

Strong parenting practices can literally “open doors” for children: Parents’ involvement in the preschool years has a profound effect on children’s academic outcomes during formal schooling, and on their learning potential throughout life (López, Barrueco, & Miles, 2006). And in Latino communities, much-lauded child-rearing traditions consistently produce healthy birth outcomes, strong early social skills, nurturing families, and a rich cultural heritage (Crosnoe, 2006; Fuller et al., 2009).

## Abriendo Puertas: Opening Doors to Opportunity

### A National Evaluation of Second-Generation Trainers

But the tough economic realities facing many Latinos—with more than one-third of Latino children living in poverty (Nepomnyaschy, 2007)—may eclipse these assets, especially in the areas of education and health. Many Latino children start kindergarten six months cognitively behind their non-Latino peers. This lag marks the beginning of an achievement gap in literacy, math, and general learning that continues, culminating with Latino children at great risk for dropping out of high school—for those who do graduate from high school—low rates of college completion (Fry & Lopez, 2012; Fuller et al., 2009; Reardon & Galindo, 2009). What’s more, compared to their non-Latino peers, these youth also exhibit high rates of obesity, which is linked to serious health problems (Escarce, Morales, & Rumbaut, 2006).

A solution to the challenges facing Latino communities may lie within the communities themselves. Programs like *Abriendo Puertas*/Opening Doors empower Latino parents to transform cultural strengths into the tangible tools they need to build solid foundations for their children. And the need for Latino children to excel in school—and in life—has never been more urgent: Currently one-in-five American children is Latino; by the year 2030, that statistic will likely grow to one-in three (Mather & Foxen, 2010; U. S. Census Bureau, 2004). The extent to which we foster the well-being of Latino children will play a fundamental role in the extent to which we all enjoy a strong, shared future.



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## KEY FINDINGS

Participants in Abriendo Puertas/Opening Doors made significant gains across *all* areas of assessment, with moderate to large effects.

- Parents demonstrated significant increases in their knowledge of language and literacy development, social-emotional development, health development, and school preparation.
- Parents exhibited noteworthy gains in understanding their rights as parents, and their children's rights in school.
- Parents reported a significant boost in self-confidence regarding their parenting skills, getting their children ready for school, and advocating on behalf of their children.

*"Abriendo Puertas/Opening Doors is a great gift to our programs. Head Start staff benefit from the wisdom of its design, and Head Start families benefit from the high expectations they set for themselves as a result."*

— Ed Condon

Senior Director, Membership and Professional Development, National Head Start Association

*"'Transformative' is often used by families to describe their experience in the Abriendo Puertas classes we implement in New Mexico. The curriculum not only helps families gain knowledge around children's early development, but it is also a tool for organizing and developing leaders in communities."*

— Adrián A. Pedroza

Commissioner, President Obama's Advisory Commission on Educational Excellence for Hispanics, and Executive Director, Partnership for Community Action

*"Abriendo Puertas/Opening Doors is an incredibly comprehensive and powerful program to prepare parents of young children to be their lifelong teachers and advocates. Our goal is to offer this program to parents in all of our elementary schools. If we can accomplish this, we will no doubt see an improvement in student achievement. "*

— Ruth Yoon

Administrator, Parent Community Services Branch, LAUSD Early Childhood Education

## ABOUT ABRIENDO PUERTAS

Abriendo Puertas/Opening Doors (AP/OD) is a comprehensive, 10-session parenting skills and advocacy program developed by and for low-income Latino parents with children ages 0 to 5. Drawing from the real-life experiences of Latino parents and local data about their schools and communities, sessions are filled with interactive activities that aim to develop parents' self-understanding as powerful agents of change to improve the lives of their children. This unique curriculum builds on participants' cultural strengths to transform the achievement gap into an opportunity to improve and enrich the lives of their children and families.

