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## Supporting Parent Engagement in Linguistically Diverse Families to Promote Young Children's Life Success

Sandra Barrueco

*The Catholic University of America*, barrueco@cua.edu

Sheila Smith

*Columbia University*, ss3793@cumc.columbia.edu

Samuel A. Stephens

*National Center for Children in Poverty*, stephen@nccp.org

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Parents' central role in their young children's learning and development is evident in a wide range of parenting behaviors. Some of these behaviors are embedded in daily routines, such as parents' responsive verbal play with infants and toddlers during bath time and conversation with preschoolers while preparing dinner. In other instances, parents engage in highly intentional efforts to help children learn, as when they explain the meaning of words while reading a storybook or when they help a child practice counting. The interactions parents have with the adults who care for and teach their children in child care and early education settings can also influence children's development. Through these interactions, both parents and caregivers can learn about ways to support children's learning in light of their individual needs and circumstances. A large body of research shows that varied forms of parent engagement have a positive influence on development, early learning, school readiness, and long-term educational success of all groups of children, including those from diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds.<sup>1-8</sup>

This paper provides a general review of research that can inform policies aimed at building the capacity of early care and education programs to promote parent engagement in linguistically diverse families. The term, "parent engagement," as used in this paper, refers to two types of activity: 1) parents' nurturing, responsive interactions with their children, at home and in the community, that help children acquire competencies they need for school and life success, and 2) interactions parents have with providers in early care and education settings that help both parents and providers promote children's learning and development. Linguistically diverse families are those whose home language is not English and whose family members may have varying degrees of proficiency in English, including limited English speaking and reading skills.

There is wide agreement that early care and education programs should support parent engagement that promotes children's early learning and lays the foundation for continued engagement in later school years that contributes to children's longer-term educational success and self-sufficiency. Compared to families headed by English-only speakers, linguistically diverse families, particularly immigrant families, are more likely to be poor, live in economically and linguistically isolated communities, and experience discrimination.<sup>9-12</sup> Consequently, the children in these families face risks to their development that are similar to those affecting children in other low-income families as well as those that may be associated with immigrant or refugee status. As discussed in greater detail later in this paper, there is a need for policies that can equip early care and education programs to address widely documented barriers that impede linguistically diverse families' access to programs and engagement in activities, in partnership with programs, that promote their children's learning.<sup>10,13-15</sup>

Designing policies that help programs promote parent engagement in linguistically diverse families could benefit a large and growing number of children,

particularly children whose school readiness and success may be challenged. Currently, of the approximately 23 million children in the United States under the age of six years, 8 percent live in households where no one over the age of 14 is proficient in English.<sup>16,17</sup> Young children of immigrants comprise 25 percent of all children under nine years,<sup>10</sup> with the percent of children of all ages who are themselves immigrants or who have an immigrant parent expected to rise from 23 percent in 2005 to 34 percent by 2050.<sup>18</sup> While less than half (47 percent) of foreign-born parents of young children report not being able to speak English “very well,” 90 percent of all parents of young children who have limited proficiency in English are foreign-born.<sup>10</sup> Fostering parent engagement in these linguistically diverse families during the early childhood period can promote school readiness among children who face higher educational risks, including family poverty and linguistic isolation, while also leveraging key family strengths, a topic explored in a later section.

The remainder of this paper addresses four interrelated questions:

- 1) What factors affect linguistically diverse families’ access to early care and education programs?
- 2) What do we know about linguistically diverse families and how parents in these families support their young children’s learning and development?
- 3) What features of early care and education programs appear to contribute to high levels of parent engagement in linguistically diverse families?
- 4) What policies can help increase the capacity of early care and education programs to support parent engagement in linguistically diverse families?

While examining the research on parent engagement of linguistically diverse families, it is important to recognize that:

- These families are a diverse group, although much of the research has focused on Spanish-speaking families or families with a Hispanic background;
- Linguistically diverse families as a group share many characteristics with mono-lingual English-speaking parents, while many also have experiences that may pose distinct challenges and opportunities for parent engagement; and
- Most parent engagement studies, including those concerned with immigrant families or families speaking a language other than English at home, provide limited information about parents’ language proficiency and about other potential characteristics that may influence parent engagement; even when more information is provided, most studies have not been able to disentangle the role of English proficiency from

other important characteristics affecting parent engagement in linguistically diverse families.

