

Parenting Contributions to Latinx Children's Development in the Early Years

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Despite comparatively high levels of poverty, Latinx parents, on average, provide their children with early home experiences that promote development at rates that at least equal that of other demographic groups. From a strength-based perspective, we describe the demographic heterogeneity among Latinx children during early childhood (zero to eight years), given that these years are critical for later development. We then discuss the individual- and family-level factors that promote positive outcomes in Latinx children despite the presence of economic and social stressors. We synthesize these findings to generate policy recommendations that support Latinx families and children by addressing their specific needs and building on the strengths they already possess.

Keywords: Latinx; Hispanic; child development; parenting; resilience; school readiness; policy

Decades of research have shown that competent parenting and the broader family environment are unequivocally the most significant drivers of children's well-being and healthy development (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine 2016).

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DOI: 10.1177/00027162211049997

Right from birth, children depend on the consistent love, protection, and support of their parents and other caregivers for their growth and development. Parents' impact on their children's development is fundamental during the earliest years of life when children's brains are rapidly developing, because parents almost exclusively create and shape childhood experiences (Blair and Raver 2016). Competent parenting is protective, mindful, and an integrated mixture of warmth and developmentally appropriate control (Teti et al. 2017). Competent parents help children to develop and build the foundational skills and knowledge that they need to learn about the world through parenting practices, behaviors, and social interactions. In the early years, parenting is most effective during sensitive periods where the neural pathways and the behaviors they support are most malleable (plastic) to environmental inputs (National Research Council 2000).

Latinx parents, as a group, experience comparatively high rates of family stress, including poverty, racism and discrimination, and, for many, challenges related to acculturating and rearing children in a different country that can compromise competent parenting. Yet research demonstrates that many Latinx parents are still able to provide their children with early home experiences that mitigate the negative effects of poverty on their children's development. Insights from research on Latinx children and families tend to focus on poverty and adversity; research on strengths and resilience in the Latinx community is relatively limited and not as rigorous. Researchers and policy-makers need to better understand the protective factors and strengths inherent in Latinx parents and families that contribute to children's outcomes and specifically support and invest in these strengths. Investing in and promoting what Latinx parents are already doing to protect and rear their children is the most efficient way to support the future of Latinx children.

This article accomplishes two goals: (1) we provide a demographic context for understanding Latinx parents and parenting; and (2) we highlight the proximal influences on Latinx parenting and describe how they support children's development in the early years (zero to eight), a period that sets the stage for later development. We do so with an eye toward delineating proximal and distal ways that the parenting role can be factored in to support the well-being of Latino youth. We also recognize that parents are not the only influences on children's development; we focus on parenting because nonparental care and education are covered in another article in this volume (see Mendez-Smith et al., this volume).

We set the stage by presenting a theoretical framework that contextualizes parenting and children's development in a broad ecological system that includes cultural and social determinants of parents' and children's well-being. We present a short profile of Latinx children's development and contextualize parenting and children's development by framing it within a risk and resilience framework. Understanding how parents create positive developmental pathways for their children in the context of adversity is fundamentally important for supporting parents, particularly in the early years. We conclude with a discussion of implications for programs and policies to strengthen the protective role that Latinx parents play in their children's lives and to provide continued support of their already positive parenting.

Theoretical Background

The prevailing paradigm to understand how parents and the family environment contribute to children's development has almost exclusively focused on parents' socioeconomic status (SES) and the investments of money and time parents make in their children (Yeung, Linver, and Brooks-Gunn 2002). When applied to Latinxs, this paradigm tends to perpetuate a deficit view that Latinx parents, many of whom are economically vulnerable, lack the resources that promote parenting competence, and therefore their children lag behind on many indicators of school success (Guerrero et al. 2013). Critics of this approach point to its limitations, including that it does not consider protective factors; ignores the powerful influence of social position indicators on opportunities, parenting, and developmental outcomes; and discounts culturally specific ways in which Latinx parents rear their children.

A new way to examine how parents matter for Latinx children's development that goes beyond parents' money and education is to consider specific social and cultural influences that are most likely to impact parents and consequently children's development. Cynthia García Coll and her colleagues (1996) developed the Integrative Model for the Study of Developmental Competencies in ethnic minority children (i.e., the Integrative Model) to better understand the multiple influences on parenting and children, including social positions of race, social class, ethnicity, and gender, as well as the implications for opportunities and outcomes (García Coll et al. 1996). The Integrative Model takes as a given that child development is influenced by a set of proximal (e.g., parenting behaviors) and distal (e.g., economic conditions) characteristics and processes of the family and community in which children live. These factors include parents' social position; race-based factors, such as racism, victimization, and discrimination; family residential, economic, social, and psychological segregation; the quality of schools, neighborhoods, and health care facilities; family adaptive cultural factors, such as cultural legacies; child characteristics, such as age and temperament; and family structure, values, beliefs, and goals.

