The Impact of a Collaborative Family Involvement Program on Latino Families and Children's Educational Performance

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Abstract

Latino families highly value education and are committed to their children's educational success; however, Latino students often experience educational challenges. Well-designed family involvement programs can encourage Latino families, especially new immigrants or monolingual Spanish-speakers, to increase their involvement resulting in positive outcomes for children, families, and schools. This two-year study examined the impact of the YMCA Family Involvement Project on levels of family involvement and children's educational performance using a sample of 144 low-income, urban, predominantly monolingual Spanish-speaking, Latino caregivers of 208 elementary-age children. Family workshops developed based on community input focused on in-home education strategies, parenting education, family literacy, and community leadership and advocacy. Teacher training on family involvement and school socials were also provided. Significant improvements were found in frequency of family–teacher contact, family involvement at school, and quality of the family–teacher relationship after program participation. Hierarchical regression analyses found higher levels of family participation predicted significantly better student social skills and work habits grades after one year of participation when controlling for baseline scores. At the end of two years, level of participation significantly predicted student effort, social skills and work habit grades, and standardized English Language Arts test scores and was somewhat predictive of achievement grades. Implications for practice are discussed.

Key Words: collaborative family involvement program, Latino families, education, outcomes, YMCA, Spanish, parents, teachers, social skills, elementary students, achievement, community organizations, classes, workshops

Introduction

Latinos are the fastest growing ethnic group in the United States, and about 25% of all public school children are Latino (Lopez & Velasco, 2011). Unfortunately, the educational inequalities facing Latinos are quite troubling. Latinos, especially those born outside of the United States and English language learners, have more difficulty in school than their peers from entry until graduation (Chen, Kyle, & McIntyre, 2008; Fry, 2003; Fuligni & Hardway, 2004). Latino youth are at greater risk to start elementary school less prepared, to experience school failure and retention, to be suspended or expelled, and to drop out of school before graduating high school (Behnke, Gonzalez, & Cox, 2010; Fuller & Garcia Coll, 2010; Galindo & Fuller, 2010; Hemphill & Vanneman, 2011). In California, Latinos score significantly lower than Whites and Asian Americans on the Academic Performance Index, and approximately 22% of Latino students fail to graduate from high school, compared to 11% of Whites and 7% of Asian Americans (California Department of Education, 2010).

These findings are undoubtedly influenced by the fact that Latinos are overrepresented in low-income communities (Balfanz & Legters, 2006; Greene & Anyon, 2010; Stuart & Hahnel, 2011), and 35% of Latino children live below the poverty line (Lopez & Velasco, 2011). Students who live in poverty have significantly lower grades, standardized test scores, and high school completion rates than their higher income counterparts (Balfanz & Legters, 2004; Education Weekly, 2011; Guskey, 2011; Hopson & Lee, 2011; Reardon, 2011; Stuart & Hahnel, 2011). Living in low-income communities also means children are more likely to go to schools that are underfunded and underachieving (Lacour & Tissington, 2011), and out-of-school programs are often limited (Deschenes et al., 2010; Ferguson, Bovaird, & Mueller, 2007). Thus, fewer educational supports are usually available for them and their families.

Family involvement is a broad concept that encompasses many activities. Both home-based (e.g., reading, monitoring homework, discussing school, promoting higher education) and school-based (e.g., attending conferences and events, joining the PTA, volunteering) family involvement in children's education have been found to be predictive of higher academic success, social and emotional functioning, high school graduation rates, and college entry, regardless of ethnicity (El Nokali, Bachman, & Votruba-Drzal, 2010; Jeynes, 2005; LeFevre & Shaw, 2012; McWayne, Hampton, Fantuzzo, Cohen, &

Sekino, 2004; Mena, 2011; Pomerantz, Morroman, & Litwack, 2007). Family involvement may also mediate the impact of poverty on school achievement (Lee & Bowen, 2006). Latino parents may have even more influence on their children's educational decisions than parents from other ethnic groups (Behnke, Piercy, & Diversi, 2004; DeGarmo & Martinez, 2006), and immigrants often demonstrate higher educational aspirations for their children (Ramirez, 2008). Unfortunately, schools have often been less effective in engaging Latino families, especially when they do not speak the dominant language or are recent immigrants (Auerbach, 2007; DeGaetano, 2007; Gonzalez-DeHass & Willems, 2003; Jasis & Ordoñez-Jasis, 2012; Vera et al., 2012).

