Latino Parental Involvement Programs

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Abstract

The purpose of this work is to create awareness for the importance of parental participation with the objective of promoting involvement in the Latino community. In writing this paper, I was driven by my own experiences and my lack of knowledge about how the educational system works in the United States. I found it more difficult than I anticipated to be able to understand the differences between the systems of education in the United States and my home country, Spain; I found myself lost in the system. In this paper, I focus on creating awareness for both parents and the school community to better understand the factors that influence perceptions of parental involvement. Teachers need to understand that parents do care about their children even if they aren't involved in school the way teachers expect them to be; some parents might have different beliefs based on their knowledge, experiences and cultures. I believe that providing Latino parents with information about programs and parental involvement helps them understand how the educational system works in the U.S. and may increase parental involvement, which can improve the academic performance of their children.

Keywords: Parental Involvement, school programs, teacher and parent education, cultural awareness
Lessons from My Life

I was born and raised in Spain, where I was a successful student and college graduate. When I began studying in a graduate program at Boise State University, I assumed the education system was similar to Spain. However, I was surprised to learn that the structure of education was very different. I felt frustrated and helpless by the lack of assistance with transitioning to U.S. education. I wasn’t able to participate in activities and programs because as I found out, the University assumed I knew how higher education worked in the United States. It wasn’t until I talked to my peers that I realized I was blind to the differences between education in Spain and the U.S. At times, I felt uncomfortable asking for help. I was in graduate school and I thought people would think I was ignorant for asking about the things I didn’t understand that were obvious to people familiar with higher education. Other times, when I asked questions, I felt I wasn't treated fairly or with respect. It seemed people were judging me based on my lack of knowledge of the system. Having these experiences with the education system can cause anxiety and distress.

Unfortunately, by talking to others who were not raised in the United States, such as students from other countries, parents that I met while living in Boise, and by reading books about Latinos and the system of education in the U.S., I realized that many Latino parents are faced with the same feelings when it comes to navigating the U.S education system.

Introduction
“At the end of the day, the most overwhelming key to a child’s success is the positive involvement of parents.” - Jane D. Hull

In this paper, I will explore the different programs and opportunities available to Latino parents in several Idaho schools, with the objective of promoting parental involvement. Parental involvement in schools is crucial for the strong academic performance and social development of students. As quoted in Reaching All Families (1996), studies show that activities initiated by the school to improve the home educational environment can have a strong influence on school performance, especially in schools serving low-income and minority families (Graue, Weinstein & Walberg, 1983; Henderson & Berla, 1994; Leler, 1983; Moles, 1993). Because of the different backgrounds represented in schools, there are common misunderstandings of the purpose of parental involvement and why it is important.

I had the opportunity to volunteer for one of the programs offered by the West Ada School District in Meridian, Idaho. The program, Juntos Podemos, also allowed me to speak with numerous teachers who work in the schools where a large number of students from the Latino community attend. Many of the comments found in this paper are based on my own experiences and struggles as a Spanish speaker living in the United States, the difficulties with understanding the American education system, and my friendship with many Latinos residing in Boise, Idaho, who also find the education system different from where they come from and which causes insecurities and fear. In his paper The parent-teacher-student triad in Mexico, Welling (2001) writes about this same problem Latino parents face when dealing with the educational system in the U.S. Welling refers to Mexican parents’ experiences, quoting Chispeels (n.d), noting:

According to J. H. Chispeels, parent-teacher-student relations in Mexico differ from that of the US. This can cause adjustment issues for families immigrating out of Mexico to the United States. For example, Chispeels found that the difference in the expectations placed
on parent caused them to feel confused, intimidated and unsure about the precise steps they should take to participate in their child's education (p.1).

Citing Delgado- Gaitan & Trueba (1991), Welling also notes, "Some studies reported that such misunderstandings have led teachers to perceive Mexican parents as indifferent about their children's education." I believe the concerns of Latino parents need to be addressed by schools and the U.S. educational system needs to be aware of the variety of cultures represented in school. The cultural needs of Latino students are different from the needs of Anglo students, therefore teachers and society needs to be aware of these cultural differences to better understand the relationships Latino parents have with schools.

