

COLORADO STATEWIDE  
PARENT COALITION

PARTNERS IN EDUCATION

*A Guide for Teachers*

ENGAGING MEXICAN  
IMMIGRANT PARENTS IN THEIR

Children's  
Education



ENGAGING MEXICAN  
IMMIGRANT PARENTS IN THEIR

# Children's Education



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## COLORADO STATEWIDE PARENT COALITION

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# Purpose

*“The important thing is not so much that every child should be taught, as that every child should be given the wish to learn.”*

JOHN LUBBOCK



Teaching is probably the most rewarding profession, yet it can also be the most challenging as teachers strive to ensure that every child receives the best education possible. Education has become so complex that it is impossible for the classroom teacher to do it alone. Schools must reach out to parents and effectively engage them in the education process.

This handbook is designed to help teachers who work with English-language learners to understand the differences between the education systems in Colorado and Mexico. It is our hope that by becoming more knowledgeable about these differences and recognizing the strengths of Mexican families, teachers will develop culturally-sensitive strategies to effectively engage parents in their classrooms and improve the academic achievement of students. While we believe that the concepts addressed in this handbook can apply to engaging Spanish-speaking families from most Latin American countries, we placed our focus on Mexican families because the majority of immigrant students in Colorado schools are from Mexico.

The intent of this handbook is not to generalize nor diminish either education system. Colorado schools are diverse in philosophy and pedagogy. In Mexico, a big difference exists between public and private schools. Teachers who are aware of the differences can help Mexican parents understand the education system in Colorado and enhance their ability to become more involved in the education of their children.

The first part of this handbook highlights specific differences between the two education systems; the second part allows teachers to share and reflect on the ways in which they can capitalize on the cultural strengths that Mexican families bring with them to enhance student learning. The information in this handbook reflects over 20 years of experience and learning in working with Mexican families across Colorado from the point of view of an educator and a family advocate.



# Primary Differences Between Schools in Colorado and Schools in México

## EXPECTATIONS OF STUDENTS

**M** In Mexican schools, students must master specific skills before being promoted to the next grade. Generally, students must take tests at the end of the fall semester in January and at the end of the spring semester in June. Monthly tests are given throughout the year. At each grade level, students are required to take an assessment to determine their understanding of the material they will cover at the grade level to which they will be promoted. Some urban high schools require that students pass an admissions test to get into the school of their choice. There are two types of high schools in Mexico: one offers general studies and the other focuses on science, math and technology. Both prepare students for college.

**C** In Colorado schools, students are promoted from one grade to the next regardless of whether they master the skills for their grade level. In order to retain a student, teachers must prove that the student is not socially or emotionally ready for the next grade. The parents need to be in

agreement. The current high-stakes, standards-based testing is placing more emphasis on the academic readiness of each student. Attendance is extremely important in Colorado schools. The Compulsory School Attendance Law, CRS 22-33-104, mandates that every child who has attained the age of seven years and is under the age of 16 years must attend school. This law also applies to a 6-year-old child who has been enrolled in a public school. Parents are responsible for ensuring that their children attend school regularly. Parents who do not comply with the law are subject to a court hearing and could possibly be charged with neglect and monitored by the local Department of Human Services.

## CURRICULUM

**M** Mexico has a standardized national curriculum based on the constructivism theory. In addition, third grade students in each state receive a free textbook that includes the history and geography of that region.

Ⓒ The United States has no standardized national curriculum; however, the current emphasis on state content standards is helping school districts develop a more uniform curriculum. The Colorado constitution gives school districts local control. There are 179 school districts in Colorado and each district determines the best instructional program to educate English Language Learners (ELL students).

## TEACHING STRATEGIES

Ⓜ In Mexican schools, teaching methods can vary from one teacher to the next or from one region to another. In addition, instruction appears more formal since students are seated in rows and work independently; however, learning is becoming more interactive and working in groups is encouraged. Classroom management is more traditional than in Colorado schools. There is an unspoken expectation of respect for teachers that has been passed on from one generation to the next.

Ⓒ In Colorado schools, process is very important. Teaching methods can vary dramatically from one teacher to the next; however, most school districts are moving toward research-based, scientifically proven teaching strategies. In some schools, instruction appears informal as students work in small groups and often sit on the floor. Learning is interactive and hands-on. In Colorado, each school develops its discipline policy based on federal and state laws.

