



Facilitator Highlight:

Margarita Gómez of Tandem, Partners in Early Learning

From Parent to Facilitator: Tandem, Partners in Early Learning, Margarita Gomez Brings AP-OD Full Circle

Across the Bay Area, [Tandem, Partners in Early Learning](#) works alongside families, educators, and community partners to create equitable, high-quality early learning experiences for young children. By reaching children wherever learning happens, from homes and classrooms to libraries, parks, and other community spaces, Tandem helps strengthen the adults and systems surrounding young children while addressing barriers that can impact children and families.

Through its implementation of AP-OD (Abriendo Puertas/Opening Doors), Tandem is creating opportunities for parents not only to strengthen their knowledge but also to become leaders who can share that knowledge with others.

Margarita Gómez's story offers a powerful example of parent leadership in action. As an Early Literacy Specialist with Tandem and an AP-OD facilitator currently implementing the 4th Edition, Margarita brings both professional expertise and lived experience to her work with families.

But Margarita's connection to AP-OD began long before she became a facilitator; it began when she participated in the program as a parent herself.



Margarita facilitating an AP-OD parent and caregiver session

From Parent Participant to Facilitator

When Margarita first learned about AP-OD nine years ago, she had just welcomed her daughter. Although she was already the mother of two older children, having a new baby made her feel like a first-time parent.

Margarita discovered AP-OD while she was participating in family programs at Good Samaritan. She was eager to learn more about her daughter's development and quickly connected with the program's offerings.

For Margarita, the experience was especially meaningful because she had not had access to the same types of parent learning opportunities in her home country. As she gained new knowledge and began applying it with her own family, she started thinking about how she could share what she was learning with other parents.



Margarita recalls,

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**Why not learn how to now
share the knowledge I gained?
Why not teach newly arrived
mothers everything that I
learned?**

Today, Margarita brings that experience into her work with families, combining what she learned as an AP-OD parent with her professional experience in early literacy.

Supporting Families as They Navigate a New System

Many of the parents Margarita works with are families who have recently arrived in the United States. She sees firsthand how challenging it can be for parents to navigate a new education system while also trying to understand how best to support their children's development.



Margarita (front left) with her AP-OD participants on graduation day

Margarita emphasizes that families already bring love, commitment, knowledge, and their own experiences. What AP-OD can provide is additional tools and information that help parents navigate new systems and build on their strengths. Margarita shared,

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What I love about Abriendo Puertas is that it is popular education—it is parent-to-parent education—which is the most beautiful part. I always learn from the parents as well. I'm a parent, so I learn from them too

That approach creates space for parents and facilitators to share their experiences and learn from one another.

Turning Learning into Everyday Practice

One of the most rewarding parts of facilitating AP-OD for Margarita is seeing what happens when parents take what they learn during a session and begin using it at home.

Families have shared how their understanding of child development has changed. Something as simple as going to the park can take on new meaning when a parent understands how running, climbing, and playing help strengthen a child's physical development.

Margarita has also seen parents transform the way they approach reading with their children. During sessions, families practice strategies such as using different voices and sounds to make stories interactive and engaging. Parents later return and share that they tried those strategies at home—and saw their children become more interested in books.

"I didn't know that using voices or sounds would capture my child's attention and motivate them to pick up a book," is the kind of feedback Margarita hears from families.

The learning extends beyond early literacy. Families also learn about children's emotional development, ways to become more involved in their children's schools, and how everyday interactions can support their children's growth. Parents have told Margarita that, before participating, they did not always know they could visit their child's school, ask questions, and become active partners in their education. After the sessions, they feel better prepared to advocate for and support their children.



Margarita facilitating an AP-OD session on early literacy

Caring for Parents, Too

One story that has stayed with Margarita came from a mother during an AP-OD graduation. The mother shared that she had always believed being a good parent meant putting her children before herself. Through the program, however, she began thinking differently about self-care. She realized that caring for herself was also part of caring for her children. "If I don't take care of myself, I won't be able to help them. If I get sick, who will take care of my child?" the mother shared.

For Margarita, moments like these demonstrate that the lessons families take from AP-OD can influence not only how parents support their children's development, but also how they see themselves and their own role within the family.

Bringing Fathers Into the Conversation

Margarita has also been encouraged to see fathers participating in AP-OD sessions. She recognizes that conversations about early childhood and parent education can sometimes center on mothers. Seeing fathers attend sessions, participate in activities, practice strategies, and share their experiences has therefore been an important accomplishment.

For Margarita, their participation reinforces a central idea behind AP-OD: every parent and caregiver can play an active role in supporting a child's learning and development.



Margarita (far right) with graduates from the AP-OD program

Encouraging the Next Generation of Parent Leaders

Margarita reminds families that the learning they gain through AP-OD does not end when their child turns five or when the sessions are over.

During the first session, parents identify goals for themselves and their children. Margarita encourages them not to put those goals away after the program.

"Don't put your goals away in a drawer; put them on the refrigerator, where you can see them every day," she tells families. Each day provides another opportunity to take a small step toward the future they envision for their children.

Now, Margarita hopes other parents will consider becoming facilitators themselves.

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"There is a great need—an enormous need—in the community. I would recommend that other parents become certified because...this is something valuable—something that is truly worth it."

Margarita's story demonstrates the ripple effect at the heart of AP-OD's parent leadership model: **when parents gain knowledge, build confidence, and share what they know with others, the impact can extend from one family to an entire community.**

Mission: Tandem, Partners in Early Learning is a Bay Area nonprofit working at the intersection of social justice and early childhood education. Their mission is to co-create equitable, high-quality early learning experiences.

Visit them at www.tandembayarea.org or follow them at:  