

Impact of Latino Parent Engagement on Student Academic Achievement: A Pilot Study

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Abstract

The current pilot study examines the impact of the *Ten Education Commandments for Parents* program on (1) new immigrant Latino parents' knowledge of the U.S. public education system, (2) parent engagement, and (3) their children's academic achievement. Utilizing a preexperimental, pre- and post-test research design, four schools with similar demographic compositions were chosen for the study. Parents in the experimental group ($n = 68$) participated in the *Ten Education Commandments for Parents* workshop sessions and completed pre- and posttests to assess differences in their perceptions and knowledge of parent engagement before and after attending the program. Additionally, two consecutive years of student data from these parents' children ($n = 164$) were compared with students attending similar schools ($n = 1,628$) whose parents did not participate in the workshop sessions. Results from both parent survey questionnaires and student report cards strongly suggest positive outcomes in three areas: increase in parents' understanding and knowledge of the U.S. education system, greater parent engagement in their children's education, and improvement in student achievement. Findings also support the implementation of the *Ten Education Commandments for Parents* program in other schools, suggesting it has the potential to positively influence both parent engagement and the academic achievement of Latino students.

Key Words: Latino students, parents, workforce development, engagement, academic achievement, family workshops, ten education commandments

Introduction

Latinos remain the largest minority population in the U.S. and one of the most rapidly increasing ethnic groups today (Garcia & Bayer, 2005; Kohler & Lazarin, 2007). With increases in immigration, U.S. public schools and other institutions are faced with the immense challenge of identifying and attempting to meet the unique needs of its mounting Latino immigrant student population in order to ensure the success of its students and to create a more educated and competitive workforce across the U.S. This ethnic/racial group is often characterized by high dropout rates, low college enrollment, and lack of educational attainment, which negatively perpetuates the pervasive Latino achievement gap (National Center for Education Statistics, 2014). Addressing the Latino achievement gap remains a top priority. This pilot study will examine, in part, the implications of the rising Latino immigrant population in the educational system within one of the most populous and richest counties in California: Orange County.

According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2014), Latinos account for 34% of Orange County's current population, and based on new government population projections, the minority group is expected to grow to nearly 45% by the year 2060. Additionally, when considering the total youth population (under age 18), Latinos currently comprise 46.7%. Almost a tenth of Orange County's residents are undocumented immigrants that work in low-wage jobs. Not surprisingly, Latino families have twice the rate of poverty than the rest of the county. Furthermore, nearly three times (43.5%) the number of Latinos have attained less than a high school diploma, compared to 15.7% of all Orange County residents (Waheed, Romero, & Sarmiento, 2014). In the 2012–13 school year, Latino students in this county represented approximately 48.3% of the public school enrollment, yet maintained one of the highest dropout rates in comparison to other minority and nonminority groups (Kena et al., 2014). This is especially significant given education-based earning differentials contributing to risk factors—including unemployment, poverty, substance abuse, and crime—negatively impacting the achievement of future generations (Annunziata, Hogue, Faw, & Liddle, 2006; Trusty, Mellin, & Herbert, 2008).

Additionally, the workforce gap continues to lend to the cycle of underachievement in Latino families such that parents with lower paying jobs tend to have little or no education and live in poorer neighborhoods, which in turn limits their access to supportive services and additional learning opportunities for their children (Lee & Bowen, 2006). In targeting the Latino achievement gap early on, Latino students are given the opportunity to pursue higher education—indicative of greater job mobility, financial stability, higher lifetime

earnings, and individual success, which benefits not only the individual, but also Orange County's workforce.

In identifying the exact etiology of the achievement gap among immigrant populations, parent engagement has been identified as a significant contributing factor. Carpenter, Ramirez, and Severn (2006) found that, regardless of race, the most significant predictors of achievement are rooted in the home, with parent engagement playing the most significant role in increased achievement for Latinos—more than any other racial group. Parent engagement has also been shown to mediate the effects of risk factors typically characteristic of the academic achievement gap, such as low socioeconomic status, parents' educational attainment, and race/ethnicity (Altschul, 2012; De Civita, Pagani, Vitaro, & Tremblay, 2004; Eamon, 2002; Schreiber, 2002). It follows, then, that parent engagement represents an important and effective target strategy to support immigrant populations in closing the academic achievement gap, thereby positively impacting the workforce gap as well. Empowering parents, one of the keys to student success, is a critical mechanism to ensure a better educated, better prepared, and more competitive workforce in Orange County and elsewhere. Therefore, the current pilot study seeks to assess the impact of the *Ten Education Commandments for Parents* program on (1) new immigrant Latino parents' knowledge of the education system, (2) parent engagement, and (3) their children's academic achievement.

