Immigration and Early Education:

An Account of Family Engagement and Academic Gap Reductions
Demographics

- Maternal educational attainment varies by:
- Immigrant status
  - Native mothers are 50% more likely than immigrant mothers to hold high school/college degrees [8th grade mean].
- National heritage
  - Mexican and Central American mothers are the least likely groups to have degrees [9th grade mean].
Young Children’s Educational Circumstances

• Academic Gap
  – At nine months of age no gap is identified by race/ethnicity in infant development outcomes
  
  – However, Hispanic “immigrant” children start kindergarten behind in mathematics and literacy when compared to White children
Young Children’s Educational Circumstances

- Immigrant children face negative structural educational circumstances and segregated schooling
- Children
  - are the most segregated group of children in the American educational system
  - are much more likely to attend schools that are overcrowded, with a high proportion of students of color who live in poverty, with under-qualified teachers
  - are the least likely group of children to attend preschool
    - Although Hispanic parents have demonstrated great interest in enrolling their children in preschool programs if programs were available
Family Engagement and Positive Effects

• When parents are educationally involved:
  – students improve academically
  – students have higher graduation rates and greater enrollment rates in post-secondary education
  – teachers hold higher opinion of parents (Antunez, 2000)
Family Engagement

- Parent involvement initiatives that are normally in place in schools better complement the values of mainstream, middle class families.
- Schools are particularly challenged when providing services to large numbers of Latino immigrant families.
Common Factors Dissuading Immigrant Family Involvement

- Language and cultural differences
- Lack of familiarity with U.S. school system
- Inflexible work and school functions schedules
- Lack of transportation
- School’s climate toward immigrants & parent involvement
Successful Family Engagement
Strategies for Immigrant Families

• Initiatives should be carried out in the families’ home language

• Programs should be community based
  – Families should be consulted when creating programs intended for their use
  – When possible programs should be facilitated by members of the community

• Information about schools and programs, leadership and decision making power needs to be shared with parents
Family Characteristics & Positive Educational Effects

- Familism/La Family
  - family identification, obligation and support (Velez-Ibañez & Greenberg, 1992).
  - Positively affect Latino students’ academics (Valenzuela & Dornbusch, 1994).

- Intact Families
  - help contribute to Mexican-American children’s high levels of psychological wellbeing, which in turn positively affects academics (Crosnoe, 2006).

- Education “Positives”
  - *Esperanzas (Immigrant Paradox); Educacion; Confianza* have been linked to family education participation (Garcia, Schribner & Cuellar, 2009).
Promising Parent/Family Engagement Programs

- Abriendo Puertas
- Home Instruction of Parents of Preschool Youngsters (HIPPY)
- AVANCE
- Project FLAME (Family Literacy: Aprendiendo, Mejorando, Educando)
- Parent Institute for Quality Education (PIQE)
- Family Literacy Programs
Conclusions

- Family engagement can improve children’s educational outcomes
- Schools are often ill-equipped to work with linguistically and culturally diverse immigrant families
- Community-based programs have tried to mitigate this problem
  - providing parents with information about parenting, the US. Schooling system, services, their role, etc
  - Partner with the family to support children
  - Provide upgrades in economic well-being opportunities
- Evaluations of the programs on average show promising findings for Hispanic immigrant parents
Publications
