

**BUENOS PRINCIPIOS:
LATINO CHILDREN IN THE EARLIEST YEARS OF LIFE
Miriam Calderón, 2007**

Overview

Research has told us that the earliest years of life are crucial to future academic success, especially for disadvantaged groups. Greater investment in high-quality early childhood education is the key to closing the academic gap between Latino and White children which persists well into elementary school. This report contains information on how early education programs can move forward to create a system that work for Latinos and the nation as a whole.

The Goals of Early Intervention Programs

Short-term goals such as providing a secure, stimulating environment or nutritious food to children who lack these essentials are obvious objectives. Because it is often difficult to track long-run outcomes of early intervention, evaluations generally focus on intermediate goals, such as producing children who arrive at school "ready to learn." Such students are thought to be more likely to succeed in school, and hence to have better long-term outcomes as well.

Who They Are

- Latino children represent the fastest-growing segment of the U.S. child population, with children under the age of three accounting for one in five of all infants and toddlers in the U.S.
- Ninety-seven percent of Latino children under the age of three are U.S. citizens and 64% of these children are members of immigrant families.
- Fewer than 12% of young Latino children attend more formal programs at child care centers. Since many Latino infants and toddlers are cared for in informal settings, greater efforts are required to reach out to these parents and caregivers with child development information.

Programs that Address Many of the Challenges Faced by Latino Families/Children

- *The Even Start Family Literacy Program* – This literacy program serves the neediest families with children under seven. Evidence shows that Hispanic families participating in Even Start significantly increase their children's reading activities and help them gain vocabulary.
- *The Early Head Start (EHS) Program* – This program plays a significant role in narrowing the school readiness gap for Latinos. Latino children enrolled in EHS have shown better cognitive and language development and are more likely to be in homes that foster early learning.

Conclusion/Recommendations

These recommendations are intended to help federal policy-makers in improving the quality of school readiness for Latino children in the U.S. to give them the tools to succeed in school.

1. Expand the research and resources of the Even Start program.
2. Make the early Head Start program available to at least one-half of the eligible child population by increasing EHS funding and flexibility.
3. Enhance the knowledge base on Latino infants and toddlers, which includes improved data collection and research.
4. Improve implementation of federal child early childhood education programs for communities with limited English proficiency.

Calderón, M. (2007). *Buenos principios: Latino children in the earliest years of life*, Washington, DC: National Council of La Raza.