

*Examining  
the Impact  
of Parental  
Involvement  
in a Dual  
Language  
Program:*  
**Implications  
for Children  
and Schools**



UNIVERSITY OF  
**Nebraska**  
Omaha

**OLLAS**



OFFICE OF  
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# Examining the Impact of Parental Involvement in a Dual Language Program: Implications for Children and Schools

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*Pictured on cover: Carlos Franco-Soto (foreground) and Alexis Phillips, Babe Gomez Heritage Elementary School.*

*Cover photo courtesy of Rudy Smith, Babe Gomez Heritage Elementary School.*

OLLAS (the Office of Latino/Latin American Studies of the Great Plains) is a center of excellence that focuses on the Latino population of the Americas with particular emphasis on U.S. Latino and Latin American transnational communities. It is an interdisciplinary program that enhances our understanding of economic, political, and cultural issues relevant to these communities. In August 2003, OLLAS received a \$1,000,000 award from the Department of Education (Award # P116Z030100). One of the three central objectives funded by this grant is the “Development and implementation of a research agenda designed to address the most urgent and neglected aspects associated with the region’s unprecedented Latino population growth and its local, regional and transhemispheric implications. These projects will involve collaboration with community agencies, UNO programs and faculty and other governmental and non-governmental associations.” This report represents a clear example of our fulfillment of that objective.

For more information on OLLAS contact Dr. Lourdes Gouveia (402-554-3835) or go to the website:

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## About the authors

The authors of this report constitute the University of Nebraska at Omaha – Omaha Public Schools Dual Language Research Group (UNO-OPS). This research group began in 2003 with a focus on trying to better understand the comprehensive issues facing children and families participating in dual language programs. To date the UNO-OPS research group has focused primarily on the role of parental involvement on children's success within the program.

*UNO-OPS Dual Language Research Group publications and presentations include:*

- Kelly-Vance, L., Nero, C.L., Casas, J.F., Ryan, C.S., Ryalls, B.O., Kurien, S., & Ferguson, A. (in press). Parental involvement in education: A comparison of English and Spanish speaking parents. *New Mexico Review*.
- Casas, J.F., Ryan, C.S., & Kelly-Vance, L. (2006). Parental definitions of school success, acculturation, and involvement: Implications for children's language competency. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the National Association for Bilingual Education (NABE). Phoenix, AZ (January, 2006).
- Ryalls, B.O., Ferguson, A., & Nero, C.L. (2006). Parents' reasons for and against enrolling children in dual language education. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the National Association for Bilingual Education (NABE). Phoenix, AZ (January, 2006).
- Kelly-Vance, L., Ryalls, B.O., Ryan, C.S. (2006). The use of reading benchmarks with English language learners in a dual language program. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the National Association for Bilingual Education (NABE). Phoenix, AZ (January, 2006).
- Ferguson, A., Casas, J.F., & Nero, C.L. (2006). Encouraging parental involvement in a dual language program. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the National Association for Bilingual Education (NABE). Phoenix, AZ (January, 2006).
- Casas, J.F., Ryalls, B.O., Ryan, C.S., Kelly-Vance, L., & Nero, C.L. (2005). Parental Involvement, Perceptions of Success, and Acculturation In Dual Language Programs. Poster presented at the biennial meeting of the Society for Research in Child Development (SRCD). Atlanta, GA (April, 2005).
- Kelly-Vance, L., Nero, C.L., Ryalls, B.O., Casas, J.F., Ryan, C.S., Kurien, S.A., & Gregory, J. (2005). Parental involvement and perceptions of success in dual language programs. Poster presented at the annual meeting of the National Association of School Psychologists (NASP). Atlanta, GA (April, 2005).
- Kelly-Vance, L., Nero, C., Casas, J.F., Ryan, C.S., & Ryalls, B. (2004). Context-based collaborative research: Linking university and practitioner resources to provide better outcomes for children. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the National Association of School Psychologists (NASP). Atlanta, GA (April, 2005).