**Background**

The goal of the Latino parental involvement programs I researched is to increase the participation of parents in their children's schools. Due to social and cultural differences, sometimes parents struggle to understand these differences; because of their background, they might feel like the involvement they would have with the school and their children would be limited. This programs, like Juntos Podemos, can help them develop a better understanding of the American schooling system, the community, parents' rights, and also the different ways they can participate and be involved in both school and at home. But as Ofelia B. Miramontes explains, "Unfortunately, the system is set up to blame students and families for their lack of participation and/or poor schooling achievements." (1997, p.25).

Many parents also struggle with their competency in English, so these programs can also help them reach a level of language proficiency, which may assist them in becoming more confident in many aspects, in addition to just being more comfortable speaking. In doing so, parents will find it easier to offer their kids the required help when doing homework and they will also
demonstrate to their children the value of education and the importance of the sacrifice and dedication required in their studies. The National Center for Children in Poverty’s (NCCP) (2010) article about English language proficiency, family economic security, and child development suggests that English language proficiency has a great impact on children’s wellbeing in the United States.

Skinner, Wight, Aratani, Cooper & Thampi (2010) state English-language proficiency is important for family economic security and child’s well-being because if the child’s parents are proficient in English, they are more likely to experience increased workforce participation, significantly higher earnings, and economic mobility (p.6). This therefore contributes to the amount of family resources available to their children. (Skinner, Wight, Aratani, Cooper & Thampi, 2010). Programs that promote parent involvement as well as English language proficiency benefit the entire family. Educating parents about these benefits may motivate them to access the English language programs and promote parent involvement.

It is important that schools and teachers know what parental involvement means and what they are expecting from the parents. It is also important that schools and teachers approach the parents to help them understand they appreciate how important and necessary their involvement is in their children’s education. For example, helping them with homework, reading times, and other activities that can make their children realize the importance of school. As Valdés (1996) mentions, “The general held view, as the publication What Works (US Department of education, 1987) made evident, is that schools depend directly on parents for assistance in educating children, and that without parental help the schools cannot carry out their work as effectively” (p.31). Parents need to understand the importance of their roles as they share the responsibilities of educating their child with the child’s teacher. Knowing that a connection between home and school
may help a student develop a positive attitude towards school and positively impact the student’s behavior and achievements. McCaleb (1997) notes, “The term parental involvement as generally used in American education encompasses a wide variety of approaches or activities though which parents can contribute to the school and their own child’s academic progress” (p.3).

According to Baltimore in an article published by the National Education Association’s (NEA) Higher Education Journal (n.d), Latino parents come from a culture where parental involvement is different from what schools in the United States expect:

- Hispanics -on average- differ from non-Hispanic whites in family income, place of birth, language proficiency, family support, availability of role models, and orientation toward the dominant culture. Individual and institutional racism and stereotyping also affect opportunity for Hispanic students (p.68)

In the United States, it is normal for the parents to volunteer for field trips and classroom activities. In many Latino countries, parents only go to the school for the parent teacher conferences, so when they come to the United States that is the only model of parental involvement they have been exposed to. In 2007, Zarate said, “When asked to define parental involvement in education, Latino parents mentioned participation in their children’s lives more frequently than academic involvement” (p.8). In her paper, “Understanding Latino Parental Involvement in Education,” Zarate (2007) discusses parents’ perceptions of what constitutes the parental involvement in education. Zarate states, "When asked to define parental involvement, Latino parents mentioned life participation more frequently than academic involvement" (p. 8). She further states:

“Latino parents equate involvement in their child’s education with involvement in their lives: participation in their children’s lives ensures that their formal schooling is complemented with educación [education] taught in the home. Parents believed that monitoring
their children’s lives and providing moral guidance resulted in good classroom behavior, which in turn allowed for greater academic learning opportunities.” (p. 9)

These concepts are deeply rooted in Latino culture and traditional schools in the U.S need to be aware of those differences. It is important that parents learn about school activities where they can participate from the time their kids join the school; from making decisions in the Parent Teacher Organizations (PTOs) and Parental Advisory Committees (PACs), to volunteering for school activities, like field trips, or going to the school and helping the teachers in their day-to-day activities.

