

## DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 327 626

UD 027 890

AUTHOR Pell, Elena; Ramirez, Elizabeth Weiser  
TITLE Making the Most of Your Child's Education: More Topics for Parents. Prepared for the ASPIRA Hispanic Community Mobilization for Dropout Prevention Project.  
INSTITUTION ASPIRA Association, Inc., Washington, DC. National Office.  
SPONS AGENCY Anheuser-Busch Companies, Inc., St. Louis, MO.; Department of Education, Washington, DC.  
PUB DATE 90  
CONTRACT S201D80010-89  
NOTE 44p.  
AVAILABLE FROM ASPIRA Association, Inc., 1112 Sixteenth St. NW, Suite 340, Washington, DC 20036 (\$5.00; 6-14 copies, \$4.50; 15-24 copies, \$4.00; 25-75 copies, \$3.50; 76+ copies, \$3.00. Also available in Spanish).  
PUB TYPE Guides - Non-Classroom Use (055)  
EDRS PRICE MF01 Plus Postage. PC Not Available from EDRS.  
DESCRIPTORS \*Educational Improvement; \*Hispanic Americans; \*Parent Associations; Parent Influence; \*Parent Participation; Parent Role; \*Parent School Relationship  
IDENTIFIERS \*Latinos

## ABSTRACT

This guide for Hispanic American parents offers practical advice on how to help their children succeed and how to improve their children's schools. Education is important because in today's service and technically oriented economy, education means the difference between a well-paying, stable job and a low-paying unstable job. In the next 10 years, Hispanic Americans will make up 15 percent of new job seekers and two-thirds of the new jobs will require a high school diploma while one-third of the new jobs will require a college degree. However, over one-third of Hispanic Americans drop out of high school and only about 12 percent earn a college degree. Even for those students who finish school, it is important to keep learning new skills because the world keeps changing. Labeling a child as "at risk" of dropping out on the basis of his home background results in blaming the victim and does nothing to help the child. Parents and schools can work together to improve the educational experiences of all students. The following steps to parent participation are outlined in the form of pointers addressed directly to parents: (1) attend to your child's basic health and nutritional needs and help with homework; (2) participate in school events and parent-teacher conferences; (3) volunteer to work in the school as a teacher's aide, a community liaison, or a planner of special events; and (4) become an advocate for school improvement by joining or starting a parent group. Many schools already have some type of parent committee operating. Sometimes, however, Latino parents may not feel comfortable in these groups or the group may meet at a time when it is impossible for them to attend. In that case, chances are good that other Latino parents feel the same way, and suggestions are offered for such parents to start a Latino subgroup or an entirely new group of Latino parents. A list of parent groups and lists of discussion questions are included. A list of 13 references and a brief description of ASPIRA are appended. (FMW)

ASPIRA Association, Inc.  
Institute for Policy Research

Making the Most of Your  
Child's Education:

# MORE TOPICS FOR PARENTS

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION  
Office of Educational Research and Improvement  
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION  
CENTER (ERIC)

This document has been reproduced as  
received from the person or organization  
originating it.

Minor changes have been made to improve  
reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this docu-  
ment do not necessarily represent official  
OERI position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS  
MATERIAL IN MICROFICHE ONLY  
HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Elizabeth Ramirez  
ASPIRA

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES  
INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

Prepared for the ASPIRA  
Hispanic Community Mobilization  
for Dropout Prevention Project

ED327626

u0027890

Major funding for this project was obtained through U.S. Department of Education grant no. S201D80010-89. The Anheuser-Busch Companies provide core funding for the ASPIRA Institute for Policy Research, which houses this project.

# Making the Most of Your Child's Education: **MORE TOPICS FOR PARENTS**

Prepared for the ASPIRA Hispanic Community  
Mobilization for Dropout Prevention Project

Published by the ASPIRA Institute for Policy  
Research, Washington, D.C., © 1990

Written and produced by Elena Pell and  
Elizabeth Weiser Ramírez  
Artwork by Hugo Bonilla



## Acknowledgements

We would like to acknowledge the parents who volunteered to evaluate and provide feedback on draft materials for this booklet. The comments of these parents contributed greatly to the tone, content, and format of this publication: María T. Aquino, Tonia Cobo, Roberto Cobo, Angela García, Leonor García, Gloria Nader, and Nancy Pérez-Carrillo.

We thank the Directors and staff of ASPIRA of Florida and ASPIRA of New York for volunteering to conduct field tests of the topics for this booklet with parents in their communities.

Our gratitude also extends to Linda Moore, Community Education Project Director, Council of Chief State School Officers; Rodolfo Caridad Careaga, Information Specialist, National Clearinghouse for Bilingual Education; Dr. Edward P. Keller, Deputy Executive Director, National Association of Elementary School Principals; and Mr. Oliver Moles, OERI - U.S. Department of Education, for taking time from their busy schedules to review drafts of these materials. Their direct experience, expertise in the field, and comprehension of the goals and philosophy behind our work in communities made them invaluable advisors.

Finally, we thank Magdalena Lewis, Bilingual Coordinator, National Committee for Citizens in Education, and Arcadio Torres-Arroyo, National Coordinator for Leadership Development, ASPIRA Association, Inc., for their assistance with translation.