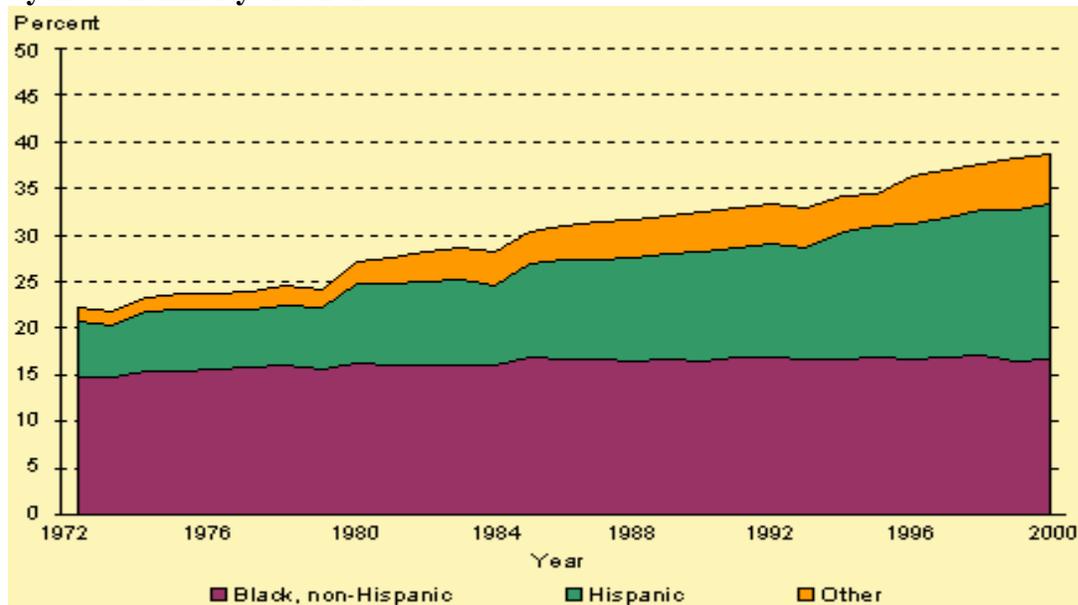
## Examining the Impact of Parental Involvement in a Dual Language Program: Implications for Children and Schools

*Most native-born, English-speaking Americans – if they understood that developing the native language is good for English and good for long-term academic achievement – would support bilingual education. The problem is, almost none of them have heard the case. They have only heard the disinformation, coming from people who oppose these programs for extraneous (i.e., political) reasons (James Crawford, 1999).*

### General increases in the diversity of school age children, including dramatic Latino population growth, will necessitate changes in our nation's schools.

- During the years 1972-2000 the percentage of minority students enrolled in United States public schools increased by 17% such that by 2000 minorities constituted almost 4 out of every 10 children enrolled in the nation's public schools (U.S. Department of Education, 2002).
- This dramatic growth was fueled primarily by increases in Latino enrollment. For example, Latino increases in enrollment during these 18 years was approximately 11% whereas for Blacks students the increase was only about 2%.

### Percent of Public School Students Enrolled in Grades K–12 who were Minorities, by Race/Ethnicity: 1972–2000



SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, *The Condition of Education, 2002*, based on U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, October Current Population Surveys, 1972–2000.

**The growth in the Latino population has varied by region of the country with sizeable growth occurring in the Midwest and Nebraska in particular.**

- Nebraska is one of the states in the Midwest seeing dramatic growth among its Latino population.
- Many cities in Nebraska saw a tripling of their Latino population during the years 1990-2000 with continued growth in recent years.

<b>Percentage Change in White Alone, not Hispanic/Latino, and Hispanic/Latino Populations in Selected Nebraska Cities, 1990–2000</b>						
<b>City</b>	<b>White alone, not Hispanic/Latino</b>		<b>Hispanic/Latino</b>		<b>Percent Change in White Alone, not Hispanic/Latino Population in 2000 (based in 1990)</b>	<b>Percent Change in Hispanic/Latino Population in 2000 (based in 1990)</b>
	<b>1990</b>	<b>2000</b>	<b>1990</b>	<b>2000</b>		
Omaha	276,218	293,876	10,288	29,397	6%	186%
Bellevue	26,968	36,916	1,213	2,609	37%	115%
Columbus	19,171	19,209	167	1,395	0%	735%
Fremont	23,261	23,570	165	1,085	1%	558%
Grand Island	36,732	34,960	1,887	6,845	-5%	263%
Hastings	22,192	21,790	268	1,343	-2%	401%
Kearney	23,415	25,525	667	1,118	9%	68%
Lexington	6,231	4,635	329	5,121	-26%	1457%
Lincoln	179,302	198,087	3,764	8,154	10%	117%
Norfolk	20,748	20,834	299	1,790	0%	499%
North Platte	20,994	21,725	1,355	1,596	3%	18%
Schuyler	3,873	2,893	164	2,423	-25%	1377%
Scottsbluff	10,460	10,548	2,720	3,476	1%	28%
South Sioux City	8,704	8,074	545	2,958	-7%	443%

Source: Gouveia & Powell, 2004.