The majority of studies reviewed in the following sections were published between 2000 and 2015 and were found through searches for research articles in the Child Care and Early Education Research Connections collection.<sup>19</sup>

### **What factors affect linguistically diverse families' access to early care and education programs?**

Compared to children of native-born parents, young children in foreign-born families, in which many parents do not speak English well, participate less in early care and education settings.<sup>13,14,20</sup> This is particularly true for children of low-income immigrants. There have been a number of studies, primarily qualitative, exploring the factors associated with immigrant families' child care decision-making, both their decisions about using non-parental care and about the type of non-parental care they select. While the focus of many of these studies has been on identifying cultural factors unique to immigrant families, more recent research has found that some factors affecting child care decision-making among immigrant families are similar to those of native-born families.<sup>15,20,21</sup> These factors include characteristics of the family such as income, educational level, and employment status, as well as those of early care and education settings such as cost, hours of operation, particularly in relationship to family work schedule, and supply of early care and education programs in the community. Given the fact that immigrant families are more likely to have limited financial resources, less education, and employment that may be less stable and occur during non-traditional working hours, these factors contribute to their overall lower use of non-parental care.<sup>20,22</sup>

In addition, there are factors affecting child care decision-making that are specific to immigrant families, some of which particularly apply to families in which parents have limited English proficiency. These include concerns over their children losing connection with their home language and culture, worries about how to communicate effectively with program staff, differences in child rearing practices related to discipline and expectations for learning between home and program, limited access to accurate information in their home language about child care options, and among some groups, concerns about citizen documentation requirements.<sup>14,15,20</sup> At the same time, families understand and value the special benefits that participation in early care and education programs can provide to their children and themselves. For example, a study that included Somali, Sudanese, and Cambodian refugee parents in Maine and Mexican immigrants in Colorado found common themes in the reasons why they enrolled their children in early care and education programs: opportunities for the children to learn, to socialize, and to become accustomed to the norms and expectations of the American educational

system, and opportunities for families to learn about and get access to other services and supports in the community.<sup>15,20</sup>

### **What do we know about linguistically diverse families and how parents in these families support their young children's learning and development?**

Many linguistically diverse families confront challenges to parent engagement as partners with early care and education programs in promoting their children's learning. Language barriers may discourage parents from participating in activities at their children's program, such as attending parent orientation or parent-teacher meetings.<sup>10,23,24</sup> Many immigrant parents may feel uncomfortable interacting with early care and education teachers due to a lack of familiarity with U.S. educational institutions.<sup>12,25</sup> Some of these immigrants may be undocumented and therefore wary of involvement with public agencies and programs. Others may be refugees coping with the consequences of dislocation and trauma. About 10% of persons obtaining legal permanent resident status in 2012 were refugees. More than one-third of refugee arrivals (37% or 21,292 individuals) in that year were dependent children.<sup>26</sup>

Families in which a non-English language is spoken in the home, irrespective of English language proficiency, also bring strengths to their young children's development and learning. For example, a higher percentage of Hispanic families regularly eat meals together than other groups (59% compared with the national average of 46%) and most engage in activities at home that promote learning, including storytelling, singing, and teaching letters and numbers.<sup>27</sup> Hispanic parents with limited English skills have been found to convey high educational aspirations to their children through stories and conversation.<sup>22,28</sup> Similarly, qualitative research with families from Hmong, Somali, and Hispanic backgrounds, although with unknown English language proficiency, have documented parents' support of their children's learning in everyday routines, such as a Somali mother's report that she listens to her young children's frequent questions about everyday situations and offers explanations.<sup>29</sup> Overall, parents in linguistically diverse families, including those with limited English proficiency, have been found to support their children's early learning through home- and community-based activities, typically woven into everyday life.<sup>28,30</sup> These parents typically engage in home- and community-based activities more frequently than program-based activities such as volunteering in the classroom or participating in parent-teacher organizations.<sup>31-36</sup> Research showing this pattern has primarily focused on Hispanic families, but includes studies of families with other cultural and linguistic backgrounds, including East Indian, East Asian, and Chinese.<sup>30,37</sup>

