



Creating Head Start programs that fully engage Latino Fathers in their child's early literacy development

Between 2008 and 2010, the Academy for Educational Development [AED] piloted the Las Manos de Apá project at two Seasonal and Migrant Head Start Programs in the states of New York and Michigan. Funded by the Office of Head Start, The Las Manos de Apá Project is focused on developing a best practice model for the engagement of Latino fathers in the education of their young children. This tip sheet is was developed based on lessons learned from Head Start staff, Father Involvement Coordinators, fathers who participated in the program and their families.

This tip sheet provides an overview of what the Las Manos project found to be important steps for creating Head Start programs that are successful in engaging Latino fathers in the literacy development of their children.

Build a strong foundation

For a Head Start Program to effectively reach Latino fathers, all staff need to be involved and need skills to welcome and reach out to Latino fathers.

1. Everyone has a role to play from the bus driver to the lead of the agency

- Find ways to communicate and encourage all staff to reach out and welcome Latino fathers.

2. Strengthen staff skills

- Provide training. Staff are ready to learn more about how to engage Latino Fathers in early literacy development of their children. The response to Las Manos training has been very positive and evaluations indicate that staff are eager to try new ways to reach out to fathers and want to learn more.
- Strengthen staff skills to engage Latino fathers in the education of their children in a culturally and linguistically appropriate manner. Las Manos de Apá staff training curricula addresses 4 main topics: 1. The Importance

of working with Latino Fathers; 2. What Latino Fathers Want for Their Children; 3. Latino Father Engagement in Early Language and Literacy Development; and 4. Becoming a Latino Father Friendly Program.

3. Identify a person within the agency to lead the charge

- Every program needs a champion. Find a staff member who is passionate about fathers and ask them to lead the charge in making program environments and activities friendly for Latino fathers. The Las Manos project provided funds for a father involvement coordinator to work half to full time in this role. Are there funds available in your for this?

Create father friendly environments

Take a moment and walk through your center from its front doors, down the halls, classrooms and meeting rooms...how friendly is it for fathers?



4. Use the Latino Father Friendly Assessment & Planning Tool and rate your center. How friendly are you?

- Try to involve as many people as possible in doing the inventory. One staff member shared, “It is good to ask families, staff and community members the questions because all of them have different points of view”.

5. Find ways to improve the center and classroom environments

- Display posters and book that show fathers and children together.
- Take photos of current fathers and families and display them in the halls and in classrooms.
- Involve the staff and fathers- they have many ideas.

6. Think of creative and inexpensive ways to make fathers feel welcome. Staff can:

- Greet fathers by name when they visit the center.
- When calling home try to speak with the father and if possible schedule home visits when both parents are home.
- Address correspondence to the mother and the father. Invite fathers to parent meetings.

Engage fathers in center and classroom activities

Father engagement can be so much more than helping with repairs and maintenance of the center. Offer father’s meaningful opportunities to become engaged.

7. Invite fathers to come into the classroom to...

- Special events like breakfast with fathers or Father pick up day.
- Read a book to children at circle time or with one child. Staff can demonstrate how to read to young children by focusing on the pictures and inventing the story. Staff can model how reading the words in English is not necessary.
- Talk about their jobs so they can be role models to children and staff can learn what fathers do.
- Organize **field** trips to places where fathers work. One father helped organize a trip to a pizza place where he worked. A staff member commented, “...it was good to see how father’s can be involved without having money but still organize an activity with the children.”

8. Send activities home for fathers and children to do together

- Teachers organize activities that ask fathers to read with their children and complete activities together.

Offer father-specific activities

Father specific activities such as support groups give fathers an opportunity to explore new aspects of their role as fathers, address their own literacy and language goals, and support the early literacy skills of their children.

9. Start a Latino father’s group at your center.

- To learn more, refer to the Father’s Group curriculum and training recommended for Father’s Group Facilitators.

10. Link fathers to community resources

- Arrange visits for fathers to community agencies or invite agencies to the center. These visits can help fathers and families: learn about educational opportunities available to them, inform fathers of opportunities available to their children after they graduate from high school and support fathers who may feel marginalized or are less likely to seek assistance from community agencies that could be useful them when planning their futures.

ADDRESSING THE NEEDS OF LATINO FATHERS WILL REAP RICH REWARDS.

What the research tells us...

Father involvement in a young child’s life is associated with:

- Higher cognitive functioning
- Improved academic achievement
- Higher satisfaction and engagement with school
- Improved social competence, maturity, adjustment and development

What staff tell us...

“ We see the radiation of passion from (fathers’) eyes and we see greater communication among fathers in the program.”

What Hispanic Fathers say...

“ ***I really like the activities that [staff] have taught us. The importance of being a part of your child’s life so early on. I’ve lost my fear through this program. I’ve learned to spend time with my children... It seems that it is part of our culture to give the responsibility of the children to our wives, this program has made us think differently. The activities have taught us that we also have a responsibility to find ways to spend time with our children.***”