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# The Positive Effects of Immigrant and Hispanic Families' Participation in their Child's Education

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The Positive Effects of Immigrant and Hispanic Families' Participation in their Child's  
Education

A Senior Honors Thesis

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for Graduation in the Honors College

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**Abstract:**

The recent increase of children from immigrant families into the United States has fostered numerous questions on their academic achievement in the American school system. According to research, these immigrant families experience various barriers that hinder building positive, beneficial relationships with school personnel. Through literature-based research one can note why and how parents become involved with their children's education as well as the benefits of parental involvement in academic achievement. The findings of this research suggest that increasing communication between immigrant and Hispanic families with school personnel, encouraging learning at home, and providing culturally relevant experiences can positively increase a child's academic achievement and self-efficacy in the classroom.

**Key Words:** parental involvement, English language learners (ELLs), Hispanic, family, parents, communication, barriers, elementary schools, culturally responsive pedagogy

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## **Chapter 1. Introduction**

### **Chapter 1.1 Historical Background**

In recent years, the population of children from immigrant families has increased at a faster rate than any other group of children in the United States (Hernandez, Denton & Macartney, 2008). According to the U.S. Department of Education, over 5 million school-age children are English Learners (NCELA, 2006). By 2050, the U.S. Census Bureau has projected that 1 out of every 3 teens and children in the United States will be Hispanic (2005). In addition, research demonstrates that during the elementary years, Hispanic youth are more likely to drop out of high school, not complete college, nor graduate when compared with their non-Hispanic counterparts (Plata-Potter & de Guzman, 2012). Furthermore, research indicates that elementary Spanish-speaking English language learners are more likely to score lower on academic assessments than their monolingual English-speaking peers as a result of a lack of parental involvement within the school community (Delgado-Gaitan, 1991). This unfortunate statistic can also be attributed to immigrants and English learners that come from families with lower education levels or low incomes (Garcia & Cuellar, 2006). The trend for such low scores on academic assessments may lie in the consequences of “high poverty rates..., home environments with limited resources to cultivate English language skills, and a lack of family experience with the U.S. educational system” (Tang, Dearing & Weiss, 2011, p. 177; Delgado-Gaitan, 2004). Attributable to this anticipated high representation of Hispanics and English learners in the United States, the American school system experiences several implications for culturally responsive pedagogy.

The academic success of all children is a priority for educators, faculty, students and parents. Much research supports the claim that Hispanic youth and families that come from non-English speaking backgrounds experience numerous barriers to the American educational system. These barriers include language, culture, expectations of students, school regulations and perceptions about families. At times, a combination of these factors results in English Language Learners (ELLs) with lower levels of academic achievement, behavioral problems, and a lack of school preparation (Colombo, 2006). It is vital to address these barriers and offer suggestions for eliminating them to foster a collaborative, communicative relationship between families and parents. Building this partnership and encouraging parental involvement during the elementary years bridges many gaps that can aid in the academic achievements of students that come from non-English speaking backgrounds. For example, research and literature suggest that children of all ages that are involved with their parents tend to have “higher attendance, achievement levels, and more positive attitudes toward school” (Henderson & Mapp, 2002, p. 24). Therefore, it is vital to note the positive effects of increasing Hispanic families’ participation and involvement efforts with the school system in order for the students to receive the best education possible.

### **Chapter 1.2 Research Questions**

Based on the current literature surrounding Hispanic and immigrant families’ involvement in their child’s education, there is a lack of information that identifies how families and school personnel can create home-school partnerships. Therefore, I plan to explain the ways in which families and schools can eliminate barriers to promote a positive relationship that fosters a child’s education. The following research questions guided the current investigation:

1. How does the level of participation of Hispanic and immigrant families in the school setting positively or negatively affect their children?
2. How can parents and teachers create home-school relationships?
3. How do relationships between Hispanic and immigrant families with their children's teachers aid in their children's education?
4. What kinds of barriers exist for Hispanic and immigrant families?

The goal of this research is to determine the effect to which a communicative relationship between the school personnel and immigrant and Hispanic families can positively aid in their child's education, as well as eliminate numerous cultural, academic, linguistic and school-based barriers that hinder home-school relationships.