Several factors have been found to be related to parent engagement in families generally, including linguistically diverse families. Less parent engagement is associated with lower levels of parents' formal schooling,<sup>38</sup> lower

family socio-economic status,<sup>39</sup> and less proficient parent language and literacy skills.<sup>40-42</sup> Parent mental health problems<sup>39,43</sup> and smaller parent social networks<sup>2</sup> are also linked to less parent engagement.

In order to partner effectively with linguistically diverse families, early care and education programs will need to respond to both their strengths and the challenges they face. These include those shared with many other families and additional ones related to language proficiency and family circumstances, such as immigrant status. The next section examines features of early care and education programs that appear to help support effective parent-program partnerships.

### **What features of early care and education programs appear to contribute to high levels of parent engagement in linguistically diverse families?**

Current research, while limited, suggests features of early care and education programs that can help promote meaningful parent engagement in linguistically diverse families. This section examines staff characteristics and program practices that create a welcoming, supportive environment for families and strategies programs can use to promote parent-child learning activities. In addition, the potential value of using two-generation supports that address both children's and parents' educational needs is discussed.

#### ***Creating welcoming, supportive environments for linguistically diverse families.***

Parent-provider relationships associated with positive family and child outcomes are characterized by mutual respect and shared decision-making.<sup>44,45</sup> Parents in linguistically diverse families may face special barriers to experiencing such relationships with early care and education providers. These parents, particularly those with limited English language skills, have reported feeling unwelcome in educational settings in numerous studies.<sup>10,24,46</sup> Teachers' limited understanding of linguistically diverse families' life circumstances and parenting practices may contribute to parents feeling unwelcome in programs. For example, teachers may interpret nonattendance at parent-teacher conferences as lack of interest and support for children's education without considering other factors such as work schedules and the need for translation services. Similarly, when teachers are not aware of culturally appropriate practices that parents use to promote children's learning, it may be more difficult to establish a positive relationship with parents.<sup>47,48</sup> For example, Latina mothers employ culturally valued approaches to encourage their children's educational success, including *consejos* (stories and admonitions that reinforce personal characteristics such as resilience and perseverance) and *apoyo* (emotional and moral support to build self-confidence and self-discipline).<sup>49</sup> Such practices may not be evident to early care and education providers if they are mainly focused on other signs of parent

engagement such as parent communication with providers and participation in the classroom.

Research on specific program features and practices that can foster positive relationships between program staff and linguistically diverse families is limited, but suggestive. Professional development has been found to increase teachers' understanding of cultural differences affecting parent engagement and use of more flexible parent engagement strategies, although most studies have focused on elementary school teachers.<sup>50,51</sup> One study of cultural competence among infant-toddler caregivers, measured by the Infant and Toddler Caregiver Cultural Rating Scale, found that hours of diversity training and extent of reading about diversity contributed to providers' cultural competence.<sup>52</sup>

Bilingual, bicultural program staff appear key to helping parents in linguistically diverse families feel welcome and comfortable with teachers. In a study of Spanish-speaking Mexican-American families, parents of children with delays in their literacy skills became more involved in their children's schooling between kindergarten and third grade if their children were in classrooms with bilingual teachers, and increased involvement during this period predicted children's learning outcomes.<sup>53</sup> Several parent engagement interventions delivered in families' home language have had positive impacts on parenting or children's learning.<sup>54,55</sup>

Creating opportunities for parents of similar cultural and linguistic backgrounds to get to know each other is another program practice that may support parent engagement in early care and education program activities. In a national study of English- and Spanish-speaking Latino families with kindergarten-age children, the strongest predictor of school involvement was the number of other parents in their child's class whom the parents knew well enough to converse with.<sup>2</sup> Other researchers have documented the development of social networks among Spanish-speaking parents that grew out of supportive parent-to-parent interactions during an elementary school-based leadership program and led to greater parent involvement in children's schooling.<sup>56</sup>

