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ABSTRACT

This handbook offers background and suggestions for developing programs in which parents learn how to actively participate in their children's education. It is based on 42 participating projects throughout the country. It contains the following seven chapters: (1) "The Hispanic Profile"; (2) "Misperceptions and Misconceptions"; (3) "The Elements of a Successful Parent Involvement Program"; (4) "Recruitment Strategies: DOs and DON'Ts"; (5) "Retention Strategies: DOs and DON'Ts"; (6) "Is It Worth the Effort?"; and (7) "Special Challenges: Hispanic Fathers, Teenage Mothers, Troubled Families." The following conclusions are drawn from previous attempts to develop parent/school partnerships: (1) parent behavior is subject to change; and (2) participating Hispanic parents, mothers in particular, become full partners in the education of their children. Also included are an introduction and the following four appendixes: (1) "Barriers and Solutions," a checklist of potential problems and solutions; (2) "Sample Programs," sketches and profiles of some projects around the country; (3) "Sample Outreach and Follow-up Materials," examples of letters, information, and fliers to parents from project administrators; and (4) "Directory of Projects," a list of the participating projects on which the information in this handbook was based. (MYM)

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# Building Strong Partnerships Between Schools and Hispanic Parents

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# SCHOOL

"This is not a book about the 35 percent of U.S. Hispanic students who are achieving in school and moving toward stable, successful futures. It is a book about the parents of the 65 percent —most of whom care deeply about the achievement and future of their children, but are unfamiliar with the system of education in the United States, do not understand how they are expected to relate to it, and do not know how or where to find assistance.

"It is also a book about teachers, school personnel, and leaders of education unions—most of whom care deeply about children and want them to learn, but are unfamiliar with Hispanic parenting practices, do not understand the cultural strengths of the Hispanic families whose children are filling their classes, and do not know how or where to find assistance."

# TOGETHER IS BETTER

## *Building Strong Relationships Between Schools and Hispanic Parents*

by Siobhan Nicolau  
and Carmen Lydia Ramos

HISPANIC POLICY DEVELOPMENT PROJECT, INC.  
NEW YORK • WASHINGTON, D.C.  
1990

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*"Nearly a quarter of America's children are on an educational path leading nowhere....The gap between their skills and performance and those of their peers is growing wider. These are the children of the poor, who are also often ethnic minorities."*

Patricia Gandara  
Professor of Education  
California State University at Sacramento

Too many of the minorities to which Professor Gardara refers are Hispanic children: 40 percent of Hispanics drop out of high school; another 25 percent graduate from high school without the skills required to find employment that will pay a living wage and offer opportunity for advancement.

**Think what this means: Sixty-five percent of our Hispanic children are condemned to marginal futures.**

This is not a book about the 35 percent of U.S. Hispanic students who are achieving in school and moving toward stable, successful futures. It is a book about the parents of the 65 percent—most of whom care deeply about the achievement and future of their children, but are unfamiliar with the system of education in the United States, do not understand how they are expected to relate to it, and do not know how or where to find assistance.

It is also a book about teachers, school personnel, and leaders of education unions—most of whom care deeply about children and want them to learn, but are unfamiliar with Hispanic parenting practices, do not understand the cultural strengths of the Hispanic families whose children are filling their classes, and do not know how or where to find assistance.

This is a book to help Hispanic parents and schools understand each other's cultures, goals, hopes and needs. This is a book that attempts to translate the mutual caring of parents and schools into the strong relationships that can promote the academic achievement of Hispanic children.

***This handbook is dedicated to all the schools and parents and children who participated in the Reader's Digest Foundation/General Foods Fund Inc. competitions. Their willingness to try, their willingness to risk success or failure while we looked over their shoulders, their willingness to trust us and let us into their families and schools, turned concept into reality. As a direct result of their efforts, other schools, parents, and children have been given the opportunity to learn and benefit.***

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## INTRODUCTION

The Hispanic Policy Development Project's focus on parent/school cooperation grew out of the three years of research that led to the publication *"Make Something Happen": Hispanics and Urban High School Reform*. That report, published in December 1984, documented the growing number of Hispanic young people who either fail to graduate from high school or graduate without an adequate education. One of the major findings of *"Make Something Happen"* was that **successful education requires that schools and families function as full partners in the education of children.**

A sobering second finding of *"Make Something Happen"* was that **the interaction of poor Hispanic parents and the schools their children attend ranged from low to non-existent.**

Because the benefits and mutual reinforcement derived from a school/parent partnership are so often the key to a student's academic achievement, HPDP set out to discover why Hispanic parents and schools so seldom make the crucial connection.

With the generous support of Reader's Digest Foundation and The General Foods Fund, HPDP sponsored a competition to promote and test strategies to increase Hispanic parental involvement.

In 1986 and 1987, a request for proposals was sent to elementary and middle schools across the country, to groups in their communities, and to the schools' parents' organizations. The only criterion for entry was that the school population be at least 25 percent Hispanic. Those who entered the competition were asked to define the challenges they faced in establishing relationships between Hispanic parents and schools, and to describe programs they would like to undertake to build partnerships and to address specific problems relating to Hispanic children. HPDP received 610 proposals and made 39 awards.

In 1988 HPDP worked with additional agencies and schools at various sites to explore techniques to reach specific groups that had proved to be the most difficult to attract, *teen mothers, fathers, and seriously at-risk families.*

The 42 participating projects explored a wide variety of activities designed to recruit Hispanic parents and retain their involvement. Some were extraordinarily successful. Others tried but failed. **Both failures and successes provided valuable insights.**

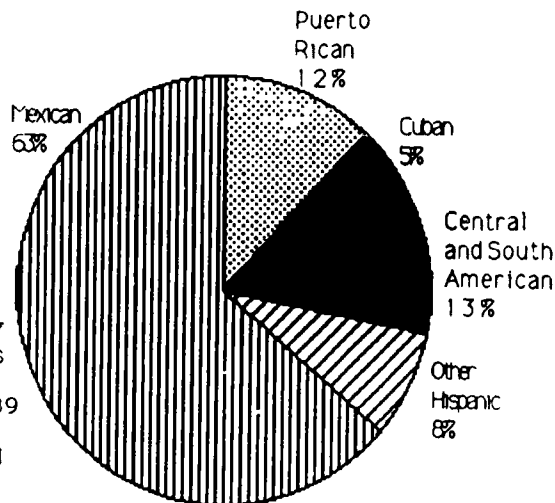
Effective strategies—as well as some of those that do not work—are documented in this handbook.

# CHAPTER I

## The Hispanic Profile

U.S. Hispanics are not a homogeneous group. Although united by a common language and an origin in Spanish colonization, they are separated by age, race, socioeconomic status, geography, the nature of their arrival—immigration, migration, exile, or asylum—and by the length of their residence here, as well as by their country of origin. Some Hispanics were settled, long before the Pilgrims landed at Plymouth Rock, within what are now the boundaries of the United States. Others arrived at the turn of the century, or over the decades of the 1900s. Still others have only recently entered the United States. The chart below indicates the population breakdown of the major Hispanic subgroups.

Hispanics by Sub-Group, 1989



Source: Bureau of the Census, Press Release # CB89-158, Oct 12, 1989. Due to rounding, percentages total more than 100%.

## The Hispanic Populations

- The number of Hispanics in the United States reached 20 million in 1989.
- The Hispanic fraction of the U.S. population will be at least 10 percent by the year 2000.
- It is estimated that by the year 2020 Hispanics will be the largest U.S. minority.

U.S. Hispanics, with a median age of 26, are much younger than other Americans. The median age for non-Hispanics in the United States is 33. Hispanics also have more children. Their youth and relatively high birth rates, together with continued immigration, create considerable momentum for future growth.

U.S. Hispanics are concentrated in the urban centers of nine states: Florida, New York, Illinois, Texas, California, Arizona, New Jersey, New Mexico, and Colorado. Eighty-nine percent of the U.S. Hispanic population is located in these geographical areas.

Contrary to popular myth, Hispanics learn English as rapidly as other immigrants of the same socioeconomic status. And they are not all poor. There is a stable and growing Hispanic middle-class.

However, despite the fact that Hispanics are eager workers, a sizeable portion of the Hispanic community suffers lower average incomes and higher rates of unemployment and poverty than does the general population. Low educational achievement has been—and continues to be—a major barrier to the advancement of Hispanics in U.S. society.

While lack of education has always been seen as a barrier to upward mobility, in today's labor markets it constitutes a serious obstacle to survival. The well-paid, unskilled jobs that have traditionally supported first-generation immigrants are rapidly disappearing. Today's entry level jobs offer lower salaries and require higher skills. An individual entering the job market must know more to earn less.

Increasing numbers of Hispanic families are becoming trapped in the ranks of the working poor—even when both parents work, even when they hold down more than one job. Lack of skills locks many others into welfare dependency.

## **Educational Achievement: The Problem and The Answer**

By the year 2000, U.S. Hispanics will constitute a large share of school children and young job seekers in this country—almost 16 percent. In major markets where Hispanics are concentrated, they will constitute a majority of the school populations and the entry-level work force.

Research indicates that the success of children in school usually can be predicted from the educational status of their mothers. That being so, Hispanic youngsters are distinctly disadvantaged because Hispanic women in the age range 25 to 34 years—those most likely to have school-age children—are over three times as likely to have dropped out of high school as are other American women in that age group.

Many poor Hispanic youngsters, like many other low-income children, come into the classroom unprepared to tackle school work that their middle-class peers find easy, because their parents have not known how to provide them with the social, linguistic, and cognitive skills teachers expect. Seventy-five percent of the children have no preschool or daycare experience; many have never been out of their immediate neighborhoods. **They start the job of learning without the proper tools.**

For example, large numbers of low-income Hispanic children, like other poor youngsters, suffer delayed language development. But although language delay is a strong contributing factor in the low achievement levels of both monolingual and bilingual low-income Hispanic children, it is not the only factor. Lack of experience outside their neighborhoods is another. Poor Hispanic children, like other poor children, rarely visit museums, zoos, the theater, or summer camps. They do not travel on vacations. They watch little educational television. Their parents seldom read to them. They enter school with exposure to a very narrow sliver of the world.

If special steps are not taken to help Hispanic parents prepare their children for school and to assist children who arrive unprepared, the gap between their skills and those of their peers widens as they go from grade to grade. Many never catch up, and many are "left back." For example, about 44 percent of 13-year-old Hispanic students are one or more years below expected grade level. Too often this leads to a sense of failure; the students perceive themselves to be "dumb."

Great numbers of these students do not make it through high school. Over 40 percent drop out of school. An estimated 59 percent of Hispanic dropouts leave school *before completing the 10th grade.*

Many schools fail to understand the problem; others understand it but are at a loss to resolve it.

## Hispanic Parents—An Untapped Resource

Parents who wish their youngsters to succeed in U.S. schools must do certain things in the pre-school years to give their children the skills they are expected to have mastered when they enter kindergarten.

Although they teach their children essential social skills such as cooperation, most low-income Hispanic parents are unaware of specific practices—such as talking and reading to children and encouraging their curiosity—that lay the academic skills foundation. These practices begin in the home, and must be carried out by a child's first and most important teachers—the parents.

Additionally, low-income Hispanic parents often are uninformed about the value of out-of-school activities—such as trips to parks,

zoos, museums, and libraries—that may provide a solid base for understanding the larger world and may reinforce what youngsters learn in class every day.

While most Hispanic parents understand that children should do their homework, few have any idea that school-age children should spend up to 20 hours a week engaged in other “constructive learning activities” outside the classroom, such as—

- reading for fun;
- writing (even if it's writing telephone messages or helping with the grocery list or performing similar chores);
- pursuing hobbies;
- watching educational television;
- talking with adults about the day's events;
- spending leisure time with the family: playing games, going on family outings; and
- participating in sports.

Knowing how to help your child succeed in the U.S. school system is an acquired skill and can be learned. Many low-income Hispanic parents—like other poor parents—are unaware of the crucial role they can play in supporting their children's sense of accomplishment and self esteem.

