



PRESCHOOL ENROLLMENT AMONG LATINO CHILDREN IN CALIFORNIA

By Belinda Reyes and Elias Lopez

Increasingly scholars and educators point out the benefits of a preschool education for children. These benefits could be even higher for children who experience significant disadvantage, such as those living in extreme poverty (Gorey, 2001). Proponents of preschool education maintain that “the ability to think analytically, reason abstractly, and solve problems through the manipulation of words and number” can be improved through interventions, such as preschools programs (Gorey, 2001: 10).

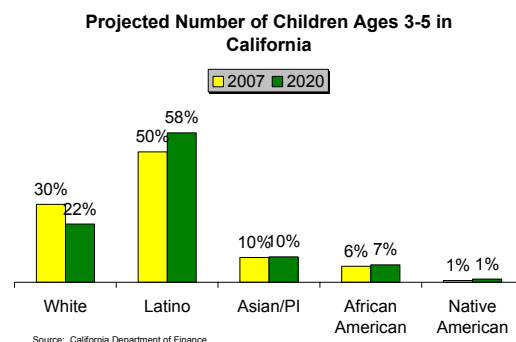
There is strong indication that preschool has a positive impact on Latino children. On average, Head Start reduces the gap in test scores between Latino and non-Hispanic White children and two-thirds of the gap in the probability of grade retention (Currie and Thomas, 1999).

Although preschool is believed to be of benefit for children, Latinos are not enrolling in preschool at the same rates as other racial and ethnic groups, and even when they do enroll, few enrolled for more than a year (Liang, Fuller, & Singer, 2000; Zarate and Pachon, 2006; Radey, M., & Brewster, K., 2007). The low preschool enrollment of Latino children could be the result of language constraints, cultural ideas about childbearing, affordability, or lack of awareness about benefits and programs

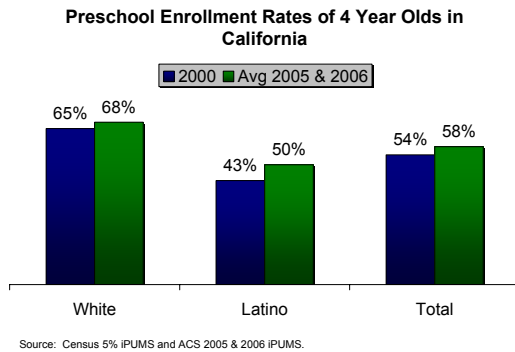
(Becerra and Chi, 1992; Arcia, Keyes, Gallagher, & Herrick, 1993). There may also be differences in enrolment throughout California responding to program access, quality or supply (Hill-Scott, 2004). Besides, available programs may not respond to the needs of Latino children or parents (Fuller, et al., 1996). For instance, Latino parents may need more culturally sensitive programs with caregivers that support and promote the use of Spanish. In the following pages we examine preschool enrollment for Latino children in California.

LATINOS AND THE PRESCHOOL ENROLLMENT IN CALIFORNIA

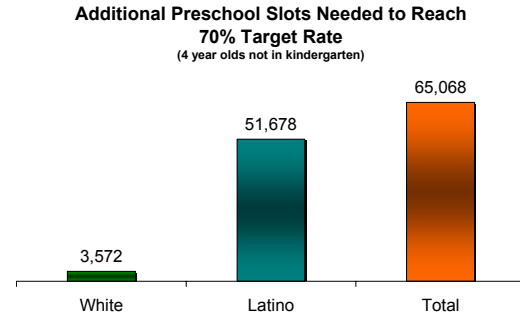
Currently fifty percent of preschool age children (ages 3 to 5) in California are Latino and their numbers will continue to increase in the next decades. By 2020 there will be 1,048,663 Latino preschool age children in the state.



Preschool enrollment rates are increasing among Latinos. Since 2000, improvements occurred by household type, poverty level, educational attainment, ability to speak English, citizenship, employment status, and regions of California. However, there is still a gap between Latino and White preschool enrollment. Half of Latino four year olds in California were in preschool or childcare in 2005-6, while 2 of every 3 White children were in preschool.