Literature Review

To date, Latinos remain the largest minority population in the U.S. and one of the most rapidly increasing ethnic groups (Kohler & Lazarin, 2007). These numbers have important implications for the systems with which Latino immigrant families interact, primarily the educational institutions charged with providing students with what immigrant families often hope to be a "brighter future" for their children (Fry & Gonzalez, 2008). Over time, research has consistently identified Latino students as a group chiefly defined by persistently high dropout rates, the lowest rates of college enrollment, and overall lack of educational attainment (Garcia & Bayer, 2005; Kena et al., 2014; Lutz, 2007). This gap in educational achievement is accentuated by a number of social and structural barriers or risk factors faced by Latino immigrant families, such as language barriers, limited parental education, and poverty (Bohon, Macpherson, & Atilas, 2005; Marschall, 2006).

Despite provisions outlined in legislation, there continues to exist a disparity between the academic achievement of Latino students and their nonimmigrant counterparts. Though the dropout rate for Latinos decreased over the years

from roughly 32% to 13% between 1990 and 2012, it remains the highest in comparison to other minority and nonminority students; only 76% of Latino students graduate each year compared to 94% of White students (Kena et al., 2014). At the college level, Latinos continue to underperform in comparison to their minority and nonminority counterparts, demonstrating a six-year graduation rate of only 50% (Aud et al., 2012).

Though awareness exists of this widespread problem and its negative, long-term, intergenerational impact, there is no true consensus on its specific etiology (Good, Masewicz, & Vogel, 2010). One theoretical view espouses the benefits of assimilation over acculturation. Some (Portes, Fernandes, & Haller, 2005; Portes & Rumbaut, 2001; Portes & Zhou, 1993) have argued for the concept of segmented assimilation as one explanation of the development and perpetuation of differential outcomes in the achievement of minority groups. Segmented assimilation theory describes the way in which the new second generation becomes incorporated or assimilated into the stratified system of modern-day society (Xie & Greenman, 2011). It also stresses the role of parental human capital, family structure, and modes of incorporation in predicting long-term outcomes for the children of immigrants (Jeynes, 2008; Waters, Tran, Kasinitz, & Mollenkopf, 2010). Moreover, other researchers have pointed out that highly acculturated immigrant children have shown lower levels of academic achievement in what is known as the Immigrant Paradox (Garcia & Kerivan, 2011).

It is important to highlight that external factors play a major role on positive family functioning, health outcomes, and student academic achievement (Halgunseth, Ispa, & Rudy, 2006). Communities that receive present-day immigrants are also considered risk factors in that newcomer families often settle into disadvantaged, underprivileged neighborhoods that coincide with schools which are, in turn, underfunded and poorly performing (Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 2001). This environment poses a risk to youth assimilating into a culture defined by underachievement and lack of engagement, thereby impeding the potential for upward mobility. Individuals from socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds tend to perform poorly in school and often live in impoverished, high crime communities, which further limit their access to services as well as their motivation and ability to prioritize educational attainment (Harris, Jamison, & Trujillo, 2008; Henry, Merten, Plunkett, & Sands, 2008; Ramirez & Carpenter, 2005).

As far as internal factors, research has identified a number of variables contributing to the underachievement of Latino immigrant students (Bohon et al., 2005; Marschall, 2006). These variables can include but are not limited to low levels of parent education, difficulties with language acquisition, and

lack of access to Internet or other educational supports. These risk factors can predispose individuals to specific vulnerabilities, disadvantages, or hazards and therefore place them at risk of negative life outcomes (Woolley & Grogan-Kaylor, 2006). Additionally, parents may be limited by their lack of education in that they simply cannot support their children in areas for which they have little or no experience (Houterville & Conway, 2008).

A significant but often overlooked area of research is the role positive parent engagement plays in the achievement level of Latino immigrant students (Ceballo, Maurizi, Suarez, & Aretakis, 2014). Parent engagement is defined in a number of ways throughout the literature; however, it most often includes investment in resources and supportive behaviors, such as attending parent–teacher conferences, engaging in volunteer activities at school, providing help with homework, or having school-related discussions at home (Epstein et al., 2009). Given the Latino culture’s emphasis on collectivism and family bonds, it follows that most Latino parents report providing informal educational support for their children at home through homework assistance, giving advice, and providing emotional support (LeFevre & Shaw, 2012).