## **Chapter 2. Barriers to Academic Achievement**

Immigrant families and children that come from non-English-speaking backgrounds experience many adversities when enrolling in a new educational system. There are numerous barriers that can hinder Hispanic families' involvement in their child's education, including, but not limited to, cultural, linguistic, logistical and school-based barriers. It is crucial to consider all barriers when addressing the needs of non-English students in order to create an environment where communication is welcomed and involvement is encouraged.

### **Chapter 2.1 Cultural Barriers**

The population of culturally diverse families increases every year. However, most, if not all, teachers and administrators come from mainstream, middle-class backgrounds (Colombo, 2006). This cultural barrier hinders many students from experiencing their cultures in the classroom at a time when pressure is already at a high point. Immigrant families that come to the United States often feel stressed when entering new surroundings (Colombo, 2006). Therefore, it is crucial that schools recognize the importance of the home culture in fostering communicative relationships between families and teachers. Bronfenbrenner's hypothesis states:

The developmental potential of a setting is enhanced to the extent that there exist direct and indirect links to power settings through which participants in the original setting can influence allocation of resources and the making of decisions that are responsive to the needs of the developing person and the efforts of those who act in his [and her] behalf. (1978).

This hypothesis argues that when sociocultural congruency exists between the home and school environments, children are more likely to succeed in school (Delgado-Gaitan, 1991). When

teachers immerse students in a variety of cultures in the classroom, the students will be able to make connections to other cultures and develop respect and understanding for them. This act of immersion demonstrates to parents that the teachers respect their cultures and encourage them in their classroom.

Culture plays a very important role in promoting the academic achievement of ELL students, but can also hinder some students' academic abilities. Many ethnically diverse families that have children that are English learners experience poor socioeconomic conditions as a result of low educational levels (Delgado-Gaitan, 1991). These families often are faced with continued isolation from the school culture, eliminating any type of communication and relationship between families and teachers. One way that schools perpetuate this type of alienation is establishing activities that require "specific majority culturally based knowledge and behaviors about the school as an institution" (Delgado-Gaitan, 1991, p. 21). Immigrant families and culturally diverse families may not practice the same beliefs, regulations, rules, and customs that are considered traditional in the United States' educational system, making these families isolated and unwelcome.

A substantial amount of culturally diverse students lag behind their peers because teachers are unable to bridge this cultural gap. A specific barrier that many Hispanic families face is their cultural beliefs. For example, some Hispanic families might feel that teaching should be left to the trusted educational experts, and it would be "disrespectful" to question their classroom practice, or to ask about their methods of assessment (Colombo, 2006). The mainstream cultural expectation in the United States of highly active parents that advocate of their children can be a "cultural incongruity" for many parents of English Learners (Vera, Israel, Coyle, Cross, Knight-Lynn, Moallem, Bartucci, & Goldberger, 2012). Furthermore, culturally



diverse families may instill knowledge of the meaning of respect, which differs from the meaning in United States' education, such as not maintaining eye contact or raising one's hand. Students from culturally diverse backgrounds may express discomfort from a teacher's close proximity, praise, body gestures, or physical contact, such as a pat on the back. Until teachers are made aware of these cultural differences, there will continue to be a disconnection between the families and the educators. This disconnection negatively affects how children learn, and puts them at a disadvantage compared to the rest of the children in the mainstreamed culture. Teachers must recognize these differences as strengths in order to view their culture as an asset in the classroom.

Culture also includes perceptions of one's own culture as opposed to the mainstream culture. Immigrant children and Hispanic children may come from backgrounds specific to their culture with few similarities to American culture. They feel an insurmountable amount of pressure to assimilate into American culture and leave behind their families' beliefs. If children find that teachers value the mainstream culture more than the variety of cultures within their classroom, the students will attempt to assimilate into the mainstream culture and leave behind their home culture. These children believe that their family's values and beliefs are inferior to those of the school, which negatively affects how they view themselves and their ability to "integrate who they are with the expectations of the school" (Borba, 2009, p. 682). If students are unable to share their customs and beliefs, they will most likely never reach their fullest academic potential. It is the job of the teachers to embrace various cultures within the classroom to strengthen the bridge between the home and school.

