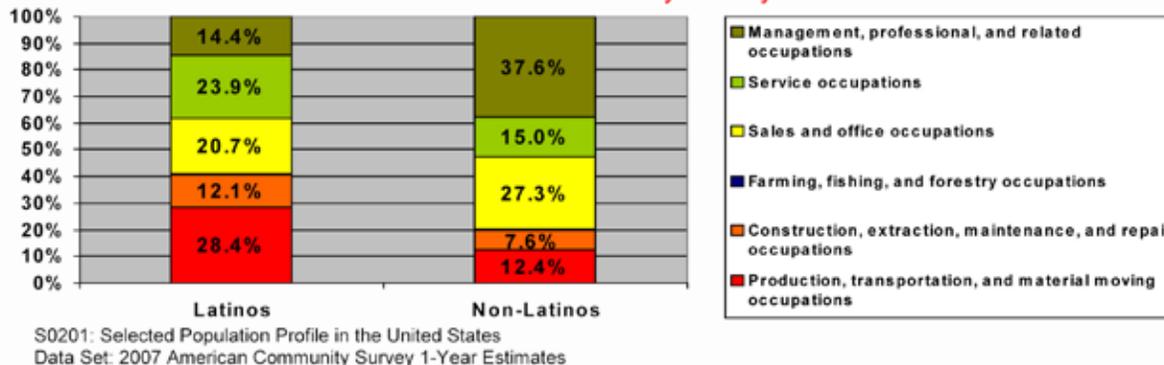
Children of foreign-born parents are more likely to be part of low-income families with parents who have low levels of education.²² On average, they are much more likely to live in poverty, have lower household incomes, and have parents who work long hours in physically demanding jobs. It is likely that both parents are in the workforce and twice as likely that they have physically demanding industrial or maintenance-related jobs.

In 2007,²³ 14.3 percent of all Latino families lived in poverty, nearly double the rate for non-Latinos. One-third of households headed by a single woman were below the poverty level, as compared to one-quarter of comparable non-Latino households. Median family income for single Latina households was \$29,036.

The median income for families in Illinois was \$48,525, about \$20,000 less than non-Latinos. Per capita income was \$15,594, approximately half of that for non-Latinos.

About 72 percent of Illinois Latinos over 16 years old were in the labor force in 2007, compared to 65.8

Occupations of Latinos in Illinois American Community Survey 2007



also holds true for social service and education programs such as CCAP childcare subsidies and state preschool. Immigration status plays a role in eligibility for some of these programs, but not for others. Foreign-born parents, particularly those who are not U.S. citizens, may not know for which programs they and their children qualify. Some may not participate at all in early childhood programs because they think they are ineligible.

percent of non-Latinos. More than a quarter of employed Latinos worked in manufacturing, transportation or related industries. An additional one-in-eight worked in construction; nearly a quarter worked in service occupations; and one-fifth held sales and office jobs.

Over one-third of non-Latinos held higher-paying management and professional positions. As for women, four times as many Latinas worked in manufacturing and other industrial jobs as non-Latinas. In addition to working in more physically demanding industries, Latinos were more likely to carpool, take public transportation or walk to work.

¹⁹ Early childhood education stakeholders must also consider the background of any immigrant populations.

²⁰ *Para Nuestros Niños* (National Task Force on Early Childhood Education for Hispanics, March 2007), 25.

²¹ *The Challenges of Change: Learning from the Child Care and Early Education Experiences of Immigrant Families* (Center for Law and Social Policy, May 2007), 3.

²² Nearly half of children in immigrant families have a low income, compared to just over a third for children in U.S.-born families. *Kids Count: Illinois Profile for 2007* (Annie E. Casey Foundation), available at <http://www.kidscount.org>.

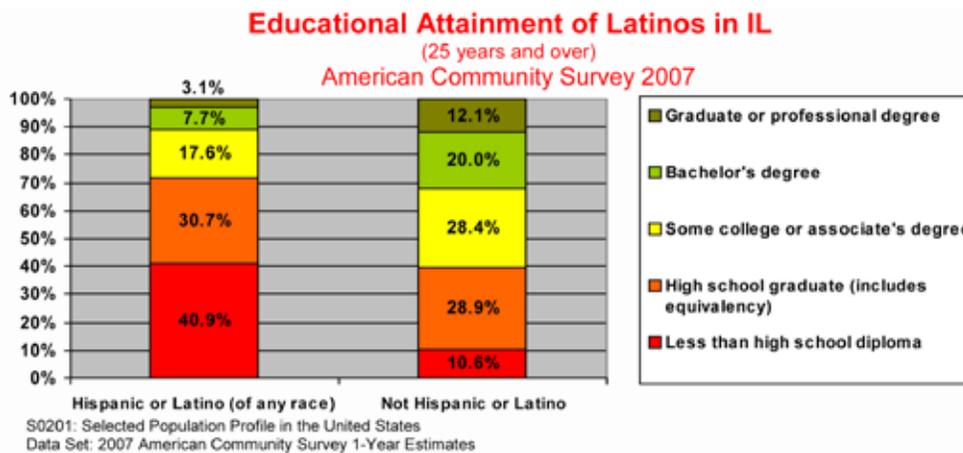
²³ Demographic data is derived from the 2007 American Community Survey, unless otherwise designated.

The Impact on Early Childhood Education

Lower incomes limit a Latino family's ability to make copayments for early childhood programs, access support services and private healthcare, or purchase educational materials. Longer work days and non-traditional schedules can prevent them from attending activities at school. At home, they may have less time to spend with their children. Latino children may be read to and spoken to less than others.²⁴ Many parents work second- and third-shift schedules and have multiple jobs.

Their education level can affect a child's development. Mothers without high school diplomas were less likely to tell stories or sing to their infants or toddlers. On average, they had only half as many books in their homes as mothers with at least a high school education.²⁸

Only eleven percent of adult Latinos have a bachelor's degree or higher and the pool of Latinos who are teachers is proportionately small.²⁹ Advanced degree holders comprise only three percent of the Latino population in Illinois, compared to twelve percent of non-Latinos.



This in turn, requires childcare beyond traditional hours and transportation between early childhood centers and home-based care.²⁵

EDUCATION ATTAINMENT

Education is a high priority for Latinos.²⁶ However, the level of achievement among adults remains relatively low. In 2007, approximately 40 percent of the adult population had less than a high school diploma and 30 percent held a high school diploma or its equivalent. Only about 30 percent had at least some level of college, less than half as many as their non-Latino counterparts. Eleven percent had a bachelor's degree or beyond, compared to 32 percent for non-Latinos.

The Impact on Early Childhood Education

The state of Latino educational achievement has significant implications for early childhood education. Illinois Latino children are four times as likely to have a parent who did not graduate from high school. This affects family income levels and frequently requires parents to work for lower wages and longer hours.²⁷

A growing concern among colleges and universities is the even smaller pool of professors with multicultural backgrounds. Latinos' underrepresentation in academia compounds the struggles it faces finding qualified, diverse faculty to conduct research and to develop and teach courses integrating linguistic and cultural competency.³⁰ This has a significant impact on teachers who work in early education because they are required by many programs to hold a bachelor's degree and an early childhood certificate.