Since its inception in 2007, Abriendo Puertas/Opening Doors has reached more than 22,000 families in 31 states and Puerto Rico. The program's unique, three-day Training-of-Trainers Institutes teach community educators, trainers, and leaders how to bring the 10-session AP/OD Parenting Program to their communities nationwide, and how to train others to do the same. Institute graduates conduct Institutes of their own, framing AP/OD's curriculum within local community realities, strengths and challenges, exponentially increasing the number of trainers across the country. To date, more than 40 training institutes have been conducted.

*"Because of Abriendo Puertas/Opening Doors, I now read the nutritional information on the food we buy, allowing us to eat healthier. In addition, we make exercising a fun family activity."*

— Araceli

Given AP/OD's recent national expansion, the evaluation outlined in this brief aims to provide evidence of the program's efficacy in addressing the needs of the large and growing Latino community when brought to scale. This brief presents

findings from the evaluation of the programs conducted by second-generation trainers (those instructed via Training-of-Trainers Institutes), examining how—if at all—increases in parenting knowledge, skills, and confidence are associated with participation in the program.



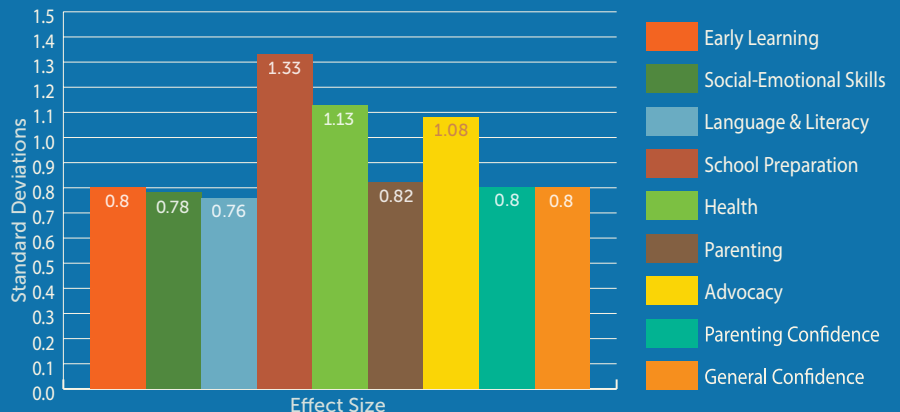
## EVALUATION APPROACH

In an effort to systematically examine the program's effectiveness as it is taken to scale, participants in all AP/OD Parenting Programs that were launched between August 2010 and March 2011 were invited to participate in an evaluation. Thirty-five AP/OD Programs conducted in six states collected pre- and post-surveys from their parent participants. The results from these surveys are presented in this report.

The 15-minute multiple-choice pre- and post-surveys tapped participants' knowledge of children's early learning, social skills, language and literacy, school preparation, and advocacy, and their parenting skills and confidence before and after their participation in AP/OD. Of the 855 participants who took part in the AP/OD Program, 623 (73%) completed both the pre- and post-surveys. Approximately 17% (148) of the total group started the program and completed the pre-survey, but did not complete the post-survey. Another 10% (84) started the program late and completed the post-survey only. Those who completed both surveys did not differ

## THE EFFECT SIZES OF ABRIENDO PUERTAS/ OPENING DOORS PARENTING PROGRAM

Results are presented in terms of effect sizes, which are expressed as a fraction of a standard deviation on each outcome. Since we want to compare Abriendo Puertas /Opening Doors outcomes to other interventions that are measured on different scales, using effect sizes allows us to evaluate how AP/OD stacks up to other parent interventions. Most statisticians agree that a small effect size ranges up to 0.49 SD, moderate effects are between 0.50 and 0.79, and large effects exceed 0.80 SD.



significantly from those who completed only the pre-survey on personal characteristics (marital status, number of children, or years of education), nor did they vary on pre-survey subscales. These findings focus on the 623 participants with complete data.

### **PARTICIPANTS**

Participants varied in their backgrounds. The vast majority (86%) of participants reported being immigrants to the United States; most were from Mexico. In terms of education, a little more than one quarter (28%) reported having completed grade school, about 23% reported having completed some high school, and 27% reported having a high school diploma/GED or having completed some college coursework. About two-thirds of participants reported being married, and 21% reported never having been married. Most participants reported having two children, with 21% of the participants reporting having four or more.