## **Chapter 2.2 Linguistic Barriers**

Linguistic barriers are often linked with cultural barriers when referring to the educational system. Almost all students that come from culturally diverse backgrounds also come from linguistically diverse backgrounds. Similar to the benefits of incorporating culture into the classroom, language has a significant advantage in promoting a child's academic performance. However, language also negatively impacts Hispanic families and their children in the educational context. Some of the negative impacts of language include a lack of dominant language proficiency as well as a language gap between families and school personnel (Vera et al., 2012). Many Hispanic families come from home environments with limited resources to foster English skills, and the skills are acquired when children progress through the American educational system. However, the parents' progress in English development can remain stagnant, and the communication between them and the teachers will be difficult. In this manner, many immigrant families that speak little to no English are unaware of how to assist their children at home with their educational responsibilities. For example, a Massachusetts parent explained her concerns with the language barrier, voicing, "I just don't feel comfortable going to the school. My English isn't that good, and I didn't know what to say to the teacher" (Colombo, 2006, p. 315). This linguistic barrier significantly impacts the success of the child and the parental involvement with the child's school.

Although family involvement has a powerful effect on the academic success of students, it is not an "equal opportunity practice" (Colombo, 2006, p. 315). Families that speak the same language as the school administrators or teachers can communicate in a simpler manner than those who speak a different language. Consequentially, immigrant and Hispanic families and teachers must "bridge cultures and languages...[that] require more effort to create and sustain"

relationships (Colombo, 2006, p. 315). Some barriers that parents have identified with regards to this lack of communication include obstacles with understanding and reading information sent home, unavailability of translations of materials, and the inability to express their concerns with the faculty and school personnel (Plata-Potter & de Guzman, 2012, p. 99). One of the greatest concerns that parents express is their frustration with language obstacles between their children and the school. If language barriers exist between students and teachers, students' academics are severely affected.

Another aspect of linguistic barriers is a translator. Some family members have to act as translators between the faculty and the families, which can seem like an added task (Borba, 2009). Parents that are not comfortable with their English skills may feel uncomfortable confronting educators, or may not know what to say (Colombo, 2006). Educators often struggle with communicating with families that have a different first language, because they may have not received professional development, training, or have a faculty member that speaks the language of the family. The institution of translators for culturally and linguistically diverse families is a step forward in maintaining a communicative and respectful relationship between parents and teachers. Although very beneficial to the comprehension for some parents and teachers, translators can also be detrimental. Translators can be used during parent-teacher conferences to address the needs of both the families and educators. However, to some parents, translators can make them feel a lack of confidentiality between the sensitive information about their child with the rest of the educational personnel. Furthermore, many important sayings are specific to certain languages, and often points that parents or teachers attempt to make during conferences can be "lost in translation" (Plata-Potter & de Guzman, 2012). Moreover, parents express their concerns that due to this language barrier, their time is reduced in half during

conferences to compensate for the translator. This can lead to an inability to voice parental and student concerns, negatively impacting a child's success in school.

Perceptions of a family's comprehension of a language can also inhibit a student's academic success. For example, once a family becomes somewhat proficient in English, some educators hold students to the same high standards for English proficiency as non-English learners, even if their comprehension is lower than the majority of their peers. Similarly, parents that are perceived to understand English may not receive translations of vital information. Language is based primarily on two main functions, including speaking and listening. There is a large difference between understanding and knowing how to respond, especially for immigrant and Hispanic families. In addition, perceptions of a child's language and culture can also be detrimental. Faculty members that have not been trained in culturally responsive pedagogy may ask ELL students to perform certain tasks that would be inappropriate to ask of English speaking students. For example, a young girl, Escolastica, was asked to shorten her name to make it easier for her teachers to pronounce and for her to write (Borba, 2009, p. 681). This demonstrates that the school faculty does not acknowledge the family and their desires for their children in the educational system. It also shows a lack of respect for her language and culture, damaging the relationship between the family and the school. Furthermore, this does not present a welcoming, accepting environment for the family, the student, or their culture. In order to achieve academic efficiency within the educational context, students must feel safe and welcome in their environment. Educators must be aware of these important aspects of linguistic barriers in order to prepare a child for academic success.