A major goal in California is to increase preschool enrollment. If we set a goal of having 70% of four-year olds enrolled in preschool, how many children would have to enroll in preschool to go from 58% to the 70% goal? Using the 70% enrollment rate target we estimate that a little over 65,000 children would need to be enrolled in preschool, almost 80 percent of them Latinos. This shows the importance of increasing Latino preschool enrollment in California. Possible avenues for intervention are explored in the next pages.

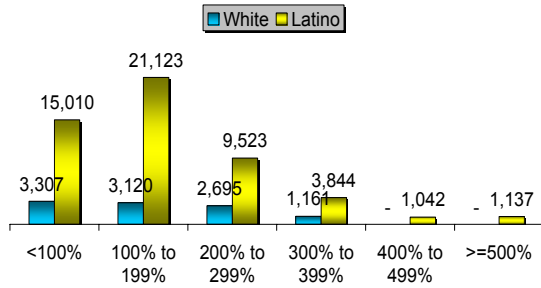


UNDER-ENROLLMENT AMONG LATINO CHILDREN

The low preschool enrollment of Latino children is in part due to an under-enrollment of particular Latino groups: low income Latino children, children of low educated mothers, children of non-citizen mothers, and the children of limited English mothers. But these groups are critical because they housed a large proportion of Latino children. Two-thirds of Latino four year olds in California in 2005-06 have a mother with less than a high school education; over 60% live in a household 200% below the poverty line; half have a non-citizen mother even though 90 percent of them are citizens, and a third have a mother who does not speak English well.

Because of limited resources, many government programs need to prioritize services to the neediest children. Head start programs generally use 100% the poverty line as a cut-off. However, the largest unmet need is among the working poor (100 and 200% of the poverty line). As shown below, 21,000 more Latino four year olds between 100 and 200% the poverty line would have to register in preschool to reach the 70% enrollment target. This may be accomplished by increasing the eligibility cut-off.

Additional Preschool Slots Needed to Reach 70% Target Rate by Poverty Level
(4 year olds not in kindergarten)



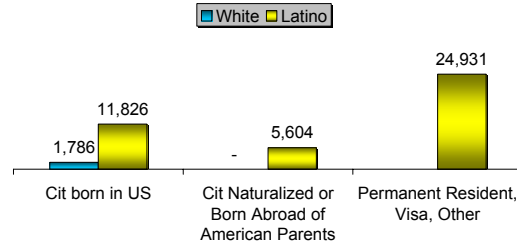
Note: Four year olds living below the poverty level had a median family income of \$13,854 and those between 100% and 199% had a family income of \$33,616. The family incomes of other poverty levels follow: 200% to 299%: \$55,341; 300% to 399%: \$73,446; 400% to 499%: \$94,736; and 500% or above: \$146,383.

But the issue is not solely eligibility. Although children in household 100% below the poverty line qualify for government programs, only about half are enrolling in the programs. To reach the 70% enrollment target, 15,000 more Latino four year olds in these household would have to register. This may require more outreach and information into Latino communities. But also critical may be to simplify the application process. Currently the application for State Preschools is about 20 pages long. The application process also requires that families first be on the Centralized Eligibility List (CEL) and then go through an interview. As a consequence, parents have to sometimes make several trips to complete the process.

Children of non-citizen parents are also significantly under-enrolled, even though 90 percent of these children are U.S. citizens (Buriel and Hurtado-Ortiz, 2000). Less than half of Latino four year olds in these household were enrolled in preschool in 2005-06. About 25,000 more Latino four year olds of non-citizens mothers would need to

register in preschool to reach the 70% enrollment target.