Many low-income Latino families experience the education system as impersonal and nonresponsive to their concerns (Fine, 2014). As a result, many Latino parents are distrustful of the school system and fearful of being perceived as undeserving. This experience has resulted in deep-seated fears and attitudes among many Latino parents toward the school, such as the fear of being put down, either overtly or covertly (Chavkin & Williams, 1988). In addition, few teachers are explicitly trained in working with families, and some may view parents, particularly immigrant and low-income parents, as liabilities rather than assets in children’s educational pursuits (Hayes-Bautista, 2004; Nicolau & Ramos, 1990). A study by Ong, Phinney, and Dennis (2006) found that GPA increased in relation to persistent parental support and engagement, irrespective of socioeconomic status. Eamon (2002) noted similar results in regard to academic performance such that greater parent engagement was indicative of both higher reading and math achievement among Latino students.

Practices promoting the participation of parents in student learning have been found to not only benefit the student, but also to result in gains for the parents as well (Larrotta & Ramirez, 2009). Furthermore, parent efficacy depends upon the parents’ beliefs about whether or not their engagement is likely to have a positive influence on their children and may need to be encouraged (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005). Parent engagement has also been shown by a number of studies to mediate the effects of risk factors—such as low socioeconomic status, parents’ educational attainment, and race—on achievement outcomes. These findings highlight not only the immense positive impact of

parent engagement, but also the challenges yet to overcome in order to facilitate its increase. Additionally, it is well-documented that parent-to-parent social networks can be a viable and effective option for low-income Latino parents who are learning how to support their children and to more effectively navigate the U.S. educational system (Curry, Jean-Marie, & Adams, 2016; Medina, 2011). Raising parent awareness of the educational system, promoting home-school communication, and encouraging and supporting parent engagement in and outside of the home are all means to address the Latino student achievement gap (Auerbach & Collier, 2012; Hoover-Dempsey, Green, & Whitaker, 2010).

Given the diversity of issues discussed above, it is important to continue discovering the potential effects of parent engagement programs in student academic achievement. Therefore, this study aims to answer three key research questions: First, can immigrant parents learn how to effectively navigate the U.S. school system? Secondly, once parents have a better understanding of the education system, can this new knowledge influence greater parent engagement behavior? Thirdly, does greater parent engagement increase the child's academic achievement? Researchers hypothesized that greater parent knowledge and engagement does lead to their children's higher academic achievement.

The Latino Educational Attainment Initiative in Orange County

The Latino Educational Attainment (LEA) Initiative was created in the wake of the *Orange County (OC) Register* series "Our Children, Our Future" (June 2003–March 2004). A key outcome of this 12-part report was the identification of the inability of immigrant parents to effectively navigate the U.S. education system. These immigrant parents wanted their children to succeed—become doctors, lawyers, business people—but they did not know how to help their children achieve these goals. The *OC Register* acted as a convener to bring a variety of businesses and community groups together to address this issue. Key stakeholders included: the Orange County Department of Education; the Orange County Business Council (OCBC); United Way of Orange County; KidWorks, Inc.; The Roman Catholic Diocese of Orange; Santa Ana College; Santa Ana Unified School District; Fullerton Collaborative; Creer, Inc.; Boy Scouts of America, Orange County Chapter; Garden Grove Unified School District; and Saddleback Unified School District.

As a result of this stakeholder meeting, the OCBC created the LEA Initiative with the focus on building a more competitive workforce and empowering parent coalitions to take a more active role as parent advocates in their children's education. OCBC committed to act as the lead and backbone organization for

the LEA Initiative, working on the collective impact efforts and maintaining momentum to provide resource allocation and coordinate program implementation. Currently, OCBC supports new and ongoing parent coalitions that are engaged in the LEA initiative by providing monthly networking meetings; maintaining the Initiative's website and marketing materials; creating, printing, and translating training materials; and hosting the annual LEA Initiative Awards Reception.

The vision of the LEA Initiative was to fill the gaps left by the educational system to address critical issues to improve and maintain Orange County's workforce. The LEA Initiative adopted the following goals:

- Ensure the future of Orange County's highly skilled workforce.
- Assist parents to be more effective advocates for their children's education.
- Improve student performance, lower the achievement gap, and increase enrollment in postsecondary education and training.
- Empower and unify the community by being neighborhood-based and school-based.
- Foster parent-to-parent social networking opportunities by promoting dialogue—"the good gossip" (speaking and sharing about the benefits of education).
- Align and leverage existing programs rather than create new ones.