A number of other practices aimed at creating a welcoming, supportive environment for families have been suggested by researchers as promising strategies that should be further examined. These include enlisting community organizations that serve linguistically diverse families in efforts to promote parent engagement, having teachers extend personal invitations to parents in these families to participate in activities such as parent-teacher conferences, offering family-teacher conferences in a group format for parents with shared linguistic and cultural backgrounds, and providing supports to meet families' basic needs as part of family engagement activities.<sup>31,32,47,57-62</sup>

### ***Supporting Parent-Child Learning Activities at Home.***

Early care and education programs can play a critical role in promoting children's learning and development by encouraging parents to engage in learning activities with their young children at home.<sup>8,63,64</sup> This strategy may be especially important for linguistically diverse parents who prefer home-based parent engagement.<sup>33</sup> Programs can provide a range of supports, including information (e.g., about the value of parent-child interactions in the family's home language); materials, such as books and math games, and demonstrations of learning activities.

The practice of encouraging parents to engage in home-based enrichment activities in the family's home language may be particularly important. A recent research review highlights the benefits of parents' use of the family's home language, even as children are learning English.<sup>65</sup> These authors conclude that non-English-speaking or limited-English-speaking parents often provide the strongest language support for overall language development by conversing with children in their first language. Some family literacy programs that were conducted in families' home languages have shown positive language and literacy outcomes for children.<sup>66,67</sup>

A small number of intensive parent engagement interventions in early education programs that target or include linguistically diverse families have shown promise in their ability to achieve high levels of family participation, enhance parent-child learning activities, and benefit children's learning. Examples of these are described in Box 1. These programs share several features that may contribute to these outcomes, including: 1) an explicit focus on children's school-readiness competencies, including social-emotional, language, literacy, and numeracy skills; 2) opportunities for parents to observe and actively practice effective ways to support their children's learning in the context of warm, nurturing interactions; 3) the provision of supports and materials that encourage parents' engagement in these types of interactions at home; and 4) the intentional use of strategies that reduce barriers to participation in the intervention. A recent analysis of parent engagement interventions in early childhood programs underscores the value of giving parents opportunities to practice activities with their children after seeing demonstrations of the activities. In this analysis, only interventions that included this feature were found to promote children's pre-academic skills, leading the researchers to conclude that modeling and parent practice are key to effective parent engagement interventions.<sup>68</sup>

### **Box 1: Promising Parent Engagement Programs**

The East Coast Collaborative for Enhancing Language and Literacy (ECCELL) program was developed in collaboration with a Migrant and Seasonal Head Start program which largely served young, impoverished Hispanic children and families with limited English

proficiency. A bilingual adaptation of *Building Language for Literacy* was used in the Head Start classrooms and adult ESL (English as a second language) courses were provided to parents. In addition, parent-child activities and home visits offered parents guidance about how to promote their children's language and literacy development. Families were given rotating sets of books and language- and literacy-fostering manipulatives as well as a multimedia English learning resource, *Inglés sin Barreras*. Children in this program had higher scores on measures of language, early literacy, and socio-emotional growth than children in comparison sites.<sup>69</sup>

The Family Mathematics Curriculum was implemented with groups of African-American and Latino Head Start families, including about 40% who were Spanish-speaking. During Saturday classes, teachers demonstrated how parents could use manipulatives to engage in enjoyable math activities with their children, and supported parents and children as they tried out the activities. Teachers' provided the sessions in Spanish to Spanish-speaking families. To encourage continued activities at home, families were given math kits. Parent participation was high, a fact attributed to the focus on identifying and helping parents address barriers to attendance. Children in the intervention group made greater gains in all targeted math skills than children who did not participate.<sup>55</sup>