This home–school disconnect has led to calls for schools to develop, often in partnership with Latino families, culturally sensitive programs for building on and enhancing Latino family involvement (Behnke & Kelly, 2011; Downs et al., 2008; Gonzales-DeHass & Willems, 2003; LeFevre & Shaw, 2012; Lopez & Donovan, 2009; Osterling & Garza, 2004; Vera et al., 2012; Zarate, 2007). Due to a lack of time, resources, or skills, schools may need to work with community organizations to strengthen family involvement, create more welcoming school environments for diverse families, and improve family–school relationships (Lopez, Kreider, & Coffman, 2005; Zarate, 2007). However, it is important to evaluate programs that promote family involvement to see if they are accomplishing their goals (Weiss, Bouffard, Bridglall, & Gordon, 2009) and to gain a better understanding of whether schools can help parents develop skills to become more involved in their children's education (Jeynes, 2012). This study investigated the impact of a collaborative family involvement program on levels of family involvement and children's educational performance among low-income, urban, predominantly Spanish-speaking, Latino families.

Latinos and Family Involvement

Studies have documented that Latinos are involved in and supportive of their children's education (Auerbach, 2007; Durand, 2010; Lee & Bowen, 2006; LeFevre & Shaw, 2012; Mena, 2011). However, U.S. school staff and Latino families may have very different ideas on what constitutes family involvement, and schools often overlook the valuable contributions Latino parents make to their children's education (DeGaetano, 2007; Gonzalez-DeHass & Willems, 2003; LeFevre & Shaw, 2012; Zarate, 2007). Cultural differences may result in Latinos being involved more in the home than on school campuses, resulting in their contributions being overlooked by school staff (Auerbach, 2007; LeFevre & Shaw, 2012).

There are other barriers that may prevent Latino families from maximizing their involvement in their children's education. Some of these are logistical

such as lack of child care, transportation, or translation; inflexible work schedules; and inconvenient meeting times (Jeynes, 2005; Lopez et al., 2005). The belief that families have the skills and ability to contribute to their children's education is also an important determinant of level of involvement (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005). Unfortunately, Latino parents who are new immigrants or monolingual Spanish-speakers might not believe they have such skills or may not have a full understanding of how school systems operate or how to access services for their children (Gonzalez-DeHass & Willems, 2003; Olivos, 2004; Zarate, 2007). Latinos might also experience discrimination from school staff who may hold biased views or perceptions or who are unprepared to work with this population (Chen et al., 2008; Gonzalez-DeHass & Willems, 2003; Lee & Bowen, 2006; Olivos, 2004). Teachers must have knowledge about different cultures and communities to effectively serve diverse children and families (Gonzales-DeHass & Willems, 2003; Lopez & Donovan, 2009).

Special efforts must sometimes be made to encourage involvement among diverse populations. Methods of encouraging family involvement in school-based programs include providing child care, transportation, translation, food, flexible scheduling, and developing culturally appropriate and relevant programs. Including parents in leadership roles and creating diverse opportunities including social events for families are also beneficial. Allowing community input into program development can also be helpful in increasing family involvement (Behnke & Kelly, 2011; DeGaetano, 2007; Downs et al., 2008; LeFevre & Shaw, 2012; Lopez & Donovan, 2009; Mena, 2011).

Programs to Promote Family Involvement

Jeynes (2012) completed a meta-analysis on the effects of family involvement programs on urban students' academic achievement using a sample of 51 studies. Participation in family involvement programs was positively predictive of academic improvement for both elementary and secondary students. Shared reading programs had the biggest impact on student achievement, followed by parent–teacher collaboration and communication programs.

Efforts have been made to implement school-based programs to encourage Latino family involvement. Zarate (2007) reported that organizational initiatives to increase involvement have typically focused on training parents on how to be involved or to help with academic achievement, building leadership skills so parents can work better with schools and school staff, helping parents to become advocates for their children in the schools, and community organizing. The Latino Family and Advocacy Support Training was a six-session advocacy training program for Spanish-speaking family members designed to support families and increase their school involvement (Behnke & Kelly, 2011). After

attending, participants reported significantly more knowledge of how to re-quest parent–teacher conferences, greater comfort in who to ask for school information, better ways to address school challenges, and more knowledge of available resources (Behnke & Kelly, 2011).

St. Clair, Jackson, and Zweiback (2012) investigated the long-term effects of a 25-session family literacy training program among migrant Latino families with kindergarten students. Six years later, children in the intervention group scored significantly higher on the state reading test than those whose parents did not participate in the program. Jasis and Ordoñez-Jasis (2012) used an eth-nographic approach to explore outcomes related to Latino family involvement using participants from three parent and/or community-led initiatives. They concluded that participation in these programs led to parent empowerment, an increased sense of efficacy, and greater involvement and meaningful school engagement among immigrant Latinos.