The Integrative Model is consistent with Latino/Latina Critical Race Theory (LatCrit) that focuses on multidimensional identities and considers the intersectionality of various forms of oppression, such as racism, sexism, and classism (Bernal 2002). Latinx parents' experiences are shaped not only by their ethnicity, but also by the language they speak, their immigration experience, their sexuality, their phenotype, and their culture. This way of thinking about how ethnic minority parents support their children's learning and development is theoretically and methodologically different from the parenting and child development models that guide most of the parenting literature. It is not surprising, then, that studies that have tested this integrative model are lacking and the bulk of the available evidence is descriptive and correlational.

We recognize that strengthening parents' resources and capabilities to foster children's healthy development provides the best rationale for integrating parent and child services (Shonkoff and Fisher 2013). For example, early childhood programs that offer parenting or English as a second language classes can maximize their investments on children. These efforts coined "Two-Generation 2.0"

programs offer a compelling rationale for integrating services for both children and parents (Chase-Landsdale and Brooks-Gunn 2014). While the evidence for the effectiveness of these programs is spotty, we agree that services and programs designed to promote children's development might be more effective when they also provide services to improve competent parenting.

How do Latinx children perform relative to peers?

To understand how Latinx children perform in standardized tests, researchers typically compare them to their white peers. The strongest evidence comes from studies using nationally representative samples of children. A consistent finding is that Latinx children, as young as nine months of age, score lower than their white peers on measures of cognitive ability (Halle et al. 2009). Latinx preschoolers also show lower receptive and expressive vocabulary skills and less knowledge about literacy, numbers, and shapes than non-Hispanic white preschoolers (Chernoff et al. 2007). Studies also show that Latinx boys have significantly lower cognitive scores and less expressive vocabulary than white boys at 24 months, as well as lower expressive language and math scores at preschool and kindergarten age (Cabrera et al. 2017). When compared to Latinx girls, Latinx boys have worse expressive language skills at 24 months and at preschool age but have better math scores at preschool and at kindergarten. These early differences between Latinx children and their white peers seem to increase during the first two years and persist in preschool and at kindergarten entry (Cabrera et al. 2017; Fuller et al. 2015). In contrast, several studies have found that Latinx children's social skills and social adaptation seem to be at the same level or better than those of their peers (Padilla, Cabrera, and West 2017).

When studies compare Latinx children to other Latinx children whose life experiences vary from their own, the story is different and more informative. Studies using national datasets show that Latinx children whose parents are immigrants perform worse on cognitive tests than Latinx children whose parents are not (Padilla and Ryan 2018). The evidence is similar, although less consistent, for Latinx children's social skills. A study of low-income Latinx children in Miami found that immigrant Latinx children (i.e., children born outside the United States) are rated by their teachers as being more socially competent and having fewer behavior problems than their native-born Latinx peers (De Feyter and Winsler 2009). This "immigrant advantage" might reflect immigrant parents' values and strong work ethic that encourage children to obey the teacher and conform with school rules and norms (Aldoney and Cabrera 2016; Feliciano 2001). Other studies have found the opposite: first-generation Latinx children are rated by their teachers as being lowest in social competence (e.g., self-control, interpersonal skills) compared to later-generation Latinx children (Galindo and Fuller 2010).

Parenting in Context: Risk and Resilience

We take it as given that risks at multiple levels—individual, family, and community—present threats to and undermine the quality of parenting and, consequently,

children's development. But we also recognize that not all children growing up poor exhibit negative outcomes and that, under some conditions, established risk factors are not associated with negative outcomes (Masten 2001). It is particularly important to examine not just the adversity of parents who are considered to be "at risk," but also how they promote good outcomes for their children against all odds (Masten and Cicchetti 2016). Information about the positive developmental pathways—and protective factors—that parents create for their children in the context of adversity is essential to public policies intended to intervene early to prevent problems later in life.

Risk factors

Risk factors are conditions or behaviors that increase the chances that individuals will have negative outcomes. The key sociopsychological factors for which substantial evidence exists about the risk they pose for parents and children include distal processes, such as family economic resources and poverty, experiences with racism and discrimination, and immigration status; and more proximal processes, such as parenting behaviors and parental well-being.