The LEA Initiative began by surveying and interviewing Latino parents to assess their knowledge of the education system and how to get involved in their children's education. Results suggested that parents were limited in their understanding of the education system. To address the identified gaps, the LEA Initiative collaborated with educators at the Orange County Department of Education and youth advocates from different nonprofit organizations to create the parent curriculum, *The 10 Education Commandments for Parents*, which is an easy to understand, accessible 33-page guide containing 10 key messages for parents (see Figure 1 for the list of The 10 Education Commandments). A train-the-trainer model was designed to train volunteer facilitators from participating organizations to disseminate this information to parents. The majority of these volunteer facilitators were parent educators who had experience with providing training to parents. All materials were translated into English, Spanish, Vietnamese, and Korean to address the diverse needs of the Orange County community. To date, the curriculum is in its third edition, and more than 30,000 parents from over 134 neighborhoods in Orange County have completed the training in a variety of venues; the curriculum is customizable to meet individual setting needs (e.g., schools, community centers, neighborhood associations, churches, etc.). The long-term goal of the LEA Initiative and its principal sponsor, the Orange County Business Council, is a better educated,

better prepared, and competitive workforce in Orange County. Empowering parents, one of the keys to student success, is a critical mechanism in creating that globally competitive 21st Century workforce.

Typically, parents are recruited for the workshops by educators, other parents, or community members. Flyers are sent home with students or announcements are made during open houses and school meetings. Once parents register to participate, they attend 10 hours of training (about 3–4 hours per week). For every training session, refreshments and childcare are provided by the host agency. *The 10 Education Commandments for Parents* curriculum is divided into three parts (usually during three or four days of instruction/sessions). First, parents take the pretest so the facilitator knows their knowledge and perceptions of the school system. During this first session, parents learn Commandments 1, 2, and 3, focusing on what they can do to help their child improve their academic achievement. During the second session, parents learn the next three commandments, covering expectations and educational outcomes of elementary and middle school. The last meeting covers the final commandments, including financial aid, high school, and beyond. At the end, parents complete the posttest and answer a few open-ended questions to gauge their learning and satisfaction with the program. (See below and next page for Figure 1.)

<p>The <i>10 Education Commandment for Parents</i> curriculum teaches parents the fundamentals of the American education system and gives parents the tools to become more actively engaged in their children’s education. A brief description of each educational commandment follows.</p>
<p>Commandment 1 – Commit as a family to be involved in school.</p>
<p>Family engagement in your child/children’s education is an important way for you to support your child not only in school, but for future life success. Everyone in the family has a role to play and something to contribute to their child’s education.</p>
<p>Commandment 2 – Do my part in helping my child study.</p>
<p>Supporting your child’s education begins with your interest and support at home. What are you doing at home to support learning at school?</p>
<p>Commandment 3 – Understand how grades work (A, B, C, D, F).</p>
<p>Grades are an important way to communicate to parents how a child is doing in school in both achievement and effort. Monitoring your child’s progress from grading period to grading period and year to year gives YOU the opportunity to help your child, seek help if needed, and/or celebrate their success in school.</p>

<p>Commandment 4 – Learn how schools are structured.</p> <p>Students need to demonstrate proficiency at each grade level and master the Common Core State Standards which set grade-level learning expectancies for students in grades K–12 for mathematics, English language arts, and science. These standards were designed to prepare students for success in college and the workplace. They set clear, consistent, and high learning goals.</p>
<p>Commandment 5 – Learn what my child needs to graduate high school.</p> <p>Graduating high school can be a challenging task if you don't know the class requirements needed to graduate. California requires that students must pass a minimum set of required courses and an exit examination. In California, the minimum requirements are three courses in English, two courses in mathematics, two courses in science, three courses in social studies, one course in visual/performing arts or foreign language, and two courses in physical education.</p>
<p>Commandment 6 – Support the learning of math, science, and English.</p> <p>Science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) education is a critical program focused on ensuring students' success in school and the real world. Parents can support their children by engaging in his/her daily school schedule and finding someone who can provide tutoring in these courses.</p>
<p>Commandment 7 – Encourage my child to take honors and advanced courses.</p> <p>Advanced courses are available in high school to students who excel in core subject areas such as English, math, science, history, foreign languages, and art. These rigorous and challenging courses require commitment on the student's part and support from parents. The advantages to taking these courses include the possibility of earning college credit and a higher and competitive Grade Point Average (GPA).</p>
<p>Commandment 8 – Help my child prepare to be college and/or career ready.</p> <p>Help your child prepare for college early. Planning for college and career begins as early as the elementary years. It is important to plant the seed of a future beyond the classroom. Making the connections between education and careers helps children understand the path toward realizing their career goals.</p>
<p>Commandment 9 – College options are affordable.</p> <p>You don't have to pay for school all by yourself—there are grants, loans, and scholarships that can help you pay some or all of the expenses of college.</p>
<p>Commandment 10 – Teach my child to view obstacles as challenges, to hope, and to visualize their future.</p> <p>Teach your child how to set goals and to pursue them from an early age. Create your plan to support your child/children to reach their full potential. Start early, be intentional, and involve your child as you support them to reach their goals.</p>