## Introduction

For the past thirty years, ASPIRA has been working in Latino communities around the country to help develop the leaders of the future. Our founders were Latino parents and professionals who realized that their community could not improve with so many of its young people dropping out of school. They formed ASPIRA because they believed that their children needed to know that they were needed by their community, and that they would be helped to succeed because they were expected to succeed. This mobilization of the community on behalf of our youth continues to this day. We are a community helping ourselves to move forward.

Unfortunately, many people still think that Latino parents don't really care about their children's education. Since its founding, ASPIRA has been living proof of the interest of parents in ensuring an excellent education for their children. Most recently we have witnessed the mobilization of parents around the country who have worked with us in this project.

This booklet, Making the Most of Your Child's Education: More Topics for Parents, is the second in a series for Hispanic parents offering practical advice on how to help their children succeed. Our first booklet, Making the Most of Your Child's Education: A Guide for Parents, focused on how parents can help children. This booklet talks about what parents can do to make the schools better. In our next booklet we will be talking about how parents take leadership in education issues.

1991 marks ASPIRA's 30th year. Today, we are more sure than ever that together we can make a difference because together we have been making a difference.

Janice Petrovich, Ed.D.  
National Executive Director

## Table of Contents

1. About These Booklets.....7
2. Why is Education So Important?.....11
3. What is Happening With Education?.....21
4. How Can I Work to Improve the  
School?.....29

**Topic #1 :  
About These  
Booklets**

# About These Booklets

## Why Was This Booklet Written?

This booklet, Making the Most of Your Child's Education: More Topics for Parents, is the second in a group of books for parents by ASPIRA. It was created especially for you, because you matter the most. You are the most important person in your child's education and development.

**BECAUSE YOU MATTER:** When we began writing these books, we started by asking people like you what issues were most important to them in improving the education of their children. This is how we chose topics for these booklets. They cover some very important subjects and will help you take the first step to improving your ability to work with your children, at home and through the school, to do their best, and be the best that they are capable of.

**BECAUSE YOU MATTER:** We created booklets that are easy to read and understand, and are available in both Spanish and English. These booklets will help guide you even if you are not yet familiar with how the school system works, have never been a member of a parent group before, or if you want to help your child do better in school, but don't know where to start.

**BECAUSE YOU MATTER:** Parents like you were asked to comment on these booklets before we printed them. We heard from Latino parents from all over the mainland U.S. and Puerto Rico. They gave us their comments on the drafts of these brochures, and gave us important feedback on how to make these materials work for the community.

## How to Use These Booklets

Use these booklets as a guide through some very important issues about parent involvement. Don't feel you have to read them all at once! They are designed for careful thought and discussion. You'll want to use them again, share them with family and friends, discuss the topics in groups of parents and with your children.

The topics include discussion questions and exercises at the end. That's because we wanted to create something that would help parents work with other parents to explore how to improve their children's success at school.

Many of you who will receive these booklets are already meeting with other parents. Most of you have a person from a school or community organization who is experienced in these issues working with you. They are wonderful resources. If you are already meeting with other parents, you know that parent groups can be very helpful. They can remind you that you are not alone in the problems you face. Parent groups are extremely good places for sharing information and ideas. Finally, getting together with other Latino parents can give you a chance to discuss ways to improve education and schools. Encourage other parents to come with you to these meetings! If you are not meeting with other parents, it might be time to start!

Of course, there are many topics you will want to find out more about. These booklets are just a beginning. It is our hope that once you finish them, you'll have found new things you'll want to get together with other parents to talk about!

**Topic #2:**  
**Why is Education  
So Important?**

# Why is Education So Important?

If you and your parents' group have looked through our first book, Making the Most of Your Child's Education: A Guide for Parents, you know by now that we at ASPIRA think education is the key to a child's future. Why do we think that?

There are lots of reasons why education can make a difference in someone's life. Here are a few:

- ✓ The more you know, the better and more active a citizen you can be.
- ✓ The more you know, the less anyone can take advantage of you. Education helps you protect your rights.
- ✓ The more you know, the more you can help your family, friends, and community.
- ✓ The more you know, the more *you* have control over your life, doing what you want to do and being treated with respect.
- ✓ The more you know, the better you feel. Education is something to be proud of.
- ✓ The more you know, the more you understand the world - and yourself.
- ✓ The more you know, the more opportunities are open to you.

So, education is important for many reasons. Let's talk a little more about one.



**The more you know, the more opportunities  
are open to you.**

How much education you have makes a big difference in the kind of job you can get. And the kind of job you get determines whether you can:

- buy a house,
- raise a family without worrying about money all the time,
- choose to work one job, or
- afford to leave a job you don't like.

At ASPIRA we think that every person has the right to have a decent job and be treated well. We believe our youth can, and should, try to be the best they can be. They can be doctors, scientists, lawyers. But it will take everyone's contribution to make and keep our community strong. The Latino community needs all of us to do all we can to help our community grow. A sure way to succeed and help our community is to get a good education. *That's another very important reason why education is so necessary!*

Now, we know that many parents haven't had much education. When you were growing up, your parents probably thought it was wonderful if you finished high school. And it was! With a high school diploma you could get a good job that paid pretty well. And over half the people in our communities didn't finish high school. Lots of them still got pretty good jobs, and could raise their families.