## HOMEWORK

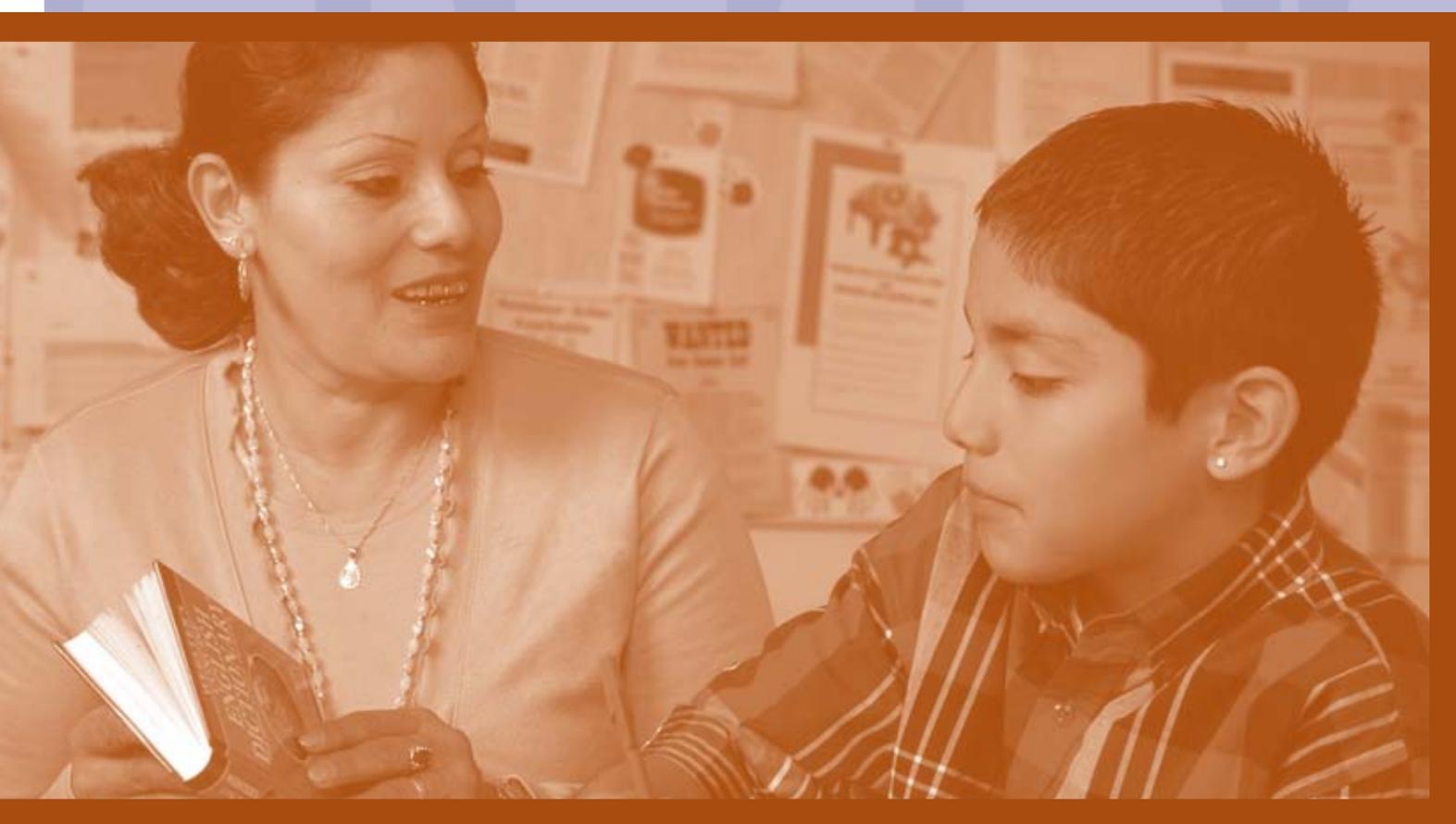
Ⓜ In Mexico, homework is an important component of the learning process. The purpose for assigning homework is twofold: 1) to practice what the student learned in school and 2) to keep parents informed about what the student is learning in the classroom. The role of the parents is to ensure that the student completes the homework and returns it to school. Beginning in first grade, students take their textbooks, their workbooks and school supplies home each night.

Ⓒ Teachers in Colorado, for the most part, determine their own homework policy. In some elementary schools, books are seldom sent home for homework purposes. Nevertheless, most teachers send home storybooks and encourage families to read with their children. Some school districts have very rigid homework policies and parents are expected to help their children with homework.