Chrispeels, González, and Arellano (2004) evaluated the effectiveness of the Parent Institute for Quality Education among a group of predominantly La-tino families. After intervention, parents engaged in significantly more home learning activities, had higher educational aspirations for their children, and re-ported more academic knowledge than parents in the control condition. They also evidenced a greater belief in their ability to support their children's edu-cation and in their role related to education. Program participants were also significantly more involved in the school than control parents. However, there were no differences between the two groups in grades or school behavior, pos-sibly due to the short time frame of the intervention (Chrispeels et al., 2004). Another study investigated the effectiveness of Families and Schools Together (FAST), a multigroup family intervention designed to increase child well-being and family involvement, using a sample of Latino families. Two years after the program, teachers reported significantly higher social and academic skills and less aggression in students in the FAST group than those in a family education program (McDonald et al., 2006).

Some have advocated training school staff to work more effectively with diverse populations as a way to increase family involvement. It is hoped that providing staff training related to family involvement will result in less nega-tive perceptions of Latino families, a better understanding of the different types of family involvement, and increased culturally sensitive outreach by teachers (Chen et al., 2008; Gonzales-DeHass & Willems, 2003; Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005; Zarate, 2007). Teacher training and parent–teacher social activities (e.g., making lunch together) were part of one project designed to engage La-tino parents on school campuses. Teachers seemed to develop higher levels of respect for parents and were more welcoming of their involvement in the

classroom (DeGaetano, 2007). Marschall, Shah, and Donato (2012) found that preservice teacher training and in-service professional development were significantly predictive of the presence of family involvement programs in communities with larger immigrant populations. Overall, these evaluations—both quantitative and qualitative—suggest that well-designed family involvement programs may benefit Latino children, families, and schools.

YMCA Family Involvement Project

The YMCA Family Involvement Project began in 2008 with a three-month planning process; however, the organization had been working on collaborative projects related to family involvement in the Long Beach, California community for many years. The program, both planning and implementation, is funded through a grant obtained by the YMCA. Six bilingual (Spanish/English) community forums were held at five low-income (97%–100% free and reduced lunch), predominantly Latino (78%) elementary schools with 142 family members attending. Participants shared their thoughts on how to make schools a more welcoming place for families, the best ways to get families involved in their children's education, barriers to family involvement, desired family programs and supports, and the types of training that school staff needed to encourage family involvement. Eight meetings were also held with 76 principals and teachers who responded to similar questions. At each meeting, participants were also asked to rank their top five topic areas.

Several key themes regarding family involvement emerged from both groups which guided the implementation process. These were the need to: (a) increase family–school communication and positive interaction; (b) increase educational supports in the home; (c) provide both family members and teachers with training to maximize family involvement; and (d) make the school environment more welcoming and inclusive of family involvement. Stakeholders understood the need to reduce barriers to family involvement, and, similar to the literature, noted the importance of flexible scheduling, providing culturally inclusive programs in multiple languages, providing child care, and offering a broad range of activities that met the specific priorities of the community (Comer, 2005; Epstein & Salinas, 2004; Mendez, 2005).

Based on the planning process, the project employed a multipronged approach to increasing family engagement. First, it provided weekly adult and family education. Second, it provided yearly school staff training and ongoing consultation to administrators (and, when requested, to teachers) on culturally appropriate methods to involve diverse families. Finally, monthly school-site socials to improve family–school communication and relationships were also held. During this time, family members met with school staff to learn about the school, academic expectations, and upcoming events, and to share their

concerns in a supportive environment. Team-building activities were also facilitated by YMCA social workers.

Weekly family engagement workshops were held at the elementary school sites. Guided by the major themes that emerged from the planning process, a series of workshops were designed in the areas of in-home education, parent education, family literacy, and school and community leadership development. The four topics rotated throughout the school year so each series was offered at each school yearly. In-home education was an eight-week series which taught structuring the home environment, monitoring homework, talking to children about education, and providing home and community academic support activities. Parent education was an eight-week series designed to help parents to positively discipline and communicate effectively with their children. Several evidence-based parent education curriculums were used depending on the school or year. Family literacy was taught using Motheread/Fatheread (an eight-week program designed to strengthen family bonds, increase school readiness and adult reading skills, and help caregivers be reading role models for their children) and Story Exploring (a four-week intergenerational program that uses multicultural books to foster creative problem solving, increase children's love of books, and build reading skills; see http://www.motheread.org/).