*"...what helped me the most was understanding that the development of a child is a process that requires the parents' daily involvement as a means of expanding their knowledge and promoting healthy growth."*

— Miriam

### **EVALUATION FINDINGS**

Evaluation findings will be discussed in terms of their effect sizes. Effect sizes are simple calculations of the magnitude of AP/OD's "significant" benefits for participants, allowing readers to compare these magnitudes to other interventions. For example, the benefits on cognitive growth for young children who attend a quality preschool is about 0.35 of a standard deviation, which is considered a small effect size. A large effect size, by contrast, exceeds 0.80 of a standard deviation (SD). Moderate effects are between 0.50 and 0.79 SD. The following sections examine the impact or effect size of AP/OD on participants' knowledge of early learning and development, social-emotional skills, language and literacy, school preparation, health, parenting, and advocacy, as well as their confidence about parenting and general confidence (see chart).

**Early Learning and Development:** The early learning and development section of the survey examined parents' general knowledge about how children's brains develop, and how young children learn. Specifically, parents were asked about the most important time period for children's brain development, the most important areas of children's development, and the ways parents can improve their young children's later school success.

Before the AP/OD Program, only 43% of parents answered the questions correctly; after, 89% parents did. Analysis indicates that there was a significant increase in parents' knowledge of children's early learning and development over the course of the AP/OD Program ( $F=370.57, p<0.00$ ), which is a large effect size (0.80 SD).



**Social-Emotional Skills and Development:** In addition to assessing parents' general knowledge about early learning and development, the AP/OD survey tapped their understanding of particular domains of child development, including social-emotional development. Parents were asked about the skills they needed to support children's social-emotional development—for example, what positive skills in this area include, and how they can help their child learn to express and regulate thoughts and feelings effectively. Before the program 47% of parents answered most or all of the questions in this area correctly. After the AP/OD Program, the proportion was 92%. Analysis confirmed the statistical significance of this gain in parents' knowledge of their child's social-emotional development between assessments ( $F=313.05, p<0.00$ ). This increase in knowledge constitutes a moderate effect size (0.78 SD).

**Language and Literacy:** In the area of language and literacy, parents were asked about when and how children optimally learn, and what they can do to facilitate the learning process. Before the AP/OD Program, 34% of parents correctly answered all six questions; after the AP/OD Program, 65% of parents did. Analysis indicates significant increases in parents' knowledge of their child's language and literacy development over the course of the program ( $F=292.45, p<0.00$ ), which is a moderate effect size (0.76 SD). Related to literacy practices, parents were also asked how often they take their child to the library. Before participating in the AP/OD Program, 30% of parents had never been to a library with their child; afterwards, fewer than 2% of parents reported this. Also, there was a 36-percentage point increase in the number of parents who reported taking their child to the library one time per week.

**School Preparation:** To assess parents' knowledge and beliefs regarding school preparation, they were asked about what they can do to help their young children now for success in school later. Before the AP/OD Program, 12% of parents correctly answered five or more of the seven questions; that proportion grew to 77% after the program. As shown by analysis, parents' school preparation knowledge between assessments significantly increased ( $F=960.77, p<0.00$ ). The increase in knowledge about school preparation is considered a large effect size (1.33 SD).

**Health Knowledge:** Parents were also assessed on their knowledge of basic health information pertaining to diet and exercise for themselves and their children. Just 7% of parents answered the questions correctly prior to the program; after, 40% did. Analyses indicate significant differences in health knowledge between pre- and post-assessments ( $F=475.422, p<0.00$ ), which is a large effect size (1.13 SD).