Many low-income Hispanic parents are in the dark about how children learn and how schools function.

Many schools are in the dark about low-income Hispanic families.

The results are misperceptions and misconceptions.

## CHAPTER II

# Misperceptions and Misconceptions

### How Some Teachers Perceive Hispanics

*....they are so different. I just don't know how we can include them. They don't fit in.*

*....I send home notes and I call and still I can't get them to a meeting. I think that a lot of them just don't care.*

*....they are clannish; the few that come all sit together and refuse to participate. I don't know why they even bother. They don't contribute anything. I think that many of them are illiterate.*

*....where have they been all their lives? The children don't know anything. They come into kindergarten without knowing colors or numbers. They can't hold a pencil.*

*....the children are unresponsive. They won't look adults in the eye, and they refuse to participate in class unless directly called upon.*

*....how am I supposed to teach them when they don't speak or understand plain English? Why do their parents speak to them in Spanish?*

*....why don't their parents learn English? Everybody else did. How am I expected to communicate with these people?*

### How Some Hispanics Perceive Schools

*....the teachers are professional people. They know what is best for children. I went to the third grade; how can I question my son's teacher? She knows what is best for him.*

*....I am called by the school when there is a problem with my son, then the teachers make me feel embarrassed and hurt about his behavior. I feel I don't belong in the school.*

*....I teach my children to behave like the teacher says and not be asking questions or talking too much. She says my child is too quiet. I don't understand. My child is good.*

*....we feel we are discriminated against. We as parents are not welcome or even allowed access to the school. They say if we cannot speak English, there is no point in wanting to see the principal or the counselors.*

*....we want what others have, help that is realistic. Sure, some parents are careless, but we have a lot who do care.*

*...I want to be correct but nobody tells me what is correct here.*

*....teachers aon't like me. I flunked school. Better for my kids if I stay away as much as possible.*

*....my husband, he works two jobs and I have two babies. We got no time to go to school. Besides, what can we tell a teacher?*

Certainly these quotations do not reflect universal points of view, but they are instructive. They demonstrate how strongly **many teachers and many parents feel that the other does not care.**

Yet the remarkable outcomes of those experimental projects that increased Hispanic parental involvement demonstrate clearly that both schools and parents *do* care. Hispanic parents and schools can and do establish lasting and effective partnerships once ignorance and communication gaps are overcome.

## Schools Need Help in Bridging The Gap

The negative feelings that some school personnel harbor toward Hispanics stem mainly from an unfamiliarity with the family traditions and the life realities of the Hispanic parents whose children are rapidly filling their classrooms. In major urban areas, population patterns have altered significantly over the last decade. As a consequence, schools that historically served white populations—sometimes white middle-class populations—find themselves ill prepared for the arrival of large numbers of low-income Hispanic students, many of whom speak little English and come from troubled backgrounds.

Few teachers or administrators are offered guidance or training to help them interpret Hispanic behavior, reach out to Hispanic parents, or understand the considerable strengths Hispanics can bring to a school/parent partnership. In many instances there are no Hispanic personnel in the schools in a position to assist their non-

Hispanic peers. Left on their own to sink or swim, many school officials and teachers misread the reserve, the non-confrontational manners, and the non-involvement of Hispanic parents to mean that they are uncaring, passive, and uninterested in their children's education. Teachers see that the children aren't learning and the parents aren't helping. And when their traditional strategies and methods for involving parents fail to elicit a response from Hispanic parents, principals and teachers become frustrated. Too often that frustration becomes an impatience and indifference that affects the schools' expectations for Hispanic students.

Sadly, some teachers decide that since Hispanics aren't going to cooperate, there isn't much point in making the extra effort to reach them.

## First- and Second-Generation Hispanic Parents Need Help

Most Hispanic parents want their children to succeed in school.

In fact, the vast majority of Hispanic parents are not refusing to cooperate with the schools. **Most poor Hispanic parents behave in a manner consistent with the way they were expected to behave in the countries in which they or their parents were born.** Like all of us, Hispanics tend to do as their parents did.

The U.S. school system assumes that parents will take some responsibility for their children's success in formal education by preparing them for school, teaching basic skills and reinforcing what goes on in the classroom after children reach school age. Most low-income Hispanic immigrant and migrant parents are unfamiliar with this role. In their countries the role of parents and the role of school in relation to education are sharply delineated and divided: Parents have a serious duty to instill respect and proper behavior in their children. *That is a parent's job.* It is the school's job to instill knowledge. *Teaching is not the parents' business.*

Low-income Hispanics tend to regard the educational system as omnipotent. They treat it with great respect and relate to it the way most Americans relate to medical doctors, lawyers, and priests—with awe. Doctors, lawyers and priests seem to know complicated things that are beyond most of us and they speak in strange jargon. More often than not we accept their diagnoses of our physical, legal, or spiritual ills, even when we really want to question them.

So it is with poor Hispanic parents and schools. **The parents view the educational system as a bureaucracy governed by educated non-Hispanics whom they have no right to question.** Even parents who speak English perceive the institution as vast and intimidating. The schools have complete control and the teachers are the experts when it comes to educating children.



Although bewildered by the system and its structure, most first-generation Hispanic parents believe and trust that the schools will educate their children and will provide them with the skills necessary to enter the job market and to become successful members of society. With some concern about how "different" the school and the teachers are, but generally confident that all will be well, the majority hand over their children—neat and very respectful—to be educated. "Respectful" often means not looking adults in the eye, not speaking to adults unless spoken to first, and not asking questions. Casual conversations between parents and children, or adults reading to children, are not the norms in most poor Hispanic homes. Curiosity, or trying new things, is not encouraged.

Most Hispanic children are warmly and enthusiastically welcomed and loved, but the parents' deep sense of responsibility to instill proper behavior and respect, and to protect the children from a world that they themselves do not fully understand, frequently hinders their ability and willingness to build on their traditional parenting practices to include the skills that prepare children for success in the U.S. system.

Language delay is one of the most serious obstacles—and often the most misunderstood—that many low-income Hispanic children must overcome when they enter school. The good Hispanic child is the quiet, obedient child. As the proud and adoring mother of two little girls told us—"*...my little ones are so good. When we come home from school they go straight to their room and sit on the bed quiet. They never bother me.*"

But conditioning preschool children to be quiet around adults amounts to conditioning them to be non-verbal. When parents limit language interaction to create an atmosphere of respect and, in addition, seldom read to their young children, those youngsters—monolingual and bilingual alike—arrive in school with underdeveloped language skills. This is a challenge for any child, but those who simultaneously must learn a new language and catch up on language development in general are truly disadvantaged at the starting line.

## Some Native-born Hispanic Parents Also Need Help

Hispanic parents are not a homogeneous group and, contrary to popular stereotype, not all are recent arrivals. About two-thirds of today's Hispanic parents arrived here at an early age or were born here. Many of these parents, in fact, dropped out of the very U.S. school system to which they are now delivering their children.

For young dropped-out parents, school is not the symbol of hope and opportunity that it represents to many immigrant parents. On

the contrary, it is the site of their failure; there is little that makes them want to return as students or as parents. Despite the fact that most of them want their children to do well, they do not want to subject themselves to renewed feelings of inadequacy. In some instances parents fear that teachers may judge their children's potential in terms of their own failure. And very often, parents do not know what it takes to prepare a child for school and to support a child's academic progress. In varying degrees they may be unaware of how they too must build on and add to the parenting practices of their mothers and grandmothers.

It is also important to bear in mind that almost all poor Hispanic families—immigrant and native-born—are struggling simply to survive. Often both parents work, sometimes at more than one job. Mothers may have a number of young children in their care. Mothers may be single and on welfare. Their neighborhoods may be dangerous, transportation and childcare expensive or nonexistent. The struggle to survive may leave some families deeply troubled and in need of help that they may resist seeking because *"we do not discuss family affairs with strangers."*

## The Basic (But Flawed) Assumption

Low-income Hispanic parents' lack of education functions as an internal and external barrier to school/parent partnerships. **The assumption—on the part of both immigrant and native-born parents as well as the school.—that poor Hispanic parents have little to offer the schools or their children has a serious negative impact on all concerned—especially the children.** Isolated from each other, schools and parents cannot work as a support team. Instead they are left alone to puzzle out each other's realities.

Many teachers have values and expectations that stem from their own educational experiences and from teaching middle-class children. Yet many children—Hispanics and others—are socialized somewhat differently from the middle-class children for whom most American schools are designed. When those children and the schools meet, both parties can find themselves seriously handicapped. Frequently teachers, who must gain the children's confidence and unlock their potentials, do not know where to begin with the "different" child. Parents, for their part, have no idea what the schools expect. When the parents are not part of the educational team, the children and the teachers undertake the educational journey on a tricycle with two wheels—one third of the support mechanism is missing. More often than one wishes to admit, a gulf between home and school translates into inadequate learning or no learning at all.

**This isolation need not prevail.** Through the experience of success and through the experience of failure, 42 School/Parent

Partnerships have shown us at the Hispanic Policy Development Project how to strike down some of the barriers and bridge the gulf.

As one project director reported—

*"...non-Hispanic teachers must be made aware of traditional Hispanic views of teachers. They must learn that a parent's quietness may not be out of lack of concern but one of not questioning the authority of the teacher. The hardest part of a parent program for Hispanic parents is to humanize teachers and to let parents know that teachers want to talk bilaterally if not bilingually about their students."*

Parents who participated in successful partnerships told us—

*"Before, I was afraid to walk into the school building; now it's like walking into my own house."*

*"It gave me an opportunity to become involved in school affairs which is very important to me. They understood I needed a babysitter and they had meetings at times when I could get there."*

*"I liked the meetings because the principal was able to form a relationship with the Hispanic parents. I was afraid to talk when the educated parents were in charge. In this small group we are learning. When we know enough we can join the regular parents' groups."*

*"Now I know how to help my children. It makes me proud."*

## CHAPTER III

# The Elements of a Successful Parent Involvement Program

It is absolutely clear that the single most important element in launching and maintaining a successful school/parent partnership is **committed leadership**. The school must want to make something happen and they must be willing to extend themselves to see that it does. Half-hearted efforts accomplish little. Overcoming the cultural and social conditioning of low-income Hispanic parents does not require the expenditure of large sums of money. It does, however, require time and energy, patience and persistence.

It also requires **flexibility**. The recruitment and retention methods that attract mainstream parents often fail to attract poor Hispanic parents.

### "The Way We Always Did It Doesn't Work"

The programs that failed to attract Hispanic parents were those that had second thoughts about trying new techniques. Often a ranking official in the school bureaucracy would review the program in progress and call for changes—back to "the way we always have done it." What those officials accomplished was the maintenance of the status quo—but they gained little or no increase in Hispanic parental involvement.

Keys to reaching Hispanic parents are **strong personal outreach, warm, non-judgmental communication, and the ability to convey respect for the parents' feelings and concerns**. While Hispanic personnel certainly can facilitate the process, the projects proved that non-Hispanics can be very effective in gaining the confidence, respect, and affection of Hispanic parents. In fact, the two most innovative and successful partnerships were led by a Chinese principal, in one case, and an Anglo principal in the other. (It must be noted, however, that both these principals were able to speak Spanish.)

Personal outreach and communication take time—lots of it. It is not an activity that a regular staff person can handle in spare moments. The partnerships that succeeded all had project coordinators who were (1) genuinely interested in working with the Hispanic community, (2) sensitive to the culture and needs of the Hispanic

community, and (3) determined to make the program work. They were also the coordinators whose supervisors gave them time to do the job.

**Perseverance and creativity** were found to be crucial factors in organizing and maintaining parent programs. The less successful projects often were those led by individuals who had been assigned—as opposed to those who had volunteered for the job. Their hearts were not in the initiative and their performance showed it.

But one coordinator does not a partnership make, however energetic he or she may be. The programs illustrated the fact that the best efforts of a project coordinator will fail if he or she does not have the **active support of the school principal and the staff**. When the principal and the teachers are supportive of parent partnership projects, when these individuals show that they sincerely want Hispanic parents to become involved in the educational process, and when they are willing to be flexible and try new strategies, parents sense the sincerity and they respond. A congenial environment, plus some degree of camaraderie, invites and supports parent participation.

