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Latina Teachers and the “BA Challenge:”

**Impacts and Conditions of Increasing Requirements in
Early Childhood Education**

Research clearly demonstrates that high quality preschool programs have significant and consequential impacts upon children’s long-term outcomes. For example, the foundations of reading success are based in the skills and abilities developed before age five (Snow, Burns & Griffin 1998). Meanwhile, Latino children are a large and rapidly growing demographic in need of appropriate, high-quality early childhood education.

Increasingly, policymakers for federal and state preschool programs have raised credentialing requirements for early childhood education (ECE) teachers. Nationally, about one in five (19%) of all ECE teachers are Latina (NASEM, 2017). Latina teachers bring an incredible amount of experience to the classroom: 27% have between 10 and 15 years in the field, and an additional 24% have worked in ECE for more than 16 years (Griffin, 2018). However, most Latina ECE teachers do not possess a bachelor’s degree.

It is crucial that the field retain, support, and develop Latina ECE teachers. Latino children are a large and growing group within the United States population. By 2050, some estimates are that one of every two public school children in the United States will be Latino (Tang, Dearing and Weiss 2012). It is imperative to retain and even increase the number of Latinas in the ECE workforce. Latina teachers bring an understanding of the culture and heritage of the children to their classrooms and to their teaching; identify with the lived experiences of the children and their families; and are often able to support the continued development of children’s proficiency in Spanish (Espinosa 2010; Flores 2017; NASEM 2017; Nieto 2017).

The “BA Challenge”

In 2018, UnidosUS conducted policy research on Latina teachers working in ECE settings operated by our Affiliate organizations. Our primary purpose was to examine the “BA Challenge,” namely: the concern that Latina ECE teachers without degrees would lose or leave their positions due to increased educational requirements. Across the United States, many Latina ECE teachers must now have a bachelor’s degree or be enrolled in a degree program as a condition of their employment.

Summary of Findings

We found minimal evidence that ECE teachers among UnidosUS Affiliates are leaving the field due to increased educational requirements.

Our research indicated that:

- The real “BA Challenge” is that teachers are seeking degrees but are not properly compensated.
- The continuing under-compensation of ECE teachers undermines program quality.
- Some teachers must finance the entire costs of their degree, which is especially burdensome given their compensation.
- Requirements for associate and bachelor’s degrees are often un-aligned, which delays degree completion, adds significantly to the costs of earning a degree, and produces additional stress for individuals working in a stressful job.
- Many degree programs do not address children who are dual language learners, which is a significant mismatch between the composition of the classrooms our teachers work in and their academic preparation.

Policy Recommendations

UnidosUS recommends the following for federal and state policy:

1. Increase ECE teacher compensation to be commensurate with job responsibilities.
2. Increase supports and system alignment to facilitate teacher’s degree completion, including a federal scholarship program.
3. Revise teacher preparation programs to meaningfully incorporate cultural and linguistic responsiveness as substantive and fundamental to course syllabi and degree program requirements.
4. Revise teacher preparation programs to mandate transparent and seamless articulation agreements that facilitate the transition from associate degrees into bachelor’s programs without loss of credits.
5. Revise teacher preparation programs to assess and develop the availability of hybrid (blended) and on-site course offerings to meet available demand.
6. The field should recognize and incorporate cultural and linguistic responsiveness as essential elements of high-quality ECE.

Methodology

UnidosUS conducted interviews with 26 program administrators from 11 of our Affiliates. We also conducted 10 focus groups with 94 teachers employed in Early Head Start, Head Start, Migrant/Seasonal Head Start, or state pre-K programs. Thirty-two participants (34%) indicated having 15 or more years of experience in the field. Focus groups were conducted in the preferred language(s) of participants (English, Spanish) and videotaped, then transcribed and coded.

UnidosUS in Education

Latinos will soon represent nearly 30% of all students enrolled in U.S. schools. Our success as a nation is tied to their success, and UnidosUS's education work is dedicated to ensuring all children have access to quality education. Our education programs, policy, and advocacy ensure that all kids have the opportunity to become empowered adults. We work with practitioners, policymakers, and advocates to develop and promote best practices that help students succeed from early childhood programs through college and beyond.

About Us

UnidosUS, previously known as NCLR (National Council of La Raza), is the nation's largest Hispanic civil rights and advocacy organization. Through its unique combination of expert research, advocacy, programs, and an [Affiliate Network](#) of nearly 300 community-based organizations across the United States and Puerto Rico, UnidosUS simultaneously challenges the social, economic, and political barriers that affect Latinos at the national and local levels.

For more than 50 years, UnidosUS has united communities and different groups seeking common ground through collaboration, and that share a desire to make our community stronger. For more information on UnidosUS, visit unidosus.org or follow us on [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#), and [Twitter](#).