- In 2002, almost 14% of all Nebraska births had foreign born mothers. In 2000, 66% of all Latino births in Nebraska were to foreign-born mothers (CDC, 2002). These statistics suggest that ELL programs will play an increasingly important role in the coming years.
- According to some estimates, by the year 2030 Latino children will make up almost 1 in 4 (22.3%) Nebraska children under age 5 (Gouveia & Powell, 2004).

## About the dual language program and the study

The current study focused on a dual language (Spanish-English) program in the Omaha Public Schools. Dual language programs are programs in which children develop proficiency in two languages. These programs are currently seen as the gold standard within second language education because of the large amount of empirical support they have received with respect to children's academic gains. All of the dual language classrooms in the current study included half native English speakers and half Spanish speakers. Instruction was given in both languages to both language groups. Parents were actively encouraged to participate in activities throughout the school year and were required to sign a contract which articulated that they were expected to help support the program by volunteering during the school year. Specifically, families were asked to commit to 20 hours in the school although it was not uncommon for families to volunteer for many more hours.

The project involved 115 parents and their children enrolled in grades K-4 in the dual language program. 68% of the parents who agreed to participate were Latino (75 mothers and 8 fathers) and 28% were non-Latino (28 mothers and 4 fathers). A majority of the children in the program, approximately 75%, qualified for free/reduced lunch.

Parents completed questionnaires in a group setting. Questionnaires were available in both Spanish and English and experimenters fluent in both languages were available for assistance. The parent packet included questionnaires on:

- *Definitions of School Success:*
  - Parents were asked how important they considered various academic (e.g., “get good grades”) and social/behavioral (e.g., “get along with friends”) goals to be.
- *Involvement in Education:*
  - Parents were first asked how they were involved in their children's education, what they weren't doing but wished they could do and the barriers that precluded them from being more involved in their child's education. They then rated their own and others' (e.g., friends, relatives, neighbors) level of involvement in both the home and school settings.
- *Barriers to parental involvement*
  - Parents answered open-ended questions about the barriers that prevented them from participating more fully in their children's education.
- *Acculturation:*
  - Parents rated their level of involvement in and acceptance of various aspects of both Latino and non-Latino American cultures.
- *Reasons for/against enrollment:*
  - Parents completed a questionnaire that asked in an open-ended format about their considerations when deciding to enroll their child in the dual language program. Parents were specifically asked to mention the reasons for and against enrollment.

## Why is the study important?

- Greater parental involvement has been shown to facilitate children's academic achievement, school behavior, and social competency (Hill & Craft, 2003). Indeed, recent findings indicate that family practices concerning education are more important to children's school success than are characteristics such as parent education and socioeconomic status (Fuligni, 1997).
- Parental involvement has received much empirical attention with respect to traditional school programs. However, little is known about the role of parental involvement in dual language programs (Lindholm-Leary, 2001). Systematically studying dual language programs is an especially important area of investigation because of the latest census trends and because barriers to involvement for the parents of language minority children are likely to differ from those for the parents of language majority children.
- This study can also provide important information about the value systems of Latino and non-Latino families with regard to education. Such data are of critical importance to understanding the ways in which parents involve themselves in their children's education.