The Getting Ready for School (GRS) program targets both literacy and mathematics skills, and has been piloted with Spanish-speaking Head Start families. Families attended a series of sessions that provided demonstrations of activities and hands-on practice with materials that could be used at home. Parents also received a guide that illustrated activities with pictures. A preliminary study showed greater gains in school readiness skills for the children in the intervention group compared to children whose parents did not participate.<sup>70</sup>

The Getting Ready intervention provided ten home visits over two years to Head Start parents and children, 20% of whom were non-English speakers. This intervention included modeling and guidance for parents in using nurturing interactions and natural learning opportunities in the home to promote school readiness. Across two studies, children participating in the Getting Ready intervention were found to have stronger social-emotional and language skills than non-participating children.<sup>71</sup> Children who entered the Getting Ready intervention with minimal English abilities made even larger gains in reading and language than English-speaking children participating in the program.<sup>72</sup>

In addition to the shared features of these interventions, one of the programs also illustrates a two-generation strategy which may be especially beneficial to parents with limited English proficiency and their children. The East Coast Collaborative for Enhancing Language and Literacy provided support for home-based parent-child activities to promote children's learning as part of classes to help parents learn English. Because weak English language skills may limit both home-based and program-based parent engagement, two-generation literacy development approaches in early childhood have been recommended.<sup>10</sup> Some intergenerational literacy programs have been successful in improving English proficiency for both parents and children.<sup>67,73</sup> For example, Literacy for Life raised parents' English literacy and their young children's emergent literacy skills through a combination of adult literacy, early childhood literacy, and parent-child activities.<sup>73</sup>

### **Policy Implications**

The research reviewed in this paper highlights the need for policies that can help early care and education programs expand their capacity to effectively partner with parents in linguistically diverse families. Policies that could help build this capacity would support a set of key strategies that include:

- providing resources for outreach and support to help linguistically diverse families explore options for enrolling their children in high quality early care and education programs;
- establishing program requirements and quality standards that specifically address the needs and interests of families whose home language is not English;
- providing educational opportunities to individuals who can increase the linguistic and cultural diversity and competency of the early care and education workforce;
- providing resources to support programs' use of evidence-informed parent engagement practices and activities that are most promising for linguistically diverse families; and
- using data to understand the participation of linguistically diverse families in parent engagement activities and inform efforts to strengthen programs' capacity to engage diverse families.

More specific policy recommendations related to these strategies are suggested below.

### **Policy Recommendations**

***Federal and state resources should be invested in community-based outreach and support to linguistically diverse families to assist them in learning about and gaining access to high quality early care and education programs.***

This outreach and support could be provided through partnerships among community-based early care and education programs and organizations that serve linguistically diverse families as well as through child care resource and referral agencies that have bilingual staff trained to assist families. Supports provided to families should include some of the strategies that have been found to engage already enrolled families such as group information sessions for parents of similar backgrounds that allow parents to meet staff from local programs and learn about available subsidies, translated materials, and efforts to address barriers to participation such as transportation and child care.

***Program requirements for early care and education programs and standards for quality established in Quality Rating Improvement Systems (QRIS) should specify a wide range of promising practices that early care and education programs can use to partner with linguistically diverse families. (See Box 2 for a description of these practices.)***

Overall, current early care and education program requirements and QRIS quality standards focused on parent engagement tend to be fairly general and limited in their focus on supports for home-based learning in all families and in linguistically diverse families.<sup>64</sup> QRIS standards could therefore be strengthened in two ways – by including a wider range of the promising practices, such as those shown in Box 2, and by providing more specific descriptions of methods that promote meaningful home-based parent-child learning activities, especially strategies that go beyond the provision of information. Offering parents a chance to see and practice activities that can promote young children’s learning at home is an especially important evidence-informed strategy that should be incorporated into states’ QRIS standards related to parent engagement.

In setting program requirements and quality standards designed to promote parent engagement in linguistically diverse families, states can build on the guidance and resources developed for the Head Start and Early Head Start programs available at the National Technical Assistance Center on Parent, Family, and Community Engagement.<sup>74</sup> In addition, several state quality rating and improvement systems (QRIS) have included specific standards that address engagement of linguistically diverse families; examples are shown in Box 3.