LATINO FAMILY ARRANGEMENTS

Latino children live in larger families. In 2007 in Illinois, their average size was four,³¹ compared to 3.2 for non-Latinos. Nearly 83 percent of households were families, compared to 65 percent for non-Latinos. According to the 2000 Census, approximately three of five children lived in two-parent homes.³² One-in-six children lived with a grandparent, compared to about one-in-ten for non-Latinos. Living in large households can also lead to more crowded conditions in the home, so

24 *Para Nuestros Niños* (National Task Force on Early Childhood Education for Hispanics, March 2007), 25.

25 Most public ECE funding sources do not provide additional funding specifically for transportation expenses.

26 *An American Agenda from a Latino Perspective* (Latino Policy Forum, April 2008).

27 Marcia Stoll, et al., *Working Later in Illinois: Work Schedules, Incomes and Parents' Access to Child Care*, (Illinois Action for Children, May 2006).

28 Delis Cuellar, et al., *Latinos and Early Education: An Account of Diversity and Family Involvement* (National Taskforce on Early Childhood Education for Hispanics, December 2007).

29 *Obtaining a First Professional Teaching Certificate*, Illinois State Board of Education, available at http://www.isbe.state.il.us/certification/requirements/first_certificate.htm

30 Workforce Diversity Workgroup, Illinois Early Learning Council, IELC Meeting, January 16, 2009.

31 American Community Survey 2007

32 U.S. Census Bureau, Census 2000, special tabulation, available at http://www.census.gov/population/www/socdemo/2004_detailedtables.html

families may not have space dedicated to early learning materials.

Impact on Early Childhood Education

Family is very important to Latinos, perhaps more so than any other value.³³ As an asset, family can be a significant mechanism to support children’s educational development. Most Latino children live with extended family members who can be valuable resources. Older siblings, parents and others in the home can provide academic support and opportunities to practice social English skills. This suggests the need for more comprehensive strategies to engage the whole family and

According to the 2004 Survey of Consumer Finances, 20 percent of Latinos surveyed stated that education was their primary purpose for saving. This makes them nearly twice as likely to save for education as non-Latinos. For Latinos, saving for educational expenses was a higher priority than saving to purchase a home.³⁶

The Impact on Early Childhood Education

Latino parents, like all parents, want the best education for their children. The value that education plays in Latino families is an asset to early childhood programs. If teachers are unfamiliar with a family’s culture and background, they may misread a parent’s

behavior. When teachers know how highly Latinos value education, they have a better understanding of the children they teach.

Family Structure of U.S. Children in 2000		
Family Structure	Latinos	Non-Latinos
Living with married parents	62.6%	68.1%
Living with mother only	22.3%	20.9%
Living with father only	7.4%	5.8%
Living with neither parent	7.7%	5.3%
Foster child	0.4%	0.5%
Presence of grandparent	16.7%	11.0%
Presence of grandparent responsible for at least one grandchild	6.1%	4.6%
Multigenerational household	15.6%	9.6%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Census 2000, special tabulation.

CIVIC ENGAGEMENT PATTERNS

Latinos are community oriented and civically engaged. A survey conducted by the Institute for Latino Studies found that nearly half were members of community organizations. One-third were church members who attend church “nearly every week” and eleven percent were members of other faith-based

creates a need for careful determination of a child’s home language.

organizations. They belonged to organizations ranging from PTAs to neighborhood watch groups. Engagement patterns differed between foreign-born and U.S.-born Latinos; foreign-born were more likely to be involved in community organizations.³⁷

VALUE OF EDUCATION

In 2006 and 2007, the Latino Policy Forum conducted a series of meetings with more than 600 leaders from various sectors of the Illinois Latino community to develop a Latino agenda. From those meetings, education emerged as the top priority— higher than immigration— housing, health and others.

In a national survey, three quarters of Latinos indicated that pre-kindergarten programs were very important for children.³⁴ In addition, a majority reported they would be willing to pay an additional \$100 in taxes if the state would provide universal, voluntary pre-k. Surveys done in Chicago Latino communities found similar results and showed how strongly education was valued.³⁵

The Impact on Early Childhood Education

Developing appropriate opportunities to engage parents is a challenge to educational providers. Latinos’ experience with civic engagement is an important asset. Because many Latino families are civically involved, outreach efforts can target specific organizations to engage parents.

33 *An American Agenda from a Latino Perspective* (Latino Policy Forum, April 2008).

34 Valencia, et al., *Latino Public Opinion Survey of Pre-Kindergarten Programs: Knowledge, Preferences, and Public Support* (Tomas Rivera Policy Institute, April 2006).

35 *Strategies for Success: Cicero Education Forum Summary* (Institute for Latino Studies, University of Notre Dame, March 2004), 22; *Getting to Preschool for All: Reaching Chicago’s Latino Communities* (Illinois Action for Children, 2007), 3.

36 Analysis by Latino Policy Forum; *Survey of Consumer Finances: 2004*, Federal Reserve Board, available at <http://www.federalreserve.gov/pubs/oss/oss2/2004/scf2004data.html>.

37 *Latino Civic and Community Involvement: Findings from the Chicago–Area Survey*, Institute for Latino Studies at the University of Notre Dame, Latino Research at ND, Vol. 3, No. 4, December 2006, 3.

CHILDCARE AND EARLY EDUCATION PARTICIPATION

A common perception among early childhood education providers is that Latinos do not use center-based programs because they prefer to have family members care for their young children. Participation statistics support this perception. According to the National Household Education Survey,³⁸ 51 percent of Latino children are cared for by a parent. Children from birth to five are significantly more likely to be cared for by a parent than non-Latinos. They are much less likely to use center-based programs than non-Latinos. Only one-in-four attends center-based programs. Despite popular belief, Latinos do leave their children with non-parent relatives at the same rate as non-Latinos, approximately 20 percent. Of those Latino children not in the care of a parent, over half attended center-based programs.

Many surveys have found that Latino families, particularly immigrant families, do not take advantage of center-based programming because they lack availability or information about them. According to a report by the Illinois Facilities Fund, most of the 117 Latina mothers surveyed said that childcare centers were their preferred method of non-parental care for three- and four-year-olds and had the greatest potential to prepare children for elementary school. The mothers identified insufficient availability and high cost as the primary reasons for not enrolling their children in the programs.³⁹

Childcare arrangements also vary depending on home language. Children whose parents speak mostly English are nearly twice as likely to have some non-parental care arrangement as those with only one English-speaking parent. When neither speaks English, children are significantly more likely to be

Types of Care Arrangements, by Race/Ethnicity					
<i>Children from birth through age 5 and not yet in kindergarten participating in various weekly nonparent care arrangements, by child and family characteristics: 2005 in the United States</i>					
Characteristic	Number of children (thousands)	Only Parental Care	Non-Parental Care Arrangements		
			Relative	Non-relative	Center-based
White, non-Hispanic	11,488	38%	20%	16%	38%
Black, non-Hispanic	2,962	31%	26%	10%	43%
Hispanic	4,283	51%	20%	10%	25%
Asian or Pacific Islander, non-Hispanic	655	47%	16%	7%	37%
Other race, non-Hispanic	1,278	40%	26%	9%	38%
Non-Hispanic	16,383	37%	21%	14%	39%

DATA SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Early Childhood Program Participation Survey of the National Household Education Surveys Program (ECPN-NHES:2005).