*"I really appreciate that they gave their attention and time to people like me, people who did not receive a formal education. It gives me great joy that at my age I can learn new things that will not only help me, but help me become a better guide for my children and friends."*

— Sara

**Parenting Knowledge:** In addition to academic domains related to school achievement, parents were also assessed on their general knowledge about discipline and setting goals to promote attainment of those objectives. Question topics included how best to discipline the child and set goals to promote family success. Before the AP/OD Program, 47% of parents correctly answered both questions; the post-program rate was 91%. Pre- and post-assessments revealed significant differences in parenting knowledge ( $F=362.18, p<0.00$ ), which constitutes a large effect size (0.82 SD).

**Advocacy for the Future:** Parents were asked about their rights in advocating for their child, specifically their child's rights to a public education and to get help learning English in school, as well as their (the parents') rights to be involved in school-related decision-making. Before participating in AP/OD, 31% of parents knew their rights; afterwards 92% did. Analyses revealed significant gains in parents' advocacy knowledge between pre- and post-assessments ( $F=652.20, p<0.00$ ). This is a large effect size (1.08 SD).

*"Parents have a real hunger for information that will enrich their parenting, and they have indicated that Abriendo Puertas has been an invaluable resource. Parents, organizations, and schools have expressed tremendous gratitude for having this incredible program available in Spanish."*

— Sylvia Puente

Executive Director Latino Policy Forum

**Parenting Confidence and General Confidence:** Finally, parents were asked about their confidence with regards to raising their children, as well as their general confidence. Specifically, with regards to feeling efficacious as a parent and being able to get their child to behave, prior to completing the AP/OD Program, 55% of parents reported feeling confident or very confident in these arenas. After completing the program, 98% of parents reported feeling so. Analyses revealed significant differences in parenting confidence between pre- and post-assessments ( $F=365.07, p<0.00$ ), which is considered a large effect size (0.80 SD).



In addition, parents reported about their confidence across all domains: language and literacy, school preparation, and advocating on behalf of their child(ren). Before participating in the AP/OD Program 45% of parents reported feeling confident or very confident; afterwards, 96% of parents did. Analyses show significant differences in general confidence between pre- and post-assessments ( $F=355.52, p<0.00$ ). This is a large effect size (0.80 SD).

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## CONCLUSIONS

This evaluation reflects the second-generation impact of Abriendo Puertas/Opening Doors nationwide: trainers who participated in the Training-of-Trainers Institutes and subsequently conducted the AP/OD Parenting Program have collected pre-survey and post-survey data on their parent participants. This examination of the AP/OD approach—to locate and spread the program within Latino communities—is rigorous in its range and scope.

Participants in Abriendo Puertas/Opening Doors made significant gains across all areas of assessment, with moderate to large effects. Participation was associated with parents' increased knowledge in language and literacy development, social-emotional development, health development, and school preparation. Parents also displayed significant gains in their knowledge about their rights as parents, and their children's rights in school. This boost in knowledge may have facilitated the significant growth in parents' self-confidence regarding their parenting skills, their confidence in teaching their child language, getting him/her ready for school, and in advocating on his/her behalf.

Not only did parents exhibit noteworthy increases in knowledge, they reported feeling good about it and connecting it to their rights as parents. Finally, parents expressed having positive experiences with the Abriendo Puertas/Opening Doors Program. The vast majority—about 98%—reported that it was extremely helpful in teaching them



the necessary skills to be a more effective parent.

These results provide promising data about the impact that AP/OD has had on parents' knowledge and reported behaviors and confidence when the program curriculum is disseminated through Training-of-Trainers Institutes and implemented by trainers in their communities. With moderate to large effect sizes on all domains, AP/OD suggests the power of a parenting-based intervention that is developed within and for the community. With this impact, Abriendo Puertas/Opening Doors has the opportunity to empower more parents—and to change the lives of more children, shaping a strong, shared future.

*“Abriendo Puertas is an effective program for parents with young children. The incredibly smart and elegant strategy results in energizing trainers to validate the use of language and meaning of culture in child development, as well as the value of parents’ contribution to their children’s development.”*

— Yolanda Garcia

Director, E3 InstituteWestEd

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