**Today, though, the world is different.** Those jobs in factories or industries that used to support our communities aren't there any more. You've probably noticed that in your own neighborhood, but did you know that across the country factory jobs have been disappearing?

There are often two kinds of jobs left. The first kind is what are called "semi-skilled service jobs." That means working in restaurants, supermarkets, or hotels. Service jobs also include cleaning offices, baby sitting, or other jobs like that. You can get some service jobs without finishing high school. But because there are more and more of these types of jobs, that means that many high school graduates are also working in service jobs. Now, service jobs are good honest work and are important to our economy. But the problem with them is that many of them pay very little, they often mean working strange hours (so it's hard to be with your family), and there isn't much room to advance to a better job. Making hamburgers might be a good job experience when you're 17, but not many people want to do it for their whole lives!

The other kind of jobs are the jobs that graduates of colleges or trade schools get. Jobs for people with special skills. These days, nearly everybody - from secretaries to mechanics to managers to airline pilots to teachers to small business owners - goes to college or a trade school. Nearly every office job you can think of requires education beyond high school. This is because these jobs today require you to use so much technology. Computers are everywhere, and jobs change so quickly that employers need people who can always be learning new skills - that is, people who are educated. Jobs like this pay better than other service jobs, the hours tend to be more regular, there's less of a chance that workers will be laid off, and there are more possibilities for advancing to a better job.

Right now, a college graduate will earn in his or her lifetime about \$450,000 more than a high school graduate and \$700,000 more than a high school dropout. And the difference between low-paying jobs for people who don't finish school and high-paying jobs for people who do will only become greater. The young people

who will graduate from high school and start looking for work beginning in the year 2000 are in second grade this year. They will face a world where:

- most new jobs will be service jobs;
- new technology will create jobs for people who can use it, and get rid of jobs for people who can't; and
- education will mean the difference between well-paying, stable jobs and low-paying, unstable jobs.

### What does the future look like?

In the next ten years, Hispanics will make up 15% of new people looking for work.

Two-thirds of the new jobs will require workers with a high school diploma.

One-third of the new jobs will require workers with a college degree.

So, there are lots of reasons for getting an education. Also, to be successful these days, education means more than just being able to read and write.



*Today's successful person needs to:*

- 1) *Know how to learn*
- 2) *Know how to read, write, and do basic math*
- 3) *Listen and speak clearly*
- 4) *Know how to solve problems and think in a creative way*
- 5) *Believe in his or her own value, set goals, and work to carry them out*
- 6) *Be able to work in a team*
- 7) *Understand how the company works*
- 8) *Be a leader*

Yes, a *leader*. Your child is going to start work in a time where more and more workers will need to make

independent decisions, have new ideas, and work with less supervision.

### Where are Hispanics now?

Now, if all the good jobs are increasingly going to college or trade school graduates, it seems to make sense that Latino young people should be finishing high school and continuing their education, right? But last year, over a third of our young people had dropped out of high school, and ASPIRA has found that more than one half of Hispanics in big cities drop out. Only about 12% of Hispanics have a college degree. This means more unemployment, more low-paying jobs, and more poverty for our communities. Today more than ever before, we need our young people to stay in school and get a good education.

We at ASPIRA believe that all of us working together - parents, community, schools - can help our young people. We *have* to do it, the need is so critical. The rest of this book talks about how you, as a parent, can work with other parents. Together you can help your child and all the children of your community to get the education that will help them succeed in life.

Did you know that the more education and training *you* have, the better your child will probably do in school? Research says this is true.

## What You Can Do About Your Education and Job Skills

We talked about what education can do for you. But even if you think you have it all, a good job, respect from your families, friends, and community, a feeling that you have something to give to others, it never stops. Even when you finish school, it's important to keep learning new things. The world is changing a lot--there are always new things to learn. Besides, when you get down to it, learning feels good.

If you have a job now, ask at work if there are any opportunities for training in new areas. If you show an interest, your company may train you in some of the skills that are needed to do a better job and advance.

If you would like help with basic educational skills like reading, writing, arithmetic, or English, most cities have community groups that offer tutoring. Check at your local church, the neighborhood community center, the library, or other organizations in the community. They should be able to help you find classes you can attend for free.

## Discussion Questions

Ask members of the group:

- 1) In what ways does education give you more control over your life?
- 2) How are jobs today different than they used to be?
- 3) Some people say that these days, education never really ends. In the world we live in you need to spend your whole life learning. Why do you think they say that?

**Topic #3:**  
**What is  
Happening With  
Education?**



# What is Happening With Education?

It is hard to be a child today. Close to half of all poor people in the country are children. Most families need to have all adults working, so there is less time to spend with the children. Drugs, gangs, and violence are big problems for many communities. Hispanic children have to face discrimination and prejudice.