Note: Total of non-parental care arrangements may equal more than 100% when multiple care-arrangements were used. Estimates include any combination of relative care, non-relative care, and center-based programs, but only one arrangement of a given type (e.g., one non-relative arrangement, or one center-based program). Percentages based on non-parental care arrangement distribution. Non-Hispanic is calculated based on average distribution for non-Hispanic sub-groups.

Types of Care Arrangements, by Parents' Language					
<i>Children from birth through age 5 and not yet in kindergarten participating in various weekly non-parental care arrangements, by child and family characteristics: 2005 in the United States</i>					
Parents' language spoken most at home	Number of children (thousands)	Only Parental Care	Non-parental Care Arrangements		
			Relative	Non-relative	Center-based
Both/only parent(s) speak(s) English	17,620	37%	22%	14%	38%
One of two parents speaks English	565	63%	11%	4%	24%
No parent speaks English	2,480	58%	13%	9%	24%

DATA SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Early Childhood Program Participation Survey of the National Household Education Surveys Program (ECPN-NHES:2005).

Note: Total of non-parental care arrangements may equal more than 100% when multiple care-arrangements were used. Estimates include any combination of relative care, non-relative care, and center-based programs, but only one arrangement of a given type (e.g., one non-relative arrangement, or one center-based program). Percentages based on non-parental care arrangement distribution.

cared for by a parent. Only 24 percent of children with one non-English speaking parent attend center-based programs, compared to 38 percent whose parents both speak English. This data supports the suggestion from parents that there is insufficient information about early childhood programs in languages other than English.⁴⁰

38 U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Early Childhood Program Participation Survey of the National Household Education Surveys Program (ECPN-NHES: 2005).

39 *We Need More Day Care Centers* (Illinois Facilities Fund, June 2003) 4, 9.

40 *Getting to Preschool for All: Reaching Chicago's Latino Communities* (Illinois Action for Children, 2007), 3; *We Need More Childcare Centers* (Illinois Facilities Fund, June 2003), 11.

Other barriers identified by Chicago area Latinos included trusting caregivers, enrollment requirements, work schedules, availability, cost, and understanding the need and value of early childhood education.⁴¹

Impact on Early Childhood Education

Latinos are interested in using center-based early childhood programs. However, availability, limited information about eligibility, high cost, and poor outreach are deterrents to using these programs for three- and four-year-olds. Increasing program availability

in Latino neighborhoods is the most important recommendation from the Illinois Facilities Fund findings. For existing programs, information regarding availability, eligibility and cost needs to be more widely disseminated. Families may not take advantage of programs that do not require a family co-payment, like Preschool for All, because they are not aware of cost or eligibility requirements.

⁴¹ *Getting to Preschool for All: Reaching Chicago's Latino Communities* (Illinois Action for Children, 2007), 3.



Latinos are interested in utilizing center based care. However, there is not enough program availability.

Transforming Early Learning

When early childhood institutions incorporate policies to address every child's needs, they ensure the success of Latino children. This next section identifies characteristics that are standard to the success of any early childhood program.

To effectively serve Latinos, the following programmatic components need to address important linguistic, cultural and socioeconomic issues:

- outreach
 - screening
 - curriculum
 - professional development
 - parent engagement
 - evaluation
- transitioning into kindergarten

The Preschool for All requirements for each component are laid out. Each section identifies practices necessary to effectively serve preschool Latinos and English Language Learners (ELLs). Components were developed after meetings and conversations with educators, administrators and representatives from various sectors of the early childhood field.⁴² The suggestions provide insight into some of the key issues of traditional early childhood education programs. The discussion of each component ends with a series of strategies utilized by three leading Latino early childhood providers in Chicago— Casa Central, El Valor and Erie Neighborhood House.⁴³ The agencies have a combined history of providing 230 years of service to predominantly Latino families. As part of community-based organizations, their programs function differently from those that are school- or home-based. But their example is clearly valuable to other providers facing many of the same challenges and their practices can serve as examples to guide administrators and policymakers.

Early childhood education programs require adaptation to effectively serve Latino children.

Latinos are not a monolithic cultural group and cannot be treated as such. However, in 2005, about 70% of all Latino children had a foreign-born parent and lived in a household with an adult who spoke a language other than English.⁴⁴ The fact that some Latino children are English language learners, while others are not, highlights the complexity of designing a program model that effectively serves them all. Linguistic and cultural responsiveness to these children requires that serious attention be paid to Spanish language usage and to the varied cultural roots of their families.

REACH OUT TO LATINO FAMILIES

Preschool for All in Illinois

The Illinois legislature currently funds Preschool for All (PFA), “...to achieve a goal of Preschool for All Children for the benefit of all children whose families choose to participate in the program.”⁴⁵ Although all three- and four-year-olds are eligible, funds are limited, and priority is given to new programs “serving primarily at-risk children.” At-risk children are, “...those who because of their home and community environment are subject to such language, cultural, economic and like disadvantages to cause them to have been determined as a result of screening procedures to be at risk of academic failure.”⁴⁶ State regulations require programs to explain how they will recruit eligible students.⁴⁷ To ensure finding, screening and including at-risk children in early childhood education programs, providers need to add linguistically and culturally appropriate outreach to their processes.

42 Many of the issues were identified by the Illinois Early Learning Council's Linguistic and Cultural Diversity Committee recommendations and discussions.

43 The information about the programs comes primarily from interviews with administrators from each program.

44 *State of Latino Chicago* (Institute for Latino Studies, University of Notre Dame, 2005), 22.

45 105 ILCS 5/2-3.71(a)(4.5)

46 105 ILCS 5/2-3.71(a)(4.5)

47 23 IAC 235.20(c)(4)(A)

The Issues

Outreach and screening are a crucial part of implementing Preschool for All programs because at-risk families may be the least likely to seek out or know about such services. In order to reach these children, providers must actively seek out their families, even when funded slots could be filled without additional outreach. Outreach challenges include: locating and identifying eligible children, reaching non-English speakers, connecting with the community, and ensuring public understanding about eligibility for various programs.

Delivering appropriate information for eligible families goes beyond simply informing them about existing programs. It also means providers have to ensure that each family understands what being eligible means.

In 2007, 83 percent of Illinois Latinos spoke a language other than English at home. This clearly requires that providers make every effort to reach out to families in their home language.⁴⁸ Translating materials and conducting outreach in Spanish acknowledge the reality that many Latino families are less fluent in English.

The general nature of at-risk families suggests that they are harder to reach and are not integrated into social service networks. Targeted dissemination of materials and developing strong ties to the community are ways to deliver the message to those who may not be aware of existing programs. Reaching families in their homes or neighborhoods can be a challenge for providers with limited knowledge of or ties to the Latino community. Beyond translating materials, providers can target these families in their stores and churches, and in the civic organizations they use in their community.