All the programs that lacked the support of teachers and principals failed to increase Hispanic parent involvement. And all the schools that felt that the poor Hispanic parents should begin their involvement by joining the existing parents' organizations failed as well. Low-income parents are intimidated and made exceedingly uncomfortable when expected to cope with unfamiliar organizational structures and procedures. Moreover, they are not always warmly welcomed by the existing parents' committees who perceive them as a threat to their control, particularly when the school population is predominantly Hispanic. Eventually, when they have acquired the skills they feel they need to contribute and compete as equals, poor Hispanic parents can and do join the Parents Advisory Committees.

Some of the partnership programs were more successful in increasing Hispanic parental involvement than others. But the lessons derived from all the projects and from the experiences shared by the participants demonstrate *WHAT WORKS* and *WHAT DOES NOT WORK*. The programs have shown us how schools can recruit Hispanic parents into a partnership, and how schools can retain their interest and participation in a mutually supportive partnership.

## CHAPTER IV

# Recruitment Strategies: DOs and DON'Ts

Most low-income Hispanic parents, for the diverse reasons described in the previous chapters, resist entering into parent/school partnerships. Therefore, the first challenge in launching such a partnership is finding a way to get the parents to the first meeting.

As project coordinators discovered, marketing the idea of a parent/school partnership to poor Hispanic parents is no easy feat.

One project coordinator wrote: "*It is one of the most difficult jobs I have ever undertaken....*"

### How To Make The First Contact

The projects used the following techniques to try to reach and recruit Hispanic parents:

- Home visits
- Telephone calls
- Flyers and handwritten notes from teachers given to students to take home
- Notices posted on school bulletin boards, in local neighborhood stores, at health centers, at social service agencies
- Announcements at Sunday Spanish-language church services, on local radio and television programs, in schools' monthly calendars and newsletters
- Articles in local newspapers
- Child-made invitations
- Volunteers posted at school doors and yard gates during drop-off and pick-up times
- Distribution of Spanish-language posters throughout the community

With the exception of home visits, most of the methods proved inadequate in recruitment. They did not convince the parents to participate in any school activity (although some of them, used in conjunction with other, more effective techniques, probably helped).

**The personal approach, which means talking face to face with the parents, in their primary language, at their homes, or at the**

school, or wherever a parent could be "engaged," was the strategy deemed most effective by 98 percent of the project coordinators.

But a single home visit or conversation may not do the trick. It may be necessary to make personal contact two or three times to convince parents to attend an activity. Many parents are uncomfortable or suspicious of the invitation to become involved in school activities. Many who are not bilingual feel nervous about attending an activity they think will be conducted in English. Mothers with small children and no childcare facilities, as well as those who have no way of getting to and from a meeting, need help—baby sitting, a ride, or money for transportation.

Some of the projects had anticipated these needs and were able to provide immediate solutions to the problems the parents raised. Other projects made mid-course corrections and established support systems to respond to the obstacles their home visits brought to light. Certainly the home visits helped to personalize invitations, an element which many Hispanics find important.

The following selected comments from the reports of the project coordinators demonstrate their conviction that one-on-one is the only effective way to make that crucial first contact:

*"We believe that recruitment must be very active and persuasive in its nature. Passive recruitment such as flyers aren't effective....personal contact is invaluable.... home visits are a must...."*

*"The most effective strategies were personal. Home visits, grape vines, gatherings at the gate."*

*"During our home visits we assured parents of the availability of transportation, babysitting, and meals. The home visits were the most effective. The letters were least effective."*

## Getting To Know The Parents

Home visits actually serve two purposes. In addition to being an effective way to convince parents to at least try one activity, home visits provide an opportunity to get answers to questions that are basic to the creation of a successful program.

**Schools cannot design rational partnership programs until they understand who their partners will be.** Are they single parents, welfare parents, working mothers, intact families, large families, immigrant families, native-born families? Do they speak English? Who are the primary caretakers of the children—the mothers, the fathers or the grandparents? Are the neighborhoods dangerous? Do they live near or far from the school? Is transportation available? Do the fathers permit the mothers to go out alone? Are there places

or institutions in the neighborhoods where the families gather or feel comfortable? Do many of the families appear troubled?

The decisions about *whom* to invite to *which kind of an affair* at *what time* is difficult if you do not know who your families are or how they live their lives. The projects that took the time to know their families were the ones that succeeded.

There are innumerable factors that restrict how and when poor families can make themselves available. Schools that want to encourage their participation must adapt the programs to the schedules and life realities of the families they are serving.

**Project coordinators recommend the following additional strategies:**

**DO assign recruitment to someone who knows how to work with Hispanic parents, understands their culture, and is sincerely interested in involving parents in school activities. Give the recruiter the time required to do the job.**

**DO follow up visits with a friendly telephone call.**

**DO follow up invitations to activities with a telephone call one or two days before the event.**

**DO post the principal or teachers outside the school in the mornings and in the afternoons to personally greet parents who drop off and pick up their children. This technique proved to be an effective icebreaker that "humanized" and "personalized" the school—made it a warmer and more caring place.**

**DO use parent-to-parent contacts. Build parent networks. If some Hispanic parents are involved in school events, encourage them to bring their neighbors to school activities. Some programs made a survey of where families lived so that they could put together groups of parents living in the same community.**

**DO use a nucleus of involved Hispanic parents to serve as the motivational center for organizing other parents. These parents are most effective when they receive special leadership training on program objectives and school procedures and regulations.**

**DO post parent volunteers at school gates, in yards, or in hallways to greet other parents personally and give them information about upcoming events.**



### **The project coordinators agreed on the following list of DON'Ts:**

**DON'T use mailings or flyers (in Spanish or in English) to invite parents to activities. Mailings were found to be nearly useless, because many parents do not read. Sometimes parents chose not to open a letter from school—such letters may contain bad news. If a letter must be sent, it is essential that it be followed up with one or two telephone calls or a personal visit.**

**DON'T send initial communications on official school stationery. Make the follow-up invitations and notices appealing and non-intimidating, designed to suggest that the event will be fun. (See samples in the back of the book.)**

**DON'T issue an invitation that will make parents stay away. For example, never say or write: "Mrs. Fulano, why don't you come to our class to learn how to be a good parent." (One project actually sent out such a letter.)**

## **That Crucial First Meeting**

*A Hispanic parent arrives in school, with a small child since she has no sitter, to attend a meeting.*

*The parent is confronted first with the security guard at the school entrance, an individual who usually does not speak Spanish. He manages to direct the parent to the principal's office.*

*When the parent arrives at the principal's office she is then confronted by the secretary, another individual who usually does not speak Spanish. If the secretary is on the telephone, the parent has to wait. When the secretary finishes her conversation, she asks aggressively: "Yes?" Or, "Can I help you?"*

*The parent is finally off to the meeting which, she is told, is in the conference room. (Where is the conference room?) The discussion is in English, and although she understands a little, she wishes someone would explain what is being said. (What is PAC? SSC?) She is given handouts, written in English, on her way out of the meeting. As she leaves the school building she wonders, what was the meeting about?*

The initial activity must be a warm, comfortable, profitable experience for the parents. Otherwise, the first meeting will be the last meeting they ever attend—and all the effort put into personal recruitment will have been wasted.

Successful projects were those that made the first meeting—and all the subsequent meetings—fun. They understood that learning

need not be punitive and that adults do not respond well when they are "talked at." Successful projects did not treat poor parents like children.

Bringing Hispanic parents into a strong parent/school partnership is, in large part, a matter of gaining their confidence. This is a process. It takes time and frequent positive contact to overcome suspicion, fear, and reluctance.

School is not a place in which most low-income Hispanic parents feel comfortable. **The most successful projects recognized that the school itself was an obstacle to establishing a relationship, and they scheduled their first events outside the school at some neutral neighborhood site or a location that clearly was the parents' turf.**

One project took over the local McDonalds and invited the parents to a dinner. The principal and teachers donned McDonalds uniforms and served the families, thereby actually and symbolically sending the message that the school and its personnel were there to serve the parents and the children. After dinner the principal made some brief remarks about building an on-going relationship. Subsequent meetings were scheduled in the public housing project where many of the families lived. Eventually, when the parents and the teachers felt comfortable with each other, meetings and activities were held at school.

Another project ran its first event like a Tupperware party. The school gave coffee-and-doughnuts money to a number of parents and asked each of them to invite up to 10 of their friends to their homes twice a month. The principal, along with a teacher, the school nurse, and a counselor, attended the gatherings and in a most informal manner discussed school and health issues.

Still another budding partnership hooked the parents on a project that involved a production of *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*. The parents were asked to help make costumes and scenery. They were *needed*, in other words, and their kids were in the play. By the time Opening Afternoon arrived, the parents and the teachers were pals, confidants, and co-workers, not to mention producers. From that point on, building the on-going partnership was a breeze.

The projects from which parents fled, vowing never to return, were those that did not consider how to make the parents comfortable, those that loaded the first meeting with serious information that was directed "at" the parents, and those that tried immediately to integrate the Hispanic "first-timers" into the regular parents committees. The projects that took the position that socializing has no place in the serious business of education found themselves at unattended workshops.

**In sum, project coordinators warned—**

**DONT** have the first activity at the school. You'll find that parents may accept the invitation to attend—but they won't show up. Schools can appear threatening to parents who have little or no education.

**DONT** plan a formal meeting or conference as the first activity. Such activities are scary for parents. They signal that someone will be making judgments about them or asking questions they won't be able to answer. Instead, hold a "fun" activity and make sure that the entire event is one at which they will be comfortable. Move the parents into the partnership at their own pace.

Use the first icebreaker event to capture the parents' attention and ease their nervousness. Offer them some carefully considered options for the next event—options you have reason to believe will correspond to their needs and wants. Tell them when the next activity will take place and make it plain that you really care about their participation.

The real job begins after the first meeting: holding the parents attention—maintaining attendance—gaining their participation in the partnership.

## CHAPTER V

# Retention Strategies: DOs and DON'Ts

Recruiting parents is difficult; retaining them is harder.

*One of the demonstrations was confronted with yet another barrier to Hispanic parent participation:*

*The school's Parents Advisory Committee (PAC) was composed of predominantly Anglo parents. They were opposed to the Hispanic parent/school partnership project even though a proposal, describing the plan of action, had been submitted to them and had been approved. After the award had been made they tried to alter the program so that the Hispanic program and the program dollars would become part of the regular PAC agenda.*

*After much discussion and disagreement between the project coordinator, the principal, and the president of the PAC, a meeting was scheduled for the Hispanic parents as outlined in the proposal. The project coordinator did an outstanding job and 300 Hispanic parents showed up, the greatest number of parents ever seen at a school meeting.*

*The Hispanic mothers came to the meeting because the project director had convinced them that this meeting was different; it was specifically for them.*

*Although the PAC members were not invited, they arrived and before long, the PAC members took over the meeting. The agenda scheduled for the evening was ignored, and so were the Hispanic parents. As the Hispanic parents exited after the meeting, the majority were heard saying that they would not attend another. They commented that things had not changed. They felt betrayed.*

*Only 35 Hispanic parents attended the second meeting.*

Retaining the participation of the Hispanic parents who have been recruited is the second challenge of the partnership game. How do you maintain attendance? How do you hold the parents' attention? After all, as one project coordinator worried, *"Not every meeting can be a party."*

Low-income Hispanic parents are no more frivolous than the rest of us. Not every meeting has to be a party. However, every meeting has to respond to some need or concern of the parents. Parents will come when they believe that they are getting something out of the activities, that their feelings are respected, and that they are a needed and valued resource.

Successful retention strategies require flexibility but it is not necessary for schools to abandon their agendas. In truth, the agendas of the parents and the agendas of the schools are similar; both are deeply concerned about the children. What may be different are the timetables and priorities. When schools adapt their early programs to accommodate what the parents think is important, they find that

before long the parents are eager to respond to the school's agenda items.