**Box 2: Promising Practices in Early Care and Education Programs that Support Parent Engagement in Linguistically Diverse Families<sup>¶</sup>**

- The program has bilingual staff who are fluent in the languages most often represented among the families of enrolled children. These staff are available to support teacher-parent communication.
- The program invites parents to share information about their home language use, methods they use to promote their child’s learning and development, family strengths and challenges, and goals for their children’s education and for parent development and advancement; this information is used to plan parent engagement and family support activities.
- Information about the program—including consent forms, descriptions of procedures for child assessment, newsletters, and invitations to events—is provided in families’ home languages; important information is provided orally in families’ home languages for parents with limited reading skills.
- Program staff communicate with parents about methods for supporting learning at home in the parents’ home language and use multiple formats for this communication, including individual meetings, group parent meetings, home visits, and the provision of home learning materials with easy-to-use guidance.
- The program provides opportunities for parents to see and practice culturally relevant adult-child activities that foster a supportive parent-child relationship and children’s learning.
- Program staff provide guidance for families about the value of helping children further develop their home language skills through parent-child conversations and activities that draw on cultural and family traditions.
- The program reaches out to parents in linguistically diverse families to help remove barriers to their participation in program-based parent engagement activities; methods for reducing barriers include the use of interpreters, meeting with the parent at a time that accommodates their work schedule, arranging a discussion by phone, and assisting with transportation and child care.
- The program provides opportunities for families from the same linguistic and cultural background to develop social networks with each other, including family and parent-child events.
- The program helps parents obtain needed supports and services such as English as a Second Language as well as vocational training, health and mental health services, or assistance meeting basic family needs.

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<sup>¶</sup> These practices reflect this article’s literature review and recommended practices in a recent joint position statement of the US Department of Health and Human Services and Department of Education at [https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/ece/dll\\_policy\\_statement\\_final.pdf](https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/ece/dll_policy_statement_final.pdf), and practices used in the programs described in Box 2.

- Staff are provided with professional development on cultural and linguistic diversity and on engaging linguistically diverse parents.
- The program periodically assesses its use of practices designed to include and support linguistically diverse parents as partners in promoting children's well-being and early learning.

***States should design and invest in workforce development policies that expand the number of linguistically diverse and culturally competent early care and education professionals who have expertise in promoting parent engagement.***

As the population of young children and their families becomes increasingly diverse, expanding the number of bilingual, bicultural individuals in the early care and education workforce is critical. These professionals also need the knowledge and skills necessary to partner effectively with linguistically and culturally diverse families. Workforce development policies to achieve this goal include the following:

- States should develop and invest in supports for early childhood practitioners and potential practitioners from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds to help them obtain early childhood teacher or family worker credentials; these supports could include scholarships, advisement and mentoring, and assistance with child care and related needs.
- States should require that higher education early childhood teacher preparation programs include coursework and practica that develop knowledge of effective parent engagement practices and competencies needed to partner effectively with linguistically and culturally diverse families.
- Institutions of higher education and state agencies should collaborate to develop onsite, credit-bearing professional development for linguistically diverse early childhood program staff who may find it challenging to attend classes during normally scheduled times or who experience other barriers to accessing higher education.

Box 3 – Examples of QRIS Parent Engagement Standards Supporting Linguistically Diverse Families

**Colorado - Family Partnerships** [excerpt from Colorado Shines Points Structure Guide for quality levels 3-5, May 2015, available at:

[http://coloradoshines.force.com/resource/1440607605000/asset\\_pdfs1/asset\\_pdfs1/ColoradoShinesPointsStructureGuide.pdf](http://coloradoshines.force.com/resource/1440607605000/asset_pdfs1/asset_pdfs1/ColoradoShinesPointsStructureGuide.pdf)]

**Home Language Standard 2.1:** The program provides documentation or written policy of the use of interpreters, or other resources to help with other languages of enrolled families

**Sensitivity to Diversity Standard 2.2:** The program provides materials and resources (information about community-based programs, community mental health, child nutrition, physical fitness, food banks, Child Find, medical/dental resources) in a way that is accessible to all families including families with high needs [Children with high needs are defined as children who: live in low-income families; have disabilities or developmental delays; are English-language learners; reside on “Indian lands;” live in migrant families; are homeless; live in foster care; or are recent immigrants.]