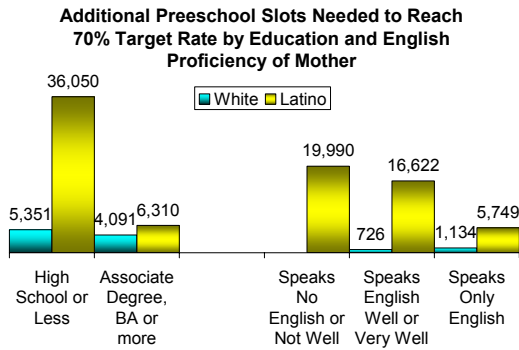
Additional Preschool Slots Needed to Reach 70% Target Rate by Mother's Citizenship Status



This may again be an issue of information and difficulty applying for available programs. Programs need to appraise the need to require birth certificates before allowing a child into a program and the potential impact of this policy on immigrant children and families. Latino parents may be afraid that registering their children in government funded programs could impact their immigration status. Although there has not been any reported case of deportations at preschool or daycare centers, the rumor of raids in schools could hurt Latino children access to preschools. Information needs to become available in immigrants communities to highlight the benefits of preschool, to clarify that program enrolment would not have an impact on the families' immigration status and to ensure parents that schools would be a sanctuary for them and their children.

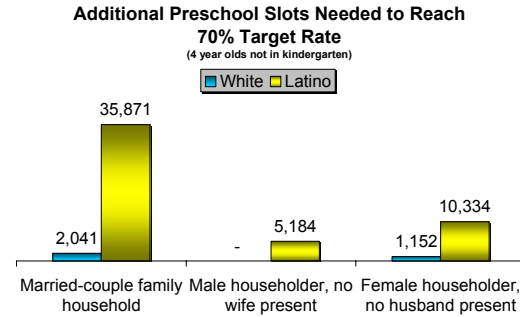
The mother's education and her level of English proficiency may also have an impact on preschool enrollment. Less than half of Latino four year olds in these families were in preschool in 2005-06. In order to reach the 70% target enrollment, 36,000 more Latino children of mothers with a high school education or less and 20,000 of children of mothers

with limited English proficiency would have to enroll in preschool.

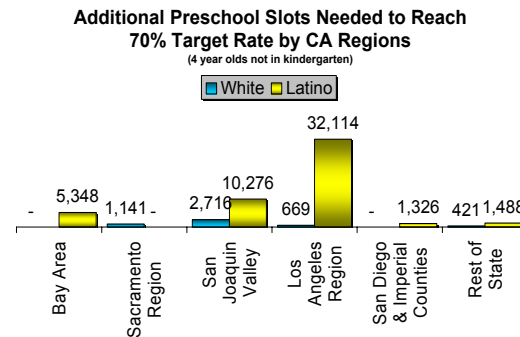


The low levels of English proficiency and educational attainment among Latino mothers begs for parallel adult-child educational programs. Programs in community organizations and family center programs, that would help parents be better advocates for their children in schools, may be ideal for Latino households. There is also a great need for more multi-language staff and instructors that would be able to communicate with both the child and the parent.

Type of household is another critical aspect. Many of the programs designed by the state are heavily focus on providing childcare to female headed households. Moreover, federal and state funded programs are design to meet the needs of mothers in public assistance. These programs may not meet the needs of all Latino households. Currently in California, preschool enrollment is lower for married couple families than for female headed households. Although programs need to be available to children in single headed households, most of the increase in California needs to take place among married couples.



There are also regions of the state that need special attention. San Joaquin Valley has the lowest enrollment rate and only 40% of the Latino four year olds were in preschool. If the San Joaquin Valley is to meet the 70% target, over 10,000 more Latino children would need to be register in preschool programs. But the greatest enrollment increase is needed in the Los Angeles region which includes the counties of Los Angeles, Orange, San Bernardino, Riverside, and Ventura. Over 30,000 Latino children would have to enroll to reach the 70% enrollment target in the Los Angeles region.



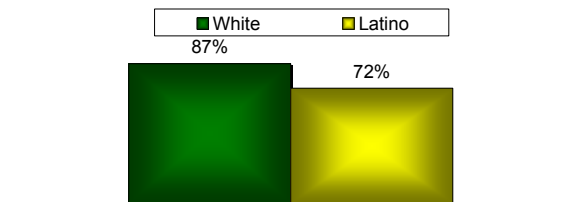
LATINO PARENT’S VIEWS AND PREFERENCES

Latino children preschool enrolment could be the result of culture, affordability, or lack of awareness about benefits and programs (Becerra and Chi, 1992; Arcia, et al., 1993). There may also be differences in enrolment throughout California because of the

lack of high quality preschools (Hill-Scott, 2004; Zucker, Howes, and Garza-Mourino, 2007). What's more, available programs may not respond to the needs of Latino children or parents (Fuller, et al., 1996). For instance, Latino parents may need more culturally sensitive programs with caregivers that support and promote the use of Spanish.