The projects that planned an agenda of meetings, and imposed the issues and the format on the parents without their input, found Hispanic attendance uneven and low. Those that tried merely to incorporate Hispanic parents who never had been involved in the school system into existing parents' organizations met with similar results. The projects that spent time asking the parents what was important to them, and offering them options, had higher rates of attendance.

The behavior we found most puzzling was a tendency on the part of many schools to repeat programs that already had failed to attract Hispanic parents. They didn't work.

Project coordinators employed a wide variety of formats—

- parent/teacher meetings
- conferences
- assorted workshops
- parenting classes
- tutorial and homework centers
- leadership skills training
- ESL classes
- social events
- community projects

All the formats worked. But participation levels, regardless of the format used, seemed most directly related to three factors—

- **Flexibility** (as discussed previously).
- **Consultation** with parents regarding subject matter and format.
- **Providing a caring environment**—the manner in which the subject matter is presented and the event is conducted.

## Consultation

Successful programs are those that give the parents a sense of ownership, which is what "partnership" is all about. As outlined in previous chapters, the programs that work are those that first learn what the parents want and then offer them options about the ways in which the parents and the schools can work together to achieve their goals.

The most effective programs are those that present the parents with the needs and wants of the schools—needs that **only the parents can meet**. When the schools say that they need help and that they need to learn from the parents, the relationship becomes a partnership of equals sharing knowledge and expertise.

### *Subject Matter*

Though every situation is different, a review of the interests of parents found that the first issues they wanted to tackle were AIDS,

teen pregnancy, drugs, spouse and child abuse, and ESL classes.

Schools admitted that had they not asked the parents' advice, they would have begun the program with homework, good study habits, discipline and communication. It is instructive to note that the programs that started with the parents' agenda items eventually did cover the issues the schools felt were vital. And, most important, the parents expressed interest in the school issues and their attendance at these meetings remained high. The partners had established a relationship of mutual confidence and trust. They were responding to each other.

### ***Format***

Low-income parents often are not comfortable in a formal meeting or conference setting. They find informal, more participatory formats to be less intimidating. Small groups are more effective than large ones, and role playing and other interactive methods of presenting ideas and information are more successful than lectures.

The following activities were popular with the parents:

- **Parent Activity Centers** in children's classrooms. Parents sat in class with their children; they listened to, and participated in, the lessons. This activity helped the parents to better understand what constituted their children's school day.
- **"Make and Take" workshops** where parents learned how to make educational games, flashcards, and activity boxes (containing paper, crayons, scissors, etc.). They learned how to use these materials at home to assist their youngsters with basic skills, math and reading.
- **Community Projects** such as painting murals, cleaning up lots next to the school, planting gardens, building playground equipment, mounting a drive against neighborhood drug dealers, organizing to get sidewalks or street lights. Such activities build spirit and a sense of community, they allow parents to make direct and visible contributions, and they do not place the parents in the position of being judged.
- **Tutoring and Homework Centers** where students received assistance with homework, and parents attended workshops and parenting classes.
- **Informal Workshops** given initially on the issues the parents identified, and later on subjects that the schools felt were priorities.

## Providing a Caring Environment

In addition to providing activities requested by the parents, coordinators indicated that making the parents feel comfortable and welcome at the activities was essential in maintaining attendance. A caring environment means:

- Talking *with* parents, not *at* them.
- Sharing personal experiences teachers have had with their own children.
- Never posing questions to which there can be wrong answers. Exposing adults' ignorance in front of peers will drive them away.
- Providing childcare, interpreters, and transportation when necessary.
- Offering refreshments, however modest, at all events except those that take place in the classroom.
- Taking steps to recognize the efforts of the parents.
- Providing social events that create additional opportunities for parents and school personnel to mingle informally.
- Setting aside a parents' room in the school that has a pleasant, living-room atmosphere in which the parents can meet informally.
- Stocking the parents' room with applications and forms that relate to their needs—DMV applications for learners' permits, license-renewal forms, food stamp forms, tax forms, voter registration cards, etc.—and providing someone at specific hours who can help parents fill them out.

The projects provided a wealth of experience and knowledge. Project coordinators offer the following DOs and DON'TS for keeping the parents involved:

### To Retain Parents:

- **DO schedule meetings and workshops with consideration for parents' availability. This is essential. Working parents cannot attend daytime activities. Most Hispanic women cannot attend when it is time to feed their families.**
- **DO pick up and escort reluctant parents to meetings and events—especially the first few times.**
- **DO encourage parents to attend activities by providing the childcare and transportation that will make it possible.**

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- **DO extend the invitations to families, and make it clear that grandparents are especially welcome. Many Hispanic children are in the care of their grandparents while their parents work.**
- **DO delegate responsibilities to parents. Involve them in decision making, planning, and the implementation of plans. Do not dictate what parents should do and how they should do it.**
- **DO keep parents involved in activities that offer incentives for participation. Provide parents with the information or skills that they need by:**
  - **Choosing workshop and meeting topics that are of immediate concern, such as learning how to apply for childcare and food stamps, what to do about child abuse, how to get help for alcohol and drug users, where to find summer day camp programs.**
  - **Solidifying participation by uniting parents to combat neighborhood problems — traffic, vandalism, graffiti, theft, drugs, gangs.**
  - **Involving parents in educational activities that are practical, activities that help them as parents.**
- **DO involve parents in action-oriented projects — role playing in workshops, participatory discussion sessions, making things to use with children to improve reading or math skills. Meetings that require parents simply to listen to a speaker are seldom effective.**
- **DO involve parents in activities they later can duplicate and share with their children—for example, trips, picnics, and cultural and social events.**
- **DO encourage parents to visit classrooms and observe class sessions.**
- **DO design *small group interaction* activities to provide in-depth and specific skill development. Parents become more involved and interact with greater ease in small groups. Large groups sometimes overwhelm shy parents.**

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*(continued)*

- **DO** make parents feel comfortable during discussions. Never allow parents to feel that they may appear foolish, ignorant, or "wrong" if they contribute their ideas.
- **DO** prepare school personnel, especially teachers and office staff, before parents arrive at school for meetings. School personnel must understand the community they serve. Weeks of patient recruitment can be destroyed by one rude or uncaring receptionist.
- **DO** be generous with recognition and awards. Recognize parents for their efforts in newsletters and on school bulletin boards. Give awards to both students and parents.
- **DO** plan short-term projects with high potential for success, and limit the number of meetings per project.
- **DO** hold social activities for parents. Dances, potluck dinners and graduation ceremonies attract Hispanic parents. Social activities are non-threatening and provide an opportunity for teachers and parent organizers to "capture the parent" and provide information in a casual manner about future activities.
- **DO** organize special interest groups, such as sewing, gardening, or crafts clubs.
- **DO** try new ideas and devise new projects to provide variety and to renew interest. When a strong core of parents have become involved, consider organizing a retreat. Retreats create a sense of cohesion, stimulate positive group dynamics, and clarify the goals and objectives of parent programs.

Above are the positive guidelines. Now for the negative:

**To Retain Parents:**

- **DON'T** design the program to suit the convenience or tradition of the school.
- **DON'T** place the parents in the role of students who are being taught by the schools.
- **DON'T** assume that the parents have no knowledge or strengths to bring to the partnership, or that their parenting practices are bad. A strong sense of family loyalty, discipline, and respect are qualities that teachers value. Parents should be praised for instilling these qualities in their children.
- **DON'T** tell parents they have to change the way they are rearing their children. Tell them that they should consider building on their tradition by adding to it those practices that will better prepare their children for U.S. schools.

And especially:

**DON'T** give up if the initial response is not overwhelming. Under the very best of circumstances—doing all the right things with adequate personnel—it takes time. If you can attract a core of parents, and keep them coming to events, word will spread. Little by little, others will dare to join. They will discover that it is a rewarding experience and will tell their friends. Keep up the effort, and one day you will find that you can't keep the parents away.

## CHAPTER VI

### Is It Worth The Effort?

The parents are reluctant, the outreach must be extensive and ongoing, the activities have to be specifically tailored to the parents' needs and concerns, the response is likely to be slow—is it really worth all the effort it takes to build Hispanic parent/school partnerships?

**We think it is.**

The schools that established partnerships that increased parental involvement found that the parents who attended activities on a regular basis became knowledgeable and familiar with the workings of the school system; any mystery evaporated along with the parents' sense of discomfort and fear. Parents began to feel that they belonged; many became deeply involved both in school activities and in the educational progress of their children. The involved parents repeatedly remarked how good it felt to be able to help their children learn.

Project coordinators reported that they saw many changes in the attitudes and behavior of the once reluctant parents. For instance:

- More parents telephoned schools to make inquiries, and to ask for homework assistance for their children.
- Parents became more cooperative in responding to school requests.
- Parents no longer visited the school only when their children were in trouble. More parents were dropping by school to speak to school personnel, to share problems, to express concerns, or to ask for advice.
- Parents no longer waited to be asked to come in—many initiated visits and communication with teachers.
- Many parents told project directors that they felt more confident about things in general, and they felt appreciated by the school staff and principal. They confessed to feeling less in awe of the school, the personnel, and the administrative procedures.
- Some parents requested additional activities (parents' centers, for example, and education training for husbands, relatives, and friends).
- Parents became more assertive with teachers and asked questions about educational programming.

- Parents became more vocal at meetings and functions.
- Some parents showed an interest in becoming involved with decision-making. Some joined Parent Advisory Councils and Parent Committees.
- The camaraderie between parents and teachers had a positive effect in building trust and mutual respect.

From the schools' point of view, the successful partnerships made their jobs easier and more rewarding. As one teacher reported, "It put the joy back in my job. My job satisfaction is based on children learning. I am willing to put in the extra time if I see results, if I see that I am making contact."

Another teacher admitted that before her principal involved her in the program, she had been afraid of the Hispanic parents, and angry that she had to cope with parents with whom she could not communicate. A year later she was counting herself lucky. In all her years of teaching, she had never had class parents who were so eager to help with any project and so willing to respond to her suggestions.

Four of the projects in the first competition have been tracking both the academic and the social and behavioral performances of "project students" and "non-project students." These four projects have baseline data for the year prior to the initiation of the partnership program and data for three additional years. The children of the involved parents—the "project students"—do not show large academic gains compared to the children of the non-involved parents—the "non-project students." But their attitudes toward school, their participation in class, their behavior, and their study habits have improved markedly over those of their "non-project" peers—signs that bode well for the future of these children.

## CHAPTER VII

# Special Challenges: Hispanic Fathers, Teenage Mothers, Troubled Families

The first two rounds of the School/Parent Partnership Competitions demonstrated that schools can build strong and rewarding relationships with low-income Hispanic mothers.

While the Partnership Projects did not set out to target specific groups of Hispanic parents, project directors repeatedly reported a lack of participation on the part of three groups: **Hispanic fathers, teenage mothers**—particularly single teenage mothers, and parents in severely troubled, multi-problem families.

Consequently, a third round of awards was targeted specifically to these groups to see what additional lessons could be learned.

### Hispanic Fathers

As a general rule, all fathers, regardless of their race, ethnicity, or socioeconomic status, are less involved in school matters than are mothers. The general consensus among the project coordinators was that recruiting Hispanic fathers was "next to impossible." The vast majority of low-income Hispanic fathers perceive education and anything related to it—like child-rearing—as a woman's job. And the mothers tend to agree.

Although Hispanic families tend to be intact, it must be remembered that the male head of household in some families is not, in fact, the biological father of the children in that household. Involving these "fathers"—whether uncle, grandfather, stepfather, or someone else who plays the father role—in the education of the children is likely to be even harder than involving biological fathers.

A Hispanic father is the master of his house. He considers himself to be the protector and the provider of the family, even when his wife works outside the home. He is expected to project a serious, even stern and unapproachable image. This often means that he does not express affection openly and does not communicate easily with the children. At the same time he is expected to show respect to his family, and in return the family is expected to show him respect. He is revered. Sometimes the family is afraid of him.