When schools neglect to discuss with parents the benefits of the parental involvement and the programs available to parents that promote participation, parents may feel unprepared, overwhelmed and withdraw from participation. Their response may be perceived by the school as negative and they may misunderstand the intentions of Latino parents. As Finders and Lewis (1994) explained in their article, Why Some Parents Don’t Come to School, the school experiences among parents have to be taken into account, since that might influence the kind of relationship they choose have with the school. Finders and Lewis interviewed one of the parents who wasn’t involved in his child’s school. He stated, “They expect me to go to school so they can tell me my kid is stupid or crazy. They’ve been telling me that for three years, so why should I go and hear it again? They don’t do anything. They just tell me my kid is bad. See, I’ve been there. I know. And it scares me. They called me a boy in trouble but I was a troubled boy. Nobody helped me because they liked it when I didn’t show up. If I was gone for the semester, fine with them. I dropped out nine times. They wanted me gone.” (1994, May). That is why there needs to be a positive relationship with the families and communication which provides teachers with information about a student’s background, so teachers can better understand the different chal-
challenges in each student’s life. As quoted in Reaching All Families: Creating Family-Friendly Schools (1996), "Many parents prepare their children well for school on their own and contact the schools as needed. Working with such parents requires little effort. But there are many others who want to help their children learn more, yet do not come to school. This fact should not be taken as evidence that they do not care about their children's education (Chavkin & Williams, 1989; Epstein, 1983; Moles, 1993)." (p.9). It is possible that parents don't show interest about many of the things included in the programs for very personal reasons, but teachers have to approach parents to make sure they know about programs being offered at the school. Ada and Zubizarreta (2001) note:

“Unfortunately, the typical educator rarely understands high expectations parents have for their children. In fact, we often half encountered well-meaning teachers who whole the assumption that Latino parents do not place a high value on their children's education. These teachers believe that if parents had high hopes for their children, they would express them in a manner similar to European American parents. This translates into actively requesting information, participating in the PTA, and making overt references to their plans for their children's academic futures. Many Latino parents, however, have not had the opportunity for much schooling and see themselves as having a limited contribution on their children's education. Many of them believe that their role used to lay the foundation at home and trust that the school will take care of the rest” (Delgado-Gaitán, 1994; Valdés, 1996).

When coming from a completely different culture, compared to the dominant U.S. culture, there are so many things that parents don’t know, while other parents have had negative experiences in the U.S. and abroad that may contribute to tensions which might interfere with the
development of positive home-school relations (M.Finders and C.Lewis, 1994). Even though it seems they don't care, they actually lack the knowledge on how the education system works, which causes them to encounter barriers when they are learning the rules of participation. Karen Salinas, communications director for the Center on School, Family, and Community Partnerships at Johns Hopkins University, quoted in The Center for Comprehensive School Reform and Improvement (2015) states, "A lot of it is perception. Teachers perceive that families don't want to be involved when, in fact, families don't know how to be involved." It is important for parents to understand they can be a valuable resource for teachers and schools. Latino parents need to be aware of the importance of knowing how the school works, their ability to talk to the teachers any time they need to share their concerns, and the importance of sharing their funds of knowledge. Additionally, teachers need to inform parents they have a voice, and the importance of expressing their concerns about their children, the classroom, the school, and social life. As Henderson et. al (1986) state, "Families and school need to interlock in a cooperative way that encourages the child's learning and maturing as a social being" (p.17).

Finders & Lewis (1994) wrote about the explanation a mother gave regarding her culturally-based believes for not attending to her 12-year-old daughter's school functions:

"It’s her education, not mine. I’ve had to teach her to take care of herself. I work nights, so she’s had to get up and get herself ready for school. I’m not going to be there all the time. She’s gotta do it. She's a tough cookie…. She's almost an adult, and I get the impression that they want me to walk her through her work. And it’s not that I don’t care either. I really do. I think it's important, but I don't think it's my place" (p.50-54).