Language is a fundamental aspect of education that relies on many factors. Linguistic diversity is a tremendous strength for elementary students, but can present some barriers for

immigrant and Hispanic children. A common misconception that teachers that have not received training on culturally and linguistically diverse families make is viewing them through “mainstream lenses,” focusing on the deficits instead of the strengths and opportunities that accompany diversity (Colombo, 2006). One of these mainstream lenses is asking Hispanic or immigrant families to only speak English in their household. Not only does this negatively impact the child’s English skills due to the family’s lack of comprehension of English, but it also interrupts the child’s cognitive development. Research indicates that Spanish-speaking English language learners (ELLs) are twice as likely as their monolingual English-speaking peers to express sub-average literacy skills (Caesar & Nelson, 2014; Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998). During the elementary years, ELL students struggle with language. However, as they progress through their educational career, ELL students dominate both languages with proficiency. The development of two languages is interconnected and intertwined. The “linguistic proficiencies of [Language 1] will usually transfer to [Language 2]” (Caesar & Nelson, 2014, p. 319). Moreover, many research studies have discovered that “cognitive and academic development in the first language has an extremely important and positive effect on second language learning at school” (Borba, 2009, p. 683). This justifies the enormous value of language and culture as crucial elements to a child’s academic success. In most Hispanic culture, oral language is highly valued and preferred (Caesar & Nelson, 2014). When teachers foster this literacy in the students’ first language, students are better equipped with the knowledge and skills to develop the target language, English (Montrul & Ionin, 2012). The earlier that students solidify and maintain their first language, the easier it is to acquire the second language with native-like efficiency (Montrul & Ionin, 2012). Teachers must not overlook this linguistic fund of knowledge that families can provide for enhancing classroom instruction.

### **Chapter 2.3 Logistical Barriers**

In addition to cultural and linguistic barriers, logistical barriers hinder parental involvement in their child's education and contribute to obstacles that parents face when attempting to communicate with teachers or to attend school functions (Vera et al., 2012). Many parents desire to be involved in their child's education, but carry the burden of work responsibilities, time commitments, and childcare. Numerous immigrant families that have just arrived in the United States struggle with finding work that can sustain a household. ELs are more likely to have parents with lower formal education levels than non-EL parents and come from low-income families (Vera et al., 2012; Capps, Fix, Murray, Ost, Passel, & Hewantoro, 2005; Garcia & Cuellar, 2006). Therefore, some often work multiple jobs, causing them to miss out on opportunities for parent-teacher conferences, afterschool activities, volunteering, and bonding time with their children. Fathers may work jobs that exist in other towns while mothers remain the sole parent during the week. Conversely, some need the assistance of their children, contributing to the high dropout rate seen with immigrant families (Caesar & Nelson, 2014). Plata-Potter and de Guzman (2012) conducted a study on Mexican immigrant families and discussed the "difficult decision that families face as to whether a child should go to school or work to help the family" (p. 98). Often when younger children are sick, older siblings are obligated to stay home and care for them while the parents work multiple jobs. Furthermore, families may want to participate in activities and functions at the school, but require flexibility, transportation, or childcare services. Schools must take into account these logistical factors in order to promote the overall academic success of children and relationships between families and teachers.

## **Chapter 2.4 School-based Barriers**

A barrier that immigrant and Hispanic families often face involves negative climates or perceptions towards their populations. School-based barriers drastically impact countless families while addressing expectations of students that may be different in various cultures and raising awareness of how students feel in new surroundings. One school-based barrier is a negative climate toward immigrant parents, including perceptions and experiences of these parents as they attempt to navigate the U.S. educational system (Plata-Potter & de Guzman, 2012; Quezada, Diaz, & Sanchez, 2003). This barrier is known as a “deficit perspective” because the schools view inactive parents as incompetent, unable to aid their children due to language and logistical barriers, and are generally not interested (Delgado-Gaitan, 1991, p. 22).

The myth that immigrant and Hispanic families do not value education or care about their child’s academic performance is without merit. Various research studies examining parental values towards education describe immigrant parents as often having even greater aspirations for their children’s educational success than U.S. born parents (Kao & Tienda, 1995; Ramirez, 2008). Furthermore, the negative myth can lead to educators’ judgments of how immigrant families can contribute to their child’s success in school (August & Shanahan, 2006). Currently there is an absence of research of the experiences of Hispanic immigrant children in U.S. schools (Plata-Potter & de Guzman, 2012). However, many studies have shown that Hispanic parents are “generally supportive and highly involved in their children’s education,” (Pew Hispanic Center and Kaiser Family Foundation, 2004, p. 7); and that they care deeply about the educational success of their children. In addition, Schaller, Rocha, and Barshinger (2006) found that “100% of immigrant parents in their sample expressed expectations that their children would graduate from high school and endorsed statements about the value of education in the lives of their

children” (Vera et al., 2012, p. 186). Unfortunately, many of these Hispanic families are unaware of the regulations and implications of the U.S. educational system (Tornatzky, Cutler, & Lee, 2002). Therefore, this barrier hinders parents’ abilities to support their children and aid them in their education, negatively affecting their academic achievement.