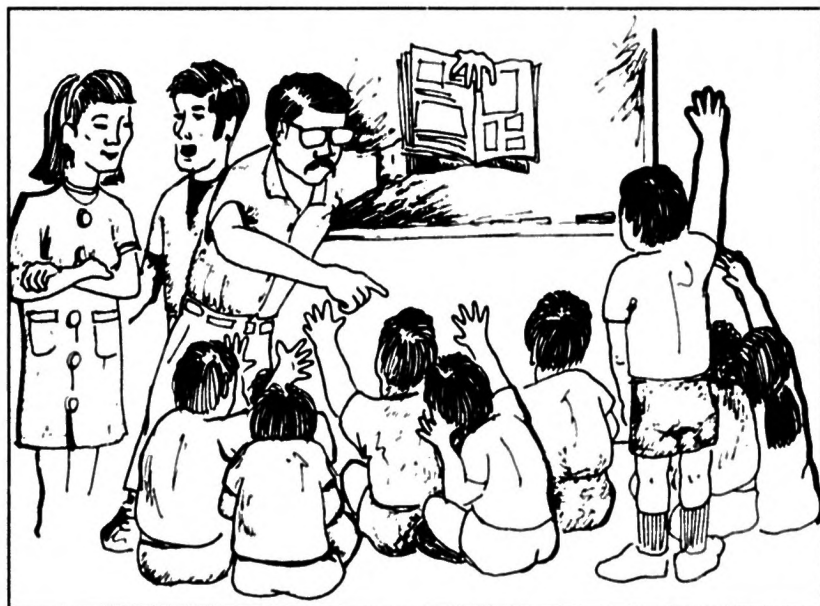
On top of everything else, everyone is saying that the schools are in crisis. Children are being held back, or they are being promoted without being able to read and write. They are also facing the same violence in the schools that they do in the street. As we said in the last chapter, about half our kids drop out of high school before graduating. Many of them drop out even before tenth grade!

Some people want to blame the children for dropping out. They want to label whole groups of kids as "at-risk" of dropping out of school. This means that they look at a child's home and background and decide that certain groups of kids are more likely to drop out. Many times, just because a kid is Latino and growing up in the inner city they get labelled as "at-risk."

You should know that labelling our children like this isn't good for two reasons. First, it blames the children and their families for the circumstances of their lives. Let's say you're a single parent, working really hard to pay the bills so your family has a place to live and food to eat. You push your child to do his homework and you try to go to school meetings whenever it's possible. In other words, you're doing the very best you can.

Then someone from outside looks at your child and says, "Latino, poor, single parent--this kid is at-risk." Instead of looking at the *positive* things you do and the benefits of your Latino heritage, they only look at what you can't do or don't have. **That's called blaming the victim, and it doesn't help you to help your child.**

The other reason labelling some kids as "at-risk" isn't a good thing is that it isn't a very true label. These days, *all* children are "at risk" of dropping out of school! The majority of dropouts are white, they come from middle class families, and they live in the suburbs. With the problems that schools face, *anyone* could drop out of school. The important thing to think about is how to keep kids *in* school.



## Keeping Them in School

To keep kids in school, the first thing to do is not to blame anyone, but to examine just what's wrong. Then we can look at what parents can do to help fix what's wrong.

We have heard from many of you that schools don't support or understand you. These are the kinds of things we hear:

### Parents often say:

Teachers don't expect our children to do well, so the children don't get much help when they start to fail.

We are only called to the school when our child has done something wrong.

We feel uncomfortable talking with the teachers.

### Schools often say:

Parents from other cultures don't understand the importance of participating in the school.

They don't volunteer in the school.

They don't help their children with homework.

They are difficult to talk to if they don't speak English.

This may seem like two sides of an argument: parents saying schools don't care and schools saying parents don't care. Really, *everybody* cares about what is happening in education, and *both* sides agree on one basic point: schools and parents need to work together in order for all children to finish high school and even go

on to college or other schools. Some schools are trying to get parents more involved. Many books have been written about what teachers and principals can do to get parents into the schools.

We know that you care about your child's education and you work hard to help your children succeed. You might not always know how to work with the schools, though.

We also know that even though some schools try to keep parents out, many schools do want to work with parents. But just like you, wanting to work together doesn't necessarily mean you know *how* to work together. Let's talk about what you, as a parent, can do from your end.

## Where do you start?

Our children deserve the best education possible, and you, other parents, the community, and the schools can work to give it to them!

Parents who are organized together can work with schools to make them better for all kids. They can show schools how to work with the community. They can change bad practices that hold our kids back or make them want to drop out. Parents can also learn what they can do in their family to make their kids more interested in learning. Finally, they can be a resource to those people in the school who want to make it more a part of the community, and more respectful of the children's backgrounds.

In our first book, we talked a lot about how you as a parent can work with your child at home, helping them to make good decisions and to do their homework. We also talked about how you have a *right* to be involved in your child's school. If you haven't read the first volume of Making the Most of Your Child's Education: A Guide for Parents, you may want to take a look at it. The information there will help you use this booklet better.

*It's a fact...* When parents participate in their child's education, the child does better in school. Active parents make a difference. Some studies show that when a third or less of parents are active in a school, *every* child in the school begins to do better!

In the next two chapters of this booklet, we will give you some ideas of how to work in the school, and how to work to change the school.

## Discussion Questions

Ask members of the group:

1. What do you think makes a really good school?
2. What would the teachers be like?
3. What would the school look like?
4. What would be different?