For this mother, her daughter’s independence is essential for her success. However, many times, schools and teachers believe what they do is the correct thing to do without stopping to think
what is the real reason behind each student and parents’ beliefs when it comes to their involvement in their children’s schools. I remember how my own parents completely relied in the teachers and felt teachers knew better about how to do deal with school related things. So even though they went to the meetings, they didn't have much to say and would just sit to listen. M. Finders and C. Lewis say, whether is for social, cultural, linguistic or economic reasons, all parents’ voices are rarely heard at schools and schools fail to hear their concerns (1994, May). There why the importance of the work schools and teacher have to do to be able to understand each of the students they deal with at their schools. Each student is different and there are different reasons why parents might not be getting involved. It is essential to get to all and each parent and make sure they get to an understanding of which is the approach and help they need.
Method

This paper is an analysis of the literature on parent and family involvement, which is based on my own knowledge and experiences on this subject, as an international student in the United States. To help guide the topics covered in this paper, I attended several meetings about parental involvement and have talked to Latino parents, as well as interviewed teachers in the Treasure Valley to help me better understand both perspectives on parental involvement. As an international student, certified teacher and graduate student, I’ve become interested in the differences in education in Spanish-speaking countries and how Latinos are perceived compared to Anglos as they try to understand their new system of education. Textbooks, articles, and speeches provided during the course of my graduate program encouraged me to research parent involvement on my own and collect information for this paper.

Review of the Literature

Based on my own negative experiences and noticing similar issues in the Latino community regarding their involvement in their children’s schools, I researched parent involvement in schools to explore options and steps Latino families can take to improve their experiences in the U.S. I interviewed eight elementary teachers from the Ada and West Ada County where Latinos are 9% of the student population (West Ada School District, n.d.), to start conducting my research. I thought this would improve my understanding of the current parent involvement programs available to Latino families. I visited two schools as well as interviewed six teachers by phone. These interviews helped me gather the information I needed to reach some conclusions about problems and solutions in Latino parental involvement.
After speaking with dual language teachers from several schools in Boise who teach at the elementary level in an area with a large Latino population, I realized that there is a wide variety of programs available attempting to increase parental involvement in schools. However, few of them include familiarizing Latino parents with the American schooling system and the dominant culture.

When the teachers were questioned about their parental involvement goals, many of them mentioned the increasing parent-teacher conferences, open houses, or back-to-school nights, participation with parents signing homework completion forms, and volunteering at field trips. There are many other ways for parents to get involved that were not mentioned in the conversations with elementary school teachers. However, offering English language classes, hosting international festivals, etc. would help Latino families feel welcome participating in schools.