When project coordinators visited homes in the evenings, fathers usually were not seen. When they did happen to be home, they

seldom participated in the conversations. They observed from a distance, listened, and sometimes nodded.

Fathers avoid functions that are billed or can be construed as "learning" activities. It threatens their control, their dignity, and implies that the father needs counseling, or is not a good father, or has flaws or weaknesses. An uneducated Hispanic father, even more than a Hispanic mother, fears professionals. What if questions are asked that the father does not know how to answer? How will that reflect on him as head of the family?

Certain lessons were learned from third-round programs targeted to fathers.

Most fathers can be lured into participation only by down-to-earth action projects that call upon their unique skills: building playground equipment, overseeing sporting events, painting a classroom or a mural, or moving furniture into a parents' room. And fathers want to do these things with other fathers. They are often not comfortable working with women. Fathers will attend events that are celebrations—appreciation dinners, assemblies, open school night, sporting events, and graduations. Meetings are almost never attractive to fathers, but when they do agree to attend, in most cases it is to hear a male speaker.

Fathers generally prefer activities held in the evenings and on weekends.

Project directors reported that when Hispanic fathers did participate in an activity, it was likely to be one of the following:

- **Activities which included incentives**—One project reported that each parent who attended its meetings received a raffle ticket for a door prize. When both the mother and the father attended, the family had a greater opportunity to win the prize. The attendance of fathers, if not their verbal participation, increased.
- **High school night**—Fathers enjoyed accompanying a son or daughter to the program to assist in reviewing high school options.
- **Small group activities with other men**, such as organizing garage sales, helping to serve a meal, or manning tables at a function.

Many teachers—male and female alike—find the attitudes of low-income Hispanic fathers distressing. Women teachers can feel deeply offended. But the Hispanic fathers, like all of us, are products of their socialization. Schools that wish to reach them have to understand their background and devise ways to bridge the gaps.

In addition, it must be recognized that if fathers are willing to participate only in action projects, and remain unwilling to attend meetings and conferences, they nevertheless are sending nonverbal

messages to their children, messages that clearly say, "School is *important*. That is why I am willing to build playground equipment or paint a mural or plant trees for the school on my day off."

## Teenage Mothers

Being a mother is a big responsibility. Surviving the teenage years can be a real challenge. When you put them together, being a teenager and a mother at the same time can be an overwhelming task.

The physical and emotional changes that assail youngsters as they pass from childhood into adolescence, and the increased freedoms and responsibilities encountered when they leave the structured confines of elementary school, create problems for most youth. The problem is particularly severe for today's young women who are subjected to peer pressure to become sexually active. That pressure, coupled with a lack of information about birth control, has led to an epidemic of adolescent pregnancy. Each year more than one million teenagers in the United States become pregnant, and more than half of them give birth.

Many Hispanic teen girls, like other adolescents, are unhappy at home, are doing poorly in school, or believe that their parents do not understand them. Many think that becoming pregnant will solve their problems. They sincerely believe that producing a baby will turn them into adults. They see a baby as the only way out. The baby, of course, is no way out. To the contrary, the children these young mothers bear only bind them to the home, frequently to welfare, and almost always to poverty. The fun, as little as it may have been, is over long before the baby arrives. The chance to take control of their lives is often lost as well.

Very few Hispanic teen mothers complete high school, and so they lack marketable skills. If they marry as teenagers, the marriage often ends in divorce or separation. More children may arrive. By age 25, a woman who had her first child in her teens may have had several more, and has little chance of ever altering her family's condition of poverty. Although most teen mothers hope to have their own homes after the baby arrives, it usually does not turn out that way. Most teenage mothers will live with their own mothers or—if married—with their mothers-in-law.

Project coordinators found teen mothers unresponsive. The girls almost always promised they would come to activities and then just didn't show up—even when the activities were those suggested by the teen mothers themselves during home recruitment visits. When questioned, some said that they forgot or felt sick; others confessed that they could not miss episodes of their favorite soap operas. Project coordinators despaired.

A special initiative focused on teenage mothers shed some light on the subject:

Some 32 teen mothers were interviewed in depth and participated in several focus groups. Twenty-six were school dropouts, and 23 had born children before they were 16 years old. Over half had more than one child, over half had never moved out of their childhood neighborhoods, only one had a full-time job, and all of them received some form of public assistance.

They all had been children having children, and most—even the oldest, who were 21 at the time of the interviews—were clearly dependent on their mothers, many of whom had been teen mothers themselves. The girls were not only locked in a cycle of welfare dependency, they were trapped in a cycle of emotional dependency as well. The normal maturation process by which one passes from childhood to assume responsibility for oneself and one's actions had been arrested. Their misguided attempts to achieve adulthood through motherhood had produced the opposite result. It had prolonged the child/parent relationship with their mothers.

Many teen mothers, therefore, can best be reached by programs that focus on the extended family. If one of the intentions of school/parent partnerships is to assist the child, then recruitment strategies that include the functioning heads of the families, grandmothers and grandfathers, may be more effective than a focus on teen mothers alone. Programs with incentives seem to appeal to the practical sense of many grandmothers. When the incentive offered is increased by the attendance of additional family members, grandmothers tend to see that their daughters leave the television and show up to collect.

Teen fathers are even harder to reach than teen mothers. A number of demonstration programs sponsored by the Bank Street College seem to indicate that programs that deal with life skills and focus on jobs and training, as well as on children, can attract young men. It is interesting to note that the Bank Street school-based model placed emphasis on including the grandparents.

But not all the Bank Street models were school based, and it may be that many teen mothers as well as teen fathers have to be reached in non-school settings. A neighborhood-based San Antonio project, AVANCE, has been enormously successful in turning around the lives of young mothers and families. It started by offering free neighborhood babysitting. The mothers and grandmothers who took advantage of the service "paid for it" by attending parenting classes which led to education and training opportunities for the mothers—and later the fathers.

Frequently the husband or male companion to a teen mother is not a teenager himself, but an older man. He often exerts a significant influence on the teen mother even though they may not live together. This influence should be recognized in designing programs for her



and in any attempts to involve him in a program.

Hispanic teen parenthood is increasing. Because daughters of teenage mothers tend to become teenage mothers themselves, there is little hope that the problem will go away. Extraordinary measures may be called for, and schools may want to consider making radical departures from the way in which they historically have viewed their role vis a vis parents. If the teen mothers can be reached only outside the schools, then schools may want to establish partnerships with neighborhood centers and other community-based organizations, thereby conveying information through third parties. There are successful examples of collaborations among schools, community-based organizations, parents, and students. Whatever it takes, the cycle of children bearing children must be halted.

One teen father reflected—

*"Sometimes, when I'm holding Terry, I think to myself, 'It's weird, I did just what my brothers did.' Two of them were teen fathers and the third was a father at 21. Even my mother and father were teen parents. And I checked this out too, my grandmother was a teen parent. So, it's been a line there. When I look at Terry I say, 'My God, will I be a grandfather at 35? NO!' I got to teach Terry. Her mother is 15, you know. And her two sisters are teen mothers, too. It's pretty regular, this thing. Runs deep."*

## Troubled Families

Severely troubled families cannot guide their children when they themselves do not know where they are going.

*Charlotte was 14 years old, big for her age and tough-looking — an important quality around her peers because she did not want them to know what went on in her life.*

*Charlotte came from a troubled home, the youngest and the only child left at home. Her father was an alcoholic. Her mother feared and obeyed him.*

*Charlotte went to school every day but was failing her classes. Around her teachers she expressed a kind of passive resistance. She was seen to "hang out" with her peers in the school parking lot at different times during the day and after school.*

*One day she came to class displaying signs of abuse. She had been beaten. When confronted, she talked to her teacher.*

*She confessed that her father drank, and that it was her job to wait for him at night to put him to bed. The night before, she had fallen asleep before he arrived. He woke her up with a beating. When Charlotte's mother was contacted, she had only one thing to say, "It is Charlotte's job to wait for her father." When pressed, her mother said: "Charlotte is just rebellious and tough to handle. She needs to be disciplined."*

*In reality the mother was so afraid of her husband that she was willing to make excuses for his behavior.*

*The proper authorities were notified, and steps were taken to monitor the home situation. Recommendations were made for the father to attend "parents anonymous" classes.*

Troubled families are sometimes called high-risk families, at-risk families, or hard-to-reach families. Whatever the labels, these are families with more than their share of problems:

- inadequate or unsafe housing
- dangerous neighborhoods
- unemployment and underemployment
- poverty and financial strains
- drug and alcohol abuse
- divorce and single parenthood
- handicapped children
- family violence
- poor health
- lack of English fluency
- depression
- illiteracy

Troubled families generally feel disconnected and alienated from the school system and often from society in general.

The school/parent partnerships found troubled families to be the hardest group to recruit. They did not respond to extensive outreach, home visits, or the information and activities planned for them, *even though many of the activities were suggested by the parents when they were surveyed by outreach workers*. Time and time again, when parents were polled by telephone, and when parents indicated that they would attend at the appointed hour, and when they were assured that childcare, transportation, and refreshments would be offered—nobody showed.

What kept them away?

Conversations with the project directors who had struggled to recruit and involve high-risk families in their programs revealed the following:

- High-risk families are consumed with a myriad of bottom-line survival issues—food, clothing, shelter, dead-end low-paying jobs (and sometimes no jobs at all), violence, illness, addiction.
- The coping skills of many high-risk families are limited or non-existent, which may explain why so many fall back on drugs and alcohol.
- Depression is a serious problem for many of these families.
- Hispanic culture discourages making public the family's private business. Hence, few seek the outside help they need, and few have any idea where help is to be found if and when they decide that they want it.

It is not reasonable to expect that individuals who are barely surviving will have the time, the inclination, or the psychic energy to get themselves together for a school meeting or a workshop. It is clear that most cannot help their children until they first have gotten help for their own all-consuming problems.

In the meantime, most children from deeply troubled back-

grounds are not learning. A school that finds itself with a large population of troubled families is facing an enormous challenge that requires a total rethinking of how the school goes about its business and how it views its responsibilities.

The school that is serving large numbers of at-risk families has to function in place of the parents while it goes about the task of seeing to it that the troubled families get the help they require to stabilize their lives and home environments. This has not traditionally been the schools' role. Others—social agencies, churches—were charged with these responsibilities. But school may well be the only connection an alienated and isolated Hispanic family has with any source of help. **The schools may have to fill the outreach/referral role by default, and the government and private sectors may have to give them the resources to do so.**

The project directors who worked with high risk families have offered suggestions and insights for working with troubled parents:

- **Surveying parents when they register their children** was found to be a good first step in gathering information on families. It may be the only time a troubled parent will appear at school.
- **Establishing a network of contacts with helping agencies** that are sensitive to the needs and culture of poor Hispanic families is another must. Building a strong relationship with a community-based agency in the neighborhood may be the most efficient way to go. In any event, the school has to be in a position to provide referral, and some central person has to be in a position to coordinate the help that the family needs. This coordination is called *case management*. Whatever it is called, **multi-problem families do not get better until their problems are addressed in some consistent and simultaneous manner.**
- However difficult it may be, **getting to know the family personally is a must.** This means home visits, and it means speaking in the family's primary language.

The first visit is crucial in setting the tone and establishing rapport. No lectures, no teaching. Just a friendly chat. Be a good listener and draw out dialog from the parents. This will help you to learn more about them, and about their needs. Acknowledge the difficulty of being a parent in today's world. Share a personal example with the family to help the process.

When the parents begin to open up, let them know that help is available for them—childcare services; interpreting services; referrals for family counseling; homework help for their children; ESL classes; parenting help; presentations on child/wife abuse and alcohol and drug abuse; and transportation to and from whatever

services they require.

But keep in mind that some high-risk families need more time than others to become sufficiently comfortable with a parent coordinator to speak freely, to ask questions, and ultimately to ask for help. Many visits may be necessary. Keeping in touch with parents on the telephone on a weekly basis is required. Leaving a telephone number where you can be reached is desirable; sometimes an emergency arises that finally triggers a parent's desire to seek help.