**Sensitivity to Diversity Standard 2.3:** The program offers opportunities for all families, including those from different backgrounds and communities, to get to know one another and work together for the benefit of the children in the program

**Engagement of Families Standard 2.10:** The program provides a series of parenting classes annually, which includes family goal setting and action plans

**Massachusetts – Family and Community Engagement** [excerpt from MA Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS): QRIS APPLICATION GUIDANCE FOR CENTER-BASED AND SCHOOL-BASED PROGRAMS; available at: <http://www.mass.gov/edu/birth-grade-12/early-education-and-care/gris/massachusetts-gris-standards.html>]

**Standards applicable at Level 3:** A daily two-way communication system is available between the educators and families through a variety of means. Families are encouraged to volunteer in the program, to assist in the classroom, and share cultural and language traditions or other interests such as their jobs, hobbies, and other relevant information. Program ensures that there are translators available, as needed, at meetings, workshops, and conferences to ensure strong communication between the program and families. Program participates in local community group work that is related to early childhood, and the cultural groups served by the program and/or family support.

**New Mexico – Full Participation of Each Child** [excerpt from On Young Children’s Learning, New Mexico FOCUS: Essential Elements of Quality for Center-Based Early Care and Education Programs January 2015, available at [http://storage.cloversites.com/littlesunbeamschilddevelopmentcenter/documents/FOCUS\\_Criteria\\_Essential\\_Elements\\_of\\_Quality\\_01222015.pdf](http://storage.cloversites.com/littlesunbeamschilddevelopmentcenter/documents/FOCUS_Criteria_Essential_Elements_of_Quality_01222015.pdf)]

Culture and Language. Classroom and program staff offer a variety of meaningful, culturally sensitive opportunities for families to participate in classroom and center activities. Implement a program policy describing how the program promotes children's home language while supporting English language

development, and includes practices to communicate with families in their preferred language.

**Minnesota** [excerpt from Parent Aware Quality Rating Improvement System: Standards and Indicators, October 2016 available at:

<https://edocs.dhs.state.mn.us/lfsrver/Public/DHS-6346B-ENG>

R1.1. Asks and listens to families.

Program has conversations to learn about each child's family's, routines ways they prefer to communicate with the program, backgrounds and interests, languages spoken in the home, and cultures they consider most important to their identity.

R1.2. Shares information with families. Program shares information in a way that meets the needs of all families, including those who speak languages other than English.

Three or Four-Stars

R1.3 Program offers a variety of activities, based on families' interests, with at least one focused on helping families extend children's learning at home.

**State and federal agencies should provide adequate resources to enable early care and education programs to meet effective program requirements and quality standards that support the engagement of parents in linguistically diverse families.**

- State agencies responsible for child care and early education programs and quality improvement initiatives should fund and ensure delivery of technical assistance to help these programs build their capacity to partner with linguistically diverse families. Technical assistance should include guidance for teachers and directors about how to implement practices shown in Box 2, especially about ways to establish positive relationships with parents and encourage parents' support of their children's learning at home and in the community. If early care and education programs are administered out of separate agencies, these agencies should collaborate in the design and provision of such supports to programs.
- State funding for preschool and other early care and education programs should be sufficient for programs to have access to bilingual family workers, either as program staff or as consultants serving multiple programs, who

can support outreach to parents and delivery of the programs' parent engagement activities. Bilingual family workers can also help families gain access to other supports such as English as a Second Language or vocational programs, health or mental health services, and assistance to meet basic family needs.

- State-funded organizations, such as child care resource and referral agencies or institutions of higher education, should be given resources and guidance to offer translation services to early care and education programs for parent outreach and engagement materials and activities.