Leadership and advocacy skills were taught through the Community Leadership Institute (CLI), a four-month program developed by the YMCA and community residents. Sessions included team building and collaboration, conflict resolution and communication, cultural diversity, community resources and involvement, group facilitation, public speaking, budgeting and running meetings, leadership styles, how to help your child be successful at school, and school and community codes, laws, and citizen's rights. In the last month, small groups chose, developed, and implemented school and community projects (e.g., developed a valet drop-off system for the school). Homework, such as attending a City Council meeting, visiting a school classroom, and helping at a school event were assigned weekly. Once participants graduated from the CLI, they were invited back as mentors and teachers for incoming groups.

Family recruitment was done primarily through word-of-mouth, booths set up at the front of the school to advertise the program, personal invitations by current participants, flyers, and school invitations. Food, child care, translation, and social activities were incorporated into every program activity. Parents assisted with recruitment and as mentors in many of the classes. Ongoing input was collected so that curriculum could be revised each year to be relevant and responsive to the community. Although the program was open to all families at the schools and in the community and all workshops were offered by bilingual social workers in English and Spanish, this study examined the impact of the program solely on Latino children and families.

Teacher trainings were also offered at each school yearly that focused primarily on current research on the benefits and types of family involvement as well as strategies on how to get families more involved and to make the school environment more welcoming. The YMCA social workers also shared information on the program, encouraged school staff to invite parents to participate, and advised on ways to improve communication with parents. Efforts were also made to include cultural content in the training.

Methods

Data Collection

Participants entered the program throughout the year, and participation in the study was voluntary. On the first day of attendance at any Family Involvement Project (FIP) class, or as soon as possible thereafter, participants were asked to complete a registration form, sign a research consent form, and take a preassessment survey on family involvement in their children's education. FIP staff distributed the surveys in both English and Spanish and provided one-to-one assistance for those with low literacy levels. At the end of each series (usually between 8 and 10 weeks), all class members were asked to complete the survey a second time. Those who attended more than one series (e.g., both in-home education and family literacy) may have completed the survey multiple times; however, the last survey completed was used here. FIP staff provided the researchers with registrations, returned consent forms, surveys, and program attendance data. If the participant had not completed a second survey at the end of the school year, researchers mailed a survey with a prepaid return envelope to them.

Report cards and district identification numbers were collected at the school sites for students whose parents had signed consents. Baseline grades were taken from the first grading period of the year in which the caregiver first attended FIP classes and from the last grading period of each year caregivers were involved in the program. Standardized test scores were collected directly from the school district's Office of Research and Evaluation. The research was approved by both the district and university Institutional Review Boards.

Sample

During the first two years of the program, 733 adults attended at least one FIP class or social, however, only 244 (33%) completed registration forms and consented to participate in the research. Of these 244 adults, 144 (59%) were Latino and had children at one of the FIP school sites with useable school data. Table 1 displays the demographics of the caregivers (N = 144). The sample

Table 1. Caregiver Demographics (*N* = 144)

	%	*n*
Gender		
Female	98%	141
Male	2%	3
Ethnicity		
Latino	100%	144
Language Spoken at Home		
Spanish	93%	134
English	7%	10
Relationship to Child(ren)		
Mother	97%	140
Father	2%	3
Grandmother	1%	1

Table 2. Child Demographics (*N* = 208)

	%	*n*
Gender		
Male	53%	110
Female	47%	98
Ethnicity		
Latino	100%	208
Grade		
Kindergarten	17%	35
1st Grade	16%	33
2nd Grade	20%	41
3rd Grade	23%	49
4th Grade	14%	30
5th Grade	10%	20
Language Fluency		
English Language Learner	76%	158
English Fluent	24%	50

was primarily composed of mothers (97%) and monolingual Spanish-speakers (93%). These 144 families had 208 elementary-age children enrolled in the FIP schools. As shown in Table 2, just over half (53%) of the children were male, and the majority (76%) were English language learners. At the time their caregivers joined the program, students were enrolled in kindergarten through 5th grade, with the highest proportion in 3rd grade (23%).