According to research from a Massachusetts school, mainstream parents were more likely to attend school activities than culturally and linguistically diverse families (Colombo, 2006). Therefore, it is vital that families feel welcomed in an accepting, caring environment where the school administrators and faculty hold high standards for all students. This also involves encouraging feelings of belonging during a time in which immigrant and Hispanic families enter a new, unfamiliar territory (Plata-Potter & de Guzman, 2012). Research conducted on Mexican families explained Mexican academic and behavioral school expectations that differ from those of the U.S. educational system. For example, academic and behavior expectations in Mexico are much higher and stricter than in the United States (Plata-Potter & de Guzman, 2012). In Mexican culture, it is respectful to stand when someone of authority enters a classroom, which does not occur often in the U.S. educational system. Therefore, this expectation from Mexican parents is not fulfilled, and they feel that the students demonstrate a lack of respect. Furthermore, expectations about parent-teacher conferences also differ from Mexican culture to American culture. In Mexico, students are not allowed to return to school unless their parents have attended the conference (Plata-Potter & de Guzman, 2012). In contrast, conferences in the United States educational system are not mandatory and hold no formal repercussions. A parent described her experience with the U.S. education system as being “unable to understand what they are expecting...not being able to help” (Plata-Potter & de Guzman, 2012, p. 101). This school-based barrier inhibits families and teachers from expressing concerns about school expectations.



Immigrant and Hispanic students may feel alienated when entering the American educational system and perceive themselves as inept. Students have to “navigate their way between two very different worlds as they move between home and school” by learning a whole new set of policies and procedures, while attempting to learn the English language, maintain high academics, and interact socially (Colombo, 2006, p. 315). Furthermore, if a child feels that his or her presence is unwelcome in the school, parents may not want to get involved with school activities. When teachers realize and understand the numerous barriers that these populations go through, their expectations are “more realistic, they are better able to scaffold learning appropriately, and they are prepared to keep parents informed” (Borba, 2009, p. 684). In this manner, the students will be better prepared for extraordinary academic success.

### **Chapter 3. Effective Strategies on Building a Home-School Partnership**

Parents sustain a major role in fostering their child's success. In order to continue a teacher's effort in creating a sense of belonging, parents must apply their knowledge and skills to help their children learn. In a 2000 study, Delores Peña found that parents identified suggestions for increasing parental involvement, such as making "the parents feel more welcomed" and taking "parents' interests and needs into consideration when planning activities" (Henderson & Mapp, 2002, p. 158). This is an active strategy to create a strong relationship built on trust and respect. These are the types of partnerships that continually sustain a connection. Parents also suggested considering the educational level, language, culture, and home situation of the parents. When teachers and school staff approach families, they should use language that is comprehensible for the families. When parents feel appreciated and accepted into the school community, they are more likely to become involved (Henderson & Mapp, 2002, p. 46). Bilingual families and teachers must view each other as "assets of student achievement" (Henderson & Mapp, 2002, p. 43). This level of appreciation can be demonstrated in a multitude of ways, such as embracing various cultures, providing a range of opportunities for involvement, and respecting the needs of parents.

Some of the ways in which parents can build a positive educational relationship with their children are to engage in learning activities, or aid with their children's homework. Furthermore, parents can attend to their children and monitor their actions at home. Communication can be the first step in maintaining a relationship, as parents can get their children excited about learning and discuss what they have been studying. Parents can also get involved with the school community by attending school events, joining committees, conferences, or volunteering in the classroom (Henderson & Mapp, 2002, p. 22). According to

Darling-Hammond and Bransford (2005), engaging culturally and linguistically diverse families within programs in the educational process considerably improves academic achievement in ELLs (Vera et al., 2012, p. 184). The parents are able to voice their concerns, observe how the American education system might differ across cultures, and demonstrate a positive relationship for the academic success of their children. However, these families are frequently presented with various barriers to academic achievement, such as cultural beliefs or language, which can hinder being involved in their child's academic life as well as interacting with the school community. Correspondingly, educators must work to improve the language proficiency between the school faculty and the families as well as develop classes on professional development and supporting culturally and linguistically diverse families.