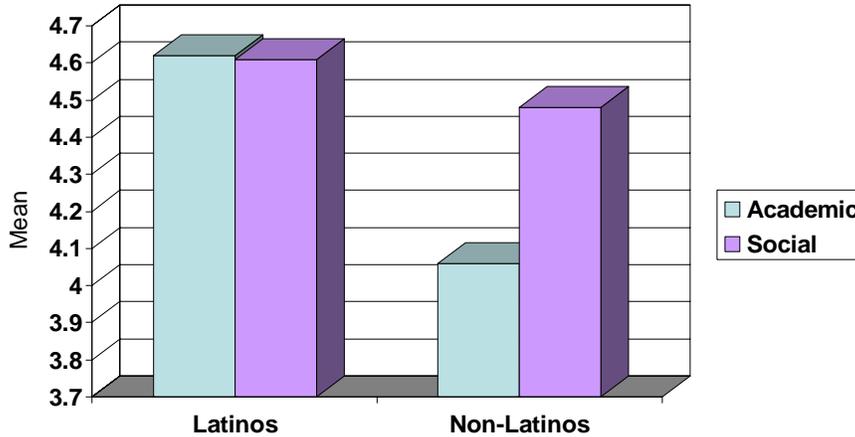
## Key research findings

### *Definitions of School Success*

Results indicate that Latino parents rate the academic and social goals of education more highly than do non-Latino parents, suggesting that Latino parents place an increased emphasis on education in general. These findings are consistent with previous work (Valencia & Black, 2002) and add to the literature that debunks the myth that Latino parents do not value education.

Other analyses indicated that Latino parents viewed academic and social/behavioral outcomes as equally important, whereas non-Latino parents viewed social/behavioral outcomes as being more important than academic outcomes. This difference for non-Latino parents was more pronounced for parents of girls. The reasons for these findings are not clear. However, it is possible that non-Latino parents assume that children will gain academic benefits and thus focus more on the social benefits that can be gained in the school context. The finding that the difference was more pronounced for girls in non-Latino families is consistent with past research showing that developing positive social relationships is seen by parents as more important for girls than boys (Petersen, Bodman, Bush, & Madden-Derdich, 2000).

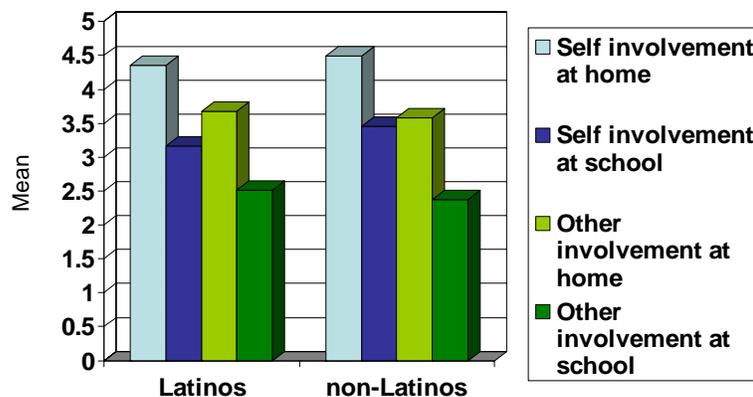
## Mean ratings of what constitutes academic success by ethnicity



### *Involvement in Education*

Latino and non-Latino parents were not found to differ in their self-reported involvement in their children's education. Additionally, both Latino and non-Latino parents reported greater involvement in the home (e.g., helping with homework) than school (e.g., helping with school committees) context. Similarly, both Latino and non-Latino parents reported that others' (e.g., spouses, friends, neighbors) involvement was greater at home than at school.

## Mean Ratings of Self- and Other-Involvement in Education by Ethnicity



One important difference that did emerge, however, was that Latino parents reported that others were more frequently involved in their children’s education than did non-Latino parents. This finding may be indicative of greater time constraints for Latinos or may reflect the importance of extended networks among Latino families.

