

Early Childhood Education and Latino Children

The human brain develops more rapidly between birth and age five than during any other subsequent period; these first five years are a time of enormous social-emotional, physical and cognitive growth.¹ High-quality early education capitalizes on young children's potential, helping to ensure later success in school and in life.² Children participating in early childhood education develop better language skills, score higher on school-readiness tests and have better social skills and fewer behavioral problems once they enter school.³ In addition, they are 30% more likely to graduate high school and more than twice as likely to go to college.⁴ While all children benefit from early learning experiences, research finds that Latino children experience particular benefits from high-quality early education programs.

Early education benefits Latino children

- Latino children who attended high-quality early education programs showed greater academic gains than their black and white peers.⁵
- Overall, Latino children who experienced high-quality early education increased test scores by 54%. Those who participated in full school-day early education programs improved test scores by 73%.⁶
- Latino children who participated in a high-quality early education program showed dramatic gains in cognitive and language skills, two specific areas that predict strong kindergarten readiness.⁷
- Latino children who are English Language Learners (ELLs) benefit greatly from high-quality early education, as it exposes them to the English language at a young age, bettering their chances for academic success.

Latinos in Massachusetts

- In Massachusetts, 11.0% of children ages 3-5 are Latino; 10.5% of children ages 0-18 are Latino.
- The high school graduation rate for Latino students in Massachusetts is 58%, compared to 68% for black students and 87% for white students.
- Fifty-five percent (55%) of students classified as limited English proficient (LEP) students in Massachusetts speak Spanish as a first language.
- In a 2006 statewide survey of families, Latino parents were more likely than black or white parents to indicate the importance of early education programs in preparing their children for school, but least likely to say their current early education and care arrangements do so.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Census 2000. Information on racial and ethnic background is for children under age 18 in Massachusetts, Massachusetts Department of Education 2008. 4-Year Graduation Rate. http://profiles.doe.mass.edu/grad/grad_report.aspx?code=00000000&fycode=2009&sortby=pcode=0102; English Language Learners, LEP Students in Massachusetts Public Schools, March 2005 www.doe.mass.edu/ell/statistics/lep.html; Statewide Parent Survey. Opinion Dynamics, May 2006.

Investing in early education opportunities for Latino children is essential

Access to and participation in early education programs becomes even more essential given today's demographics of the Latino population. Currently, 21% of children under the age of five in the United States are Latino.⁸ The current population of Latino children under five is expected to increase 146% by 2050.⁹ Although almost one quarter of children under the age of five is Latino, they are less likely than black or white children to attend early education programs. Only 40% of Latino children ages 3-5 are enrolled in early education programs, whereas 64% of black children and 59% of white children are enrolled.¹⁰ Nationally, 80% of ELL students speak Spanish as a first language.¹¹ Language barriers may discourage preschool enrollment, and research shows that children who speak a language other than English at home are less likely to attend kindergarten.^{12, 13}

National Task Force report: *Para Nuestro Niños, For Our Children*¹⁴

A report from the National Task Force on Early Childhood Education for Hispanics says that "the most promising opportunities for raising Hispanic achievement are in the early childhood years." The report recommends that states increase their investments in publicly funded, universally accessible pre-kindergarten programs, which have the potential to serve large numbers of Latino children. Additionally, the report recommends: (1) increasing Latino children's access to high-quality early education; (2) increasing the numbers of teachers and language-acquisition specialists who are proficient in both English and Spanish; (3) increasing the capacity of center-based programs in Latino neighborhoods; and (4) increasing efforts to design, test, and evaluate early childhood education strategies that can strengthen the language and literacy development of Latino children.

A recent report by NIEER indicates that programs that prepare early childhood educators for the classroom should provide training aimed at addressing the needs of Latino children and their families.

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4 Reynolds, A.J., Temple, J.A., Robertson, D.L., & Mann, E.A. Long-term Effects of Early Childhood Intervention on Education Achievement and Juvenile Arrest. *Journal of the American Medical Association*, 2001.

5 Comley, William Jr., et al. "The Effects of Oklahoma's Universal Pre-K Program on School Readiness." Washington, DC: Center for Research on Children in the US, Georgetown University, 2004.

6 Ibid.

7 Ibid.

8 Michael Lopez, PhD, Center for Latino Child and Family Research. PowerPoint presentation to NCLR Latino Birth-to-Three Agenda Advisory Committee Meeting, April 22, 2005 on U.S. Census Bureau data.

9 Ibid.

10 U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, *The Condition of Education 2002*, NCES 2002-025, Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 2002. Table 1-1.

11 P. J. Hoptock & T. G. Stephenson. *Descriptive Study of Services to LEP Students and LEP Students with Disabilities*. Special Topic Report #1: Native Languages of LEP Students. Arlington, VA: Development Associates, Inc., 2003.

12 Calderon, Miriam. *Head Start Readiness: Enhancing School Readiness for Hispanic Children*. NCLR, 2005.

13 Rumberger, Russell W. *Preschool Participation and the Cognitive and Social Development of Language-Minority Students*. CRESST, 2004.

14 National Task Force on Early Childhood Education for Hispanics, *Para Nuestro Niños, For Our Children*, 2007. Available: <http://www.eechi.org>

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