Figure 1. The 10 Education Commandments for Parents, adapted from Orange County Business Council (2017)

Research Methods

This research study measured the impact of the *10 Education Commandments for Parents* program on (1) parent knowledge of the U.S. educational system, (2) parent engagement in their children's education, and (3) parent engagement's indirect effects on their children's academic achievement. Applying a preexperimental, pre- and posttest research design, the research team partnered with the Orange County Department of Education and the Santa Ana Unified School District to conduct the study. Two elementary (Diamond and Adams) and two intermediate (Carr and Spurgeon) schools in Santa Ana Unified School District (SAUSD) with similar student demographic composition (Latino, low income, moderate/low academic achievement) were chosen for the study (see Table 1 for student demographic information; note that IRB approval was granted to use the school names). Using an availability sampling technique, parents from Diamond and Carr schools were recruited (experimental group). All participating parents ($n = 68$) attended the 10-hour parent training over five weeks and completed the *LEA Initiative Engagement and Skills Parent Survey* to assess their knowledge and behavior changes before and after the program. Additionally, parents provided written comments on their learning experience and personal testimonials at the end of the workshops. The goal of this qualitative data collection technique was to give parents the opportunity to share their personal views on the impact the training and curriculum had on themselves and their families.

Table 1. School Year 2012–2013 Demographic Information*

Student Demographics 2012–2013	Experimental Group		Control Group	
	Diamond Elementary	Carr Intermediate	Adams Elementary	Spurgeon Intermediate
Students enrolled	582	1,589	576	1,144
Socioeconomically disadvantaged	578	1,576	523	1,109
English learners	469	633	407	527
Latino of any race	460	1,559	506	1,078

*California Department of Education, 2016.

The research team collected student data (report cards/grades) for two academic years to track grade point averages of students attending all four schools. Participating parents in the experimental group ($n = 68$) had a total of 168 children attending Diamond and Carr schools. These data were also collected

from students attending two additional schools (Adams and Spurgeon), which were grouped in the control group ($n = 1,628$). Parents from Adams and Spurgeon did not participate in the parent training sessions, and only student data was collected from the control group. It is important to emphasize that the overarching goal of the program focuses on increasing parent knowledge and engagement to ensure student academic success; therefore, no student intervention took place.

A total of 68 parents of students attending Diamond Elementary ($n = 30$) and Carr Intermediate ($n = 38$) schools participated in the experimental group. These parents learned the *Ten Education Commandments for Parents* curriculum in a 10-hour training over five weeks. Parents in the control group did not participate in these training sessions. Participating parents completed *The LEA Initiative Engagement and Skills Parent Survey* before and after the program. This parent survey has 25 items using a 5-point Likert scale, one item using a simple math problem to assess whether or not they know how to calculate GPA, and the following three demographic questions: How old were you when you arrived to the U.S.? What country are you from? What level of education do you have? (Note: *The LEA Initiative Engagement and Skills Parent Survey* is available from the authors upon request).

Results

Parent Results

The survey questionnaire was developed by the researchers, testing a high test–retest reliability analysis ($r = .87$). Table 2 shows the positive variance of parent behavior and knowledge as a result of the training sessions. Parents demonstrated statistically significant improvement (using a paired samples t -test statistical data analysis) in the following areas: understanding and knowledge to navigate the educational system; engagement in their children's education, including role recognition when helping their children study; understanding of the report card and computation of grade point averages; importance of setting high academic achievement goals for their children; understanding of high school courses and graduation requirements; and awareness of financial aid choices and opportunities.