Word-of-mouth recommendations are a trusted form of communication among Latinos. A provider can take advantage of family members or neighbors who have had positive experiences to do one-on-one outreach.

Communicating effectively also includes explaining the value of high quality preschool programs. Some families are unfamiliar with the concept of preschool; they lack understanding of the difference between babysitting and a more sophisticated early education program.⁴⁹

Providers find that many Latino families are unaware of their eligibility for various early childhood services. Forty-three percent of Illinois Latinos are foreign-born and come from countries where there is not a substantial infrastructure for human service delivery. It becomes the task of providers to inform families about the robustness

Some families are unfamiliar with the difference between babysitting and early education programs.

of Illinois' services and about local educational and social service infrastructure.

The intricate nuances of the early childhood education funding system are often difficult even for program personnel to grasp. Parents may think that income eligibility and immigrant status requirements for one program will apply to another. However, the reality is that requirements for each are different.

Effective Practices from a Provider's Perspective

Three experienced early childhood education providers were interviewed for their perspective on reaching and engaging families.

El Valor is a community-based organization, founded in 1973 in Chicago's Pilsen neighborhood. It offers a range of services from three centers in Pilsen, La Villita and South Chicago. *El Valor* serves over 950 children in its Early Head Start, Early Intervention, Zero to Three Prevention Initiative, CCAP child care, PFA and Head Start programs. Eighty-seven percent of the children served are Latino and all teachers are bilingual.

Casa Central, the largest Latino social service agency in Chicago, was founded in 1954 to provide services to the Latino population. With a staff of 500, the agency serves more than 2,500 families/individuals each year. It provides assistance at its sites in Logan Square, Humboldt Park and West Town. Children's Services provides daily programming to 470 children and their families, 95 percent of whom are Latino. Ninety percent of teachers and home educators are bilingual.

Erie Neighborhood House was established in 1870 in Chicago's West Town neighborhood. Each year, its early childhood program serves approximately 400 children at four centers and through its Family Child Care Homes Network. Approximately 90 percent of students are Latino and 85 percent of the teachers are bilingual.

Strategy 1: Conduct Outreach in the Home Language

The agencies conduct their outreach efforts in both English and Spanish. All three providers distribute flyers and attend community events. Providers advertise at venues frequented by Latinos, including neighborhood stores, Spanish-language social venues, English language classes, public libraries and elementary schools. The agencies use — or are planning to use — Spanish-language

48 2007 ACS Selected Population Profile

49 *Getting to Preschool for All: Reaching Chicago's Latino Communities* (Illinois Action for Children, 2007), 3.

media such as newspapers, radio stations, community bulletins and newsletters.

Strategy 2: Provide One-on-One Contact with Families

Agency administrators report that word-of-mouth is their most effective recruitment tool. Families already receiving services inform others about programs and speak positively about personal experiences. When El Valor expanded to a new facility, the founder took the time to walk throughout the community, meeting people and sharing information about the new center.

Strategy 3: Implement Grassroots Efforts to Connect with the Local Community

Connecting with the local community is important for each agency. Nearly half of all Chicago-area Latinos, and over half of those who are foreign-born, are civically engaged.

El Valor sends staff out to the community rather than expecting community members to come to them. They participate in community fairs and attend events hosted by other organizations. They visit neighborhoods to call on local businesses, introducing themselves and their services. El Valor is described by its early childhood program director as building on the gifts of individuals and the community and delivering programs that reflect those gifts.

Once a week, Casa Central distributes flyers throughout the community, targeting a different section of the local business area. Several of the agency's sites also reach out to local business associations.

As populations shift, Erie House has found that although it is well-established and known in the community, it needs to conduct outreach beyond local neighborhoods.

Churches often play a central role in Latino communities and can provide important civic ties for outreach efforts.⁵⁰ Partnerships with them or other faith-based organizations provide direct access to Latinos because about one-third attend services almost every week. Churches also serve as institutions with staff who are trusted members of the community.

Word-of-mouth from families that have a positive experience is the most effective recruitment tool.

Strategy 4: Partner with Related-Service Providers

Increased program referrals can be developed by creating strong ties to and partnerships with area businesses and organizations that provide services to families. El Valor, Erie House and Casa Central have relationships with health clinics, Women, Infant and Children Nutrition Services (WIC) offices, neighborhood schools, shelters, or other organizations where families might seek assistance. These relationships offer a mutual exchange and sharing of resources, broaden opportunities to assist families, and greatly expand outreach efforts. For example, Casa Central participates in recruitment days hosted by each of their partner organizations.

Strategy 5: Explain the Importance of Early Childhood Education Programs

Outreach messages that go beyond increasing awareness improve understanding of the importance of early childhood programs. El Valor has a special public awareness campaign to deliver the message that "...the first three years are the most critical years in development, and parents are their children's most important teachers."⁵¹ The agency has developed a resource kit, including a bilingual video "Mis Padres/Mis Maestros: My Parents/My Teachers," posters, brochures and discussion guides regarding the importance of early childhood development.

Strategy 6: Explain Eligibility and Cost through Outreach

Program flyers and materials from Casa Central, Erie House and El Valor generally highlight which programs are free, list the documents parents need, state eligibility criteria in clear language, and refer parents to the person at the agency who determines eligibility.

APPLY PRIORITIZATION IN THE SCREENING PROCESS

Preschool for All in Illinois

Screening performs a dual role in Preschool for All. Because PFA dollars are limited, screening allows providers to prioritize enrollment of the most academically at-risk students.⁵² In addition, it is used to determine a student's developmental status. The Illinois School Code says that, "...such screening procedures shall be based on criteria established by the State Board of Education."⁵³

The Illinois Administrative Code does not establish a specific methodology, but it does require providers to

50 *Latino Civic and Community Involvement: Findings from the Chicago-Area Survey*, Institute for Latino Studies at the University of Notre Dame, Latino Research at ND, Vol. 3, No. 4, December 2006, 3.

51 El Valor website: <http://www.elvalor.org/programs/awareness.html>.

52 105 ILCS 5/2-3.71(a)(4.5)

53 105 ILCS 5/2-3.71(a)(4)

describe the screening procedures they will use.⁵⁴ Among other things, the screening process must consist of: a threshold which indicates at-risk status; a method of assessing environmental, economic, and demographic information to indicate the likelihood of being at risk; if necessary, a parent interview in the home language; and where practical, inclusion of teaching staff. It also must include “...instruments/activities related to and able to measure the child’s development in at least the following areas (as appropriate for the age of the child): vocabulary, visual-motor integration, language and speech development, English proficiency, fine and gross motor skills, social skills and cognitive development.”⁵⁵

The Issues

There are various challenges to meeting the needs of Latino children in the screening process. Identifying and serving the most at-risk students generally requires prescreening and prioritization, though it is not always the practice. Determining at-risk criteria can be undermined by the misperception that speaking Spanish at home automatically places a student at risk. This commonly used criterion does not assess how well-developed the other language is. Instead, it is based on the premise that all children exposed to other languages in a home are at risk. The ideal screening system takes into consideration English and native language proficiency, as well as the child’s family background.