## GRADES

Ⓜ Mexican schools use the numerical system as well as the letter grading system (10=A; 9=B; 8=C; 7 or 6=D and 5=F).

Ⓒ In Colorado, schools use a wide variety of grading systems such as: A B C D F (A=excellent and F=failing); Excellent, Satisfactory, Unsatisfactory; portfolios; and more recently, grading systems that reflect standards-based terminology. Schools may also use other ways of reporting student progress within literacy programs such as color-coded reading levels.



## REPORT CARDS

**M** In Mexico, students are tested and graded every month on tests prepared by the classroom teacher to measure whether or not the student has mastered the concepts of the classroom curriculum. Parents receive report cards on a monthly basis that they **MUST** sign and return. Teachers and parents can request conferences anytime during the year.

**C** In Colorado, parents receive report cards every six or nine weeks, depending on the school system. In addition, parent-teacher conferences are offered once or twice each year. Parents and teachers can request additional conferences.

## DRESS CODE

**M** In Mexican schools, uniforms are traditionally worn by all students in elementary and middle schools for the purpose of lowering clothing costs, minimizing social class differences, instilling discipline and creating a school environment where all students have a sense of belonging. More recently, mandatory uniform policies are changing in some parts of Mexico; however, strict dress codes continue to be the norm.

**C** In Colorado, some schools may choose to have uniforms; however, the majority of schools do not have uniforms. Local schools develop their own dress codes based on district standards.

# Expectations of Parents

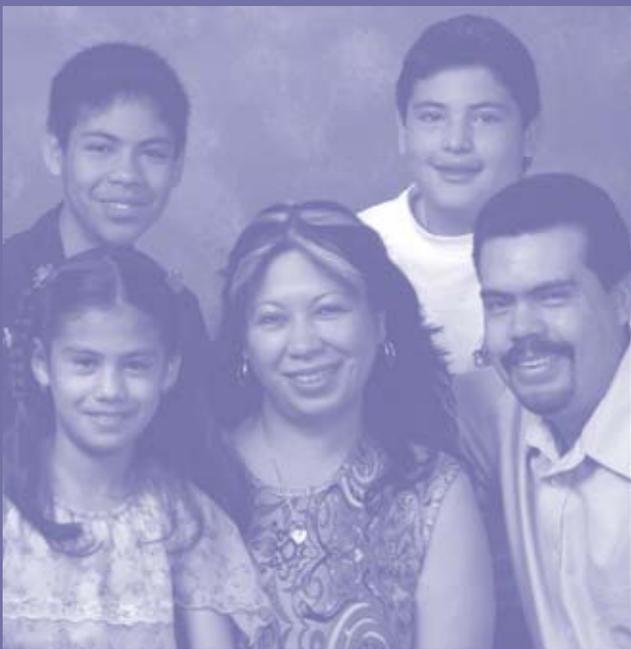


Many parents from Mexico place a high value on education and often, that is one of the primary reasons why they come to the United States.

The majority of Spanish-speaking students in Colorado schools come from Mexico. Clarifying the differences that exist within the Mexican school system is important so that we can better meet the needs of the students coming into our country.

Mexican public schools differ dramatically from private schools. Oftentimes, only the children of middle class and affluent parents, or those who receive scholarships upon passing rigid tests, attend private schools. Public schools in Mexico, like those in the United States, are free and mandated for all children; however, differences exist between small rural schools and large urban schools. Because of challenging working conditions, it is difficult for schools in small villages to attract teachers. Furthermore, classrooms often have as many as 50 to 60 students per teacher. Even when schools attract teachers, many go on strike for better wages and working conditions. Kids are often left without school for months. Despite these challenges, public schools in rural and urban communities provide a rigid and challenging curriculum.

Schools in Colorado face similar challenges. A huge achievement gap exists between schools in affluent communities and those in urban districts with large numbers of culturally and economically diverse students.