Family economic resources and poverty. Greater family economic resources, including household income and education, have small but significant effects on a range of developmental outcomes and might matter most during the early foundational years of childhood (Duncan, Morris, and Rodrigues 2011). The consequences of growing up in poverty during their first five years of life are dire: children are less likely to complete formal education and have diminished earning power as adults (Duncan, Morris, and Rodrigues 2011). This is particularly alarming because poverty rates tend to be highest in young families, during the earliest and most important years for children's development (McCarty 2016). Poverty and its correlates—unsafe neighborhoods, low wages or unemployment, no access to health insurance—pose serious challenges to competent parenting.

Poverty is a significant risk factor for Latinx parents that presents formidable challenges and stress for their ability to rear their children under these conditions (Gennetian et al. 2015). Making ends meet, dealing with the daily hassles of being poor, and having unmet material needs increases risk to parents' mental health. These experiences make it very difficult for parents to interact with children in nurturant and developmentally appropriate ways and may increase the use of harsh, inconsistent, and coercive parenting practices. Not only do income-poor parents have financial challenges, they also have low levels of education that undermine their ability to stimulate their children's learning, language, and thinking in ways that promote children's academic success (Magnuson 2007). Mothers with less than a high school degree have limited knowledge and higher-order thinking skills that, in turn, impact the way they communicate with their children. Less-educated mothers also tend to have fewer expectations for their children's education, are unable to create a better home learning environment for their children, and do not engage their children in frequent learning-related

activities both at home (e.g., reading) and outside the home (e.g., museum visits) (Davis-Kean 2005). Descriptive data show that Latinx mothers with lower education may be less knowledgeable of child development (e.g., how parenting behaviors promote learning) and engage in less caregiving and play activities with their children (Cabrera et al. 2006).

Of particular importance for young children may be the quality of parent-child interactions and parents' verbal responsiveness, which are critical for emergent language and cognitive skills (Landry, Smith, and Swank 2006). Better-educated mothers talk more to their child, are more verbally responsive to their child, and use language in more complex ways than less-educated mothers (Hoff 2013). Latinx mothers with higher levels of education have been observed to engage in more child-oriented parenting (e.g., sensitivity) during semistructured play interactions than Latinx mothers with lower levels of education (Dyer, Owen, and Caughy 2014).

Racism, discrimination, and colorism. Racism, a “system of prejudice, discrimination, and institutional power that privileges [w]hites and oppresses various people of color” has detrimental effects on the physical and mental health of the underprivileged population (Hunter 2002, 175). Colorism, a form of prejudice and discrimination based on individuals' skin tone, has similar effects on individuals' well-being (Thompson and McDonald 2016). For Latinx adults, skin tone is predictive of occupation, income, and educational attainment (Telles 2007). These forms of oppression are pronounced, persistent, and pervasive and are experienced by Latinx parents and children in the form of racial slurs and in the way people treat them as racial stereotypes rather than as individuals. Not surprisingly, racism is a significant risk factor for health inequalities, such as infant mortality, heart disease, and cancer among racial minorities (Sondik et al. 2010).

Parents who experience racism and are perceived to be part of the “out-group” have chronic health issues and feel frustrated, angry, and anxious. Systemic racism can also indirectly impair parents' ability to rear their children in safe neighborhoods and have access to good schools, clear air and water, and health care that may have an impact on their physical health (Iceland and Hernandez 2016). Children targeted by racism are more likely to be depressed, anxious, exhibit behavior problems, and have lower self-esteem, which affects learning and their outcomes in adulthood (Calzada, Kim, and O'Gara 2019; Levy et al. 2016). Both experiencing racism and parenting children who have experienced racism can be stressful, emotionally taxing, and can exhaust already limited resources, which can undermine parents' ability to interact with children positively and consistently.

Parents' immigration status. Parents' immigration status is a risk factor for adverse outcomes for children because the process of rearing children in an unfamiliar place with distinct norms, values, and expectations exposes children to unique developmental demands, opportunities, and stressors (Yoshikawa, Suárez-Orozco, and Gonzales 2017). Immigrant parents face many barriers, including

limited English proficiency, less formal education, and stress that can undermine their ability to parent their children. Latinx immigrant parents (born outside the United States) have children who perform worse on tests of school readiness at kindergarten entry than Latinx parents born in the United States (Padilla and Ryan 2018).