Although all children are eligible for Preschool for All, in reality there are limited numbers of funded slots. Funding priority is given to programs enrolling a majority of at-risk students. However, when 51 percent at-risk are enrolled, those remaining students do not need to be at risk for programs to receive priority funding. As a result, providers report extremely different systems.

Some programs screen all students and prioritize the enrollment of those considered to be most at risk of academic failure. A prescreening and prioritization process creates the opportunity for Latino and immigrant families to access programs and attempt to enroll while slots are still available. Other programs skip prescreening once enrollment reaches 51 percent at-risk.

One district established at-risk criteria that include the majority of their service area. This allows them to skip prescreening altogether and produces a first-come, first-served program. In this model, only the most well-informed families are served, many of whom may not have children who fit the at-risk definition.

As currently administered, Preschool for All methods do not require screening for a child’s native language

proficiency. A screening form, such as the Home Language Survey,⁵⁶ simply identifies languages other than English spoken in the home. Programs are not expressly required to provide assessments in the native language. For English language learners, assessment in English only gives an incomplete picture of a child’s development. Factors, such as an unfamiliar phrase or a cultural construct, may also influence interpretation of or reaction to a question. This, in turn, can lead to an unwillingness or inability on the child’s part to respond. Screening in English only does not incorporate environmental characteristics into the evaluation of development, it only provides preliminary information as to the likelihood of a child being at risk of academic failure.

Effective Practices from a Provider’s Perspective

Strategy 1: Screen Children in their Native Language

Providers need screening tools to identify native language proficiency and cultural characteristics. They also can learn a great deal by conducting a parent interview. Erie House, Casa Central and El Valor conduct bilingual screenings. The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) Program Accreditation Standards⁵⁷ require that assessment be informed by family culture, experiences and home language.⁵⁸ Effective assessment processes can include:

- A member of the assessment team who shares the child’s linguistic and cultural background to offer insight into development that would not otherwise be available.
- A parent interview intended, in part, to provide insight into social development.

An observation of the parent-child interaction to provide a layer of linguistic and cultural background not specified in the Illinois Administrative Code⁵⁹

Strategy 2: Implement Comprehensive and Individualized Screening Procedures

El Valor uses a case-management approach to prescreening. This provides a comprehensive and individualized process which begins with families filling

56 A home language survey must be administered by school districts to students enrolling in kindergarten through grade 12, in order to identify the home language. 23 IAC 228.15(a).

57 The National Association for the Education of Young Children provides national accreditation for early childhood programs meeting ten standards for high-quality early childhood education programs. NAEYC standards for accreditation are highly regarded by many practitioners, and have been described as the Gold Standard by Parent’s Magazine and the primary gauge of quality by the Wall Street Journal. See <http://www.naeyc.org/acad-emy/>

58 Standard 4.B.01: NAEYC Accreditation Criteria for Assessment of Child Progress, NAEYC Academy for Early Childhood Program Accreditation.

59 IELC Linguistic and Cultural Diversity Committee PFA RFP Recommendations

54 23 IAC 235.20 (c)(8)

55 23 IAC 235.20 (c)(5)(B)

out an application. They then meet with a caseworker who speaks in their native language and learns about their needs. The family is assessed based on program-established criteria. If eligible, children are then either enrolled or referred to other El Valor programs and placed on a waiting list.

Erie Neighborhood House follows a similar screening procedure and includes a full developmental assessment. It offers a broad range of support services on site. Staff, available to support the screening process, includes a psychologist, an MSW social worker, two educational therapists, an English speech therapist and a bilingual speech therapist. Post-enrollment testing in the native language takes place to ensure proper placement.

Strategy 3: Provide Referrals Whenever Possible

El Valor assesses the entire family's needs during a face-to-face intake session. When the agency cannot provide services directly, families are put on waiting lists or referred to other providers. If programs are full, those on the waitlist are still invited to participate in parent orientation programs. Erie House begins with eligibility screening, then refers ineligible families to other services. Casa Central provides distinct early childhood services at different sites. When families are ineligible or become ineligible for one program, they are referred to the appropriate program at a different site.

PROVIDE A CULTURALLY RELEVANT EDUCATION

Preschool for All in Illinois

The Illinois Administrative Code calls for Preschool for All programs to explain how they will provide a developmentally appropriate educational program for each child. This must be done in accordance with the results of the screening, the Illinois Early Learning Standards, and with respect to the targeted development domains.

The Illinois Early Learning Standards include the following:

- comprehensive language arts standards that identify skills a child must be taught, such as making letter-sound matches and developing phonological awareness.
- two foreign language standards:
- "...to maintain the native language for use in a variety of purposes."
- "...to use and maintain the native language in order to build upon and develop transferable language and literacy skills."⁶⁰

There is a key difference between the standards for birth-to-three programs and those for preschool. Birth-to-three standards include references to linguistically and culturally appropriate practices in the overall program and, more specifically, in the curriculum and parental components. Preschool standards do not take into account a child's linguistic and cultural background.

The Issues

Providing an educational program that is linguistically and culturally competent is a widely accepted practice among early childhood educators. The National Association for the Education of Young Children requires that accredited programs include:

- curriculum materials and equipment that reflect the diversity found in society, including language.⁶¹
- language development opportunities that align with program philosophy, and consider family and community perspectives.⁶²
- criteria for teaching daily demonstrations of knowledge of the child's linguistic and cultural context, as well as respecting and incorporating the home culture.
- use of a family's preferred language when teaching self-care to each child.⁶³

All of these activities require familiarity with the child's culture. What these requirements actually mean for Latinos, and how to provide them a quality education, become a complex set of challenges for early childhood education providers. For many Latinos, a linguistically relevant program offers native language instruction and support.⁶⁴ It also incorporates and respects the value of the native language and culture.

Effective Practices from a Provider's Perspective

Strategy 1: Become Familiar with the Family's Background and Culture

Casa Central, Erie Neighborhood House and El Valor maintain strong ties to their families' culture and community. The agencies include parents at various levels, not only as classroom volunteers, but as leaders

Provide education programs that are linguistically and culturally competent.

61 Standard 2.A.02: NAEYC Accreditation Criteria for Curriculum

62 Standard 2.D.01: NAEYC Accreditation Criteria for Curriculum

63 Standards 3.B.01, 3.B.10: NAEYC Accreditation Criteria for Teaching

64 Native language instruction can still comply with the Early Learning Standards. Students may develop phonemic awareness and other language skills in the native language. Research suggests that those native language skills will transfer to the second language

in decision-making processes. The majority of each agency's staff is bilingual/bicultural. Casa Central requires bilingual skills as a condition of employment. El Valor's grow-your-own initiatives develop teaching and administrative staff from within the community.⁶⁵ The agency has also developed and signed a unique collaborative agreement with the governor of Guanajuato, Mexico. The initiative is bi-national and serves as a mutually beneficial exchange of expertise for the benefit of children. The partnership cross-trains early childhood educators through a sharing of techniques and culture.

Strategy 2: Choose an Appropriate and Flexible Curriculum

Each of the three agencies sought curricula that allowed for individualized instruction and were flexible enough to be modified.

Erie House chose Creative Curriculum,⁶⁶ in part, because it offers the most complete curriculum and allows for modifications to meet the broad spectrum of services provided by the agency.