Childbearing practices have been raised as a possible explanation for the low enrollment of Latino children (Becerra and Chi, 1992). For instance, Latino parents read less to their children than other parents (Fuligni, et al., 2004; Garcia-Coll, et al., 1996). However, we find that the majority of Latino and White parents in the 2001 Survey of Parents read often to their children. A smaller proportion of Latino parents read to their children more than 3 times a week. Moreover, Latinos recognize the importance of reading for the language development of the child.

Frequency Read To Child
% of Parents With Children 5 & Under Saying That They Do The Activity At Least 3 Times a Week



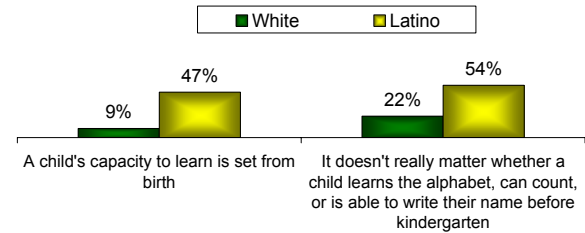
How many times in the past week did you read to or show a picture book to child?

Source: First 5 Survey of Parents, 2001.

However, because of the lower levels of educational attainment of the parents, some Latino parents do not recognize their child's capacity to learn and the preparation they need to be ready for school. From the 2001 Survey of Parents we find that 54% of Latino parents think it does not matter whether a child learns the alphabet, can count or

is able to write their name before kindergarten. They are also unsure of their role in the learning process. While most parents feel that the child's ability to learn is not set from birth, 47% of Latino parents feel that is the case.

Intelligence Set From Birth
% of Parents With Children 5 & Under Saying That They Strongly Agree (7 or more on a scale of 1-10)

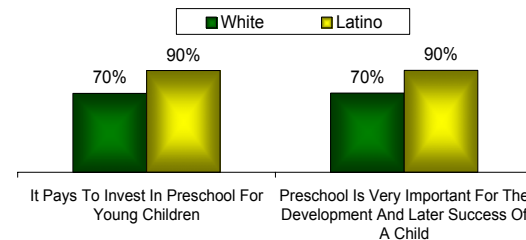


It doesn't really matter whether a child learns the alphabet, can count, or is able to write their name before kindergarten

Source: First 5 Survey of Parents, 2001.

It is important to note that these views do not affect Latino parents' attitudes about preschools. Latino respondents of the 2001 Survey of Parents value education just as much as any other group. When thinking about preschools, Latinos rank the importance of preschools for the development and the later success of children in school higher than Whites. They believe, more strongly than Whites, that it pays to invest in pre-school for young children since they will be better able to learn and be more productive members of society.

Importance of Preschool
% of Parents With Children 5 & Under Saying That The Following Are Very Important (7 or more on a scale of 1-10)



It Pays To Invest In Preschool For Young Children

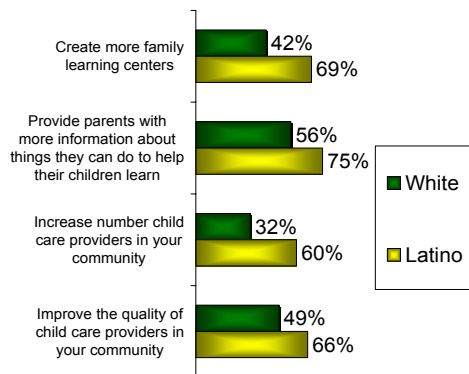
Source: First 5 Survey of Parents, 2001.