Undocumented immigrant parents face additional challenges as they typically earn lower wages, work more hours, are less likely to be connected to the formal labor market and have work protections, and, consequently, are less likely to access resources (e.g., food stamps) and interact with public institutions (e.g., schools) that are beneficial for their young children (Suárez-Orozco et al. 2011). Overall, undocumented immigrants are most disadvantaged. They average less than a high school education, are more likely to have children during their teen years, and experience more economic strain (e.g., renting a room in an apartment). Consequently, immigrant Latinx parents are most at risk for less-nurturant parenting and seldom engage their children in cognitively stimulating activities at home (e.g., reading books, telling stories, playing games) at levels that can prepare them for the demands of kindergarten (Padilla and Ryan 2018). Studies find that immigrant parents have children who are perceived to have the lowest levels in social competence (e.g., self-control, interpersonal skills) compared to later-generation Latinx children (Galindo and Fuller 2010).

Parenting well-being. Maternal depression is one of the strongest risk factors for negative developmental outcomes during early childhood (e.g., Paulson, Dauber, and Leiferman 2011). Although children are incredibly resilient, exposure to stressors such as maternal and paternal depression early in life charts a course for physical, cognitive, and emotional health problems that can be costly for families and society to navigate (Baker, Brooks-Gunn, and Gouskova 2020; Yu and Wilcox-Gök 2015). This is concerning because the rates of depression for Latinx mothers during the perinatal and postpartum period are higher than they are for mothers of other racial and ethnic groups (Shellman et al. 2014). Latinx mothers are also more likely than other mothers to say they are in poor mental health and are less likely to receive mental health support (Harris and Santos 2020; Shellman et al. 2014). Latinx mothers with high levels of depressive symptoms have children who exhibit more externalizing behaviors, dysregulation, depressive symptomology, and poorer health outcomes (Harris and Santos 2020). The effects on health outcomes are particularly noteworthy because maternal depression has been associated with both reduced weight gains over the first two years and obesity at age four (Marshall et al. 2018). Maternal depression is especially detrimental to Latinx families because it tends to exacerbate the negative effects of poverty on parenting and children.

Protective factors

How do parents rear their children when they are threatened by poverty, violence, or are exposed to racism and discrimination? How do parents rear resilient children so they can cope with adversity and even succeed despite serious

challenges to their development? Protective factors in early childhood are of particular interest because programs and interventions are more effective when initiated early versus later in childhood (Olds 2002). Limited empirical evidence exists about specific aspects of the family environment of Latinx children that might protect them from the negative effects of poverty and other risk factors. Available evidence (usually from small surveys) shows that family- and individual-level characteristics exist that improve Latinx children's chances of dealing with adversity in positive ways (Suárez-Orozco et al. 2018). The optimal solution is not to rely on the resilience of parents alone, but to remove the stress and poverty in the first place.

Nurturant and responsive parenting. Parenting research focuses on both what parents do, that is, parenting practices; and how they do it, that is, parenting quality. Parenting practices include the way parents socialize and control their children's behaviors; and parenting quality focuses on how nurturing or hostile, attuned or not, parents are when they interact with their children. Competent parenting is a mixture of parenting practices and quality. Competent parenting includes anticipating and responding to children's distress, striking a balance between being nurturing and implementing appropriate levels of control, and understanding what the child is capable of given their developmental stage (Teti et al. 2017).

Correlational and empirical evidence find that during early childhood, a variety of specific parenting practices, such as being warm, using consistent and developmentally appropriate discipline, providing structure, and monitoring their children's whereabouts, are associated with children's positive development both in the short and long term (Bornstein 2019; Cabrera et al. 2000; Jeon and Neppel 2019). One of the parenting practices most consistently associated with positive outcomes is nurturant and responsive parenting. Nurturant and responsive parents frequently engage children in informal enriching activities such as reading, playing, telling stories, and doing puzzles that promote learning. These types of activities are likely to develop the competencies children need to succeed in school and beyond (National Scientific Council on the Developing Child 2015; Ruberry et al. 2018).