**Topic #4:**  
**How Can I Work  
to Improve the  
School?**

# How Can I Work to Improve the School?

## STEP 1

### THE BASICS:

#### *You are already an involved parent*

Helping your child get the best education starts with the basics. You are already doing some important things to help your child do well in school. How are you doing that? Well, you make sure your child gets enough sleep at night. Yes, even teenagers need to sleep, although they may think they don't! Growing children probably should have about eight hours of sleep every night.

You also make sure your child has a good breakfast. Did you know that children who sit down and eat breakfast do better on tests in the morning than children who don't eat breakfast? Schools know this--that's why many schools offer breakfast programs for their students whose families can't afford to give them breakfast. If you have a hard time finding the money to feed your children a good breakfast, you may qualify for a free breakfast program at your school. Call the school to find out if they have such a program. A well-rested, well-fed child is a child who is ready to learn.

You try your best to be a good parent and to have a healthy, happy home environment. That's parental involvement, too: these things make a big difference.

You are also doing other things to help your children do better in school. For example, you make sure they have school supplies, and you look at their report cards to see how they're doing.



Probably when you think of being involved in your child's education, you also think of helping with homework. Almost all Hispanic parents ask their children about homework regularly. This is one of the most basic and most important actions that you can take as a parent.

Our first booklet gives you suggestions of how you can help your children with their homework. Again, the two most important things for you to do are:

- 1) make sure your children have a time in their day when they are expected to sit and do their homework, and
- 2) learn about the people and places you and your child can go to ask for help with homework problems.

There's a lot you are doing. There's even more you can do. The best news is that there are friends, agencies, and organizations that can help you get the things you need to make your family stronger. Don't be afraid to ask for help.

## ***STEP 2***

### **BEING A PARTNER:**

#### **Getting involved with your child's school**

As we talked about in the last chapter, many schools are starting to try to reach out to parents. They don't always do a very good job, but if you're willing to work with them, together you can help your child.

Has anyone at your child's school contacted you this year? Has the teacher asked you to come to an open house or a conference? Has your child brought home announcements of school fairs or meetings? Has she participated in a school play or a sport or a concert or art show? If any of these things has happened, what have you done? Did you go to the event? Did you talk

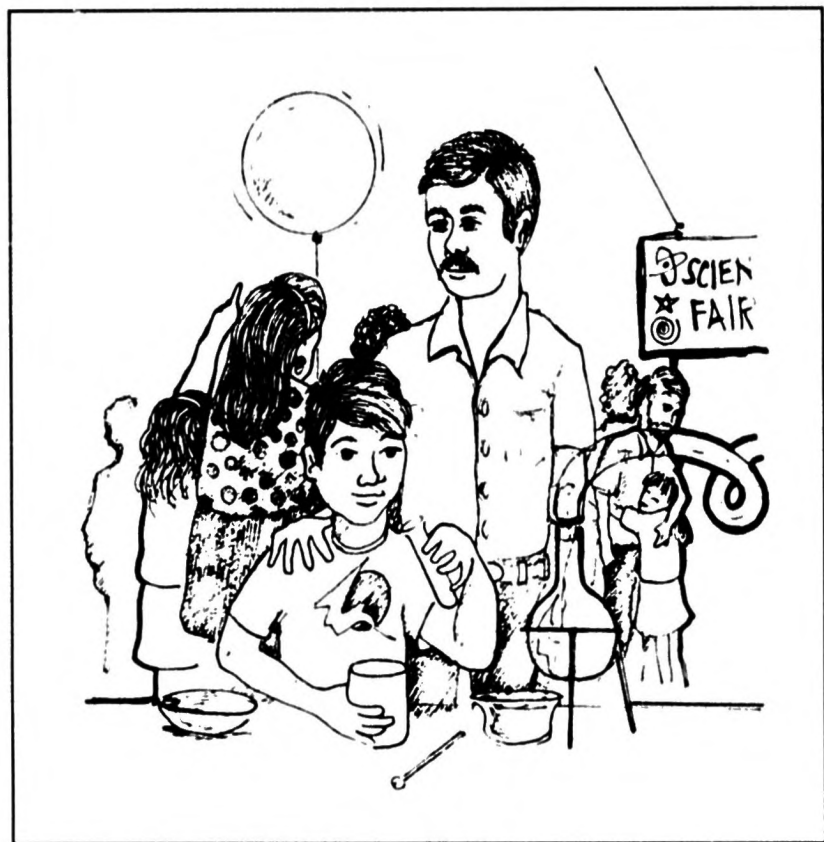
with the teacher or other school worker? We know that sometimes it's really hard to do this. Maybe you work nights, when all the activities take place. Or maybe you think the teacher is only calling when your child is in trouble. Or maybe you don't feel comfortable talking with the people at the school. Maybe there isn't anyone at the school who speaks Spanish.

It is hard, but having contact with your child's school is really important. If you don't talk with them, they think that you don't care. If they don't hear from you, they may think things are OK just the way they are, even if they aren't.