According to Family Involvement in Children's Education, from the U.S Department of Education (1998):

*Thirty years of research confirms that family involvement is a powerful influence on children's achievement in school (Eagle, 1989; Henderson & Berla, 1994; U.S. Department of Education, 1994; Ziegler, 1987). When families are involved in their children's education, children earn higher grades and receive higher scores on tests, attend school more regularly, complete more homework, demonstrate more positive attitudes and behaviors, graduate from high school at higher rates and are more likely to enroll in higher education than*

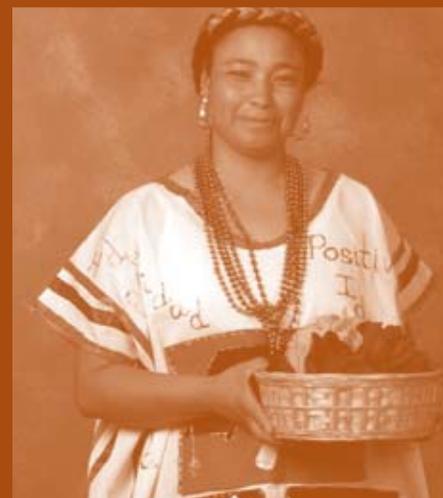
*students with less involved families. For these reasons, increasing family involvement in the education of their children is an important goal for schools, particularly those serving low-income and other students at risk of failure.*

The following sections will allow educators the opportunity to reflect on the cultural conflicts Mexican parents experience when their children enter our schools as well as the cultural strengths families bring with them. Educators will also have the opportunity to share strategies they've used to fully engage students who are English-language learners. And, educators will identify ways to effectively engage Spanish-speaking parents in their children's education experience.

# Cultural Conflicts

*“Teachers and learners are correlates, one of which was never intended to be without the other.”*

JONATHAN EDWARDS



Sometimes, simple cultural differences can create conflict between parents and teachers. Understanding the culture of the families in school communities will enhance teachers' ability to engage diverse families in their children's education processes and to meet the needs of students in a more effective manner. Educators do not need to make drastic changes in their own behavior in order to engage parents. Remember, parents are also trying to figure out the partnership between home and school. The following factors often contribute to cultural conflicts that can discourage parents from becoming involved in the education process:

- Many Mexican parents become nervous when they realize that public schools in Colorado do not have a standardized curriculum. They also may become concerned when they discover that their children can be promoted from one grade to the next without acquiring grade-level skills.
- Mexican parents often expect their children to bring home textbooks and school supplies each day so they can do their homework. When they see their child come home with a single page of homework, parents may feel as if they don't really know what the child is doing at school. They may feel incapable of helping because of a lack of explanation about how to do the homework.
- Because most Mexican parents are accustomed to going to school for the purpose of learning about their child's progress, it is not unusual for a parent to inquire how his or her child is doing during a general parent meeting, such as a PTA or PAC meeting.
- In Mexico, parents bring their younger children with them when they volunteer at school, when they come to parent meetings or during other school events; parents in Colorado usually leave their children at home with babysitters.
- In Mexico, food is part of every celebration and is shared abundantly with everyone who attends.

- In most Mexican schools, students are seated in rows and, for the most part, work individually rather than in groups.
- Often low-income families from Mexico prefer not to question authority or make demands in U.S. schools, even though in their own country they may have been very vocal and active. It takes time for immigrant parents to understand their rights and responsibilities in a system that is completely new to them.

- A welcoming school climate is extremely important in school communities that serve Spanish-speaking families. Invitations into the school or classroom are signs of respect. Some parents may be hesitant to participate in school events and meetings due to their undocumented status or the current anti-immigrant sentiments.

*Oftentimes, cultural conflicts become misconceptions that are taken as facts, making it difficult for parents and teachers to communicate effectively.*

**Q** What misconceptions or cultural conflicts have caused friction in your school?

**A**

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**Q** What do you think your school can do to bridge cultures and create a thriving environment where all staff, students and parents feel valued, respected and challenged to reach their full potential?

**A**

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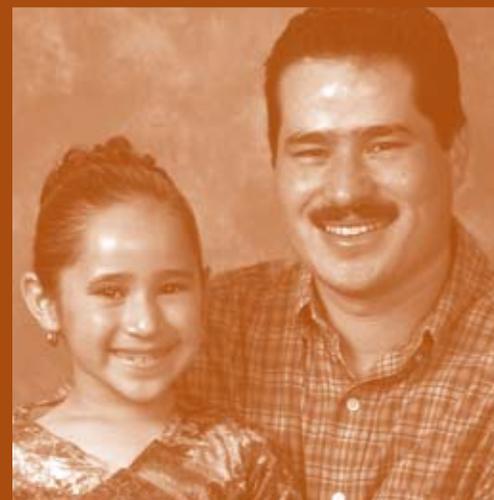
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# Cultural Strengths