The best evidence on differences in nurturant parenting among Latinxs comes from national studies that draw on measures of the frequency with which parents engage their children in literacy activities. When asked how often they engage in reading, singing, or telling stories, low-income Latinx mothers and fathers reported reading more often (i.e., three or more times per week) when their children were older (i.e., toddlers and preschoolers) than when they were infants (Cabrera et al. 2021). Parents were more likely to sing to their infants than to their older children. Singing exposes children to language, vocabulary, and rhymes that stimulate language growth, but it is not as efficient as reading because it is not necessarily directed to the child. Small survey studies using qualitative measures of parenting offer more detailed information of behaviors, such as informal teaching about mathematical concepts through cooking or chores, that Latinx parents do at home with their children (Galindo, Sonnenschein, and Montoya-Ávila 2019; Montoya-Ávila,

Ghebreab, and Galindo 2018). This evidence makes the case that Latinx children living in low-income families are growing up in homes where they are cared for and where they have many opportunities for learning. These experiences provide a good foundation for programs to support competent parenting practices. Programs would be more effective if they acknowledged and supported the strength families have rather than focusing only on their adversity or challenges.

In addition to specific parenting practices, the quality of the relationship between parents and children is a significant determinant of children's outcomes such as language and social skills. Parents who are sensitive to their children's cues and signals and respond to them promptly and appropriately during interactions have children who perform better on measures of self-regulation, social functioning, and cognitive skills (van der Voort et al. 2014). Latinx mothers are observed to be warm, sensitive, and responsive to their infants' needs but somewhat more controlling with toddlers and preschoolers (Cabrera et al. 2006, 2017).

Evidence also exists that Latinx fathers engage with their children in responsive and nurturant ways that are uniquely related to children's development. Because most Latinx children live with both parents, fathers have plenty of opportunities to engage with their children in their daily care in ways that go beyond financial support. Latinx fathers engage with their children in multiple ways, including play that is fun and stimulating (e.g., physical and rough and tumble play), literacy activities (e.g., reading), sports, and caregiving (e.g., feeding, bathing; Karberg, Cabrera, et al. 2017; Kuhns et al. 2018). Latinx fathers report more warmth and spend more time caring for their infants compared to fathers in other racial groups (Capps, Bronte-Tinkew, and Horowitz 2010). Descriptive studies that have observed Latinx fathers playing with their toddlers have shown that fathers' unique style of talking and communicating with their children (e.g., asking more *wh* questions) is strongly related to differences in children's receptive vocabulary skills at prekindergarten (Rowe, Leech, and Cabrera 2017). Although compared to Latinx mothers, Latinx fathers read less often to their children, descriptive studies find that the quality of reading is higher among fathers than among mothers (Malin, Cabrera, and Rowe 2014).

Nurturant and responsive parenting also includes using positive and developmentally appropriate discipline during socioemotional interactions with children (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine 2016). Corporal punishment, including spanking, slapping, or hitting with household objects, is strongly associated with adverse cognitive and socioemotional outcomes for children of all ages, even at low levels (Gershoff et al. 2018). It is worth underscoring that Latinx parents report lower rates of spanking their school-age children compared to other groups (Cabrera et al. 2021; Pew Research Center 2015).

Cultural beliefs, norms, and practices. Every parent around the world wants their children to grow to be a healthy, happy, and successful adult. Despite these commonalities, cultural variations exist in how parenting goals are achieved that reflect differences in beliefs, values, and practices. Among Latinx, beliefs about the centrality of the family and respect for adults and authority figures guide parents' socialization practices. The financial and emotional support and solidarity

parents receive from their families and the obligations they feel toward them (*familismo*) influence parenting well-being and parenting practices and a child's eventual development (Updegraff et al. 2005). Parents with a strong sense of familism who feel supported by their families tend to be more engaged with their children and stay strong and focused in the face of adversity (Ayón, Valencia-Garcia, and Kim 2017). In turn, parents socialize their children to prioritize family and to rely on them for affection, support, monitoring, and caregiving. Having a strong sense of familism is linked to a host of positive outcomes among Mexican Americans, including avoiding deviant peers, not engaging in antisocial behaviors, exhibiting fewer behavior problems, having more friends, and being socially competent (Kiang et al. 2013; Morcillo et al. 2011). Much of the association between family cohesion and children's well-being is mediated through reduced interparental conflict (Taylor et al. 2012).

Many Latinx parents rearing their children in the United States believe that their children will be more successful when they can navigate two cultural contexts (Aldoney and Cabrera 2016). Being bicultural, having strong ethnic and American identities, facilitates adaptation and resilience and promotes well-being. Bicultural Latinx parents tend to rear their children differently compared to parents who are not immersed in the two cultures, and research has shown this approach to parenting to be associated with preschoolers' adaptive behaviors at school, including making friends easily and exhibiting internalizing behaviors (Calzada et al. 2009). Correlational research shows that Latinx parents who report being bicultural also report higher levels of family cohesion (i.e., emotional bonding), adaptability (i.e., ability to alter family roles and rules across situations), and better parenting skills than Latinx who are not (Gassman-Pines and Skinner 2018). Bicultural parents have children who are more likely to be bilingual (Spanish-English), adaptive (e.g., making friends easily), and socially competent (e.g., fewer behavioral problems; Calzada et al. 2009). Bilingual children have better linguistic outcomes, executive functioning skills, and higher-order skills that enable children to plan, pay attention, and regulate their behaviors than monolingual children (McCabe et al. 2013).