One plucky parent coordinator spent two years working with a group of parents, 95 percent of whom were deeply troubled. She had this to say—

*"Be committed to give it all you have, both perspiration and inspiration. The parents are out there; we just have to make that first move, because they cannot."*

## CONCLUSION

*"The mind, once expanded to the dimensions of larger ideas, never returns to its original size."*

Oliver W. Holmes

Justice Holmes' statement suggests what the Parent/School Partnerships discovered. As "the mind, once expanded..., never returns to its original size," so Hispanic parents exposed to school involvement do not revert to their original ways of thinking. Those who are approached in a sensitive manner, and brought into a relationship of confidence with their children's schools, begin to alter their parenting styles. The Parent/School Partnerships revealed that **parent behavior is subject to change.**

The Partnerships created an awareness among the involved parents that they must play a role in their children's education, that schools alone cannot educate their children. The Partnerships familiarized parents with the skills their children require to be successful in school, and showed them what they, as parents, could do to promote the acquisition of those skills.

The Partnerships provided participating Hispanic parents with a better understanding of the institution that so puzzled them, making it less intimidating. **Participating Hispanic parents, mothers in particular, became full partners in the education of their children.**

The schools learned as well. They discovered that Hispanic parents are an untapped resource that can help them do their jobs better. The schools learned how to communicate cross-culturally, and they realized that flexibility can be fun, that new ways of doing things need not be threatening. And teachers experienced the educator's ultimate satisfaction—the students were learning.

But the momentum must continue. More poor Hispanic parents must be reached and educated about how the U.S. school system works. More schools must be willing to shed their preconceptions and misconceptions and do what they were trained to do—teach and communicate. Hispanics must cease believing that education goes on only in the classroom. Schools must let go the notion that Hispanic parents are the problem.

As more schools and parents work as teams, as more Hispanic parents understand and want to share in their children's education, and as schools encourage them and help them to do so, more of today's poor Hispanic children will be prepared to assume the responsibilities of citizenship and the burdens of leadership that will be thrust upon them in a not-too-distant tomorrow.

# APPENDICES

- **Barriers and Solutions**
- **Sample Programs**
- **Sample Outreach and Follow-Up Materials**
- **Directory of Projects**

*When the parents are not part of the educational team, the children and the teachers undertake the educational journey on a tricycle with two wheels—one third of the support mechanism is missing.*

# APPENDIX 1

## Barriers/Solutions

In general those projects which were successful in overcoming the barriers to Hispanic parent involvement shared many or all of the following elements:

- Activities were creative, diverse, and flexible.
- Recruiting strategies centered on the "personal approach."
- Project directors were familiar with their communities.
- Projects had support from principals and teachers.
- Project directors were dedicated, resourceful individuals with a sincere interest and concern for Hispanics.
- Project directors spoke Spanish.

The following chart summarizes the major barriers and the steps that can be taken to surmount them.

BARRIERS	POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS
<b>Communication Problems</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Language differences</li> <li>• Tradition/cultural differences</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conduct meetings, seminars, and workshops in Spanish.</li> <li>• Have bilingual aide available when Hispanic parents visit the school.</li> <li>• Encourage parents to bring a bilingual relative or friend.</li> <li>• Sensitize school personnel to the Hispanic community, its culture, and its special needs.</li> <li>• Use cultural enrichment activities to bring school and families together.</li> </ul>
<b>Feelings of Inferiority</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Limited or no education</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Involve parents in decision-making, planning, and implementation of activities. Let them know they are important partners.</li> <li>• Give parents opportunities to demonstrate and use their special skills and talents.</li> </ul>
<i>—continued—</i>	

### Feelings of Alienation

- Not welcome at school.
- Welcome parents by conveying a positive attitude when they visit the classrooms and at meetings and activities.
- Let parents know you appreciate their presence and the time they are devoting to the school.

### Lack of Understanding of the Educational System

- Belief that school is an omniscient force much wiser than parents.
- Hold workshops for Hispanic parents on the mechanics of the school system, and on school curriculum. Remove the mystery from "the system."
- Have parents instruct other parents.

### Lack of Time

- Fathers and mothers who work full time find attending daytime activities very difficult.
- Attempt to accommodate working parents and mothers of small children by holding activities and workshops in the evenings or on weekends. Hold some of the functions in their neighborhoods (i.e., church, community center, parents' homes).

### Problems Finding Childcare

- Affordable childcare or babysitting is difficult to find, especially for low-income parents with more than one child.
- Provide childcare for those parents who want to attend meetings and workshops.
- Plan activities in which parents and children don't have to be separated.
- Utilize extended family members or teenage siblings to provide childcare at meeting site.

### Transportation Problems

- Many low-income families may not be able to afford transportation to and from activities.
- Provide transportation, if possible, to and from activities.
- Set up carpools.
- Get help from people and groups in the community, such as the church, social workers, and apartment managers.
- Hold activities in the community.



## APPENDIX 2

# Sample Programs

The Parent/School Partnership Campaign generated hundreds of proposals to recruit and involve Hispanic parents in the educational system. The enthusiastic response indicated a real desire on the part of educators, community organizations, and others to work with Hispanic parents and make them a part of the school family.

Proposals came from parents, teachers, principals, local and state educational systems, non-profit organizations, and community groups. The target parents usually were described as low-income, limited-education families; many spoke little or no English. These families rarely participated in school activities, and the reasons given for their non-involvement were numerous:

- The school's lack of a demonstrated concern about Hispanic families.
- A failure, on the part of the parents, to understand the school system.
- The lack of childcare.
- The lack of transportation to school activities.
- The parents' work schedules, precluding daytime participation in school events.
- The lack of a good liaison person to do parent recruiting.
- The lack of a place to meet.
- A lack of Hispanic role models and Hispanic leaders.

The activities that were proposed included workshops, meetings, conferences, a training institute, retreats, counseling sessions, family rooms, classroom-based activity centers, community centers, after-school tutorials, social gatherings, networking, a system of rewards, and arts and crafts activities. Many other strategies, too numerous to name, were also employed.

Too many of the projects, however, built on activities which had not worked before, such as simply increasing the number of meetings per school year. Other projects scheduled activities that were in some way frightening or too ambitious for the target parents (for example, inviting parents to visit colleges or to attend a college commencement exercise, or holding a social event at a university).

### What happened?

One third of the projects were highly successful at increasing the participation of their Hispanic parents; one third did increase His-

panic parent participation but only slightly; and one third of the projects, suffering a variety of difficulties, did not increase parent participation.

Failure to increase parent participation may have stemmed from recruiting or retention strategies that did not work with a particular group of parents. In some cases the target parents were high-risk families that proved to be especially difficult to recruit and involve in school activities. In a few cases the individuals running the project were not compatible with Hispanic parents or lacked conviction about the importance or usefulness of the project.

Whatever the case, *because lessons were learned from every one of the demonstrations, there were no failures.* It must be remembered that the project directors were pioneers, charged with running the projects without guidelines; the projects were experiments in an area that had not been explored before. Therefore, all the experiences were welcomed.

Following are brief descriptions of selected projects:

## 1) California Project — Family Night at McDonalds

### Background

The participating K-6 elementary school had a student enrollment of 920; of these, 552 were Hispanic. *Less than 1 percent* of the Hispanic parents participated actively in the school. The project director's first activity got the ball rolling.

The project director — who was in fact the school principal — persuaded the neighborhood McDonalds restaurant to host "a family night," with the principal and teachers, dressed in McDonalds uniforms, working behind the counters and serving food to the families. Parent attendance was very high.

### Why were parents willing to participate in this activity?

The first parent activity should be fun, and this one was. The first activity should be held in a non-threatening familiar place, rather than the school site, which scares many Hispanic parents—and McDonalds, of course, was familiar to the parents.

The McDonalds Family Night was an ice-breaker. This activity was easier for parents to accept than a meeting would have been because it was a social function, and it was in the neighborhood. School meetings usually mean that discipline, classroom work, or homework will be discussed. While these topics are extremely important, they will not attract parent participation right away. Social gatherings, on the other hand, make people—including school personnel—more relaxed and approachable.

This school principal also took over her teachers' classes for a day in order to permit teachers to visit their students' homes. A series of

workshops (in both English and Spanish) were held by the principal and her staff in the recreation room of the neighborhood housing project. The workshops showed the parents how to develop their children's study skills. Both the home visits and the special workshops were efforts to reach those parents who had had little or nothing to do with their children's school.

One of these parents was a mother of 10 children, five in school: "I knew there were meetings...but I didn't go because I didn't know English, and I was embarrassed." It was also difficult for this mother to get to the meetings. "I don't know how to drive, I don't have a car, and I have the babies to take care of."

By the end of the project period, parent participation had increased to 478 parents (including 102 fathers).

## 2) Washington, D.C. Project — Summer Day Camps

### Background

This bilingual PK-6 elementary school had 305 students; 183 students were Hispanic. The project aimed to help parents develop skills to help their children, and to recruit parents to share their cultural resources — language, songs, stories, crafts — with the students.

Disappointed by attendance at the first activity (although 40 out of 106 parents attended the meeting), the project director took steps to increase attendance. In the process of identifying areas of great need for the families, summer day camps for children emerged as a major concern. When surveyed, 57 parents expressed an interest in summer day camps, and all families were represented at the meeting to discuss the available camps.

### Why were parents attracted to this activity?

The topic — free summer camps — was a subject of immediate interest to the families. It is difficult to entertain youngsters — sometimes two or three at a time — who are at home all day during the hot summer months; working parents especially need a day camp program during these months when school is not in session. Summer day camps provided a needed service, and therefore parents were attracted to the meeting.

By the end of the project period, 70 percent of the Hispanic parents had contributed time to the project.

## 3) California Project — Gardening and Sewing Clubs

### Background

This K-6 elementary school had an enrollment of 520 students; 224 students were Hispanic. Although some parents were deeply interested in their children's school progress and some attended

school functions, they felt inadequate and ignorant regarding their ability to help their children in academic matters (many of the parents had little or no formal education).

The project planned a variety of workshops to train parents to use and develop instructional materials for school and home use. The first workshop was attended by 52 parents; only 25 had been expected. The other workshops were just as successful.

The project director also planned a series of "continuing projects" for the parents—costume making, gardening, a video presentation, and painting a mural. The costume-making project, in particular, was highly successful. Twenty parents participated in preparing props and sewing costumes for the school play, "Snow White." The parents also became involved in helping the students practice their lines and their dances, and in putting together the scenery. It proved to be a unifying and rewarding experience for both parents and staff.

### **Why were the workshops, as well as the special projects, so attractive to the parents?**

The secret to this project's success was the project director—a second-grade teacher whose enthusiasm and sincerity touched the parents and invited their participation. They liked her, and they wanted to become involved in her workshops. The extraordinary rapport established between the Hispanic parents and the director helped the project succeed.

After each workshop, she gave each of the participating parents a box filled with crayons, colored paper, scissors, paste, and special-project materials for parents and children to use at home. The parents enjoyed the workshops so much that they were always ready to attend another one. It is particularly noteworthy that a fair number of fathers participated.

The "continuing projects" appealed to the parents, as well, because they touched on personal skills. We all have special talents we enjoy sharing with others. The projects gave them the opportunity to contribute something important to the school, something that they could well feel proud about. Sewing costumes for the play, for example, made the parents feel useful and needed.

By the end of the project period, 105 parents were confidently and comfortably participating in a variety of school activities, and were sharing home projects with their children.

Over the course of time (three years), many changes took place in the school. These changes were both the result of increased parent participation and a catalyst for further engagement in school activities of the part of the parents. The changes included increasing bilingual staff at the school—both teaching and administrative, translating all school correspondence into Spanish, and dramatically increasing the number of English-as-a-Second-Language classes.

#### 4) Texas Project — Intensive Training Institute

##### Background

The PreK and Kindergarten Schools had a total student enrollment of 778 children; 408 were Hispanic. Although the Hispanic parents had expressed a willingness to assist their children and to prepare them for school, most did not feel capable (45 percent of the parents did not have a high school diploma). The project sought to train the parents of the pre-school/kindergartners to meet the educational and emotional needs of their children and to become fully involved in their children's education, year-round.

