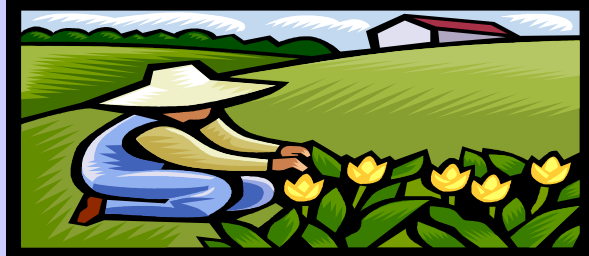


EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION BUREAU

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PARA NUESTROS NIÑOS: EXPANDING AND IMPROVING EARLY EDUCATION FOR HISPANICS (Executive Report, National Task Force on Early Childhood Education for Hispanics, March 2007)

Raising Hispanic achievement is one of the most important educational priorities for the nation. To maintain a strong economy and be competitive internationally, we need all our nation's children to be prepared to participate fully in today's technology-based society. Yet despite some progress, academic outcomes for Hispanic children remain low. We can and must do more to accelerate the rate of their educational progress. The National Task Force on Early Childhood Education for Hispanics was established in 2004 to study the challenges to academic achievement for Hispanic children and to develop recommendation to expand and improve their educational opportunities during the period from birth through age eight.

Low academic achievement patterns of Hispanic students are well established by the end of the primary grades. As part of its work, the Task Force commissioned a study to analyze data from a large national sample of children from kindergarten through fifth grade. The study found that, despite extensive efforts to raise their academic achievement, Hispanic students continue to achieve at much lower levels than Whites across the K-5 years. Principal findings of the study include the following:

- Hispanic children started kindergarten well behind White youngsters on measures of reading and math skills
- Although they gained some ground over the K-5 years, Hispanic children were still well behind in reading and math at the end of the fifth grade; and
- Achievement differences between Hispanics and Whites across the K-5 years were closely associated with differences in social class.

This last point is particularly important. Hispanics do less well because they are predominantly in the lower socio-economic levels, not because they are Hispanic. The most promising opportunities for raising Hispanic achievement are in the early childhood years. Research indicates that programs at the infant/toddler, pre-kindergarten, and early elementary levels can help reduce the academic achievement gap between Hispanic and White children. The Task Force makes several recommendations outlining the actions needed to expand and improve educational opportunities for young Hispanic children. Recommendations focus on:

- Increasing Hispanic children's access to infant/toddler programs, pre-kindergarten programs and summer programs during the early elementary years, giving high priority to Hispanic children from low socioeconomic circumstances, especially those who are English language learners in immigrant families;
- Increasing the number of Spanish-speaking teachers and language acquisition specialists; an
- Increasing efforts to design, test, and evaluate language and literacy development strategies for low socioeconomic Hispanics from Spanish-speaking homes.

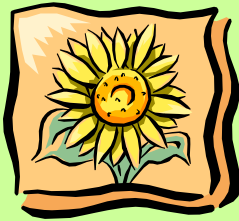


HISPANIC FAMILIES FACE CHALLENGES, BUT ALSO BRING STRENGTHS

Many Hispanic families face significant challenges in supporting their children's efforts to succeed in school. A number of demographic characteristics of the Hispanic population – such as **low parental education, poverty, and lack of English skills** - tend to be correlated with children's lower academic achievement in comparison with White children. However, despite the challenges, Hispanic families and communities are often typified by enormous strengths that contribute to society and serve as a resource for Hispanic youngsters. One of the most important of these strengths is **familismo**, a conception of the family in which family ties are very strong and family members are fully committed to the support of each other. For Hispanic children, this means that their parents and other family members are usually deeply and actively concerned about their educational, emotional, and material well-being. Even though many of the fathers in Hispanic families have little formal education, the overwhelming majority are employed and striving to provide for the material needs of their children. These characteristics are very important indicators of Hispanic parents' capacities to support the healthy development of their children.

EARLY CHILDHOOD PROGRAMS OFFER OPPORTUNITIES FOR RAISING HISPANIC ACHIEVEMENT

Infant/Toddler Programs: School readiness and school achievement patterns have much of their foundations in the period from birth to three, a time when the home and family typically play the dominant role in the development of children. One of the most important ways in which families can promote school readiness is by providing language and literacy development opportunities. The more parents talk and read to their children, for example, the larger the children's vocabularies are at age three. In turn, the size of children's vocabularies at age three is a good predictor not only of their reading skills at the end of the first grade, but also of their reading comprehension skills on through high school. Research has established that, in general, children with well-educated parents start school with larger vocabularies and stronger pre-reading skills than children with less well-educated parents. Research has also found that Hispanic mothers are less well-educated compared with White mothers, and generally talk and read less to their children. There tend to be fewer literacy-related materials, such as children's books, available in Hispanic homes. Some researches have estimated that these and related parenting differences account for between $\frac{1}{4}$ and $\frac{1}{2}$ of racial/ethnic readiness gaps at the start of kindergarten.



Infant/toddler programs can provide a strategy to supplement the language and literacy development opportunities in the home, expanding access to this very important factor in school readiness. However, only a relatively small number of children is served by infant/toddler programs explicitly designed, at least in part, to promote school readiness.