It would be desirable for all students to attain high academic achievement, but engaged parents are not the only determining factor. In order to build a strong, communicative partnership and foster collaboration within the school community, high standards and expectations must be set and held for all students and the curriculum at large. This includes aligning standards with objectives, following through on these objectives, and monitoring teaching and learning. Characteristics such as "effective leadership" and "focused professional development" go hand in hand with parental involvement (Henderson & Mapp, 2002, p 24). Effective leadership can be exemplified with school personnel as well as parents. Teachers of culturally and linguistically diverse students should schedule meetings for conferences with parents and make phone calls or house visits to deliver good or concerning news. Schools can engage families by actively inviting and welcoming parental involvement and by developing programs that support a parent's desire to be involved (Henderson & Mapp, 2002, p. 44). In order to combat the various barriers of a lack of communication between families and teachers, extensive professional development is

necessary (Colombo, 2006). It is essential that teachers that speak English as a first language that have not had the opportunity to experience and maintain relationships with culturally and linguistically diverse families attend workshops to foster collaboration and better accommodate all families. These workshops expand knowledge about cultural awareness as well as enlighten teachers of the possible needs and strengths of students from all backgrounds (Colombo, 2006). Professional development for teachers can increase awareness of the benefits of building the home-school partnership. For example, Henderson & Mapp (2002) analyzed a study in which schools where teachers reported high levels of outreach reported test scores 40 percent higher than in schools with low levels of outreach (p. 28). Furthermore, creating this connection between families and teachers involves respect. Teachers need to create a sense of belonging for the students at school in which all cultures are accepted, encouraged, respected and included in the classroom.

Throughout the duration of the school week, students spend about 35 hours in school. For elementary students, the majority of these hours are usually spent with one classroom teacher. In this manner, the teachers are the ones that spend a large amount of time with the parents' children throughout the week. In a way, teachers become the child's second mother or father. During the week, parents may experience an array of burdens, such as family responsibilities, work, and time commitments. In order to address the needs of parents that rely heavily on the cooperation of teachers, school personnel must consider childcare, transportation, or scheduling conflicts (Henderson & Mapp, 2002, p. 46). In order to overcome these barriers, schools should provide childcare during school programs, arrange carpools, encourage family members to send other members to receive vital information, and provide supplies for students to work with at home (Henderson & Mapp, 2002, p. 46). These supply kits are especially important for some

low-income families that are unable to purchase books, writing utensils, or objects. These are just a few examples of how teachers can demonstrate a considerate and trusting relationship with parents. Furthermore, once parents become aware that the schools honor their needs, they are more likely and ready to participate in activities put on by the school (Henderson & Mapp, 2002, p. 46).

#### **Chapter 4: Benefits of Parental Involvement**

Although there can be various barriers to building the home-school partnership, there are countless benefits for students once the partnership is created. Students hold better expectations for themselves when they are aware that their parents and teachers think highly of them. This is extremely important for Hispanic and immigrant students that struggle with a new school and knowledge of what is to be expected. Studies have shown that their grade point averages increase, and they are more likely to improve their behavior in both the school and home environments (Henderson & Mapp, 2002, p. 24). Moreover, they communicate their wants and needs, which promotes better social skills and adaptations in the school setting (Henderson & Mapp, 2002, p. 24). This fosters communication in the target language while maintaining their native language at home. Parents also benefit from this constant communication with the school. They are able to voice their concerns, receive pertinent information about their child, and get involved with programs in their community. This ability to share concerns and receive assistance and feedback builds trust and confidence between the staff and the family (Borba, 2009, p. 682). Studies also have demonstrated that parental involvement with the school increases a child's attendance (Henderson & Mapp, 2002, p. 24). A parent stated, "...the child, their only job is...to go to school... That is their job and responsibility" (Plata-Potter & de Guzman, 2012, p. 98). Once parents and students understand the importance of their education through communicative language, the students are better equipped with the knowledge and skills to succeed in the American school system.