Parents' optimism. Research on the strengths that enable individuals to thrive points to individuals' positive outlook or optimism as a key personality characteristic that can protect them from the negative effects of poverty and disadvantage (Bermudez and Mancini 2013). Having positive expectations about the future reflects individuals' desire to lead meaningful and fulfilling lives, nurture what is best within themselves, and enhance their life experiences. When asked about their hopes and dreams for the future, Latinx parents report being positive that the future will be better for them and their children and say they are motivated to make sacrifices, work hard, and give their children a better life (Aldoney and Cabrera 2016; Ayón and Villa 2013). Descriptive studies show that Latinx parents who are optimistic tend to be more responsive and involved (e.g., monitoring, educational involvement) with their children than less-optimistic parents (Castro-Schilo et al. 2013).

Coparenting. Parenting is shared between caregivers. Coparenting, the ability of caregivers to work together to rear their children, is significantly related to the quality of parenting and children's development, over and above the effects of each individual parent (Cabrera et al. 2012). Parents who positively coparent support each other in their parenting role, make decisions together about child-rearing, and feel close and connected as parents. Studies have shown that disruptions in the coparenting relationship are more detrimental for children's well-being than disruptions in the couple relationship (Feinberg 2002). Latinx parents who report high levels of couple conflict also report high levels of coparenting conflict, which is associated with lower levels of parenting (Cabrera, Shannon, and La Taillade 2009). Coparenting conflict is particularly problematic among Latinx immigrant families, where it is strongly associated with less father involvement (Cabrera et al. 2009).

Child-level protective factors. Children influence their own development. Children influence their parents' behaviors toward them through their temperament, that is, the way in which they approach and react to the world, how they regulate or control their behavior and emotions, and how comfortable they feel when they meet new people or have new experiences. Descriptive studies have shown that children who are rated by their mothers as having easygoing temperaments (i.e., are less reactive to stimulation, are more sociable and easier to warm up to strangers) are more likely to elicit more warmth and responsiveness from their mothers than children rated as being more difficult (Putnam, Sanson, and Rothbart 2002). Potentially, children who are easygoing are better able to regulate their emotions and behaviors in adverse situations where adult caregivers might be less responsive and consistent in their care. Children who have difficult temperaments pose more challenges to parents, especially when there are few resources and more adversity.

Building on Strengths to Create Opportunities to Support Latinx Parents and Their Children's Development

Understanding the experiences of Latinx parents can help in the design of programs and policies that are tailored to the needs of Latinx families and build on and support their strengths. The multiple influences and factors that support or compromise competent parenting underscore the need to take a multiprong approach. The empirical evidence we presented supports several conclusions and points to specific investments that might pay off in significant ways. When distilling how the parenting science informs efforts to support Latinx parents, we take a broad, systemic view and highlight both distal and proximal circumstances that suggest investment in a range of programs and policies.

Recognize and understand the heterogeneity in Latinx families

Programs that treat Latinx as if they were one homogeneous group miss an important opportunity to make a difference in their lives. The social, economic, and cultural conditions of immigrant Latinx families are different from the conditions of native-born peers in terms of their language skills, human capital, experience of racism and discrimination, and family dynamics, all of which have important implications for program content and delivery. Knowing, for example, that literacy difficulties in both English and Spanish are prevalent among immigrant Latinx families, service providers might choose to focus on literacy classes in Spanish and in English in program design. Programs need to acknowledge these differences and consider them when designing policies. And because immigrant Latino parents face multiple challenges that threaten their own and their children's well-being, an urgent need exists to identify and target support to them.