Preschool Is Very Important For The Development And Later Success Of A Child

Latino parents have low levels of education and limited experience with the educational system in the United States. They are not familiar with the services available and are unaware of how to access those services (Arcia,

Keyes, Gallagher, & Herrick, 1993). They need information about how best to create a learning environment for their children at home and how to maneuver the educational system in the United States. That makes them unsure of how to intervene in their child's education. Seventy-five percent of Latino parents in the 2001 Survey of Parents are interested in getting information about things they can do to help their children learn. Adult educational programs could help parents create a good learning environment at home and help them maneuver the U.S. educational system. As shown below, Latinos parents favor the creation of family learning centers for parents and their young children. Moreover, programs, such as the Pacific Institute for Community Organizing (PICO), in K-12 may be even more effective at the preschool level, orienting, empowering and helping parents be better advocates for their children.

Making The Community Better
% of Parents With Children 5 & Under
Saying It Would Be Extremely Effective

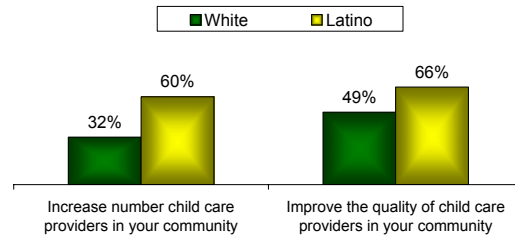


Source: First 5 Survey of Parents, 2001.

Latino parents also need high quality preschools programs accessible in their communities (Hill-Scott, 2004). Sixty percent of Latino respondents want more preschool programs available in their

communities, but two-thirds of them want improvements in the quality of the programs available in their communities.

Number & Quality of Preschools
% of Parents With Children 5 & Under Saying It Would Be Extremely Effective

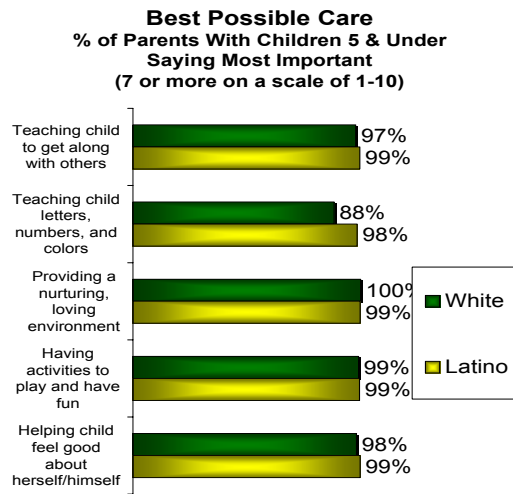


Source: First 5 Survey of Parents, 2001.

Latinos need quality preschool programs with licensed providers. The quality of the program is of particular importance to low income children (National Institute of Child Health and Human Development Early Child Care, 2003). However, research examining child care quality in the United States has indicated that most programs serving young children are of mediocre to poor quality (Cost, Quality, and Outcome Study Team, 1995; Magnuson and Waldfogel, 2005). Quality is a problem particularly for Latino parents who have difficulties finding high quality preschool programs in their communities (Currie and Thomas, 1999; Hill-Scott, 2004). California's preschool programs are better than in many states, but a recent report by the RAND Corporation evaluating publicly funded early care and education programs in the state found that even some publicly funded programs may not meet the quality standards that would ensure the maximum benefit in terms of child development (Karoly, Reardon, and Cho, 2007).

Latino parents care deeply about the social and emotional development of their children. They prefer programs

that nurture their children, have activities to play and have fun, and help their children feel good about themselves. A growing literature encourages play as a mechanism for learning. For example the work of Dorothy Singer, Roberta Golinkoff and Kathy Hirsh-Pasek (2006) highlight the importance of play on the social, emotional development of the child, but also on the cognitive development of young children.



Source: First 5 Survey of Parents, 2001.