For example, let's say you're not very comfortable speaking English. If you call up or go to one of your child's teachers and say you want to talk about your child, but you would like to talk in Spanish, what is the teacher going to say? He has to admit you care--there you are, asking to talk about your child! He might be helpful, or he might say you need to come back with your own interpreter. But what happens if other Hispanic parents also go and say they want to speak about their children, in Spanish? The school is going to realize that the problem is not that the Hispanic parents don't care, but that the school doesn't have someone who can talk to them in their language.

Many schools now have people to act as interpreters, to translate school memos, and to be a special link between parents and the schools. Some of these people are paid professionals. Others are volunteers.

This is another way you can be involved. Schools always need volunteers to do many tasks. An expert on parent volunteers says schools in the inner city often don't use volunteers enough. According to the Department of Labor, though, Hispanics are more likely to volunteer in schools than any other group! That just shows again how important education is to us.



### How do you volunteer in the school?

Well, when you go to talk with your child's teacher, you may want to tell her that you have some time to volunteer in the school. This is especially useful for parents who work at night. Maybe you can't go to night meetings and events, but one or two afternoons a week you can be at the school, involved in your child's education.

## What can you volunteer to do?

- 1) **You can help the teacher in the classroom.** For example, you could volunteer to help the teacher organize a class party to celebrate an important day for your cultural heritage, like Cinco de Mayo or Dia de los Tres Reyes. You could teach students some skill or craft that you know. You could help a small group to work while the teacher works with the rest of the class. You could help to bring in people from the community to talk with the class about important issues. You could help watch the students when the class goes on field trips.
  
- 2) **You can help the school itself.** All schools need many more people than teachers to make the school work. We already talked about one of these positions - someone to help connect the school to the local community, who can talk with other parents in their own language and who understands their backgrounds. Maybe you can help the school start a newsletter for parents in their native language. Other ways to help include answering phones, filing and other office work, being a hall monitor, and helping to keep order in the lunchroom or on the playground. Lots of elementary schools now have after-school programs for children that rely partly on paid professionals and partly on parent volunteers.
  
- 3) **You can work with the school to plan special events.** As a parent and a member of your community, you can help school personnel to plan activities and assemblies that bring the school and community together. For example, you can help the school hold an assembly for the students where people from the community come and talk about their careers. You can help plan school fairs and open houses that will bring other parents to the

school - and you can go and talk to other parents to encourage them to come. You can work with the school to develop summer programs for parents and children, or help the school work with community jobs programs for teenagers in the summer.

**Most of all, it is important to keep at it.** Keep asking questions of teachers, other parents, and administrators. If you want to be involved, keep asking how. If you think something is going on that isn't right, keep asking why it's that way. If you think something new should happen, keep asking why it isn't. Remember, the reason that you're helping the school is to help your child, so your child and the other children have the best education possible.

Finally, if you have time in the evenings, do try to attend special activities that your child participates in, like sports or science fairs. Children are so proud when they know their parents are in the audience, watching them perform. And who knows? You may be encouraging your child to display some great talent that no one knew she had!

## *STEP 3*

### *BEING AN ADVOCATE:*

#### *Working to improve the school*

Your child does need you to be involved in helping the school teach him, but he needs you to play another role, too. Your child needs you to be an advocate for good schools.

A lot is going on with schools these days. Everyone from the President to local school officials agrees that schools need to change. They call this change "school reform," and parents are an important part of it.

Lots of schools and school systems are not doing as good a job as they should of educating students. "Good" means your child is learning, passes his classes, is promoted to the next grade, and graduates. It means teachers and school officials respect your child and make an effort to reach out to you as a partner in your child's education. "Not good" means your child and you have to struggle to get the attention, respect, and services you are entitled to. It means your child doesn't do well and nobody helps him or tells you how to help. It often means your child drops out of the school.

When schools aren't good enough, the schools sometimes want to say that it's the parents' or kids' fault. "How can anyone expect us to teach this kid?" they ask. When schools aren't good enough, parents, even parents and teachers together, work to change the school. Schools sometimes need to be reminded that their job is to help students rather than pushing them out the door.

Schools have changed before, and parents have been a part of that. Since the 1800's, parents in this country have gotten together to advocate for improvements in the schools. Advocacy means getting together and speaking out for your rights. Parent advocacy groups can be advocates for better schools. You can work to make sure the school building is well-maintained, the teachers are qualified, students receive equal treatment no matter what, issues that the community thinks are important are discussed or taught, etc. Basically, anything that parents think could make the school better is something that parent groups could work on.

## What kinds of parent groups are there?

There are several different types of parent groups. They include:

- **Parent-Teacher Organizations and Parent-Teacher Associations (PTO's and PTA's):** These are groups of parents and teachers working with the school administration on projects that support the current work of the school.
- **School Advisory Councils and School Councils:** These are groups of parents, teachers, and administrators set up by the school. They may give advice to the school officials on specific programs. Or they may have some power to make decisions about running the school.
- **School Foundations:** These are groups of parents who raise money for the school, especially for new equipment or building maintenance.
- **School Boards:** Each school or school district has an elected board that makes decisions. If you feel that your community is not represented on the board, a group of parents working together may be able to help one of their members get elected.
- **Parent Advocacy Groups:** These are groups of parents organizing to change certain policies of the schools or improve the school overall. Advocacy groups do not have to have the approval of the school to operate.