To accomplish this, the project director held an informal, week-long Intensive Training Institute for interested parents — 27 mothers signed up to attend; 26 participated.

The Hispanic mothers received help on child growth and development, home learning centers, motivation and self esteem, and the process and techniques of language development. The parents also learned about the school system. Having a better understanding of the workings of the system would make it easier for parents to become involved in school activities without feeling inadequate and "lost."

This institute was followed by monthly workshops — always well attended — on what children are expected to learn in kindergarten. Parents worked on "make and take projects." Several of the parents became classroom volunteers. The parents also received additional training on how to assist in school, and as a result several mothers were employed by the school as lunchroom and classroom aides.

##### Why was this activity unique?

The week-long Intensive Training Institute provided the mothers with information that they needed before their children entered pre-school/kindergarten. This project also made numerous efforts to make it easier for parents to participate: parents were picked up and taken home every day for a week, and three meals were provided for them and for the children who accompanied them. Childcare facilities were provided on the site.

The activity brought parents and teachers together day after day, for a week, in an informal setting. The friendly, relaxed environment made it possible for everyone to become acquainted and to put aside reservations and prejudices. School staff members became ordinary people. First names were used; titles were shed.

The institute was so successful that the mothers requested another training session for the fathers and relatives. By the end of the project period, 53 parents were actively participating in school activities.

## 5) Boston Project — Classroom Activity Centers

### Background

The K-1 elementary school had a student enrollment of 870; 420 students were Hispanic. The school had considerable Hispanic parental presence — Hispanic parents, for example, were always willing to cook for school functions. But substantive Hispanic involvement in their children's education was lacking. The project proposed to remedy the situation by creating Classroom-Based Activity Centers for the parents.

Once a week, the classroom centers allowed parents to sit in their children's classes. Parents were able to watch interactions between students and teachers, and they became familiar with the curriculum. Participating teachers received a voucher to purchase educational materials for their classes, in order to provide the parents with supplies to be used in the classroom or at home with their children. In addition, the parents attended parenting workshops and counseling sessions.

### Why was this activity unique?

This activity gave the parents a first-hand understanding of their children's school day. Understanding the lessons helped mothers to work with their children at home, reinforcing what the children had learned in class, and parents were better able to work with teachers in resolving specific learning problems. Parents took pride in watching their youngsters learn and interact with the teacher. Children enjoyed having their mothers on hand.

Most of the nine classroom centers were successful. They attracted the participation of a total of 63 parents. By the end of the project period, an average of 20 to 30 Hispanic parents also attended monthly School Parents' Council meetings; less than 10 had attended meetings before the project began.

## 6) Texas Project — Home Workshops

### Background

This 3-6 grade elementary school had an enrollment of 545; nearly 100 percent of these students were Hispanic, and 75 percent of their parents spoke no English. The project aimed at helping parents with parenting skills and providing information about various ways of working together with the school for the growth and development of their children. Less than 5 percent of the Hispanic parents had participated in school-related activities.

After her attempts failed to get parents to come to school to participate in a variety of activities, this project coordinator (and

school principal) would not accept defeat. She determined that since "some parents will not come to school, we will go to them. Parenting groups will be set up in different homes."

Four homes were selected; the hostess parents received money for refreshments. The parent hostess was responsible for inviting 10 other Hispanic parents to the workshops. The principal and members of her staff—a counselor, the school nurse, the assistant principal, and a teacher—visited homes four times a week. Most of the sessions were attended by at least 10 parents.

Discussion topics (in English and in Spanish) included *Listening to your Child; Caring for your Child; Routines, Rules, and Goals of School; Grades, Homework, and Academics; The Parents' Role; and Parenting Skills.*

As parents became more comfortable with the school staff, they welcomed the information about helping their children and began to ask questions and express their concerns. The parents, for example, were worried about their children leaving elementary school and starting junior high school. Counselors from the junior high school and high school were invited to the home sessions to orient the parents about the transition and to answer questions.

#### Why was this activity unique?

It catered to the parents. Nothing can be more accommodating than to have parenting workshops right in your own living room, or in your neighbor's living room. Because the school principal had a genuine interest in involving her parents in their children's education, she was willing to be flexible. The principal insisted on attending all the sessions — four homes per week. She and her staff demonstrated to the parents that they really cared about their children. In return the parents showed their appreciation by attending the sessions and eventually becoming involved in school activities and attending events at the school itself. A total of 60 parents (including two fathers) participated in the home workshops. The parents' ability to help their children improved, and their willingness to be a part of the school family increased.

The parents were surveyed at the end of the project to assess how useful the home sessions had been. The following are selected answers from the participating Hispanic mothers (most have been translated from Spanish to English):

#### *What did you like best about the meetings?*

"What I liked mainly was the attentiveness of the persons who conducted these meetings."

"How to learn to educate my son and get to meet all the mothers and counselors."

"That we participated in unity. We all learned how to help our children."

"The fact that the principal was able to form a relationship with the parents."

"Helping our child."

*Additional comments:*

"In all the programs I learned a lot of different things [and] how to help my children."

"I feel this is a good program in our Hispanic community because it gives parents a chance to reinforce how important education is today."

This project was very successful. The school principal's determination to reach her Hispanic parents and involve them in the educational process was the driving force here.

## **7) California Project — Members of Decision-Making Committees**

### **Background**

This K-6 elementary school had a student enrollment of 500; 200 were Hispanic students. Hispanic parents were disproportionately less involved in school than were the Anglo parents, as measured by school volunteer logs, leadership in school groups, and participation in school functions. The lack of involvement was attributed mainly to the parents' unfamiliarity with the educational system, and to the cultural and social anxieties common to immigrant families when dealing with new institutions and procedures.

The project had set three goals in its efforts to increase parental participation:

- Helping parents to become members of the school community by involving them in social events and special projects.
- Linking Hispanic parents with educational resources appropriate to their needs.
- Training parents in the support services needed at the school and helping parents to become members of the school's decision-making vehicles.



The first activity was an International Potluck Dinner attended by 51 of the 60 targeted Hispanic families. Parents eventually participated in numerous other activities and projects, and all were well attended.

One of the areas in which this project made significant gains was increasing the number of Hispanic parents serving on school committees — the PTA and the School Site Council. One project parent became vice president of the executive board of the PTA (this committee has five elected members), and four project parents became members of the School Site Council (this committee has six elected parent members).

### **What was unique about this project?**

This was one of the few parent projects which worked directly toward involving parents in the school's decision-making committees. The project director was convinced that parents should be totally involved in every aspect of the schools their children attend — in school activities and in the decisions that affect their youngsters.

## **8) Texas Project — A System of Rewards**

### **Background**

The PreK-5 elementary school had an enrollment of 700; 693 were Hispanic students. This community school did not have an organized parental involvement program; parent participation was almost entirely absent.

The parent project aimed to break a pattern of alienating practices that separated the school and its students' homes. To accomplish this, the project director — and school principal — created a multifaceted program, including:

- *Parent Training Workshops* to give parents the information and skills to make their involvement in school more meaningful and productive.
- *A Summer Leadership Training Retreat* to bring teachers, parents, and administrators together to plan a course of action in working together.
- *A set of activities called Rewards* — a novel approach to parent involvement.

All the activities were well attended. But the Rewards activities were unusually successful. The Rewards aimed to motivate parents by rewarding them and their children with tangible items for fulfill-

ing specific obligations (attending parent meetings, conferring with teachers, supporting teachers in classrooms). The teachers' cooperation was also rewarded.

### **Why was this project unique?**

The rewards served to break the pattern of non-participation. Since the rewards offered were attractive (gift certificates redeemable at local stores), parents were drawn to the activities. Once parents felt comfortable about coming to school, they did not look for rewards. One indication of this was the fact that they began to forget to collect the entry forms necessary to be eligible to receive the rewards. The reward had ceased to be a reason for participating.

By the end of the project period, an average of 50 to 90 parents were participating in school activities and events — and rewards were no longer necessary.

Although some projects were extremely successful at increasing parental involvement while others were less successful, lessons were learned from all of them.

The above projects have been described to demonstrate their unique strategies in attracting parents. Their project directors demonstrated that creativity and flexibility can accomplish a great deal. They recognized the importance of knowing their communities and their parents. If necessary, they provided transportation and childcare. Other projects also produced good results. It is important to understand that different tactics work with different groups of Hispanic parents, and that not everything works with everyone.

## APPENDIX 3

# Sample Outreach and Follow-up Materials

**A selection of actual letters and  
leaflets, used by real schools in real  
situations**

(Names of places, schools, and individuals  
have been changed or deleted.)

**Note:** The letters on the next two pages are examples of ineffective or counter-productive communications. Note the use of the intimidating formal school-system letterhead in each. The first letter seems cold, alarming, and somewhat disrespectful. The second letter is less cold but equally impersonal, and it lacks relevance to the day-to-day concerns of most Hispanic parents.

**DON'T send a letter like this one.**

**NoCity School System  
NoCity Elementary School  
NoCity, USA**

Dear Parents:

You are invited to a workshop on Tuesday, May 2nd, at 8:30 a.m. to learn how to become a better parent.

The workshop will teach you how to talk to your children, and how to get involved in school activities.

Please come to NoCity Elementary School, Tuesday, May 2nd. The workshop will be held in the third floor Conference Room. Members of the PAC, PTA, and SSC will be invited.

It is important that you attend this workshop.

Thank you.

The Principal

**DON'T send a letter like this one.**

**XXXX SCHOOL  
NoCity Unified School District  
NoCity, USA**

Dear Parent:

XXXX School invites you to participate in a project for Latino parents and students. We will be having meetings on summer school application procedures, and getting your children into high school through the XYZ Enrollment Request process. We will also be inviting you and your children to visit the YYY colleges and universities.

The first meeting will be Saturday, April 30; we will introduce the project and show a film on XXXX. For your convenience, there will be two sessions; you are welcome to attend either one.

Saturday, April 30  
XYZ School  
Session 1: 10 a.m.  
Session 2: 2 p.m.

We hope to see you there.

Kathleen Roos  
Principal  
XXXX School

Miguel Sinnombre  
Coordinator  
Latino Project

The remaining pages in Appendix 3 portray examples of effective letters and leaflets. Note the warm, informal approach of most, and the welcoming tone. Parents are accorded dignity, and are thanked for their participation. The programs aim to meet parents' needs. Frequently the language is Spanish; often a leaflet will carry its message in English on one side and in Spanish on the other.

Note, in particular, the checklist on pages 60 (in Spanish) and 61 (in English). This checklist is for parents to take home for their own use. It is not an assignment, nor is it to be returned to school. These self-evaluation sheets are taken home by the parents, who then may privately read and ponder the questions. Thus new ideas are introduced without embarrassment.

## **LISTA COMPROBANTE PARA PADRES**

¿Cómo calificamos nosotros, como padres, en ayudar a nuestro(a) niño(a) a leer mejor?

### **NOSOTROS**

1. ¿leemos juntos?
2. ¿visitamos juntos puntos interesantes?
3. ¿estamos suscritos a una revista para nuestro(a) niño(a)?
4. ¿le leemos a nuestro(a) hijo(a) cuando nos lo pide así?
5. ¿llevamos a nuestro(a) hijo(a) a la biblioteca o a la biblioteca ambulante?
6. ¿proveemos materiales de lectura en los que nuestro(a) niño(a) esté interesado(a)?
7. ¿conversamos sobre las noticias con nuestro(a) niño(a) y compartimos las tiras cómicas?
8. ¿proveemos diariamente períodos de quietud para lectura y discusión?
9. ¿escuchamos atentamente a nuestro(a) hijo(a) cuando él o ella lee en voz alta?
10. ¿animamos a nuestro(a) niño(a) a comunicarse con amigos y familiares?
11. ¿ayudamos a nuestro(a) niño(a) a apreciarse aunque cometa errores?
12. ¿proveemos a nuestro(a) niño(a) con diccionarios para principiantes y enciclopedias para niños?
13. ¿participamos en juegos que ayuden a nuestro(a) niño(a) a mejorar su deletreo, vocabulario y habilidad para concentrarse?
14. ¿le hacemos saber a nuestro(a) niño(a) que estamos interesados en su lectura?