**State and federal agencies should develop guidance and supports for documenting and understanding the characteristics of families enrolled in early care and education programs and programs' parent engagement resources and practices, including those aimed at fostering partnerships with linguistically diverse families.**

While there are increasing investments in early care and education at the local, state, and federal levels, resources remain limited. Collecting and analyzing basic data on capacity across all early care and education programs and settings to partner with linguistically diverse families can help provide information necessary to more effectively design and target those resources. Examples of such data include:

- the number of children from linguistically diverse families in the program setting and the home languages represented in the program setting;
- program resources for partnering with linguistically diverse families, including bilingual family workers and teaching staff; and
- participation by linguistically diverse families in the program's parent engagement activities, including their use of home learning materials provided by the program.

**Opportunities to Advance These Recommendations**

The current landscape of policies and initiatives designed to expand and improve the quality of early care and education programs offers important opportunities to advance the policy recommendations outlined above. These recommendations are well-aligned with the final regulations concerning quality improvement in the reauthorized Child Care Development Block Grant program. One of six allowable professional development activities that this program can support is "providing training and outreach [to child care teachers] on engaging parents and families in culturally and linguistically appropriate ways to expand their knowledge, skills, and capacity to become meaningful partners in supporting their children's positive development."<sup>75</sup> In addition, as states expand their prekindergarten programs with federal and state funds, and establish and refine quality rating improvement

systems, they have opportunities to strengthen program requirements and quality standards that can help ensure effective program partnerships with linguistically diverse families. Finally, the federal Early Head Start-Child Care partnership grants extend stronger parent engagement requirements to child care settings, creating the possibility for an expanding number of programs that demonstrate promising practices for engaging linguistically diverse families and promoting children's learning through partnerships with parents in these families.

### **Conclusion**

A growing body of research supports both the value of parent engagement for children in linguistically diverse families and promising approaches that child care and early education programs can use to engage these families more fully in their children's learning. Three key points stem from the empirical literature: 1) Linguistically diverse families have strengths and opportunities in supporting their young children's development and learning; 2) Early education and care systems can incorporate a variety of approaches for improving parent engagement when working with linguistically diverse families; and 3) Policies can enhance early care and education systems in the promotion of parent engagement strategies. As such, during a time of program expansion in the early childhood field, it is especially critical to include these families in parent engagement initiatives that can contribute to positive educational outcomes and eventual economic security. All parents want to support school success and positive life opportunities for their children; parents' partnership with child care and early education programs is a proven strategy for achieving this goal.



in local community group work that is related to early childhood, and the cultural groups served by the program and/or family support.

**New Mexico** – Full Participation of Each Child [excerpt from On Young Children’s Learning, New Mexico FOCUS: Essential Elements of Quality for Center-Based Early Care and Education Programs

January 2015, available at

[http://storage.cloversites.com/littlesunbeamschilddevelopmentcenter/documents/FOCUS\\_Criteria\\_Essential\\_Elements\\_of\\_Quality\\_01222015.pdf](http://storage.cloversites.com/littlesunbeamschilddevelopmentcenter/documents/FOCUS_Criteria_Essential_Elements_of_Quality_01222015.pdf)

Culture and Language. Classroom and program staff offer a variety of meaningful, culturally sensitive opportunities for families to participate in classroom and center activities. Implement a program policy describing how the program promotes children’s home language while supporting English language development, and includes practices to communicate with families in their preferred language.

**Minnesota** – Parent Aware [excerpt from Parent Aware Quality Rating Improvement System: Standards and Indicators, October 2016 available at: <https://edocs.dhs.state.mn.us/lfserver/Public/DHS-6346B-ENG>

R1.1. Asks and listens to families.

Program has conversations to learn about each child’s family’s, routines ways they prefer to communicate with the program, backgrounds and interests, languages spoken in the home, and cultures they consider most important to their identity.

R1.2. Shares information with families. Program shares information in a way that meets the needs of all families, including those who speak languages other than English.

R1.3 Program offers a variety of activities, based on families’ interests, with at least one focused on helping families extend children’s learning at home.

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