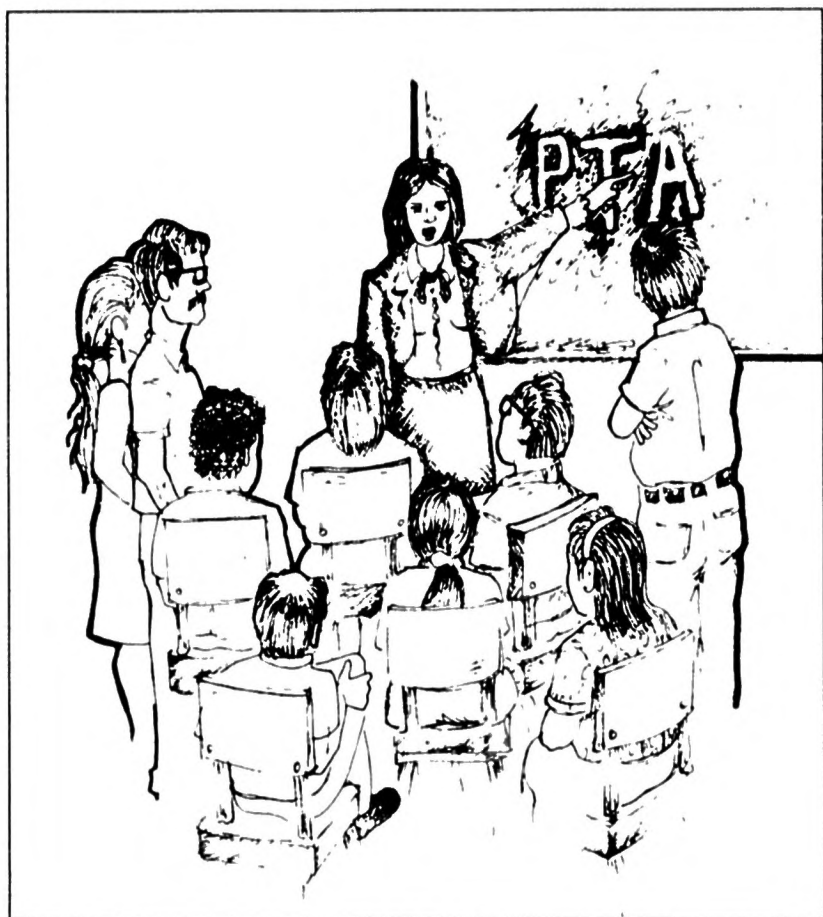
## About parents' groups

Many schools already have some type of parent committee operating. You may want to ask your child's teacher, another school official, or other parents you meet at the school if your school has a parents' group. Try going to their meetings. Some things to think about as you decide if you want to join are the following:

- ✓ Is the group working on issues that concern you?
- ✓ Is the group set up to take action on issues, or does it only discuss them? Or is its function not advocacy but something else (like fundraising, planning special events, etc.)?
- ✓ If the group includes both parents and teachers, who holds the power in the group? Can parents take positions that the teachers don't agree with?
- ✓ Do you as a Latino parent feel comfortable in the group, or do you seem out of place?
- ✓ Does the group meet at a time when it's possible for you to go to meetings?

These last two questions are important: if you don't feel comfortable or if you can't attend meetings, chances are good that other Latino parents would react the same way.





### Starting your own group

Sometimes you can work with an existing group, bringing up new issues, setting up an action committee or a Latino subgroup. Sometimes, though, you may decide it's best to start your own group. Then you need to find other parents who share your concerns and start meeting with them. If you have never started a group or run a meeting before, you can do it! But you might want to ask a local community organization or some local leader for help. You can also look in the back of this book for other brochures you can order to help you organize a parent group.

## School-based teams

Lots of schools these days are trying an experiment called school-based management. This usually means that many decisions about school budgets, classes, and activities that used to be made in a central office for the whole district are now made by people in each school. Lots of times these decisions are made by a team of people at the school, including the principal, teachers, and sometimes several parents.

If your school makes decisions like this, you may want to work to have someone from your parent group be part of the decision-making team. This could be one of the goals of your group. If you do get one of your parents on this team, make sure they keep coming to the parent meetings too. Your group's representative needs to know what the concerns of the other parents are. You want this parent to represent your concerns, just like you are representing your children's concerns.

This is really the most important point of parent advocacy work. Often it is hard or frustrating, sometimes it is exciting. Always remember, though, that you are doing it for your child, so that your child and everyone's children can have the best education possible. They deserve that, and they need that to succeed in today's world. Your work will shape their futures.

For additional information about your rights as a parent, call the National Committee for Citizens in Education (NCCE) toll-free Bilingual Hotline: 1-800-NETWORK (638-9675).

## Discussion Questions and Activities

1. Activity: Use a blackboard or some large pieces of paper taped to a wall. You will want to write things down for everyone to see. Ask members of the group:

In three or four words, tell us something you are already doing to help your child do well in school.

Once you have finished this, ask the group what other things they could be doing.

Copy this information and give it to everyone in the group at the next meeting.

2. Ask everyone to give their child's school a "grade" and explain why they would give the school that grade (A,B,C,D,F).