Subsequently, researchers collected qualitative parent testimonials after the training sessions with the goal of enhancing survey results and capturing personal impact. Parent testimonials showed appreciation for participating, learning, and meeting with other parents. Parent observations were originally written in Spanish and translated into English. The inter-rater analysis coded two key categories: increase parent engagement, and social network development.

Table 2. The LEA Initiative Engagement and Skills Parent Survey Pre- and Posttest Results ($n = 68$)*

	Pretest 2012; Posttest 2014	Pretest	Posttest				
Item #	Item	Mean (sd)	Mean (sd)	Correlation	t	df	Sig. (2 tailed)
1	Do you attend parent–teacher meetings as well as back to school nights (open house)?	3.76 (1.04)	4.85 (0.47)	-.103	-7.598	67	.000
2	Do you help your child with his/her homework, or if you cannot help him/her, do you find someone who can?	3.82 (1.09)	4.60 (0.90)	.459	-6.128	67	.000
3	I know my child’s teachers or counselors, and they know me.	3.87 (0.93)	4.94 (0.29)	.026	-9.156	67	.000
4	I feel comfortable talking with my child’s teachers or counselors about his/her education.	3.68 (1.10)	4.74 (0.84)	.165	-6.885	67	.000
5	Do you feel it is important to visit colleges and/or universities with your child?	3.78 (1.01)	4.43 (0.53)	-.269	-4.260	66	.000
6	It is important for me to know about the free application for the federal student aid (FAFSA) so my child can receive money to attend a college or university.	3.75 (1.14)	4.84 (0.56)	.029	-7.152	67	.000
7	My child has a quiet place to work on his/her homework.	3.75 (1.20)	4.93 (0.26)	-.156	-7.621	66	.000
8	My child first completes his/her homework before helping with household chores.	3.86 (1.04)	4.95 (0.72)	.042	-8.453	65	.000
9	I discuss with my child his/her future (such as goals and dreams).	4.12 (0.72)	4.84 (0.48)	-.074	-6.638	67	.000
10	I discuss with my child the importance of going to college.	3.69 (1.00)	4.79 (0.53)	-.177	-7.510	67	.000
11	I believe it is important for my child to take mathematics classes every year.	4.13 (0.86)	4.93 (0.26)	.109	-7.497	67	.000
12	I believe it is important for my child to take science classes every year.	4.26 (0.75)	4.93 (0.26)	.177	-7.322	67	.000
13	I will/do encourage my child to take AP and/or honor classes.	4.46 (0.63)	4.94 (0.24)	.181	-6.306	67	.000

Table 2, continued

14	I verify my child's grades by looking at his/her report card.	4.19 (0.89)	4.91 (0.29)	-.056	-6.900	67	.000
15	Elementary school ends in fifth or sixth grade.	4.34 (0.79)	4.93 (0.40)	-.109	-5.159	66	.000
16	Students need to complete at least 240 credits to graduate from high school.	4.06 (1.09)	4.93 (0.26)	.171	-6.639	67	.000
17	Each student must pass the California High School Exit Exam (CAHSEE) to graduate from high school.	3.84 (1.20)	4.94 (0.24)	.228	-7.750	67	.000
18	Students who get a college degree earn more money and get better jobs than students who just go to high school and do not earn a college degree.	4.00 (0.95)	4.94 (0.24)	-.067	-7.834	67	.000
19	The U.S. educational system is organized as follows: elementary, junior high, high school, and college/university.	3.90 (1.12)	4.94 (0.24)	-.079	-7.393	67	.000
20	Children who attend preschool are better prepared for kindergarten and elementary school than children who do not attend preschool.	4.16 (0.94)	4.96 (0.21)	-.039	-6.747	67	.000
21	To monitor my child's grades, I calculate his/her grade point average (GPA).	3.49 (1.40)	4.93 (0.50)	.202	-8.573	67	.000
22	Each high school student must take a series of examinations/ tests to get into college or a university.	3.99 (0.92)	4.94 (0.24)	-.004	-8.270	67	.000
23	<i>If your child gets a "D" or an "F" in a class, it means that he/she is doing really well. (REVERSED)</i>	2.48 (1.43)	1.70 (0.67)	-.101	3.872	66	.000
24	There are many kinds of financial aid resources available to help your child go to college or a university.	4.19 (0.97)	4.93 (0.26)	-.179	-5.800	67	.000
25	To get money to go to college there are financial aid application deadlines that cannot be missed.	3.56 (1.27)	4.90 (0.63)	.129	-8.204	67	.000
26	GPA exercise (Correct = 1; Incorrect = 0)	0.24 (0.43)	0.81 (0.40)	-.171	-7.501	67	.000