*“As teachers we must believe in change, must know it is possible, or we shouldn’t be teaching, because education is a constant process of change. Every single time you ‘teach’ something to someone, it is ingested, something is done with it, and a new human being emerges.”*

LEO BUSCAGLIA



Mexican families are an untapped resource in many of our school communities. By focusing on the cultural strengths of these families, teachers can find ways to involve parents. Many Mexican parents had careers in their own countries; however, because they cannot speak English fluently, they often have to settle for lower-paying jobs in the United States. Consequently, educators may not recognize the resources parents can bring to their classroom. Likewise, some families come with limited formal education; however, they still bring with them a wide range of experiences, knowledge and skills. The following are some of the more common cultural strengths of families from Mexico.

- Mexican parents **value education**. As stated earlier, one of the primary reasons they come to the United States is to make sure their children get a good education and have more opportunities than they had. Mexican parents also expect a rigid and uniform curriculum. They expect their child to bring homework home each day that includes textbooks, workbooks and their own school supplies.
- The **family** is extremely important in the Mexican culture. Parents often take their children with them everywhere they go. It is not unusual for older children to remain at home past 18 years of age or for extended family members to live together in the same household. **Gender roles** are more clearly defined in Mexico. Traditionally, mothers have been more involved than fathers in issues concerning the education of their children; however, this is changing. Fathers are becoming more involved in all areas of their children’s lives.
- Mexican parents have **strong cultural values and traditions**, such as respect for elders, harmony with nature and family unity.
- Families from Mexico come to this country with a **spirit of hope** and a strong **desire to improve** their quality of life.

- For the most part, parents from Mexico are creative and have many **talents** (occupational, musical, artistic). They have had many experiences that have taught them to be survivors and they have learned to maximize their resources.
- Families from Mexico enjoy sharing stories and ideas. **Relational time is important to them** because interpersonal relationships are the basis for building trust and confidence with others.

- Mexican parents have **respect and admiration for teachers** and may not realize that their active involvement in schools is expected. Once they receive appropriate training and adequate support, they become strong advocates for their children and full partners in their children's education.

### Identifying Cultural Strengths

**Q** What other cultural strengths have you identified among the families in your school community?

**A**

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**Q** Why do you think society perceives Spanish-speaking families as disinterested and lacking the resources to support their children's education?

**A**

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# Using a Strengths-based Approach to Enhance Student Learning

*“A teacher affects eternity; he/she can never tell where his/her influence stops.”*

HENRY BROOKS ADAMS



Recognizing the cultural strengths parents bring to our schools is the first step to effectively engage them in their children's education. The following are suggestions that you may want to use to enhance communication with parents and to build relational trust.

## STRENGTH

### Valuing Education

## ACTION

- Let parents know at the beginning of the school year the content of your grade level curriculum.
  - » Inform parents about the specific skills students must master at their grade level.
  - » Keep parents informed about their child's progress:
    - » *Inform parents about the importance of attending parent-teacher conferences.*
- Let parents know about your homework policy and implement the policy consistently.
  - » *Be clear, specific and respectful in explaining their child's progress, using terminology the parent understands.*
  - » *Be truthful with parents about their child's progress. If the child is performing below grade level, make sure the parent understands and offer strategies that the parents can use at home to help their child.*
  - » If you do not assign homework on a daily basis, ask parents to read to their children or listen to them read for a minimum of 20 minutes each day.
  - » Keep parents informed about what is going on in the classroom by assigning homework that is related to what the child did in school.
  - » Send books and textbooks home occasionally.

- » Give parents specific strategies they can use at home to support what you are doing in the classroom.
- » Make homework challenging rather than monotonous.
- Keep parents informed about the activities in the classroom through:
  - » Monthly newsletters
  - » Weekly folders
  - » Notices that have to be signed and returned
  - » Periodic phone calls and home visits.
- *Always* greet parents when you see them.
- Contact parents to give them positive feedback about their child.
- When hosting parent meetings, keep in mind that some Mexican parents attend because they think they are there to be informed about their child's progress. As a result, they may ask how their child is doing in the middle of a discussion.
  - » A suggestion for dealing with this issue is to clearly explain the purpose of the meeting. Indicate to the parents that you know how important their child's progress is to them and encourage them to make an appointment to meet with you. You may want to have a sign-up sheet for interested parents.