Many Latino parents struggle with being involved in many different areas of their children’s education. Many of them may have a limited understanding of what schools expect of them. For Latinos whose first language is Spanish, English can be a barrier when helping their children with homework or communicating with the school. Zarate (2007) found that, “For many parents, language was an insurmountable barrier to participation in their children’s academic tasks, especially as their children progressed through school and the material became increasingly difficult” (p.9). Many feel ashamed about their poor knowledge of the school systems in the United States, as well as their own abilities to help their child academically, which may make them withdraw from participation with school in their new countries. Zarate also notes, “When they give us a project, I sometimes feel that they’re trying to find out what kind of parents we are. Some of the projects are so advanced . . . [The homework] is not for the education of the child, it is to test the parents” (p.9).
Sometimes, their legal and financial situations also play a role in their willingness or ability to be involved at school. Zarate (2007) found, “In order to visit with teachers or attend school events during school hours, wages had to be forgone by at least one parent and, in most cases, the parents felt their employment would be at risk if they frequently submitted time-off requests” (p.10). Ghezzi (2014) wrote about the three tips Reed Elementary (a dual language school) in Kuna, Idaho has for Multicultural Outreach. These suggestions help involve parents with their children's school by educating school staff about the perceptions Latino families have about parent involvement. Ghezzi’s first tip encourages teachers to educate themselves about different cultures. He states, “Learn how education works in your families’ native countries. In many cultures, parents are expected to stay out of school business. Parents may think it is disrespectful to bring up an issue in the school that could be improved upon.” Her next suggestion asks school staff to consider the unique challenges of Latino parents. She urges school staff, “Talk to parents about specific barriers they face in being involved at school. …Some parents take a bus or walk to school to pick up their kids and do not have a way to return in the evening for a PTO meeting”. Thirdly, Ghezzi cautions teachers and PTO members, stating, "Don’t push too hard. Parent group leaders are known for enthusiasm, but too much effervescence may confuse or scare off a potential volunteer who doesn’t speak English fluently. Start small, with a personal invitation to a family movie night or a fun, straightforward volunteer assignment, such as preparing food for an event" (Ghezzi, 2015). It is important that schools promote group meetings for parents, so they can feel safe to talk about these problems and concerns, about both their children situation and theirs. Schools could also explain that their legal situation (documented or undocumented) is not a reason for them to be scared when approaching the school and could also show them the legal documents that say they are protected and schools don’t have to know their status: documented
or undocumented. According to Hogan & Hartson (2009), "In states where school districts are permitted or required to ask students for information which may indicate immigration status during the enrollment process or otherwise, school districts should make clear to parents the reason why the district is requesting the information, that the district is not interested in knowing a student’s immigration status, and that the district will not discriminate against students in any way based on immigration status" (p.8). In fact, “No federal law requires school districts to report undocumented students to immigration authorities and arguably school districts are prohibited from reporting them by Plyler.” (Hogan & Hartson, llc, 2009, p.10). Additionally, The U.S Supreme Court (2009) ruled that undocumented children have a constitutional right to receive a free public K-12 education. Schools and staff members need to show empathy and interest, cultural sensitivity, and awareness of their differences, but acceptance. As we can see in Domain 5 of the TESOL standards, professionalism, education policy and collaboration are important in educating English Speakers of Other Languages (ESOLs) and partnering with their families. The standard states, "Candidates keep current with new instructional techniques, research results, advances in the ESL field, and education policy issues and demonstrate knowledge of the history of ESL teaching. They use such information to reflect on and improve their instruction and assessment practices. Candidates work collaboratively with school staff and the community to improve the learning environment, provide support, and advocate for ELLs and their families.” (p.68)

Many families face economic struggles, have multiple jobs, and limited time. They are not as present or involved as they would like to be, and it is important that teachers understand these situations so they are not quick to judge or draw conclusions that can be harmful for the students and their families. Parents need to understand that not being able to make it to the school doesn’t mean that they are not participating and helping their children, it is a common
work that school has to do with the parents by being able to accommodate the curriculum to activities that parents could help with without being in the classroom. Delgado-Gaitan (2004) writes:

“Matching up the parents’ skills with the classroom's needs is a teacher's prerogative in accordance with the classroom curriculum plan. Some ways to tap into Latino parents’ talents, expertise, and interests is to identify the music, culinary, and gardening experts; tutors in subject areas; storytellers; computer whizzes; and people with good supervisory skills or any other talents. Classroom parents and community leaders can be recruited to help in these ways. The ideal, of course, is to have the parents present in the classroom, but some parents find that time is a barrier to volunteering in the classroom. However, there are ways to tap into their talents, which they can share even if they cannot be present. Parents can share their expertise through their children, who can bring stories, food and recipes, or musical instruments, which represent the parents’ gifts” (p.75).

There are many different ways parents can be involved in their children's education and it's important for teachers, parents and students to be aware of the different types of involvement. They could all discuss the different ways that would work for them to get involved, like making posters at home about songs in Spanish, sharing books in their native language, sending recipes of their favorite meals or even sharpening pencils at home and sending them to school with their child the next day.