Recognize, validate, and support what Latinx parents are already doing

The first thing that programs and policies need to do is recognize that multiple ways exist to promote child development that go beyond mainstream European American practices. Latinx families have a lot to offer their children that promote their development, but these assets are often overlooked by programs and policies. For example, low-income Latinx families are more likely to tell stories to their children and sing to them than they are to read. Programs should encourage storytelling and singing as valid and important literacy activities rather than convey the message to families that reading is the only way their children will develop language skills. The emphasis on reading alone increases the stress of families who might have low levels of literacy and may lead them to think that they have little to offer their children. They live in two-parent families that are highly stable, have a strong sense of family cohesion, have high educational aspirations, and have strong beliefs about the value of schooling (Karberg, Cabrera, et al. 2017). Many of the culturally rooted norms and practices of Latinx parents are valid and beneficial for children and need to be supported and encouraged by any of the social institutions that serve these families. Some of these parenting practices include:

- *Bearing bicultural and bilingual children.* Most Latinx parents want their children to learn and speak Spanish but have been dissuaded by misleading information that learning Spanish will make it difficult for Latinx children to succeed in school. In fact, the opposite is true. Latinx parents need to have access to accurate information about the benefits of bilingualism and biculturalism for their adaptation. This information can be made available through pediatricians' offices, teachers, churches, early childcare centers, schools, or other community organizations that serve Latinx families. Parents' efforts to teach Spanish to their children should be supported at school by including Spanish as a core language or through newsletters and

direct communication with parents. This is currently not the case in most educational settings in the United States (Devlin 2015). Because the benefits of bilingualism are more pronounced when children are exposed to higher-quality Spanish, schools could connect parents to community organizations that offer Spanish and English classes for adults.

- *Including children in daily activities.* In Latinx families, children take part in all family activities, which offers excellent opportunities for learning. Some very promising interventions exist that capitalize on family activities. *Food for Thought* incorporates strategies to teach math skills into routine activities such as cooking or grocery shopping (Leyva, Davis, and Skorb 2018). Interventions designed around activities that Latinx parents are already doing at home have buy-in from parents and can be more successful than interventions that are based on white European models of parenting.
- *Telling stories.* Individuals have a deep misconception that reading is the only way for young children to learn language. This is not the case. Children learn from a variety of sources and in different contexts. For example, storytelling is a powerful and meaningful way to learn expressive and receptive language skills. Latinx families have a rich tradition of storytelling, and Latinx children are particularly good at telling stories. Descriptive studies show that Latinx children have strong narrative skills that enable them to share and produce stories in a coherent way (Gaámez and González 2019).
- *Teaching children to be polite and respect others.* A key developmental goal for Latinx parents is to socialize their children to be polite and respectful. Even very young children are taught to display good manners and show respect toward others. Being polite, quiet, and respectful of authority are important components of being socially competent, which are important for learning. Latinx children are typically rated by their teachers as being socially competent, easy to get along with, and generally easy to manage in the classroom (Galindo and Fuller 2010). Children who are able to make friends, follow directions, cooperate, get along with others, and show self-control are more likely to have better academic outcomes, language skills, and peer relationships (Jensen et al. 2015). These skills are seldom leveraged for learning as they should be. For children to learn, they have to be able to follow directions, manage their behaviors, and pay attention. Latinx children already have these skills before they enter school, yet they have lower academic achievement than white children, who are rated by their teachers as being as socially adjusted as Latinx children. Cultural competence training for early childhood education (ECE) providers and teachers needs to include Latinx children's and family's strengths so they can acknowledge and build on them.

Identify specific challenges

For Latinx parents, several areas particularly stand out in need of consideration and improvement.

- *Improving parents' education.* Parents' low levels of education pose a significant risk factor for their children. Because educational inequality is still transmitted intergenerationally in the United States (Attewell et al. 2007), it makes sense that improving parents' levels of education can narrow or even reverse academic disparities in children (Crosnoe 2006). Investing in parents' human capital is a win-win situation for parents and children: it improves parents' educational prospectus, the quality of their parenting, as well as children's outcomes. The evidence about the effects of intergenerational educational investments on children comes mostly from work done with mothers (Crosnoe and Kalil 2010), but it would also be important to invest in fathers' human capital for the same reasons.
- *Limited knowledge of child development* can result in avoidable delays for children. Most parents of a newborn in the United States follow a recommended schedule of well-being check-ups with a pediatrician, who assesses the health and developmental trajectory of children and provides parents with basic information about how children reach key developmental milestones (Hagan, Shaw, and Duncan 2017). The dissemination and uptake of this information by low-income parents, including Latinx, is poor and ineffective (Schuster et al. 2000). Consequently, low-income parents have inefficient access to appropriate and preventive information about how their children grow and develop, and consequently their parenting practices are less optimal (Rowe 2008). This problem is relatively easy to fix. The pediatric community can improve the way they disseminate information to low-income parents. Because Latinx parents are deferential to authority, information about child development broadly would be well received and internalized into their practices. These efforts should go beyond the translation of information into Spanish to incorporate some of the specific parenting practices that are relevant for Latinx families: the pros and cons of rearing bilingual children; the timing of introducing a second language in children's lives; and the social, cultural, and economic benefit of being bilingual.
- *Latinx parents are aware that their children need help but are unable to navigate the complex and sometimes bureaucratic social services world.* Evidence exists that Latinx parents' concerns about potential delays are often ignored, dismissed, or not taken seriously by the health community, leaving parents feeling they have no recourse. Documentation requirements (e.g., requesting social security numbers) for services and benefits (e.g., childcare subsidies) place a burden on families, which may prevent them from accessing needed services (Gennetian, Mendez, and Hill 2019). A need exists for better referral systems so that Latinx families access much-needed services. Community institutions, such as schools, churches, community centers, and health care centers, that Latinx parents already visit frequently should both refer families for needed services and be the place for interventions to facilitate participation. Public health campaigns can communicate evidence-based parenting information (e.g., developmental milestones, parenting practices) to families who do not have access to accurate, easily digestible information.