## STRENGTH

### Extended family

## ACTION

- Welcome extended family members when they attend school events.
- Invite uncles, aunts or other relatives to school events if mom or dad are unable to attend.
- Find out who the significant people are in a student's life by asking the student to write about his or her family and family traditions.
- If mom and/or dad work evenings, suggest that an older brother or other extended relative help the child with homework each day.
- Be sensitive to changing family structures. Not all families have a mother and a father in the home. Letters or fliers sent home might use words such as parents, guardians or family.

## STRENGTH

### Expanding gender roles

## ACTION

- Communicate to families that mothers, fathers or other guardians are always welcome and encourage them to attend school events, field trips and to visit classrooms.
- When calling home, refrain from asking for the student's mother. This may be difficult at first because many of us are accustomed to speaking with mothers instead of fathers.

## STRENGTH

Relationships are key

### ACTION

- Take time to get to know the parents of the children in your classroom. Relationships are key when working with Spanish-speaking parents.
- Gaining the trust of the families is the first step in effectively engaging parents in your classroom.

## STRENGTH

Strong cultural values and traditions

### ACTION

- Ask students to write about their culture and family traditions including family talents, holiday traditions, migration stories, oral folklore, etc.
- Learn about the student's prior experiences – places they lived prior to coming to the United States, places they have traveled and whether they lived in a rural area or the city in their native country. Find books that relate to the experiences they've had and give them writing assignments that relate to their past experiences.
- Take a talent inventory of students' parents. Invite parents to help in your classroom and encourage them to share their talents with the students.

## AS A PARENT

*I leave my child with you each day that you may instill in him all the concepts of life.*

*You teach him sharing so he understands nothing is of value unless it is shared.*

*You teach him art so the radiant colors of the world will not pass him by.*

*You teach him letters so words may become his tool to help make this planet a gentler place.*

*You teach him time so he comes to know nothing lasts forever,*

*Especially childhood...*

*You teach him about acceptance so he learns not all of life is fair.*

*You are my child's teacher, and there is no better thing to be.*

ROBIN KEOUGH

When students witness positive relationships between parents and teachers, students feel valued and cared for and consequently assume the responsibility of working hard at school and home. The positive relationships between parents and teachers must come from an awareness of what each brings to the partnership, how much they understand each other's expectations and the sensitivity that both teacher and parent develop once they acquire this knowledge.



# Parent-Teacher Communication

*In Colorado, parents are expected to attend parent-teacher conferences which are scheduled at the beginning of the school year. If parents want to inquire further about the progress of their children, they have to make an appointment with the classroom teacher. In Mexico, parent-teacher formal conferences only occur when a serious issue arises with a student. Communication between parent and teacher is more informal. Teachers inform parents about school happenings and their child's progress when they take their kids to school or pick them up.*

## Reflections

**Q** How can schools clearly communicate the purpose of parent-teacher conferences or other important meetings to parents? Do parents understand the purpose of the different types of meetings and activities? What are some strategies teachers can use to motivate parents to attend parent-teacher conferences or other important school events?

**A**

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## Group Sharing

**Q** What information or training do parents need in order to advocate for their children?

**A**

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*In Colorado there are laws, such as the Colorado Basic Literacy Act, that support the parents' responsibility to make decisions regarding their children's learning.*

*In Mexico, parents consult with teachers and support decisions regarding their children's education. When they come to Colorado, it becomes more difficult for them to be part of the decision-making process because they don't understand the education and administrative systems.*

## Reflections

**Q** Do you think your school provides sufficient information to parents to help them make the right decisions regarding their children's education?

**A**

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## Group Sharing

**Q** What can your school do to encourage parents to be involved in decisions that affect their child's learning?

**A**

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# Reaching Out to Spanish Speaking Parents



- Clearly communicate to parents in a language they understand that the school values and wants their ideas, participation and leadership.
- Involve the entire staff in creating an environment that makes parents feel welcome and respected.
- Personal contacts are extremely effective! Flyers are probably the easiest, but not necessarily the most effective way to engage parents. *Develop positive relationships with parents.*
- If parents don't come to you, go to them. Identify community-based organizations, churches or family advocates who have already developed positive relationships and trust with those in the Spanish-speaking community.
- *Always* use a strengths-based, positive approach when working with parents.
- Do not be afraid to share power with parents.
- *Have high expectations of parents!* They are a wonderful resource to your school or your program.