Casa Central also utilizes Creative Curriculum finding that it does not require many changes to meet their children's needs. Some staff had difficulty reconciling the curriculum's choice-based approach with the fundamental importance of respect— a core value at the heart of Latino student-teacher interactions. Teachers were required to make fundamental changes in their classroom dynamics. But with the help of training and dialogue, most revamped their classroom practice to be more interactive instead of directive.

El Valor also chose Creative Curriculum and added I Can Problem Solve.⁶⁷ Both help underscore and integrate the important role parents play in their child's education and development.

Strategy 3: Nurture the Native Language

Three bodies of research present important data regarding how to nurture native language:

- Intensive support for young children in their native language improves long-term English acquisition.⁶⁸

Instruction in both English and the native language provides more long-term benefits to children.

- English language learners who were immersed in English instead of entering a bilingual or English-as-a-second-language (ESL) program showed decreases in reading and math achievement, higher high school dropout rates and lower test scores.⁶⁹
- Cognitive and neuro-scientists provide ample support that speech is the foundation for reading acquisition and reading skills must be built on it.⁷⁰

Various language acquisition methods are used to teach English. Transitional bilingual and dual-language models use native language, while ESL and immersion programs teach English without it. However, instruction in both English and the native language provides more long-term benefits to children.

Casa Central, Erie House and El Valor nurture native language in a variety of ways. El Valor's linguistic goal is to maintain native language and strengthen proficiency in English. Much of the agency's focus is with its birth-to-three students. Preschool classes use native language primarily for the first three months, after which they focus more on English proficiency. Teachers are responsive to classroom dynamics and to each child's unique learning needs. When the focus shifts to English acquisition, significant activities— such as reading and oral communication— continue to occur in both languages.

El Valor, Erie House and Casa Central use curricular materials available in English and Spanish. Although these programs are designed to transition into English, ongoing activities in both languages are consistent with the goal of helping children become truly bilingual and bi-literate.

65 See *Transforming Early Learning, Seek Out and Train Teachers From the Local Community*, Strategy 2, page 21.

66 Creative Curriculum, Teaching Strategies, Inc., <http://www.creativecurriculum.net/>

67 Myrna B Shure, PhD, *Raising a Thinking Child: I Can Problem Solve* (ICPS) Program For Families, Research Press Publishers, <http://www.thinkingpreteen.com/icps.htm>.

68 Linda M. Espinosa, *Challenging Common Myths About Young English Language Learners* FDC Policy Brief: *Advancing PK-3*, No. 8, January 2008, (citing Campos, S.J. *The Carpenteria preschool program: A long-term effects study*. In E.E. Garcia & B. McLaughlin (Eds.), *Meeting the challenge of linguistic and cultural diversity in early childhood education* (pp.34-48). New York: Teachers College Press, 1995; Gutierrez-Clellen, V. *Language choice in intervention with bilingual children*. *American Journal of Speech-Language Pathology*, 8, (1999), 291-302.; Restrepo, M.A., & K. Kruth. *Grammatical characteristics of a bilingual student with specific language impairment*. *Communications Disorders Quarterly*, 21, (2003), 66-76).

69 Wayne Thomas and Virginia Collier, *A National Study of School Effectiveness for Language Minority Students' Long-Term Academic Achievement*, Center for Research on Education, Diversity and Excellence.

70 Aylward, E.H. Richards, T.L. Berninger, V.W. Nagy, W.E., Field, K.M., Grimme, A.C., et al. (2003) *Instructional treatment associated with changes in brain activation in children with dyslexia*. *Neurology*, 61, 212-219; Ehri, L. (2002) *Phases of acquisition of learning to read words and implications for teaching*, *British Journal for Educational Psychology Monograph Series II, Number 1: Learning and teaching reading* (1), 7-28; Simos, P.G., Fletcher, J.M., Bergman, E., Breier, J.I., Forman, B.R., Castillo, E.M., et al. (2002) *Dyslexia specific brain activation profile becomes normal following successful remedial training*, *Neurology*, 58, 1203-1213.

Strategy 4: Develop Strong Child-Family-School Relationships

The three agencies encourage strong child-family-school relationships. El Valor does so explicitly by choosing a curriculum with components for both child and parent. All three have extensive parent engagement activities and cultivate the value of learning in the home. They each help parents recognize their role as their child's first teachers. By creating welcoming centers, staff interact with families and become more aware of their culture and background.

DEVELOP LINGUISTICALLY AND CULTURALLY COMPETENT ECE PROFESSIONALS

Preschool for All in Illinois

The Illinois School Code requires Preschool for All teachers to hold early childhood teaching certificates.⁷¹ The Illinois Administrative Code specifies, "Teachers of children ages three to five years must hold an initial, initial alternative, standard, master, provisional, provisional alternative, resident teacher or visiting international teacher early childhood certificate."⁷² Providers must also supply descriptions of ongoing professional development activities.

The Issues

Current early childhood certification requirements do not adequately ensure a linguistically and culturally diverse workforce.

Working with diverse populations is no longer a phenomenon contained within urban boundaries. About 80 percent of lead teachers surveyed in Illinois reported working with children who were racially or ethnically different from themselves.⁷³ The suburbanization of the Latino community and its presence in pockets throughout the state command the attention of administrators and policymakers statewide.

Prepare new and seasoned educators to teach linguistically and culturally diverse populations.

Clearly it is critical for teachers to have a strong background in early childhood education and to have expertise in identifying and serving children with special needs. However, these same teachers are not

required to be proficient in bilingual or ESL instructional methodologies despite the vast diversity found in their classrooms and in society.

The high need for a diverse workforce is met with a severe shortage. In 2008, Latinos comprised only six percent of lead teachers in community-based programs, three percent in public school programs, and seven percent of family childcare providers.⁷⁴

Multilingual lead teachers are also in short supply; only twelve percent of center-based lead teachers and six percent of those in public schools report being fluent in a second language.⁷⁵ According to the Illinois State Board of Education, less than 0.4% of the state's early childhood certificate holders also have a bilingual or ESL endorsement or approval.⁷⁶

Preparing new and seasoned educators to teach Latinos and other linguistically and culturally diverse populations requires a multi-tiered approach. Teacher preparation programs are often tailored to meet state certification requirements. Most, if not all, include lessons on working with English language learners and culturally diverse populations. However, only a handful throughout the state have integrated sufficient coursework dedicated to building expertise in ESL or bilingual instruction. Courses that devote little time to working within these areas can offer, at best, only cursory knowledge of appropriate teaching strategies. If, however, state requirements change, universities will need to integrate ESL and bilingual preparation into their teacher training programs.

High demand for professionals with multiple early childhood credentials leads to a highly competitive market. Recruiting and retaining early childhood professionals pose a different set of challenges.

Retaining teachers without being able to offer competitive salaries is a major obstacle for preschool programs, particularly those in community-based organizations. The current funding structure pays a fixed dollar amount per child enrolled. Some early childhood education centers are unable to match higher salaries offered by k-12 public schools with union negotiated pay scales. The average public school lead teacher with a Type 04 early childhood certification earns \$29.79 per hour. Teachers in PFA-funded, center-based programs earn \$20.53 hourly.⁷⁷

71 105 ILCS 5/2-3.71(a)(3)

72 23 IAC 235.20 (c)(8)(A)

73 Susan Fowler, et al, *Who's Caring for Our Kids* (McCormick Tribune Center for Early Childhood Leadership, et al, November 2008), 58.