Designing culturally sensitive programs requires more than translations

Although many federally funded programs have made changes to better serve the Latinx population, many of these adaptations consist of mostly translating program materials or having bilingual facilitators (Scott et al. 2015). The curricula used in these programs are rarely designed to target Latinx families (Scott et al. 2015).

Program content should be tailored to parents' needs. Programs for Latinxs could focus more on specific aspects of parenting that could benefit from support. They could offer tips to improve the quality of the interaction between parent and children in a way that support cognitive skills, such as language. Specifically, providing tips on how to read to toddlers or emphasizing the importance of reading to infants, even if infants cannot talk, would help children develop important receptive and expressive language skills.

Fathers should not be an add-on into program. Another important focus of programs and policies should be adapting and tailoring content specifically for fathers. Latinx fathers are highly likely to co-reside with their children and be married or cohabiting with the mother of their child(ren) (Karberg, Guzman, et al. 2017). Yet Responsible Fatherhood programs that serve a large Latinx population often focus on topics that are more relevant to nonresiding fathers (Cabrera et al. 2021), which may lead to less engagement among residing Latinx fathers.

Families are not just mothers and fathers. For programs serving Latinx families, family should be viewed as the central unit where family members collaborate to support children's healthy development and positive learning. Investments in just parents might not be as effective as investments that target the extended family. A more inclusive family model could be adopted by various programs and policies that target other areas of development. Programs can capitalize on cultural values that serve as sources of strength. Latinx families that endorse *familismo* may have a strong extended family network that can provide social support and encouragement. Multiple family members may be involved and invested in fostering young Latinx children's development, and thus involving extended family in programs may especially increase Latinx children's exposure to positive childrearing practices. Many federally funded programs (e.g., Hispanic Healthy Marriage Initiative grantees) have made changes to recruitment or program content that better align with values held by Latinx families, such as *familismo*, by emphasizing benefits of the program for the entire family and including the perspectives of extended family members into program content that teaches couples decision-making strategies (Bouchet, Torres, and Hyra 2013). Other recruitment strategies that align with the cultural value of *respeto* encourage program staff to develop mutual relationships based on trust and respect so that Latinx families may be more likely to remain engaged in services that may benefit their families (Murray et al. 2020). These relationships can be

developed through joint decision-making and working together with families in determining what services may be most appropriate.

Racism, colorism, and discrimination need to be front and center in programs

Most programs and services, as well as the ECE community and K–12 workforce, take a colorblind approach to racism and do not include program content to the experience and consequences of Latinx parents. Parents can feel overwhelmed and defeated and be at a loss of how to protect children from the negative effects of racism. Parents need specific information on how to help children handle rejection and marginalization as well as how to rear antiracist children. Parents can do several things to protect their children from racism: they need to know that racism is stressful and takes a toll on even young children's mental health; they can acknowledge race and talk openly about race and inequality with their children and expose them to role models from a variety of backgrounds. Parents can also help their children to build strong ethnic, racial, and cultural identities—becoming proficient in Spanish is a good way to achieve this goal. Recognizing that racism and discrimination have negative impacts on Latinx families, several programs have offered opportunities to talk about these experiences, but, as of yet, no evidence-based cultural adaptations exist (Bouchet, Torres, and Hyra 2013). The ECE and K–12 workforce need to work with programs and services and parents to promote positive caregiving across multiple contexts in which children grow up and develop.

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