In general, the goal of preschools and early educational programs is to get children ready for school, improving their language development, social skills and cognitive development. For low income and Latino children, however, the debate is often about compensating for perceived “problems” at an early age. In this compensatory model, Latinos are viewed as having language and socialization problems, because many of them do not speak English and they have “difficulty assimilating to the main stream” (Currie and Thomas, 1999). Meanwhile, Latino parents prefer programs that move away from a “deficiency model” to those that are developmental and respectful of their

culture, identity and language. For instance, in a survey of Latinas receiving Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) conducted by the National Council of la Raza, participants expressed a preference for care provided by family members, but they would prefer non-relative care if the service is in Spanish, culturally appropriate, and provide educational benefits to the child (Quiroz and Tosca, 1990; Calderon, 2007).

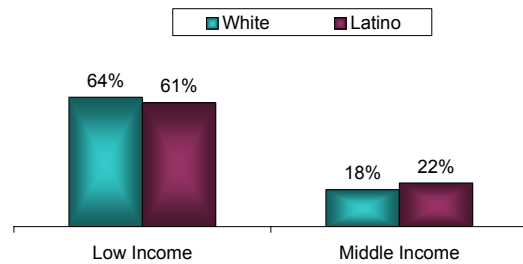
Culturally appropriate programs that celebrate the child’s culture and encourage the preservation of the first language while engaging the family in the child’s development may be best at ensuring the educational progress of Latino children. On the one hand, children that are exposed to more than one language early in their lives have greater cognitive development than monolingual children (Hamers and Blanc, 1993; Stechuk and Susan Burns, 2005). Moreover, a culturally appropriate program could support Latino children’s self-esteem in a school system that has often made them feel inferior. There is significant evidence of a correlation between self-esteem and educational performance among immigrant children and children of color (Bankston and Zhou, 2002). But also important is the strength of the relationship between the parent and the child. Research on teenagers find that warm and supportive relationships between youth and their parents promote academic achievement and positive attitudes about education, whereas more distant or conflict relationships can create stressors that disrupt educational progress (Crosnoe and Elder, 2004; Furstenberg, et al., 1999; Grotevant, 1998). With the support of families,

youth are more secure to meet challenges (Furstenberg, et al., 1999). Developing programs that support the culture and strengthened the relationship between the parent and their children, while recognizing and supporting the learning process of dual language learners is critical for Latinos. This also highlights the need to expand the number of multi language teachers and providers in California preschools.

Finally, cost is a critical factor. Parents generally attribute a lack of enrollment to affordability and a lack of knowledge about programs available in their community (Valencia, Pérez & Echeveste and Tomás Rivera Policy Institute, 2006). Thirty-one percent of Latino parents did not pay for childcare and over half pay less than \$200 per month. This is because most Latinos either care for their children themselves or leave them with family members. But even those who pay for child-care, they used cheaper alternatives. Whites pay on average \$383 per month on child care, while Latinos pay \$255. This rate varies by type of care.

When asked whether the government should help pay for all or most of the child care for low income parents, over 60 percent of parents would support the government paying for at least most of the cost of child care. But when thinking about middle class parents, the support drops and only about a quarter of the parents say that the government should subsidize most of the cost.

Should Government Help Pay For Most of Childcare Costs?
(Children 5 & Under)



Source: First 5 Survey of Parents, 2001.

RECOMMENDATIONS

We think the following issues are critical in order to improve preschool enrollment rates in California, particularly among Latino children.

California should get an exemption from the Federal Government to align the income eligibility of Head Start to the State Preschool Income Eligibility (75% of State Median Income)

Currently, to qualify for Head Start a family must be below 100% of the Federal Poverty Guidelines. For 2008, for a family of four to be eligible for Head Start they must have a family income below \$21,200. Yet this report shows that the greatest need is for families between 100% and 200% of the Federal Poverty Guidelines. Legislators should also strive to simplify the eligibility process and adopt only one income eligibility. The state should try to get an exemption from the federal government for Head Start to use the same income eligibility as State Preschools (75% of State Median Income). For a family of four, the family would qualify with an income of \$57,760 or less (this is about 272% of the Federal Poverty Guidelines).