74 Susan Fowler, et al, *Who's Caring for Our Kids* (McCormick Tribune Center for Early Childhood Leadership, et al, November 2008), 57, 68.

75 Susan Fowler, et al, *Who's Caring for Our Kids* (McCormick Tribune Center for Early Childhood Leadership, et al, November 2008), 58.

76 Data provided by the Illinois State Board of Education, February 2009.

77 Susan Fowler, et al, *Who's Caring for Our Kids* (McCormick Tribune Center for Early Childhood Leadership, et al, November 2008), 62.

Experienced teachers wanting to increase their knowledge of diversity issues, find that many training offerings are not specific to early childhood and are too costly. Teachers also demonstrate a lack of interest in this educational specialty. In a related survey, teachers were given a list of seven content area topics for professional development training. They selected English language acquisition for children as the area in which they were least interested.⁷⁸

Effective Practices from a Provider's Perspective

Strategy 1: Make Hiring Bilingual Staff a Priority

While some service providers only have bilingual teacher aides, Erie House, El Valor and Casa Central make it a priority to have bilingual lead teachers. In addition, they offered linguistic and cultural training workshops. Each agency has more bilingual staff than monolingual.

Strategy 2: Seek Out and Train Teachers From the Local Community

El Valor has developed a broad grow-your-own cohort⁷⁹ program that has trained early childhood teachers from the local community. It has also created cohorts who are working to earn associate and master degrees and even PhDs. Through partnerships with various colleges and universities, the agency is able to bring post-secondary education to its sites. El Valor recruits participants for cohorts, makes arrangements for tuition reductions or scholarships, brings university support staff on-site, and makes space available to students for studying. Most important, it provides ongoing support to students. The director of Institutional Advancement at El Valor believes that peer accountability and staff support have had a significant impact on student retention.

Strategy 3: Provide Incentives For Staff Development

Erie House received a grant from the McCormick Foundation to plan and implement its own professional development. The Educational Grant and Mentoring Program connects participants with a mentor, requires them to create a professional development plan, and offers a \$1,000 per year tuition reimbursement upon completion of the coursework. In 2008, 13 staff members completed certification programs. They reported facing two challenges: finding funds for initial payments and finding time to take courses while working.

⁷⁸ Susan Fowler, et al, *Who's Caring for Our Kids* (McCormick Tribune Center for Early Childhood Leadership, et al, November 2008), 85.

⁷⁹ Cohort refers to a program in which a cluster of students enter the program at the same time and typically take all of the courses together until they complete the program.

Strategy 4: Link Teachers to Professional Development Options and Other Resources

At Casa Central, the directors and coordinators link staff with various professional development resources:

- Great Start⁸⁰ is a professional development incentive wage supplement program.
- Gateways to Opportunity⁸¹ is a scholarship program.

After six months of employment at the agency, teachers become eligible for release time, giving them the opportunity to attend classes.

Strategy 5: Prepare Administrators to Work With Linguistically and Culturally Diverse Children and Their Families

The grow-your-own strategy applies to far more than preparing teachers. Casa Central has seen a shortage of individuals interested in becoming program directors. The agency has worked hard to link staff to a director credential group.

El Valor has used its Encouraging Leadership

Expand the pool of ECE professionals by providing training opportunities for local community members.

program to prepare a range of professionals. Participants in an MBA program have included local entrepreneurs, agency staff and even directors from other agencies.

Strategy 6: Incorporate Practical Applications of Relevant Research

Because of their classroom responsibilities, teachers at El Valor find it challenging to stay up-to-date on current research — particularly in regard to adapting programs to meet the linguistic and cultural background of children they serve. Agency administrators have assumed the task of keeping teachers current on relevant research, synthesizing it, and sharing findings so that best-practices are available for day-to-day classroom.

INTEGRATE PARENTS INTO THE LEARNING PROCESS

Preschool for All in Illinois

The Illinois School Code requires PFA programs to include a parent education component.⁸² National

⁸⁰ <http://www.inccrra.org/overview.aspx?id=171>; <http://www.dhs.state.il.us/page.aspx?item=30355>

⁸¹ <http://www.ilgateways.com>

⁸² 105 ILCS 5 2-3.71(a)(1)

Association for the Education of Young Children accreditation standards:

- emphasize active, formal and informal strategies for becoming acquainted with a child's background;
- require service deliverers to include parents in the various aspects of the program;
- offer parents volunteer opportunities;
- encourage staff engagement in community cultural events; and
- call for curriculum and environment to be adapted for families being served.⁸³

The Issues

Parent involvement in a child's education during the early years correlates with higher academic outcomes.⁸⁴ The range and type of interaction between parents and program providers vary greatly and offer opportunity for program staff to understand more about children's backgrounds. At the same time, parents learn about the complexities of child development and how they can participate in the education process from experts in the field. These connections are often better served if conducted in a child's home language.

Service providers find that many parents are not clear on a critical issue: they misunderstand the important role that use of native language can play in the successful acquisition of English proficiency. It is not uncommon for parents to believe it is better to stop speaking in the native language to avoid confusing a child with two languages.⁸⁵ This practice can have negative long-term consequences for children's language development, academic performance, and—most important—the parent-child relationship.⁸⁶

*Welcome parents
into the learning process
by explaining
the concept of volunteerism.*

Effective Practices from a Provider's Perspective

Strategy 1: Welcome Parents Through Orientations and Open Door Policies

Casa Central, Erie House and El Valor offer parent orientations, invite them to the centers to observe instruction and promote open-door policies. Parents are considered an asset to the agencies' work and each invites them to become volunteers. For many immigrant families, volunteerism is an unfamiliar concept. Center staff explain its value and the impact it has on educational outcomes.

El Valor engages parents through their talents. Staff ask about special abilities and find ways for parents to use them at the centers. To make participation easier, Erie House provides childcare for all parent activities.

Agencies know that parents are eager to participate in various activities, but engaging those who work outside of the home is a real challenge. Long hours may limit the time they have to come to the center, or to conduct activities at home. Agencies know that the activities they plan need to be flexible, varied and convenient for parents.

Strategy 2: Communicate in Two Languages

All three agencies communicate in both English and Spanish. They use many strategies for keeping parents informed about programs. Newsletters, bulletin boards, monthly meetings and one-on-one conversations are the most common. One agency provides each parent with an on-site mailbox; another conducts home visits at the beginning and end of each year.

Erie House policy calls for materials to be provided in both languages. The agency will only distribute brochures and flyers from other organizations if they are in Spanish and English.

Strategy 3: Offer Parent Training Opportunities and Adult Education Services

Casa Central has a parent involvement coordinator who handles parent activities which include delivering information on various topics at monthly meetings. Twice a year, the agency offers family literacy nights; parent conferences are held three times a year. El Valor usually has a waiting list for its parent training series, offered through a modular approach. The agency uses *Raising a Thinking Child*,⁸⁷ a parent component corresponding to the curriculum used with the children. It teaches strategies for at-home learning and for communication between child and parent.