**Discussion**

I also had a chance to visit School B in a different School District in Idaho and talk to one of the teachers in charge of a few programs that promotes parental involvement. She talked about the two programs she manages, “Family Literacy Night,” and “Parents as Partners.” She com-
mented how the programs are directed toward parents but they also provide childcare and dinner for the families to make participation easier. Depending on the population, they try to have someone who translates and helps the Latino parents, but this is not something that happens 100% of the time. She said that the teachers in charge of the programs are aware of the parents’ limited understanding of English, so they make sure they use visual resources and speak with simple speech. While parents participate in the program, the children go to an after school daycare program, where they play and get help with their homework. That time is also used to teach kids social skills.

After speaking to eight teachers from different schools, I noticed none of them had a comprehensive program dedicated to Latino parents. I met with the family support coordinator in the School B District who assists with Federal Programs administration, including training and support to Title I (provides flexible funding for additional instructional time for students who are most at risk for not meeting state academic standards) and ELL teachers. She helps with parent and family involvement activities, including translations, school choice, and socioeconomic status (SES). She told me that when it comes to the Latino community, she acts as a family advocate, participating in home visits, listening to the issues and questions of Latino families, and recruits parents to participate in the programs. She commented that, from her point of view, it’s important to create Latino partnerships and have many types of connections with the community she works with. Because many of the Latino families are from Mexico, she works with the Mexican consulate, Father Camacho (a local Catholic priest), and many other influential community members who are important to the Latino community.

She talked about the need for educating both teachers and parents, as well as supporting the families and respecting their culture. Educating both sides helps parents feel more comforta-
ble, and this increases their involvement in the school and community. The teachers involved in this process must go through training so they know how the programs work, have an understanding of the goals, and become educated about cultural differences and sensitivity.

The programs offered to Latino families are Juntos Podemos, Family Literacy, computer classes, English classes, Love and Logic, and Parents As Partners. All of these programs are available, but it is up to the schools to have them included in their programs. Parents can also request that schools add certain programs. They are working on adding additional programs and are planning to offer kindergarten readiness for Latino parents, so they can work toward preparing their pre-kindergarten children without the use of English materials.

Juntos Podemos is a program in Spanish for parents. The program gives parents a chance to raise concerns and help shape the areas of study for the adult-learning classes. Some of the themes so far have been: Health and Welfare (understanding the screening process), Professional Technical Opportunities, College and Career opportunities for all, the Obama Administration’s Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) updates and issues, and PowerSchool (an online site used to view grades, assignments and deadlines for each enrolled student). Juntos Podemos tries to address different problems in the same night so they can reach the largest group of parents and address many concerns at the same time. Dinner and childcare are provided to alleviate burdens those parents might face that may prevent them from attending.

“Juntos Podemos/Together We Can” has been created with the purpose of strengthening and supporting the successful development of the school district’s students and families of Hispanic heritage.” (Juntos Podemos, n.d)

The family literacy courses offered aim to increase parental involvement and provide resources for parents to help their children at home. Family Literacy also increases the home read-
ing environment, as well as the language and literacy skills of the parents, which has a positive effect on their children's education.

Computer classes are offered once a week to help parents become familiar with the use of computers. The course addresses individual needs and abilities from keyboarding operations to making resumes and searching for jobs, to list a few. Some teachers in this program are Spanish-speakers. However, all have experience working with ELLs.

English classes are an important part of the program. The purpose of offering the course is to help the parents improve their own lives by feeling more comfortable when communicating in English at school, as well as with members of the community. Parents tend to get more involved when their ability to communicate increases, Nister and Maiers (2000, quoted in Project Appleseed Parental Involvement in Public Schools, 2014) state, "Research has found that when parents are involved, their confidence in their ability to help their children with classroom assignments increases." They might not feel as ashamed and may feel as confident as native English-speaking parents when approaching the school. Project Appleseed found ESOL parents with advanced English proficiency become more confident to approach the school and teachers, and that interaction makes them have a better understanding of what is being taught in school as well as the programs and services offered by the school (Moorman, 2002; Caplan, 2000; Drake, 2000). This also has a positive impact on the students, according to Arlington MA: Intercultural Center for Research in Education (1998), stating "Research shows unequivocally that parent involvement has a positive effect on children’s self esteem, self confidence to do well in school and cognitive development." ( ). The research also showed the benefits of having support counselors to help parents learn about the school, stating, "It was key to the success of the program that parent leaders became familiar with the resources, communication networks and decision making
processes which impact on their children’s education, both within the school and in the community”. In addition to having a better understanding of the education system, communicating with families in this way also helps parents advocate for their children. When students are able to see how much their parents value their own education, students understand the importance of engaging with the school. This will also help the parents feel more confident, and some studies show learning another language may provide opportunities for higher income and improve quality of life. Dr. Patricia Gándara (2014) found that people who speak at least one foreign language have an average annual household income that is $10,000 higher than the annual household income of monolinguals.