Both Head Start and State Preschools Should Make the Enrollment of Four Year Olds a Priority (at least for the short-term until additional funds are available for three year olds)

Examining the data for 2005-06, 65,000 more four year old children would have to enroll in preschool to reach the 70% preschool enrollment goal. The recession has likely decreased preschool enrolment in California, particularly among low-income parents. Child development programs are also projected to be cut by as much as \$55 million, which could mean as much as 14,000 fewer children receiving preschool services (New America Media, 2009). More cuts are expected if the economy continues to worsen. The stimulus package will compensate for some of the cuts in state funding. President Obama put \$5 billion for Head Start programs in the stimulus package. California may receive more than half a billion dollars. Before more funding becomes available, policymakers should consider prioritizing four year olds and increasing their preschool enrollment rate to 70%. Other states, like Oklahoma, have similar priorities.

Simplify the Eligibility Process for State Preschools

Even if the previous two recommendations are implemented, it will be difficult to attract Latino parents with the current application process. The California Department of Education should consider adopting the Healthy Families application process which is only six pages long (two of which are instructions):
<http://www.healthyfamilies.ca.gov/Publi>

[cations/HF_App_Only_EN.pdf](#). Also, the State Department of Education should consider eliminating the requirement that parents be interviewed and do away with the ranking.

Emphasize Family-Focus Approaches as Oppose to Child-Focus Approaches

In our educational system it is critical that parents are engaged in their children's education and preschool is perhaps the best time to engage Latino parents in school. There could be two goals for the preschool programs. One is to make sure that children are ready for kindergarten, but also that parents understand how to navigate the educational system.

Latino parents are committed to the educational development of their children but they need information, training, and the resources to fashion a supportive learning environment for their children in school and at home.

Create One Central Database to Assess Preschool Supply by Neighborhoods

Information on the number of preschools and the quality of these preschools is limited. The Federal Government maintains a list of Head Start programs. The California Department of Education keeps the list of State Preschools. The Department of Social Services maintains the list of private preschool centers. There needs to be one central database for California to assess the supply and quality of preschools and child care centers. These data would help target efforts to increase enrollment by mapping existing programs and under-enrolled populations. This information

could signal areas in need of new programs or areas where improvements need to be made to existing programs.

Evaluate the Best Programs Available for Dual Language Learners

With so many Latino children, it is critical that we understand the best models to develop the skills of Dual Language Learners. Evaluations of effective linguistically and culturally sensitive positive promotion programs are needed to gain an understanding of the best way to address the needs of Latino children and families.

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DATA SOURCES

The data for this project was generated from the American Community Survey and the 2001 Statewide Survey of Parents with Young Children in California. To expand our sample, we combined the samples from 2005 and 2006 American Community Survey for children ages 4 not yet in kindergarten in California. This generated a sample of 8,437, of them 3,788 Latinos.

To ensure the precision of estimates over time, we produced estimates for only those ethnic groups with a sample size of 1,000 or more. This limited the analysis to Whites and Latinos. In addition, to ensure the reliability of the estimates by sub characteristics (example, renters and homeowners), we produced estimates for only subgroups with a sample size of 200 or more.

We also used data from the 2001 Statewide Survey of Parents with Young Children. There are in fact three surveys: a general public survey (n = 2,018), the parent survey (n = 4,801), and an opinion leader survey (n = 76). The general survey and the parent survey were random telephone samples that are representative of the California population. Some compensation was made for households without phones with additional weighting of households with intermittent phone service.

This survey of parents was one of the largest surveys of young children conducted to date. The survey asked the parents about the early childhood experiences and preferences.

The opinion leaders survey was non-random with selection based on subjective political criteria and self-selection, and were comprised of business, labor, community, religious, and state/local government leaders.

These surveys were conducted by the Field Research Corporation and funded by First Five California.

ABOUT THE WEALTH RESEARCH ORGANIZATION

The Wealth Research Organization was founded to conduct research that promotes the empowerment and well-being of low income persons and their communities. Its mission is grounded on the belief that to empower low income people we need to build individual and community assets in addition to support people's enfranchisement in the broader society. Our research concentrates on three broad areas:

- Economic Advancement;
- Political Engagement and Representation; and,
- Population and Demographics.

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