A key finding of parental involvement demonstrates that "programs and interventions that engage families in supporting their children's learning at home are linked to higher student achievement" (Henderson & Mapp, 2002, p. 25). Teaching is a team effort between the school

staff and the parents. Learning does not stop when the children exit the classroom. Parents must be held to the same responsibilities of educating their children as teachers, including fostering positive attitudes towards school. According to Tang et al. (2011), family involvement within schools conveys to children that education is valuable, which fosters positive feelings and attitudes toward school, and, therefore, fosters academic motivation (p. 178). Parents receive benefits of this communication as well as their children. For example, families that are continually involved in their child's education can collaborate with teachers to recognize and respond to student strengths and weaknesses (Tang et al., 2011, p. 184). Parents can suggest beneficial ways to enhance their child's learning, such as implementing different modes or styles, like kinesthetic or visual-spatial learning. Parents can also reinforce academic areas or behaviors that are productive and conducive to learning at home. Teachers may become aware of certain aspects of a child's behavior or academia of which parents are unaware, or vice versa. Furthermore, this parental involvement allows for a "shared power" that has led to the empowerment of the Hispanic community (Delgado-Gaitan, 1991, p. 22). Hispanic and immigrant families discover their new roles in the American school system and find access to numerous resources.

A vital benefit of parental involvement with their child's education is a sense of belonging. Every contact with the school strengthens the bond between the family and the staff. At times, there can be such vast differences in regulations between the United States and other countries in addition to language and other barriers that parents often feel "discouraged and unable to support their children in their education" (Plata-Potter & de Guzman, 2012, p. 100). Therefore, immigrant and Hispanic families that lack the tools for and knowledge of the American school system desire a positive environment in which everyone is "accepted,

important, and welcome” (Borba, 2009, p. 681). In addition, demonstrating that communication is key between non-English speaking families indicates that the school values their language and culture, and recognizes that these are essential aspects in promoting academic success. This aids in strengthening the bridge between the home and the school.

Parents possess numerous funds of knowledge that enhance the effectiveness of their child’s education. They provide their culture, language, time, and support to schools in order to better their child’s educational success. Parents that take an active interest in their child’s education cause the children to become invested in their own success. This involvement should not be taken lightly, as studies have demonstrated the positive impact to which immigrant and bilingual children have benefitted from increased parental involvement and relationships with their schools.



## **Chapter 5: Conclusion**

There are increasing numbers of culturally and linguistically diverse students coupled with a growing amount of educational achievement deficits. Logistical, cultural, linguistic and school-based barriers constantly threaten the relationships between families and school personnel. Frequently, immigrant and Hispanic families lack the tools to communicate with their child's school due to contrasting regulations from previous countries or from a language gap. This negatively impacts the ways in which these students can successfully and academically grow within the American school system. Therefore, demonstrated by this literature-based research, it is vital to describe the benefits of creating a strong, continuous relationship between the families and the school to enhance student achievement.

Two of the most crucial efforts to improve students' educational achievement levels are parental involvement and communicative relationships between teachers and families. Parents can become involved with their child's education through various means, including conferences, volunteering, reinforcing behaviors at home, homework, and phone calls. This can be difficult for parents who experience the language barrier with schools that do not have the resources for translations. Therefore, schools and parents must work as a team to foster a collaborative relationship in which concerns can be voiced and ideas are shared for the benefit of the children. School personnel must embrace and encourage native languages in the classroom, as solidifying the native language fosters an easier transition into learning the second language. Students that feel appreciated and welcome in a new environment thrive more than students who are unable to express their culture and individuality.

Although it can be much easier for parents who speak the same language and share the same customs as the school to create relationships, Hispanic and immigrant families should not

have to experience obstacles when it comes to their child's academic success. Schools must offer a multitude of ways for parents to become involved in the educational process so that they understand policies and expectations for their children. Once these relationships are formed and communication is continuous, the doors for academic achievement burst wide open. Students feel valued and are invested in their learning, they can develop social skills that foster second-language learning, and they find their role in the school. All students should have the opportunity to succeed academically with support and acceptance from their family and their school. Therefore, it is crucial to note and encourage parental participation from immigrant and Hispanic families in their child's education.

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