Measures

Family involvement was measured, with permission, using the Parent–Teacher Involvement Questionnaire (Conduct Problems Prevention Research Group, 1991), a standardized measure that assesses family and school involvement. The instrument has been shown to have strong reliability and validity with diverse populations (Kohl, Lengua, & McMahon, 2000; Wilson & Hughes, 2006; Wong & Hughes, 2006). The family–teacher contact scale consisted of the mean of four items measuring the frequency of contact between the parents and their child's teacher. Response categories ranged from "Never" to "More than once per week." Questions included, "In the past year, you have called your child's teacher," and "In the past year, your child's teacher has written you." The scale reliabilities were .77 and .83.

The family involvement at home scale consisted of the mean of four items measuring how often caregivers participated in educational activities with their child at home or in the community. Responses ranged from "Not at all" to "A great deal." Questions included, "You help your child at home with subjects that he/she is having difficulty with," and "You make sure that your child gets his/her homework done." The scale reliabilities were .64 and .68. The family involvement at school scale consisted of the mean of five items measuring how often parents participated in educational activities at the school. Response categories ranged from "Never" to "More than once per week," or from "Not at all" to "A great deal." Questions included, "In the past year you have stopped by to talk to your child's teacher," and "You volunteer at your child's school." The scale reliabilities were .62 and .77.

The family–teacher relationship scale consisted of the mean of seven items. Responses ranged from "Not at all" to "A great deal." Questions included, "You feel comfortable talking with your child's teacher about your child," and "You think your child's teacher is interested in getting to know you." The reliabilities for this scale were .87 to .92. The family endorsement of the school scale consisted of the mean of five items measuring how strongly the caregiver approved of the school. Response categories ranged from "Strongly disagree" to "Strongly agree." Questions included, "I think my child's school is doing a good job of preparing children for their future," and "My child's school does

a good job of informing me about meetings and events." The scale reliabilities were .82 and .91.

Educational Performance Measures

Report card data was used to create four educational performance scales measuring achievement (α = .84 and .87), effort (α = .89 and .91), social skills (α = .93 and .94), and work habits (α = .90 and .92). The achievement and effort scales consisted of the mean of seven items; achievement or effort in reading, writing, language conventions, listening and speaking, math, history/social science, and science. The social skills scale consisted of six items which included self-control, following rules, getting along with others, respecting authority, accepting responsibility for own behavior, and respecting the property of others. The work behaviors scale consisted of five items: making effective use of time, listening and following directions, completing class work, completing and returning homework, and working independently. Higher scores indicated better grades. Individual items measured standardized English Language Arts and Math content test scores. Standardized testing began at the end of second grade so not all children had this data. Grades and test scores were collected for the 2008–09 and 2009–10 school years.

Analyses

Descriptive statistics were used to describe FIP participation. Paired t-tests were used to compare family involvement among adult caregivers before and after participating in FIP. Hierarchical linear regression was used to examine the impact of FIP participation on children's educational performance. Given that a randomized experimental design would be extremely difficult to employ with a voluntary school-based family involvement program, a hierarchical regression analysis was used since it has been found to be useful in measuring the effect of program attendance (Riggs, 2006).

Results

During the first year a family participated in FIP classes (2008–09 or 2009–2010), FIP attendance ranged from one class (12%) to 55 classes (1%), with an average of 15 classes per adult. Over the two-year period, FIP attendance ranged from 1 class (4%) to 112 classes (1%), with an average of 24 classes per adult. Half of the group attended 14 or more classes a year or 22 or more classes over a two-year period. Most (82%) attended classes or events in both years.

Self-Reported Changes in Levels of Family Involvement

As shown in Table 3, caregivers reported significantly more family–teacher contact, $t(94) = 2.15$, $p < .05$; family involvement at the school site, $t(95) = 3.51$, $p < .05$; and better family–teacher relationships, $t(98) = 2.60$, $p < .05$, after participating in the program. However, they also reported a small but significant decline in endorsement of the school, $t(98) = 2.04$, $p < .05$.

Table 3. Caregiver Report of Changes in Family Involvement

	Before FIP Classes			After FIP Classes		
	Mean	SD	n	Mean	SD	Diff
Family–Teacher Contact	1.84	.92	95	2.07	.88	.23**
Family Involvement at School	2.44	.84	96	2.72	.77	.27**
Family Involvement at Home	3.42	.81	99	3.52	.67	.10
Family–Teacher Relationship	3.96	.75	99	4.14	.68	.17**
Family Endorsement of School	4.59	.41	99	4.49	.48	-.10**

*$p < .10$, **$p < .05$

Relationships Among Family Involvement Program Participation and Children's Educational Performance

Hierarchical linear regression analyses, controlling for beginning grades and test scores, were then run to determine whether FIP participation was related to better educational performance at the end of one year and two years of program involvement. Beginning performance levels in each area were entered into the first model, and total FIP attendance during year one was entered into the second model. As shown in Table 4, at the end of the first year, beginning grades and test scores were significantly predictive of each of the educational outcomes measured. The addition of one year of FIP attendance significantly improved the ability of the model to predict social skills grades, $\Delta R^2 = .012$, $F(2, 195) = 139.12$, $p < .05$, and work habits grades, $\Delta R^2 = .021$, $F(2, 195) = 150.83$, $p < .05$. Higher levels of FIP involvement significantly and positively predicted better social skills and work habits grades.