Pre-Kindergarten Programs: Over the past two decades, there has been growing evidence that high quality pre-K programs can make meaningful improvements in the school readiness of low SES children and help them achieve better long-term educational outcomes in school. The early results of evaluations of some state programs among them Oklahoma's universal pre-K program which serves a racially and ethnically diverse group of children, including many Hispanics, document benefits for children from all racial/ethnic groups, including Hispanics, and for both poor and non-poor children. Substantial cognitive gains were found on assessments of pre-reading, prewriting, and math reasoning skills. In "age equivalent" terms, the participants had scores equal to those usually registered by children four to eight months older, depending on the skill area.

For quality pre-K programs to benefit Hispanic youngsters, however, it will also be important to understand and address the barriers to access. **Both poor and non-poor Hispanics have long been underrepresented among children who attend some form of center-based child care and pre-K programs.** Although the reasons for the relatively low attendance of Hispanics have not been firmly established, one factor appears to be lack of capacity with overall shortage of pre-K slots in Hispanic neighborhoods. Other factors cited include parents' lack of knowledge about the programs available in their communities and the inability to afford the cost if there is one.

Early Elementary Programs: Much of the work on elementary school strategies for raising student achievement have focused on improving outcome for disadvantaged children, including Hispanics and other minorities. Many of these strategies have attempted to improve a number of aspects of elementary schools at the same time, including curriculum and instruction in key areas such as reading and math; student assessment; school leadership and management; staff development; and parent involvement.

The study by the Task Force on a number of these strategies found that several are contribution to higher achievement among Hispanics in the primary grades. Overall, the gains tend to be modest in size. Nevertheless the study found that the most promising strategies had a strong literacy focus that can be culturally and linguistically tailored to the needs of Hispanic students.

A major challenge for schools in their efforts to reduce achievement gaps between disadvantaged students and their middle class counterparts is that disadvantaged children tend to lose ground in reading and math relative to middle class youngsters during the summer months when school is not in session. The Task Force's research in this area shows that **multi-year summer programs – those that students attend for two or three successive summers – can help raise the achievement of many disadvantaged children during the primary grades.**

Recommendations for Action: The Task Force's mission has been to develop recommendations for expanding and improving early childhood education for Hispanics. If the educational advancement of Hispanics is to be accelerated, young Hispanic children need both more and better opportunities to learn during their early childhood years. To accomplish this, improvements are needed in three main areas:

- Hispanic children's access to programs;
- Increasing the number of Spanish-speaking teachers and language acquisition specialists; and
- Increasing efforts to design, test, and evaluate language and literacy development strategies.

WHAT IS NEW MEXICO DOING FOR HISPANIC STUDENTS?

One program in New Mexico showing tremendous gain in achievement in reading of Hispanic and Native American children in grades K-3 is Reading First. Over the first three years of implementation Hispanic and Native American students in all grade levels outperformed their White classmates. New Mexico Reading First is one of the initiatives shown to close the achievement gap between children from different ethnic and socio-economic groups

HOW CAN WE BEST MEASURE QUALITY IN THE EARLY EDUCATION CLASSROOM?

The evidence is quite clear that it is the teacher's implementation of a curriculum, through both social and instructional interactions with children, that produces effects on student learning. Classroom observations thus provide the most valid information on the educational experiences of young children. Structural indicators, such as the curriculum being used, teacher credentials, and other program factors are only proxies for the instructional and social interactions children have with teachers in classrooms. Yet many states and localities measure program "quality" only in terms of proxies – teacher credentials, the size and spaciousness of the facilities, the amount of learning material available, and the length of the preschool day. Except for the last characteristic, these "quality indicators" do not measure what programs offer young children that is educational important. In short, teachers' implementation of instruction through their interactions with children is a critical and typically underemphasized aspect of early childhood program quality. Judging accurately the quality of implementation requires observing what is happening in classrooms.

WHAT DOES A HIGH-QUALITY EARLY-CHILDHOOD EDUCATION CLASSROOM LOOK LIKE?

The best early childhood teachers are opportunists—they know child development and exploit children's interests and their interactions with them to promote developmental change—some of which may involve structured lessons and much of which may not. To be effective, teachers of young children must strategically weave instruction into activities that give children choices to explore and play. Several aspects of teachers' interactive behaviors appear to uniquely predict gains in young children's achievement:

- Explicit instruction in certain key skills
- Sensitive and emotionally warm interactions
- Responsive feedback
- Verbal engagement/stimulation
- A classroom environment that is not overly structured or regimented.

In an effort to examine whether children at risk of low achievement in the early grades would benefit from being exposed to high levels of observed instructional and emotional support from teachers, researchers studied the effects on two groups of at-risk children:

- Those whose mothers had less than a four-year college degree and
- Those who had displayed significant behavioral, social, and/or academic problems.

Both groups were, on average, behind their peers at age 4 and further behind by 1st grade. When the children at risk were placed in high-quality classrooms, these gaps were eliminated: children from low-education households achieved at the same level as those whose mothers had a college degree, and children displaying prior problem behavior showed achievement and adjustment levels identical to children who had no history of problems. At-risk children who did not receive these supports did not show these gains.

K-3 + SUMMER SCHOOL GRANT OPPORTUNITY Jump Start into Literacy and Math

The Early Childhood Education Bureau will soon be accepting proposals from school districts for K-3 Plus programs. This initiative provides resources for schools to extend the school year by providing 25 days prior to the start of school for kindergarten, first grade, second grade and third grade students. Single or combination classes are acceptable. Schools with 85% free and reduced lunch rates will be given priority. Please check the PED website for a letter of intent to apply, and for the application. Questions call Phyllis Martinez at 827-9972.