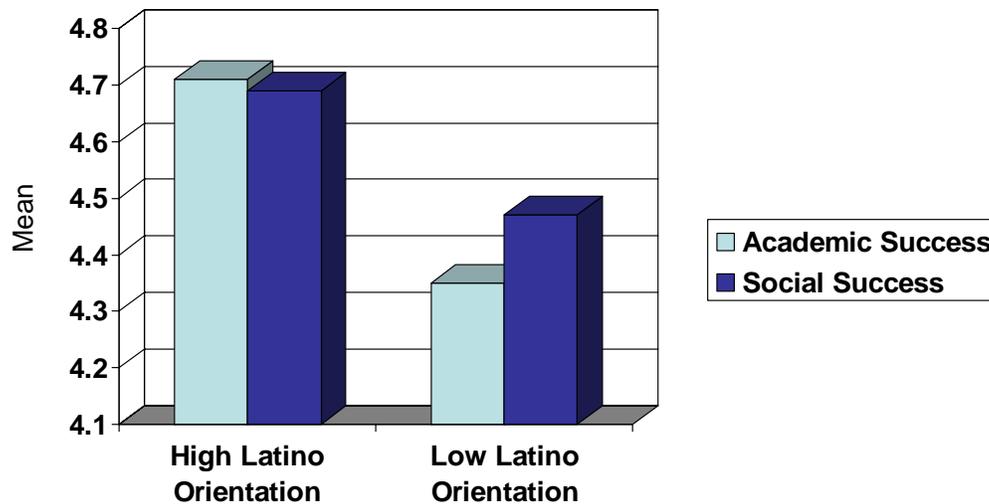
*Barriers to parental involvement*

Both Latino and non-Latino parents expressed a strong desire to be more involved in their children’s education. When asked what barriers kept them from being more involved, non-Latino parents most often cited time constraints while Latino parents often mentioned language barriers and difficulties arising from their own lower levels of education.

*Acculturation*

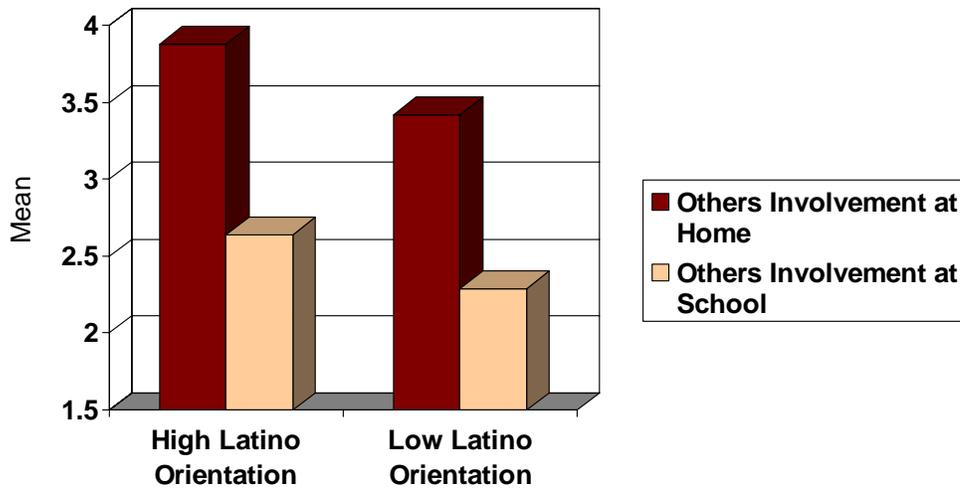
Parents who exhibited a strong Latino orientation more strongly emphasized academic and social success for their children.

## Mean Ratings of Latino Acculturation and Emphasis on Academic and Social Success



A stronger Latino orientation was also associated with greater involvement of others in the children’s education both at home and at school.

## Mean Ratings of Latino Acculturation and Others Involvement at Home and School



### *Reasons for/against enrollment*

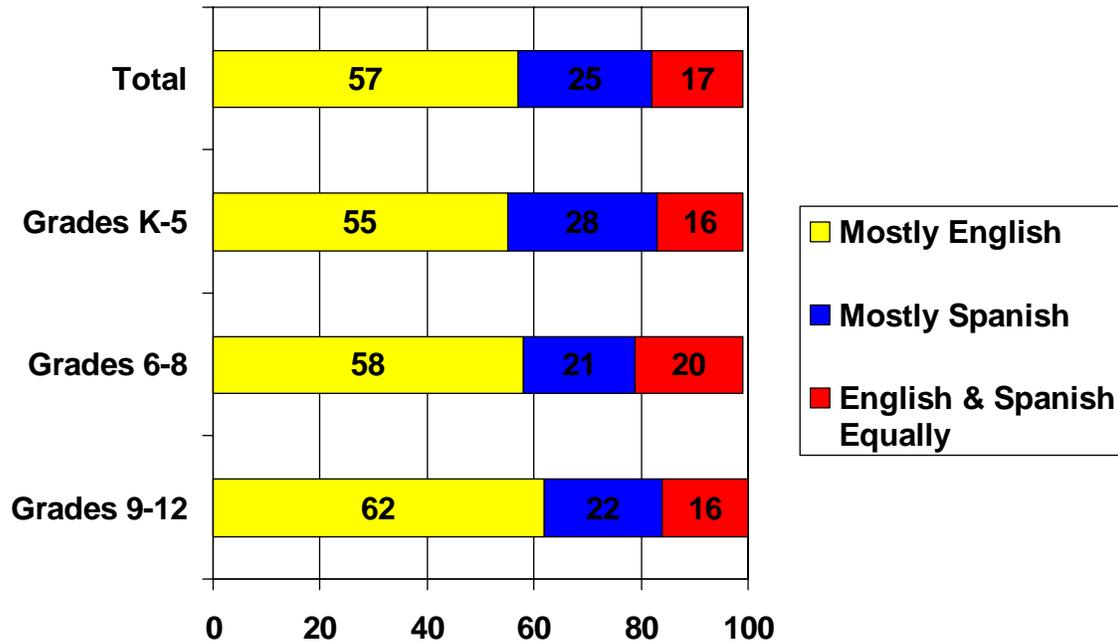
The most commonly cited reasons for enrollment concerned language learning (e.g., “...be able to read, write, and speak in both languages”), career/future benefits (e.g., “...benefit her in her future career”), and cultural reasons (e.g., “...to learn something about another culture”). In addition, parents sometimes cited benefits to other academic domains (e.g., “...be able to reason better”) and social advantages (e.g., “...to be able to co-exist with others”).