Table 4. Hierarchical Regression of Predictors of Children's Performance After One Year of FIP Participation

	n	R^2	R^2 change	β unstd.	t-value	β std.
Achievement						
Model 1	196	.635**				
Beginning Achievement				.785	18.380**	.795
Model 2	195	.635	.000			
Beginning Achievement				.785	18.017**	.795
Total FI Attendance First Year				.001	.264	.012
Effort						
Model 1	192	.402**				
Beginning Effort				.631	11.313**	.634
Model 2	191	.403	.000			
Beginning Effort				.634	11.236**	.637
Total FI Attendance First Year				-.001	-.340	-.019
Social Skills						
Model 1	198	.576**				
Beginning Social Skills				.770	16.302**	.759
Model 2	197	.588	.012**			
Beginning Social Skills				.749	15.787**	.738
Total FI Attendance First Year				.006	2.426**	.113
Work Habits						
Model 1	198	.587**				
Beginning Work Habits				.752	16.678**	.766
Model 2	197	.607	.021**			
Beginning Work Habits				.727	16.238**	.740
Total FI Attendance First Year				.006	3.211**	.146
English Language Arts Content Standard †						
Model 1	89	.180**				
Beginning ELA Score				.515	4.376**	.425
Model 2	88	.193	.013			
Beginning ELA Score				.517	4.404**	.427
Total FI Attendance First Year				.511	1.171	.113

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Table 4 cont'd

Math Content Standard †						
Model 1	94	.418**				
Beginning Math Score				.670	8.131**	.647
Model 2	93	.421	.003			
Beginning Math Score				.668	8.094**	.646
Total FI Attendance First Year				.347	.72	.057

*$p < .10$, **$p < .05$
†Grades 3–5 only

As shown in Table 5, when entered in Model 1, beginning performance levels were significantly predictive of all of the educational outcomes except effort grades two years later. The addition of two years of FIP attendance significantly improved the ability of the model to predict effort grades, $\Delta R^2 = .125$, $F (2, 95) = 7.90$, p < .05, social skills grades, $\Delta R^2 = .110$, $F (2, 93) = 13.87$, $p < .05$, work habits grades, $\Delta R^2 = .122$, $F (2, 93) = 13.11$, $p < .05$, and English Language Arts standardized test scores, $\Delta R^2 = .125$, $F (2, 44) = 9.07$, $p < .05$, and was somewhat predictive of achievement grades, $\Delta R^2 = .021$, $F (2, 97) = 28.81$, $p < .10$. Higher levels of FIP involvement predicted better educational performance in each of these areas.

Table 5. Hierarchical Regression of Predictors of Children's Performance After Two Years of FI Program Attendance

	n	*R²*	*ΔR²*	β unstd.	*t-value*	β std.
Achievement						
Model 1	100	.351**				
Beginning Achievement				.648	7.287**	.593
Model 2	99	.373	.021*			
Beginning Achievement				.605	6.658**	.554
Total FI Attendance Two Years				.004	1.813*	.151
Effort						
Model 1	98	.018				
Beginning Effort				.155	1.329	.134
Model 2	97	.143	.125**			
Beginning Effort				.140	1.277	.121

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Table 5 cont'd

Total FI Attendance Two Years				.010	3.715**	.353
Social Skills						
Model 1	96	.120*				
Beginning Social Skills				.438	3.579*	.346
Model 2	95	.230	.110**			
Beginning Social Skills				.391	3.380*	.309
Total FI Attendance Two Years				.012	3.641**	.333
Work Habits						
Model 1	96	.098**				
Beginning Work Habits				.373	3.198**	.313
Model 2	95	.220	.122**			
Beginning Work Habits				.325	2.964**	.273
Total FI Attendance Two Years				.014	3.810**	.351
English Language Arts Content Standard †						
Model 1	47	.167**				
Beginning ELA Score				.469	3.003**	.409
Model 2	46	.292	.125**			
Beginning ELA Score				.440	3.010**	.383
Total FI Attendance Two Years				.738	2.787**	.354
Math Content Standard †						
Model 1	51	.481**				
Beginning Math Score				.688	6.733**	.693
Model 2	50	.486	.005			
Beginning Math Score				.703	6.707**	.708
Total FI Attendance Two Years				-.196	-.711	-.075