*Paired samples *t*-test

Increase Parent Engagement

The great majority of parents wrote how the *Ten Education Commandments for Parents* training sessions have impacted their involvement in the schools, sparking a greater engagement with their child's academic achievement. They shared that they were no longer as intimidated with the educational system and that they now have a better understanding about their own roles when helping their children. Generally, parents explained that increasing their knowledge on how the schools are structured and operate, how to calculate a GPA, and how to access college opportunities has empowered and reenergized them to be more active in helping their child at home. A few representative examples of parent engagement comments are provided below.

I am a mother of two children. Truthfully, this information has served me to help my children in their studies and to get involved in my children's education. I would like to thank our instructors for their time and knowledge—Mil Gracias. (Diamond Elementary)

I really enjoyed participating in this program because I learned how to read my child's report card, calculate his GPA, and how I can be more involved in my child's education....Also, I learned to monitor his grades regularly and how to motivate him to try his best in school—thank you so much. (Carr Intermediate)

I liked these [parent] classes because I learned about how to be more involved in my child's education. I would like to receive more information in the future to help my child improve her grades—thank you! (Carr Intermediate)

I enjoyed the parent classes, especially strategies to help my child study more effectively. Additionally, we learned how to communicate with school teachers and counselors and how to look for university scholarships and other financial aid. I am committed to help my child read more frequently at home. I appreciated the Ten Commandments of Education—thank you! (Carr Intermediate)

Social Network Development

The second predominant theme among parents' writings focused on the impact of developing social networks. Their testimonials were highly encouraging regarding meeting other parents and building positive relationships. The idea of knowing other people who may have similar experiences and having conversations to learn more from one another was noted as being powerful. This group of parents became closer to each other and established a larger support system that seemed to last beyond the five-week training sessions. A few of their comments are presented next.

I learned so many new things, including how to guide my children in their education and specific communication skills to utilize when talking with my children's teachers. Thank you for bringing these kinds of [parent] programs and inviting us to participate. We appreciate the community support—thank you for your help. (Diamond Elementary)

My wife and I wanted to thank the LEA for teaching us the Ten Educational Commandments. We learned how to help our children at home. We also met other parents. Now, we know who to call in our neighborhood when we need help and have questions. (Diamond Elementary)

My grandchildren go to Diamond and Carr. These parent classes have taught me that I am important in their education. I enjoyed meeting and learning from other parents and family members. We are all in this together, and we can help each other when needed. (Diamond and Carr)

The instructor was very nice and knowledgeable; she answered all my questions. I have met new parents, and we have become friends. I do not feel lonely anymore. (Carr Intermediate)

Student Academic Achievement Results

Report cards for a period of two consecutive academic years (2012–13 and 2013–14) were collected and analyzed from students in all four schools. Specifically, the analysis focused on year to year comparison within and between experimental and control group student grades in math, language arts, science, and citizenship. Using an ANOVA statistical test, the research team wanted to know grade variances from one year to the next from students whose parents participated in the parents' training session ($n = 168$) and compare them to those students whose parents did not participate ($n = 1,628$).

The Santa Ana Unified School District implements a standard-based grading system for both elementary and middle school students. The elementary schools measure Standard Performance on a five-point Likert Scale (Exceeds Standards = 5, Meets Standards = 4, Working Towards Standards = 3, Below Standards = 2, Far Below Standards = 1). Additionally, the report cards also show Citizenship grades such as work ethic and other social skills based on a four-point Likert Scale (Excellent = 4, Satisfactory = 3, Needs Improvement = 2, Unsatisfactory = 1). The middle school students show their learning competencies in two key areas: Standard/Grades, using a five-point Likert Scale (Advanced = 5, Proficient = 4, Basic = 3, Below Basic = 2, Far Below Basic = 1); and Performance/Effort, applying a five-point Likert Scale (Outstanding = 5, Above Average = 4, Average = 3, Below Average = 2, Does Little/No Work = 1). The data analysis of the report cards for elementary and middle school students presented in Table 3 strongly suggest the following key study findings:

- Intermediate school students whose parents participated in the *10 Education Commandments for Parents* training sessions significantly increased from Basic to Proficient levels in math, language arts, and science, whereas intermediate school students whose parents did not participate in the training sessions remained at a Basic level in all subjects.
- Elementary school students in both groups showed an increase in math, language arts, and science grades. The elementary school results showed no significant differences between the experimental and control groups.
- Both the experimental and control groups achieved higher scores in citizenship grades, demonstrating a greater work ethic, attitude, decision-making ability, and preparedness for learning. However, there were no statistical differences on citizenship grades between the groups.

