

Early Learning and Latino Children: The Foundation for California's Future



Latino children account for more than half of all children under age 5 in California. Our state's future depends on ensuring young Latino children are ready to excel in school and get the skills they need to succeed in college and careers. Learning begins at birth, and research shows early experiences shape whether a child's brain develops strong skills for future learning, behavior and success. Without that strong foundation, children – especially low-income children – will be behind from the start.

Putting Latino Children on the Path to Opportunity

Early childhood education instills a love of learning and encourages children's natural curiosity. It helps kids continue positive behavior and social skills such as cooperating, sharing, making friends and resolving conflicts. High-quality preschool programs also promote higher-order thinking and build early literacy skills through singing, storytelling and rhyming.

Preparing for success in school

- Latino children enrolled in a model preschool program showed the largest improvements of any group in early reading and math skills that predict later achievement in school.

90% of Latino parents with children under age 5 say preschool is very important for later success, and they say it pays to invest in preschool.

- After going to preschool, Latino children's test scores increased 79% in letter and word recognition, 39% in spelling and 54% in applied problems.
- Latino students whose parents speak Spanish at home showed the greatest gains in early language, literacy and math in a high-quality preschool.
- By the time they are 3 years old, children who experience language-rich environments have a vocabulary of nearly 1100 words; children without

these experiences possess only about 500 words.

- However, there are barriers that prevent Latino children from accessing high-quality preschool, including high costs; lack of availability, information and full day programs; and long waiting lists.
- Two-thirds of Latino and African-American 4 year olds live in areas that do not have enough preschool spaces for them, compared to half all 4 year olds.

Sharing Their Stories

Children who attend high-quality early education programs are more likely to perform better in reading and math and less likely to be held back a grade or placed in special education.



Flor enjoys reading to other children. Her preschool teacher, Miss Teresa, says she's a role model.



Rachel Acosta started working with young children 30 years ago as a preschool aide. Her friends encouraged her to go back to school and now she has her permit in early childhood education from Fresno City College.

Only 14% of Latino children are in high-quality preschool programs that prepare them for success in school.

For more information or to get involved, visit www.preschoolcalifornia.org/latino-children

Strengthening the foundation of California's future

Jesus

attended Mar Vista Preschool when he was 3. He went on to graduate from the University of California, Berkeley. He's now back at Mar Vista, serving as a college prep advisor.



Miguel was very shy when he started preschool. Now when he comes to class he says to the teacher, "I'm happy to be here. What are we going to do today?"

Judith's daughter went to preschool free of charge at Hope Street Family Center, and her proud mother is committed to seeing her go onto college.

Judith, too, took adult education classes there. She passed her GED and is now a strong parent advocate for preschool.



Preparing for success in life

- Children who attend early learning programs are more likely to graduate from high school, attend college and own a home, and less likely to be involved in crime.
- For every dollar spent on high-quality early learning, there is a more than a \$7 return to society in reduced crime, education and public assistance costs.

Providing a Solid Foundation for Dual Language Learners and Continuing Development of Their Home Language

High-quality early education provides a language-rich environment for young children and lays the foundation for learning to read.

- About 40% of preschool-age children in California are English learners.
- 85% of English learners in California speak Spanish.

More than 60% of Latino children live in households with incomes below \$44,100 for a family of four, compared to 23% of white families. Latinos also tend to have higher rates of unemployment and to earn less. Such economic disadvantages have been shown to directly impact educational success.

- Using children's home language supports them in learning a second language.
- Research shows that children who learn two or more languages do better in both reading and math.

Closing the Achievement Gap

- English-proficient Latino children are about three months behind white children at age five in their pre-reading skills. This early gap – already wide at kindergarten entry – is equivalent to over 80% of the gap observed in reading skills among Latino children at fourth grade.

- The high school dropout rate for Latino students in California is 27%, compared to 21.5% overall.
- High-quality early care and education is a proven intervention that takes advantage of the window of opportunity from birth to age 5 to level the playing field.

"If Latino kids are not succeeding in school, then the school system in California is not succeeding. One key to reversing the achievement gap is a pre-kindergarten system that works for all children. Latino children make great gains in effective preschool programs - when they have access.

— Janet Murguía, President & CEO, National Council of La Raza

By 2025, Latinos will make up almost half of the new labor force in our state. California must improve educational opportunities for Latinos to ensure a brighter future for us all, and that begins with early childhood education.

Sources for all research cited in this document are available at www.preschoolcalifornia.org/latino-children