Reasons against enrollment were less commonly mentioned and reflected fears that the child would find it difficult to learn two languages at once (e.g., “...not being strong enough in English”), would do more poorly in other academic areas (e.g., “...may take away from other studies”), or that the parent would not be able to help with homework. Native English speakers were much more likely to provide reasons against enrollment than were native Spanish speakers.

## Conclusions and Recommendations

- One of the current challenges facing the U.S. educational system is providing equal educational opportunities to students who come from very different cultural backgrounds and have limited English proficiency.
- This challenge is currently being addressed through programs such as the dual language program described in this study. While these programs can help students gain English fluency (in addition to general subject knowledge) we do not yet understand the role of parents in children’s success within these programs.
- It is clear that there are many barriers to parent involvement in education, particularly for immigrant parents who may not be fluent in English and for whom English may not be the primary language spoken in the home.

## Percentage Distribution of Hispanic Students in Grades K-12, by Language Spoken at Home and Grade: 1999



SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, The Condition of Education, 2000, based on National Household Education Survey (NHES), 1999 (Parent Interview Component).

- While some past studies have tended to highlight the differences between Latino and non-Latino families, the findings from this study suggest that the parents in both groups viewed the importance of education fairly similarly. In general, both groups viewed education as being critically important with only some divergence in the relative importance of the different areas.
- It is often said that "it takes a village to raise a child." The findings from this study suggest that this notion of extended networks seems to be particularly true for Latino families. Nevertheless, for both family groups it will be important for schools to think about the ways in which parents and these important others can gain the skills and knowledge necessary to support their children's education. This will be particularly important as children progress to higher grades and the classroom content becomes more and more advanced.
- The study of children's language development suggests that it is easier for a child to master a second language at younger ages. While these data are consistent with the dual language program philosophy, many parents continue to worry that their child's participation in the program may hamper their language skills. Schools must continue to educate parents about this myth to help alleviate these concerns.
- Schools' willingness to be inclusive and to foster strong connections appears to be particularly important for immigrant families. These families often face significant barriers in the way of low English proficiency and lower parental educational levels. Schools that are willing to reach out to these families will find important and committed allies. Research indicates that immigrant families find it harder to participate, but value education and academic achievement no less than do native families (Valencia & Black, 2002).
- It is worth noting that the program of focus in this study appears to be doing a good job of addressing parental concerns. Parents' responses indicated that they believe the school is making an honest effort to not only be inclusive but to make sure that parents feel connected to the program and more invested in their children's education. This good will can make a world of difference and may reinforce parents' willingness to remain involved.
- Researchers must also work harder to diversify their samples. Those who make the extra effort will find willing and staunch participants. In our own study, Latino families volunteered for the study at about twice the rate of non-Latino families.
- Finally, though this is an initial investigation, findings suggest that parental involvement can be a very important factor in determining children's success within a dual language setting. Clearly more work is needed. However, it is likely that the programs that do best will be those that encourage parents to not only participate but to lead. Schools and parents working together will be much more

effective in promoting and sustaining children's academic excellence than will either one working alone.

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