Table 3. 2012–14 Student Academic Achievement – Two-Year Comparison

Elementary Schools	Diamond <i>n</i> = 100	Adams <i>n</i> = 579	F	Sig.
GPA Standard/Grade 2012–2013	3.42 (0.46)	3.47 (0.60)	1.065	0.359
GPA Standard/Grade 2013–2014	3.67 (0.53)	3.66 (0.52)		
Intermediate Schools*	Carr <i>n</i> = 68	Spurgeon <i>n</i> = 1,049	F	Sig.
GPA Standard/Grade 2012–2013	3.35 (1.05)	3.13 (1.16)	2.715	0.028
GPA Standard/Grade 2013–2014	3.86 (1.06)	3.35 (1.24)		

*The pre and post GPAs show statistically significant differences ($p < 0.05$) among students attending intermediate schools.

Discussion

Unfortunately, the achievement gap among different racial/ethnic groups, including Latinos, is persistent. To increase academic achievement that produces a stronger workforce, businesses and educators have to work in tandem. One of the most promising access points for this collaboration is through partnerships that deliver effective parent engagement programs, which is in alignment with the national focus on new educational standards. For example, California recently updated statewide guidance to meet the requirements of the Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF), which assists school districts in planning and implementing programs to increase parent participation in their child’s education. Furthermore, the California Department of Education released a parent engagement resource entitled *Family Engagement Framework: A Tool for California School Districts* (California Department of Education, 2014), supporting systematic school, family, and community partnerships.

The lessons learned from the current pilot study clearly illustrate the benefits of providing *The 10 Education Commandments for Parents* program related to accessibility (focusing on building parent social networks), program sustainability, and leadership opportunities at both the school and community levels. The Latino Educational Attainment Initiative's goal to contribute to parents' ability to navigate the education system and to be actively involved with their child's education was achieved, based on survey results and anecdotal evidence from parent testimonials. By increasing parent skills and knowledge about the education system, parents' sense of efficacy and commitment to continue learning was enhanced and led parents to seek additional opportunities to increase their knowledge and engagement of the educational system (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005). More importantly, qualitative data strongly suggests that parents built a strong social network among themselves with the goal to regularly support one another. Continued leadership training for parents is the next logical step. Such training sessions would develop and maintain a parent cadre of trainers to help other parents learn and share the "good gossip" (parent social networks to talk about and share the benefits of education), while enhancing individuals' leadership skills. Secondly, the ability to customize the program by providing additional training sessions in a variety of venues including schools, community halls, or parent homes as well as holding workshops at various times (day, evening, Saturday, and even Sunday) and in various languages increased the accessibility of the program for participants. Finally, the Orange County Business Council acting as the backbone organization for this initiative and program offers an effective model for businesses and community organizations who are interested in engaging in partnerships with schools and other community groups to support parent engagement as a means to positively affect academic achievement and workforce development in their respective communities.

The results of this pilot research study suggest that the *10 Education Commandments for Parents* program has positive influences on parent engagement and on the academic achievement of Latino students. More importantly, the elementary and intermediate student data presented here are aligned with a great majority of the current body of research, which shows that early parent engagement is an effective practice to increase high school completion and reduce dropout rates. The success of this parent program can be attributed to the strong collaboration between the business, nonprofit, and education sectors. The Latino Educational Attainment Initiative serves as a potential model for other collaborators to adopt as they work together to achieve greater educational outcomes in their communities.

Study Limitations

This research study's limitations are related to sampling and participant size. First, the study applies a non-probability, non-random sample technique. The parents who participated and learned *The 10 Educational Commandments for Parents Curriculum* were self-selected. Secondly, the total number of parents who participated in the study is somewhat moderate ($n = 68$). To compensate for these limitations, the research team selected a control group, composed of one elementary and one middle school from the same school district with very similar socioeconomic status and demographic compositions. It is also advised that further scientific inquiry is needed to expand existing research investigating the impact of school–business–community collaborative models as it relates to both parent engagement and student achievement.

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