*$p < .10$, **$p < .05$
†Grades 3–5 only

Discussion

This study investigated the impact of the YMCA Family Involvement Project—a collaborative school-based family involvement program designed based on community input—on Latino families and children's educational performance. Caregivers self-reported significant improvements in frequency of family–teacher contact and quality of family–teacher relationships. These findings are somewhat encouraging since better family–teacher relationships have been linked to higher student reading engagement and achievement in early elementary school (Hughes & Kwok, 2007), and prior research has indicated Latinos may be less culturally inclined to contact teachers, given the high regard they may have for school staff or the perception that education is the business of schools (Mapp, 2003; Ramirez, 2003). Although, as found in other studies (Auerbach, 2007; LeFevre & Shaw, 2012), these Latino families engaged in substantially more in-home (rather than school-based) involvement activities both before and after participation, they did evidence a significant increase in their school-based involvement. It is possible that, as these caregivers learned more about how the educational system worked, they became more confident in their skills to help their children (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005). Also, by coming to classes or socials, they may have become more comfortable interacting with teachers and school administrators, thus increasing their involvement on the school campus. It is also possible that, as a result of the school staff training, the school became a more welcoming place for Latino families. While most of the measures of family involvement increased after participation, levels of family endorsement significantly declined. Increased time and exposure at the school may have led these caregivers to think more critically about current school programs and practices.

One component of the FIP was the Community Leadership Institute (CLI) which was created to help caregivers develop and practice their leadership skills to become more involved in their schools and communities. Arias and Morillo-Campbell (2008) suggested that parental advocacy and empowerment programs, a nontraditional approach to family involvement, may be particularly useful in communities with high numbers of English language learners. Other studies have demonstrated that family involvement programs designed to enhance leadership skills, particularly those that actively engaged and built on the strengths in the Latino community, have helped family members to take on more active leadership roles in their schools and communities (Bolivar & Chrispeels, 2011; De Gaetano, 2007; Lopez & Kreider, 2003).

Family involvement has been linked to both better children's social skills and work habits (El Nokali et al., 2010; McDonald et al., 2006; Patall, Cooper,

& Robinson, 2008). Here, more frequent participation in FIP was significantly and positively predictive of social skills and work habits at the end of one year of caregiver involvement. It is possible that social skills and work habits may be more influenced by family involvement than academic measures, at least in the short term. It might also be reasonable to suggest that better work habits and social skills may allow more time for learning within the school classroom, which, in the long run, may contribute to better academic success (Arnold, Kupersmidt, Voegler-Lee, & Marshall, 2012; Konold, Jamison, Stanton-Chapman, & Rimm-Kaufman, 2010).

At the end of two years, FIP participation was positively and significantly predictive of effort, social skills and work habit grades, as well as standardized English Language Arts test scores, and somewhat predictive of achievement grades. Family involvement has been found to be related to increased student effort (Gonzalez-DeHass & Willems, 2003) and, in this study, FIP involvement was predictive of children's effort even though their beginning effort grades lost the ability to predict after they had completed two more years of school. The ability of FIP participation to predict higher standardized test scores is noteworthy given that, while many types of family involvement programs have resulted in better children's academic performance, it is rarer that such program participation has been linked to standardized test scores (Fan & Chen, 2001; Jeynes, 2012). On average, children's ELA test scores moved from "basic" to "proficient" during the two years caregivers participated in the program. This finding is particularly important since Latino students, particularly those who are English language learners, typically score significantly lower than other students on these tests (California Department of Education, 2010). Overall, the findings here suggest that the FIP helped these Latino caregivers to become more involved in their children's education, particularly in relation to the school site and school staff, and improved children's educational performance in multiple ways. This suggests that collaborative family involvement programs have the ability to positively impact Latino children and families, thereby helping schools to better reach their educational goals.