## **A CHECKLIST FOR PARENTS**

How do we rate in helping our child to become a better reader?

### **DO WE**

1. read together?
2. go sight-seeing together?
3. subscribe to a magazine for our child?
4. read to our child when requested to do so?
5. take our child to the library or bookmobile?
6. provide reading matter that interests our child?
7. discuss news with our child and share the comics?
8. provide daily quiet times for reading and discussion?
9. listen attentively when our child reads aloud?
10. encourage our child to correspond with friends and relatives?
11. help our child to like him/herself even though our child makes mistakes?
12. provide our child with a beginner's dictionary and children's encyclopedia?
13. play games together that help improve our child's spelling, vocabulary, and ability to concentrate?
14. let our child know we are interested in his/her reading?



ATENCION A TODAS LAS FAMILIAS HISPANAS  
DE NUESTRA ESCUELA XYX!

Habr  una reuni n muy importante el jueves, 9 de abril de 6:00 a 7:00 P.M. en el auditorio de la escuela. Habr  cuidado de ni os.

Queremos verlos a todos. No dejen de venir. Hemos recibido algunos fondos para realizar actividades con ustedes y queremos decidir como gastarlo. Si no vienen, corremos el riesgo de perder el dinero por falta de participacion. Nos beneficiaremos todos si colaboramos.

NO SE OLVIDEN:

**Jueves, 9 de abril**  
**de 6:00 a 7:00 P.M.**  
**en el auditorio**

Sally NoName  
Director of XYX School

Maria Sinnombre  
Coordinadora  
Proyecto de Padres Hispanos

1 de abril de 19XX

Apreciada Sra.

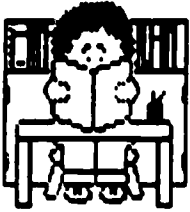
A nombre del Concilio de Padres Bilingues del Distrito, deseamos darles las más expresivas gracias por haber asistido a la Conferencia de Padres Hispanos de la ciudad efectuada el sábado, en la Escuela Superior de XXX.

Son padres como ustedes los que hacen la diferencia en nuestras escuelas. Deseamos felicitarlos por su interes y continua cooperacion y participacion en las actividades de nuestro distrito y de la ciudad. Sabemos que contamos con ustedes.

Gracias de nuevo por todo.

Muy atentamente,

TOGETHER  
IS BETTER



# FREE PARENT WORKSHOP

**BABYSITTING  
AVAILABLE**

-----

## "HOW TO HELP MY CHILD DEVELOP STUDY SKILLS AND WITH HOMEWORK"

**DATE: JANUARY 27, 1988**

**TIME: 7:00 - 8:30 P.M.**

**SESSION 1: K - 5**

**SESSION 2: 6 - 12**

**FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT:**

**ATENCION!**

**Jueves, Mayo 21**

**Bilingual Elementary School**

**“Proyecto Para Padres Hispanos”**

**ASISTA      PARTICIPE      ENTERESE**

**Información básica sobre  
PROGRAMAS DE VERANO**

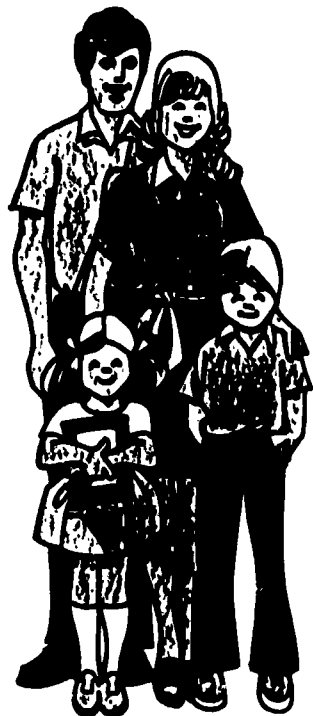
**Dónde?    Cuándo?    Cuánto?    Quién participa?**

**Recuerde:      Mayo 21  
6:00-7:30 pm  
Auditorio de la Escuela**

**Mientras Usted asiste a la reunión, tendremos disponible  
alumnos del Sexto Grado quienes cuidaran de sus hijos.**

**PADRES DE FAMILIA**

# Very Important Parent Award



THIS HONOR IS BESTOWED UPON

.....

in recognition of faithful and devoted service while participating in

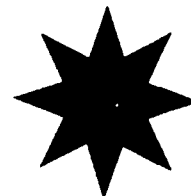
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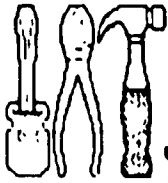
Awarded at

this

day of

19





**INEXPENSIVE  
HOME REPAIRS  
"HOW TO"  
A HANDS ON  
WORKSHOP FOR  
PARENTS**

**FREE  
BABYSITTING  
PROVIDED**

---

**APRIL 19, 1988  
7-8:30 P.M.**

**MIDDLE  
SCHOOL**

---

**INSTR.**

FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT.

TOGETHER  
IS BETTER



## BEING A PARENT ISN'T EASY!

Build on those skills you already have as a parent. Join a discussion group and become more confident in your own style of parenting. Learn new skills to:

- Communicate with your children
- Cope with frustration
- Set limits (discipline)

ATTEND A FREE PARENT WORKSHOP SERIES

WHERE:

WHEN: Once a week for six weeks, beginning:

REGISTRATION IS NECESSARY. CALL

OR RETURN FORM BELOW TO YOUR SCHOOL OFFICE.

NAME \_\_\_\_\_ PHONE \_\_\_\_\_

ADDRESS \_\_\_\_\_ ZIP CODE \_\_\_\_\_

I WILL ATTEND THE PARENT WORKSHOPS AT: \_\_\_\_\_

I HAVE \_\_\_\_\_ CHILDREN THAT NEED CHILDCARE WHILE I ATTEND THE WORKSHOPS.

THEIR AGES ARE: \_\_\_\_\_



## ¡SER UN PADRE NO ES FACIL!

Usted esta haciendo el trabajo mas dificil e' importante del mundo.

Usted es un Padre/Madre!

Los invitamos a reunirse con otros padres/madres hispanos para compartir con ustedes formas de hacer su labar mas facil.

**Asiste Gratis a La Serie De Talleres Para Padres**

**Cuando:**

Una vez a la semana por seis semana comenzando.

**Donde:**

NECESITAS MATRICULARTE. LLAMA A \_\_\_\_\_  
ó devuelve la forma de abajo a la oficina de su Escuela.

-----  
NOMBRE \_\_\_\_\_ TELEFONO \_\_\_\_\_

DIRECCION \_\_\_\_\_ ZONA POSTAL \_\_\_\_\_

ASISTIRE AL TALLER DE PADRES \_\_\_\_\_

TENGO \_\_\_\_\_ NIÑOS QUE NECESITAN CUIDADO MIENTRAS ASISTO A LOS TALLERES.

SUS EDADES SON: \_\_\_\_\_



# APPENDIX 4

## Directory of Projects

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| Alhambra School District<br>Deaf and Hard of Hearing Program<br>15 West Alhambra Road<br>Alhambra, Calif. 91801 | Jackson School/Elementary<br>329 South Lindbergh Avenue<br>York, Pennsylvania 17405                                |
| Allapattah Junior High School<br>1331 Northwest 46 Street<br>Miami, Florida 33142                               | Jamaica Plain High School<br>144 McBride Street<br>Jamaica Plain, Mass. 02130                                      |
| Blackstone Elementary School<br>380 Shawmut Avenue<br>Boston, Mass. 02118                                       | James F. Oyster Bilingual Elementary<br>School<br>29th and Calvert Streets, NW<br>Washington, D.C. 20008           |
| Center for Multicultural Outreach<br>7401 Metcalf Avenue<br>Overland Park, Kansas 66204                         | L.C. Smith Elementary School<br>One Bearkat Blvd.<br>Raymonville, Texas 78580                                      |
| Community School District No. 4<br>319 East 117 Street<br>New York, N.Y. 10035                                  | Libby Elementary School<br>423 West Redondo Drive<br>Oceanside, Calif. 92054                                       |
| Cuban American National Council<br>300 S.W. 12th Avenue<br>Miami, Florida 33130-2038                            | Lincoln Elementary School<br>333 South D<br>Exeter, Calif. 93221   |
| Danbrook Elementary School<br>320 Danbrook Street<br>Anaheim, Calif. 92804                                      | Lincoln School<br>705 California Street<br>Salinas, Calif. 93901   |
| Davis Bilingual Learning Center<br>500 West St. Mary's Road<br>Tucson, Ariz. 85001                              | Mary M. Hooker Elementary School<br>200 Sherbrooke Avenue<br>Hartford, Conn. 06114                                 |
| Fresno Unified School District<br>Tioga Middle School<br>3232 East Fairmount<br>Fresno, Calif. 93726            | Neighborhood Youth Association/<br>Broadway Elementary School<br>3877 Grandview Blvd.<br>Los Angeles, Calif. 90066 |
| Guadalupe Center, Inc.<br>2641 Bellevue<br>Kansas City, Mo. 64108   | New Haven Public Schools<br>New Haven Board of Education<br>200 Orange Street<br>New Haven, Conn. 06510            |
| Hawes Elementary School<br>909 Roosevelt<br>Redwood City, Calif. 94061  | Norwood Street Elementary School<br>2020 Oak Street<br>Los Angeles, Calif. 90007                                   |
| Inter-American Magnet School<br>919 West Barry Avenue<br>Chicago, Ill. 60657                                    |  |

Public School No. 321  
180 7th Avenue  
Brooklyn, N.Y. 11215

Pueblo School District No. 60  
315 West 11 Street  
Pueblo, Conn. 81002

Rafael Hernandez Community  
Elementary School (235X)  
1257 Ogden Avenue  
Bronx, N.Y. 10452

Rochester-Monroe EPIC  
121 North Fitzhugh Street  
Rochester, N.Y. 14614

St. Augustine College/  
Frederick Funston Elementary School  
3255 West Armitage  
Chicago, Ill. 60647

Seguin Independent School District  
P.O. Drawer 31  
Seguin, Texas 78156-0031

Silver Wing Elementary School/  
Montgomery Junior High School  
3730 Arey Drive  
San Diego, Calif. 92154

Spanish-Speaking Unity Council  
1900 Fruitvale Avenue  
Oakland, Calif. 94601

Sylmar Elementary School  
13291 Phillippi Avenue  
Sylmar, Calif. 91342

Turnbull Children's Center  
Horral School  
300 28th Avenue  
San Mateo, Calif. 94402

Ventura Unified School District  
Special Education/  
Pupil Personnel Department  
120 East Santa Clara Street  
Ventura, Calif. 93001

Youth Development, Inc.  
1710 Centro Familiar, SW  
Albuquerque, N.M. 87105

Youth Service Project, Inc.  
3942 West North Avenue  
Chicago, Ill. 60647

Zavala Elementary School  
2500 Galveston  
McAllen, Texas 78501

THE HISPANIC POLICY DEVELOPMENT PROJECT is a non-profit organization—a 501(C)(3)—which encourages the analysis of public and private policies and policy proposals affecting Hispanics in the United States.

HPDP in particular focuses on the problems of Hispanic youth: education and employment. HPDP supports high-level policy commissions composed of Hispanics and non-Hispanics; conferences, seminars, and debates around central education and employment issues; both lay and professional analysis and evaluation of specific policy options; and policy-analysis competitions open to Hispanic and non-Hispanic scholars as well as Hispanic organizations.

HPDP seeks to bring its findings to the attention of key groups and leaders throughout the United States, and publishes reports, bulletins, and books based on research and data analysis.

***Together Is Better***

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*Editors:* Stina Santiestevan, Carol Oppenheimer

*Technical Advisor:* Rafael Valdivieso

*Design and Layout:* Carol Oppenheimer

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