# Authors' Biographies

## PATSY ROYBAL

*Director of Education Programs,  
Colorado Statewide Parent Coalition*

Patsy is the Director of Education Programs for the Colorado Statewide Parent Coalition, a nonprofit organization whose primary mission is to improve the quality of education for students in Colorado by forming effective home-school partnerships. Prior to this position, Patsy was the Education Consultant for Assets for Colorado Youth. Her primary role was to provide training to students, parents, community members and school personnel across the state on the strengths-based philosophy of Search Institute's 40 Developmental Assets. Patsy worked 11 years for Denver Public Schools, three years as a parent liaison for the Bilingual Middle Schools and eight years as the Family Resource School Coordinator at Cheltenham Elementary School. In this position, she collaborated with various organizations to offer programs at the school designed to provide academic, enrichment and cultural opportunities for students over and beyond what was offered in the regular classroom to enhance student learning. She also developed and facilitated culturally appropriate parent empowerment programs designed to create effective home-school partnerships at the school level. Patsy has over 20 years of experience working in the area of parent involvement, primarily with Mexican/Latino parents. She received her Bachelor's Degree in 1974 from the University of Colorado and her Teacher Licensure from Metropolitan State College. Patsy is the community representative on the Rocky Mountain SER Denver Head Start Parent Policy Council, the Denver's Great Kids Head Start Parent Policy Council and was recently appointed as one of three chairs of the Denver Public Schools' Parent Empowerment Council.

## DELIA TERESA GARCIA, M.A.

*Assistant Principal, University Hill Elementary  
School, Boulder, Colorado*

Teresa Garcia has been a dual language teacher for 18 years in the Boulder Valley School District in Colorado. She received the Colorado Educator Award in 1998. Teresa is an adjunct professor for Regis University and teaches Master's-level classes for teachers getting ESL and Bilingual endorsements. Teresa facilitates professional development in-services for educators across the state. She actively promotes the connection between parents and teachers and has created reading programs and math-a-thons to encourage parents to use their skills to effectively support the education of their children both at home and at school. Teresa was the teacher representative on the Colorado Statewide Parent Coalition Board and facilitates workshops to parents from different school districts. For eight years Teresa has organized trips to Oaxaca, Mexico giving students the opportunity to experience the culture and education in Mexico. She was also instrumental in organizing teacher education experiences in Oaxaca through the University of Colorado. Teresa was born in Mexico City and was raised and educated in Oaxaca, Mexico. She obtained her Bachelor's Degree in Anthropology and Education as well as her Master's Degree in Bilingual/Multi-Cultural Education with an endorsement in ESL from the University of Colorado. Teresa also has her Professional Principal License.

# Acknowledgements

Many parents and educators contributed to the development of this publication. Because the field of education is an ever-changing process, we discovered early on that everyone had different perceptions and different experiences regarding the education system in Mexico as well as parent involvement expectations. People who had attended schools in Mexico 20 years ago had very different perceptions from those who immigrated more recently. Likewise, the perceptions of people raised in smaller ranchos varied from those who were raised in larger, urban areas. Furthermore, Mexican schools are in the midst of a five-year extensive reform effort. In spite of these differences, we all agreed on some basic principles and generalities that we felt were extremely important and essential in our efforts to effectively engage Mexican families in the education process. Likewise, both parents and educators from Colorado will have different perceptions depending on their individual experiences.

Writing this document without the input of a number of very talented individuals would have been an impossible task. We want to thank the following parents and educators for their contributions:

## **AURORA BRADY, *English Language Acquisition Teacher, Denver Public Schools***

Aurora was born and raised in Mazatlan, Sinaloa, Mexico. She attended school in Mazatlan until 1986 when she came to California as an exchange student. She graduated from high school and mastered her English skills before returning to Mazatlan. She attended the Universidad Autónoma de Sinaloa and obtained degrees in Education and English. Aurora taught at the Instituto Anglo Moderno in Mazatlan. She moved to Denver and earned an Associate Degree from the Community College of Denver in Early Childhood and Violence Counseling. She obtained an Early Childhood Director's License and was Group Leader Qualified. Aurora earned her

Bachelor of Arts Degree in Education from Colorado Christian University. She worked as a paraprofessional at Cheltenham Elementary School for 10 years and has been an English Language Acquisition teacher for the past five years. While at Cheltenham, Aurora became very involved in Family Resource Programs, taking advantage of every opportunity to polish her skills in the area of parent involvement, including becoming a trainer in the Strengthening Families Program. Consequently, she is extremely effective in engaging parents in her classroom. Aurora is currently working on her Masters Degree in Bilingual Education.