Implications for Practice

Latino families can play an important role in their children's social and educational development and contribute to the mission of schools to effectively educate all children. In order to maximize this resource, schools should develop culturally appropriate programs, on their own or in partnership with community-based organizations, to engage this population. However, these programs need to be developed strategically since increasing low-income, culturally diverse families' involvement requires creative strategies that take into

account culture, gender, language and reading ability, and economic status (Arias & Morrillo-Campbell, 2008; Caspe, Lopez, & Wolos, 2006). First, as has been suggested elsewhere (Bryan & Henry, 2012; Jasis & Ordoñez-Jasis, 2012; LeFevre & Shaw, 2012), it is crucial to obtain Latino families' input into program development and implementation to attract families to the program. Holding community forums to gather input from caregivers provides evidence from the very beginning that the school and/or community agency value the strengths and knowledge of the Latino community, an important aspect of successful involvement programs (De Gaetano, 2007; Durand, 2010; Larrotta & Yamamura, 2011; Lopez & Donovan, 2009). Input should also ensure that the program is seen as relevant to Latino families which should make engagement easier. It may also prove beneficial to hold forums with school staff, as was done with this project, both as a mechanism for educating about family involvement and for increasing staff commitment for such programs.

Second, higher levels of FIP involvement predicted numerous educational performance outcomes over a two-year time period. This may suggest that family involvement programs targeting Latino families should be ongoing and multifaceted rather than merely a once yearly, short-term effort. This might be particularly true given that many types of family involvement programs have been shown to be helpful for the Latino community and to contribute to academic achievement and positive family growth (Jeynes, 2012; Zarate, 2007). While family workshop topics were identified by the community itself, many of the components had been shown to be beneficial for this population including family literacy, in-home education promotion, leadership development, and caregiver education (Berzin, 2010; De Gaetano, 2007; Jeynes, 2012; Larrotta & Yamamura, 2011; Patall et al., 2008; St. Clair et al., 2012). Providing diverse classes and events may lead to more broad involvement and, hopefully, once families attend one type of program offering, they may be more inclined to attend others. Having a comprehensive program providing many different educational involvement opportunities for Latino families may increase the likelihood of a program both increasing family involvement and children's academic performance (Zarate, 2007). In addition, to recruit and retain participants, it is necessary to do personal outreach, provide child care and/or family classes, translation, food, a welcoming atmosphere, and opportunities to build social relationships among participants (Behnke & Kelly, 2011; Larrotta & Yamamura, 2011; Lopez & Donovan, 2009). Creating ways for participants to be meaningfully involved and gathering ongoing input, as was done here, may also help schools to involve more Latino families (Downs et al., 2008).

Third, given the literature on institutional barriers related to Latino family involvement, it is unlikely that family involvement programs can focus solely

on educating families on how to be involved. In order to really encourage their involvement, teacher and school staff training is needed, and mechanisms such as social events may help school staff and families to develop more positive relationships (De Gaetano, 2007; Gonzalez-DeHass & Willems, 2003; Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005; Lee & Bowen, 2006; LeFevre & Shaw, 2012). These efforts should make the schools a more welcoming place for caregivers to practice the new skills they are learning in their classes. It should also help school staff to engage in more culturally appropriate outreach to families. Given that combining these interventions may be time consuming and take skills that are not available in the school itself, it may prove beneficial to partner with community organizations to implement comprehensive family involvement programs (Jasis & Ordoñez-Jasis, 2012; St. Clair et al., 2012). Similar to previous research suggesting comprehensive family engagement programs are more likely to be successful (Redding, Langdon, Meyer, & Sheley, 2004), total FIP participation was predictive of many positive educational performance changes; however, sole participation in each of the different class options was not predictive. Future research efforts might attempt to explore whether one type of training (family literacy, leadership development) contributes more to educational outcomes.

Although the findings here indicate that the FIP was effective, there are some limitations to the study. The lack of a comparison group makes it impossible to conclude that FIP participation solely was responsible for the changes in family involvement, although it may be somewhat unlikely that these changes would occur without some type of intervention. While the regression analyses did control for baseline functioning, there may have been other factors that should have been controlled for as well. Future research efforts in this area should attempt to include a control or comparison group. In addition, there was no mechanism to measure changes in teacher or school staff that resulted from the training or levels of their involvement with family members. This is an important area in need of further study.

Overall, the results of this study provide evidence of the ability of comprehensive family involvement programs to positively impact both Latino family involvement and children's school performance. However, it appears the best programs should be ongoing, culturally relevant, responsive to the community, and target both families and school staff. It may also be useful for schools and community agencies to work collaboratively to develop and implement these programs given the fiscal and staff constraints often faced by schools. These partnerships are particularly warranted given the many positive outcomes found here.

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