# Sources Consulted

American Association of School Administrators. "Parents...Partners in Education." Washington, DC: AASA, 1982.

American Association of School Administrators. "Parenting Skills: Bringing Out the Best in Your Child." Washington, DC: AASA, 1989.

Bamber, Chrissie. "Currents of Change for Public Schools in the 80's and 90's," Network for Public Schools, Vol. 15, No. 4. Columbia, MD: National Committee for Citizens in Education, 1990.

Barnard, Spencer. "How to engage the parents of your students at risk." Kankakee, IL: Winnerscorp, 1989.

Carnevale, Anthony, et. al. "Workplace Basics: The Skills Employers Want." Washington, DC: American Society for Training and Labor, and U.S. Department of Labor, 1988.

Children's Defense Fund. "It's Time to Stand Up for Your Children: A Parent's Guide to Child Advocacy." Washington, DC: CDF, 1979.

Designs for Change. "Kids First Leadership Guide for School Reform." Chicago, IL: Designs for Change, 1989.

Kenig, Graciela. "Parent School Control: Barriers to Effective Participation," Latino, Vol. 3, No. 1. Chicago, IL: The Latino Institute, 1989.

National Committee for Citizens in Education. "Parents Organizing to Improve Schools." Columbia, MD: NCCE, 1985.

National Committee for Citizens in Education. "Why Have a Conference?" Columbia, MD: NCCE.

National Committee for Citizens in Education. "How Parents Can Evaluate Their Child's School." Columbia, MD: NCCE.

Olson, Lynn. "Parents as Partners: Redefining the Social Contract Between Families and Schools," Education Week, April 4, 1990.

Ribadancira, Diego. "Hispanics demand a better effort by city schools," The Boston Globe, November 21, 1988.

## PARTICIPATING ORGANIZATIONS

ASPIRA of Florida, Inc.  
2932 N.E. Second Avenue  
Miami, FL 33137  
(305) 576-1512

ASPIRA, Inc. of Illinois  
1567 N. Milwaukee Avenue  
Chicago, IL 60622  
(312) 252-0970

ASPIRA, Inc. of New Jersey  
390 Broad Street  
Newark, NJ 07104  
(201) 484-3314

ASPIRA of New York, Inc.  
332 East 149th Street  
Bronx, NY 10451  
(212) 292-2690

ASPIRA, Inc. of Pennsylvania  
526 West Girard Avenue  
Philadelphia, PA 19123  
(215) 923-2717

ASPIRA, Inc. de Puerto Rico  
Apartado 29132  
Estacion 65 de Infanteria  
Rio Piedras, PR 00929  
(809) 768-1985

Intercultural Development  
Research Association  
5835 Callaghan Road, Suite 350  
San Antonio, TX 78228  
(512) 684-8180

United Community Center  
1028 South 9th Street  
Milwaukee, WI 53204  
(414) 384-3100

Calvary Multicultural  
Learning Center  
1459 Columbia Road, NW  
Washington, DC 20010  
(202) 332-8697

# What Is ASPIRA?

The ASPIRA Association, Inc. is a national nonprofit organization which since 1961 has served and advocated on behalf of Puerto Rican and other Latino youth. With major program efforts in leadership development and education, ASPIRA also conducts research and informs policymakers on issues critical to Latinos. Its offices are located in five states, Puerto Rico, and the District of Columbia. ASPIRA is the oldest and largest Hispanic youth organization in the country. Its central mission is to advance the development of the Latino community. To fulfill that mission, it provides over 13,000 youth annually with the emotional, intellectual, and practical resources they need to remain in school and contribute to their community.

---

ASPIRA would like to thank its national corporate, foundation, and government contributors for their support of the ASPIRA Process: AT&T Foundation, Inc. • Adolph Coors Company • Aetna Foundation • Anheuser-Busch Companies • Borden Foundation, Inc. • The Bristol Myers Fund, Inc. • The Sam and Louise Campe Foundation • Carnegie Corporation of America, Inc. • COLSA, Inc. • Colt Industries, Inc. • CPC International • Educational Testing Service • Everett Public Service Internship Program • Exxon Corporation • Fiesta Travel • The Ford Foundation • The Ford Motor Company • General Motors Corporation • Hoechst Celanese Corporation • The Hongkong and Shanghai Banking Corporation • IBM Corporation • JCPenney, Inc. • Kraft General Foods • The McGraw-Hill Foundation, Inc. • Mr. Charles E. Merrill • Minolta Corporation • National Education Association • Paramount Communications Foundation • PepsiCo, Inc. • The Pew Charitable Trusts • Philip Morris Companies • Pfizer, Inc. • Primerica Foundation • Sara Lee Foundation • Sears, Roebuck & Co. • Texaco, Inc. • Toyota USA Foundation • Union Carbide Corporation • United Parcel Service • United Way of America • U.S. Department of Education • U.S. Public Health Service • Walgreen Company • The Xerox Foundation

ASPIRA Association, Inc.  
National Office  
1112 16th Street, NW, Suite 340  
Washington, DC 20036  
(202) 835-3600

Sponsored by:

U.S. Department of Education  
Anheuser-Busch Companies