83 NAEYC Standard 7: NAEYC Accreditation Criteria for Families.

84 Delis Cuellar, et al., *Latinos and Early Education: An Account of Diversity and Family Involvement* (National Task Force on Early Childhood Education for Hispanics, Dec. 2007).

85 Lea Lee, *Synchronistic learning of native language and English*, *Childhood Education* 80.2 (Winter 2003): 84-G(2); *Learning Two Languages: Questions Parents Ask*, PBS Parents, <http://www.pbs.org/parents/readinglanguage/articles/multifamilies/talking.html>.

86 Lily Wong Fillmore, *When Learning a Second Language Means Losing the First*, *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 6, 323, 343 (1991).

87 See *Transforming Early Learning, Choose an Appropriate and Flexible Curriculum*, Strategy 2 p 19.

Strategy 4: Encouraging Active Parent Leadership

Erie House, El Valor and Casa Central promote leadership through policy committees led by parent officers. One agency has both a policy committee and a policy council. It sends five parents to the National Head Start Conference every year. Another has a parent representative on its board of directors.

EVALUATE CHILDREN USING LINGUISTICALLY AND CULTURALLY CONSCIOUS METHODS

Preschool for All in Illinois

Preschool for All calls for the following to be in place:

- an individualized assessment profile to determine educational development.
- a progress assessment to ensure the child's needs are being met.⁸⁸
- screening of a child's development in at least the following areas when age appropriate: vocabulary, visual-motor integration, language and speech development, English proficiency, fine and gross motor skills, social skills and cognitive development.⁸⁹

The Issues

Assessments help agencies place children in appropriate programs. When language learners are evaluated, both their native language skills and their English language development need to be taken into consideration. For example, a student may be less verbally responsive in English, or not even talk at all. Some language learners go through a “silent period” when they are unwilling to speak in the second language. When English only is used to assess development domains, invalid outcomes may result because of a child's limited knowledge and exposure to English.

Effective Practices from a Provider's Perspective

Strategy 1: Conduct Initial Assessments in A Child's Native Language

Each of the three agencies makes assessments available in Spanish. They are conducted using the most appropriate language, taking into account the

***Conduct initial assessment
in a child's native language
to place children in
an appropriate program.***

child's primary language and the one used by parents or other caregivers. Erie House uses the Ages and Stages Questionnaire in Spanish and has bilingual support personnel who also play a role in ongoing evaluation. Casa Central uses the Early Screening Inventory Revised (ESIR)⁹⁰ which is available in Spanish.

Strategy 2: Create Evaluation Teams for Each Child

Using a team approach to assessment provides valuable insight from various perspectives. Casa Central uses a teacher and the disabilities manager to identify potential language delays based on ESIR performance.

Erie House has a unique approach. It has a partnership with the Chicago School of Professional Psychology to provide help with evaluations. The agency also has an on-going relationship with Jump Start⁹¹ whose corps members give valuable insight from their observations and interactions with the children. Evaluation teams are made up of the teacher, a Jump Start volunteer, a psychologist, social worker, case manager, and speech therapist— all of whom may be involved in the ongoing evaluation of a child.

Parent conferences inform staff about ongoing observations at home.

EASING THE TRANSITION OF LATINOS INTO KINDERGARTEN

Preschool for All in Illinois

Vertical transitioning refers to the system for moving children into and out of their educational programs. Preschool for All requires “...a description of how the program will ensure that those children who are age-eligible for kindergarten are enrolled in school upon leaving the preschool education program.”⁹²

The Issues

The preschool experience may be a family's first exposure to an educational system. For foreign-born Latino parents, this challenge is compounded by limited familiarity with the American system. Vertical transitioning becomes critical for them and includes:

- informing the family about the processes and expectations for enrollment in kindergarten.
- explaining the more standardized practices of K-12 classrooms.

For English language learners, kindergarten transition may be more complex. Some parents have the

90 Screening used by Chicago Public Schools.

91 The Jumpstart Program trains college students and then partners each with a young child to develop that child's literacy, language and social skills. www.jstart.org

92 23 IAC 235.30(e)

88 23 IAC 235.30(b)
89 23 IAC 235.20(c)(5)(B)

misconception that 2.5 hours of instruction per week for one to two years of preschool are sufficient to enter an English-only classroom. Children may be able to carry on a conversation but lack literacy and academic skills to be successful in a monolingual classroom. In fact, most bilingual programs at the K-12 level are designed to transition a student to English-only over a period of three or four years.

Effective Practices from a Provider's Perspective

Strategy 1: Provide Parents with a Comprehensive Transition Plan for Each Student

Casa Central develops transition goals during their February parent conferences. A community partner is invited to the agency to talk about school options in the neighborhood. Parents receive a “look at me” folder which includes various records, learning plans and a student profile. They are encouraged to share the information with teachers at their child’s new school.

Erie House has a similar approach. Transition plans are made during a child’s last seven or eight months in a

program. Parent meetings take place to discuss options such as: magnet schools, charter school applications and the Chicago Public Schools lottery system. Many students attend Erie Elementary Charter School.

Part of the comprehensive transition plan at both agencies includes information about a student’s language proficiency placement.

Strategy 2: Partner with the Schools Receiving the Children

Casa Central has valuable partnerships with local schools. Kindergarten teachers and agency staff visit each other’s classrooms during the year. Parents are invited along for those visits.

At Erie House, communication takes place between neighborhood schools and the agency regarding the children. Staff make a particular effort to communicate the requisites of special needs children to the new school. Many children also continue to be involved with Erie through its after-school programs.



CONCLUSION

Early childhood education services for Latino families will clearly benefit from a greater, system-wide understanding and awareness of immigrants and Latinos. When the Latino community benefits and prospers, so too will society at large.

Two important central themes emerge in this report:

First, it is important that those providing early childhood education programs have an enhanced understanding of Spanish language usage. Active explorations of home language use and English acquisition will contribute to the value of their programs. As they better understand the impact of language on everything from outreach to screening, they will enhance program delivery and broaden the number of clients they can effectively serve. When language is no longer a barrier, access to quality programming becomes a reality for all.

Second, there are programs in Latino community based organizations that have implemented successful strategies that can be replicated throughout the state of Illinois. It is in the spirit of promoting understanding that this report highlights those effective strategies.

The issue of making quality early childhood services available to Latino children is challenging and complex. Latino Policy Forum highlights some of those complexities, in the hope that stakeholders can come together to identify and endorse viable recommendations for educating young Latinos. The strategies presented in this report are replicable. They can serve as models for early childhood education providers serving large numbers of Latino children and others who are English language learners.

Latino Policy Forum is committed to working on the issue of early childhood education for Latinos. We will continue to collaborate with a diverse set of stakeholders, including the Early Childhood Education Workgroup, the various committees of the Illinois Early Learning Council, and members of the Quality Alliance to examine specific recommendations resulting from this analysis.

This report is another step toward generating policies to close the education achievement gap of Latino children and provide them access to quality early childhood education programs.







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