Love and Logic is a parenting class taught Spanish in this program. It is a nationally recognized program devoted to helping parents and educators gain cooperation, respect, and responsible decision making from children of all ages.

Parents As Partners is a program that uses the “7 Habits of Happy Children” to work on parenting issues. The material is adapted to the population enrolled in the course, and its role is to give families different parenting tools they can use when it comes to raising their children. This gives the families a unique opportunity to connect with one another, share parenting tips and concerns with other families, as well as discuss the difficulties they face when it comes to raising their youth in a new country.
Conclusion

After speaking with several school teachers and researching the programs available to increase the Latino parental involvement in schools, it’s clear there are many options offered to parents, however improving Latino parent involvement isn’t a priority for all schools. Programs like “Parents As Partners” are effective and should be offered in all schools. Parents need the opportunity to listen to others’ concerns, and share their experiences. This would also give parents a chance to interact with each other and create deeper relationships that would help them feel comfortable enough to talk about their own concerns.

With the large Latino community in Idaho, translators, interpreters or Spanish-speaking teachers should be involved at all parent-related programs offered by the schools. There should also be an effort to reach out to families interested in assisting with the programs, who might also have obstacles preventing them from attending.

Schools should never make assumptions about the parenting skills and the understanding parents have about the American schooling system. Most parents do care about their children, despite how schools may perceive their relationship with their kids. Some Latino parents work many hours and hold numerous jobs, which doesn’t allow them to spend as much time with their children as they would like. Many parents are overwhelmed with school and work obligations, trying to work enough hours so they can pay their bills and provide for their families. Schools sometimes assume that parents understand how the American schooling system works or that parents know they can come to the schools to discuss their concerns with their child’s education, and their lack of participation is intentional. Project Appleseed (n.d.) cites research by Caplan (2000), noting that one of the most common barriers of family involvement was “Teachers’ mis-
perceptions of parents’ abilities.” They further state, “Some teachers believe parents can’t help their children because they have limited educational backgrounds themselves; however, many poorly educated families support learning by talking with their children about school, monitoring homework, and making it clear that education is important and that they expect their children to do well in school” (Caplan, 2000). Schools should always approach the families and make an effort to invite conversation, so the parents feel comfortable with the teachers and welcome in the schools. As Concha Delgado-Gaitan (2004) suggests in her book, *Involving Latino Families in School*, it is important to integrate Latino culture in the classroom and through the curriculum. She writes, “Integrating Latino culture into de classroom though parent volunteers play a dual role. Students can appreciate that Latinos are capable in a variety of expert areas, while parents can view themselves as an integral part of their children’s classroom experience. Making the volunteer experience a productive and successful one for everyone involved…” (p.75). Furthermore, Delgado-Gaitan notes getting parents to volunteer and to participate in school committees will be a good strategy to bring in more Latino parents. Referring to a reluctant parent volunteer, Delgado-Gaitan recalled, “. . .She not only became involved, she was instrumental in getting other Latino parents involved in committees to speak up for Latino students’ rights” (p.79). It’s important to make parents and families feel like they are a critical part of the school so they feel welcome to talk about any concerns they might have. Having healthy, reciprocal relationships between families and schools are beneficial for schools, parents and students and as Moles states on his paper, “It may seem surprising, but surveys show that most parents, regardless of their background, want guidance from the schools on ways to help their children learn better (Chavkin & Williams, 1989; Epstein, 1986)” (1996, p.9).
References


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