## **DIANA GONZÁLEZ, PH.D.**

### ***Literacy Coach, Denver Public Schools***

Diana was born and raised in Mexico City where she was an educator for 30 years. Diana has 20 years experience teaching at every education level, from elementary to college. In addition, she was a professor at Escuela Normal de Maestros (School of Education) in Mexico City. She also taught at the Universidad Autónoma de Mexico City and was an administrator for the Secretaria de Educación Pública. She has a Ph.D. in Education with a focus on International Curriculums, a Masters Degree in Education and two Bachelors Degrees in Spanish and Law. Diana has been in Colorado for three years. She was the Literacy Coordinator for the Curriculum Department in the Denver Public Schools and is currently the Literacy Coach at Gilpin Elementary School. Diana has her endorsement in Bilingual Education and is an Adjunct Professor with the Bilingual Education Network at the University of Colorado at Denver.

## **CYNTHIA BJORK, *Title VII Curriculum Specialist, Denver Public Schools***

Cynthia was born in Maine and raised in New Mexico. She obtained her BA degree from the University of

Colorado at Denver and her Teacher Licensure and Masters Degree with a focus on bilingual literacy from Regis University. She worked for Denver Public Schools (DPS) as a bilingual classroom teacher for three years, a bilingual staff developer and teacher coach for the Collaborative Literacy Project for three years and is currently a DPS Curriculum Specialist for the Title VII Project. Cynthia also worked in the Adams 14 School District for two years as the District Literacy Coordinator. She is an instructor for the Title VII–DPS Graduate Program through the University of Colorado at Boulder's BUENO Center and has taught on-site graduate courses in DPS schools as well as in Puebla, Mexico. Cynthia speaks Spanish, Swedish and French. When she was young, her entire family performed in a Folkórico Dance Group in Albuquerque, New Mexico.

**PATRICIA HURRIETA, *Literacy Coach,***  
***Denver Public Schools***

Patricia graduated from Metropolitan State College of Denver with a degree in Behavioral Science and a dual minor in Elementary and Multicultural/Bilingual Education. She has a Masters Degree in Language, Literacy and Culture with an emphasis in reading and writing. She is also a trained Descubriendo La Lectura teacher and is working on her Professional Principal License. Patricia has been a bilingual teacher in the Denver Public Schools for the past 10 years. She has been a literacy coach for the last two years. Patricia assists the Family Advocate with parent meetings at her school. As a DPS graduate, Patricia has returned to teach in the Denver Public Schools.

**RICHARD GARCIA, *Executive Director,***  
***Colorado Statewide Parent Coalition***

Richard received his Masters Degree in Education from the University of Colorado. He has a Secondary Education Teacher's certificate from the Colorado Department of Education in Social Studies and a Type D Elementary Principal's certificate. He was the principal of a charter middle school in the Boulder Valley. Richard has been involved in parent involvement in education since 1970.

He founded the Colorado Statewide Parent Coalition in 1980. Richard believes that parent involvement is one important factor that has been overlooked in many schools and he has been extremely successful in advancing parent involvement efforts in Colorado. Richard serves as Executive Director of the Center for Effective Parent Involvement in Public Education, an initiative of the Colorado Statewide Parent Coalition. He also was appointed to serve on the Colorado Commission on Higher Education.

**OLIVA AMARO, *Las Madres Trainer,***  
***Colorado Statewide Parent Coalition***

Oliva was born in Fresnillo, Zacatecas, Mexico. At the age of 16, she enrolled in the school of Science and Technology in Fresnillo where she graduated from high school with an emphasis on accounting. She immigrated to the United States when she was 19 years old and attended West High School. She attended the Community College of Denver for two years. Oliva became a very involved parent at Cheltenham Elementary School where her two daughters attended elementary school. She volunteered for five years and was employed for two years as the Family Resource School Coordinator Assistant. As a parent volunteer, Oliva attended weekly parent training sessions, volunteered in classrooms providing individualized instruction to students and was actively involved in numerous committees, including the school reform committee, PTA and the Bilingual Parent Advisory Council. She helped coordinate numerous school activities and became a strong advocate for other families. Currently, Oliva works for the Colorado Statewide Parent Coalition as a lead trainer.

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COLORADO STATEWIDE  
PARENT COALITION

PARTNERS IN EDUCATION

*The primary goal of the Colorado Statewide Parent Coalition is to close the achievement gap and increase graduation rates for students who come from historically under-represented families.*

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