



# The relationships between after-school programs, academic outcomes, and behavioral developmental outcomes of Latino children from immigrant families: Findings from the 2005 National Household Education Surveys Program



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## ABSTRACT

After-school programs function especially well in improving academic and behavioral outcomes for disadvantaged children in general. However, little is known about the effectiveness of after-school programs in improving outcomes among Latino children in particular. Latino children from immigrant families are disadvantaged and vulnerable due to limited English skills and fewer educational resources. We hypothesized that Latino children of immigrant families in after-school programs would have stronger academic performance and fewer behavioral problems than their counterparts who were not in after-school programs. Using the 2005 National Household Education Surveys Program's After-School Programs and Activities survey, we examined whether children in community- or school-based after-school programs ( $n = 192$ ) presented differences in academic development (i.e., higher grades and fewer schoolwork problems) and behavioral development (i.e., fewer behavioral problems, in-school and out-of-school suspensions) than children who were not enrolled in after-school programs ( $n = 720$ ). We found that there were no significant differences in academic and behavioral domains between Latino children in after-school programs compared to students not in after-school programs. Findings from this study provide an opportunity to reflect on whether typical after-school programs are appropriate for Latino children from immigrant families. These findings also highlight the need to integrate culturally valid components into the program for areas where a large number of immigrant Latino families reside.

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## 1. Introduction

Latino children from immigrant families—those children under the age of 18 who are either foreign-born or live with at least one foreign-born parent—are rapidly becoming the largest group of immigrant children in the United States (Mather, 2009; U.S. Census Bureau, 2010 in Humes, Jones, & Ramirez, 2011). Nearly two-fifths of Latino children in immigrant families were either born in Mexico or had at least one parent born in Mexico (Mather, 2009). Compared to non-Latino children, Latino children from immigrant families whose native language is not English are reported to display lower levels of math and reading

skills (Fry & Passel, 2009; Riggs & Medina, 2005) and school completion rates (Fry & Passel, 2009).

After-school programs generally refer to programs that provide kindergarten through 12th-grade children with safe places outside of the school day to help them avoid maladaptive problems (e.g., crime, drug abuse) (Lauer et al., 2006). The programs function especially well for disadvantaged children because of the structured nature of the programs, which include highly trained and well-prepared staff, a variety of activities and academic resources, as well as partnerships with families, communities, and organizations (Little, Wimer, & Weiss, 2007). The positive outcomes in academic, physical, and behavioral areas for children in after-school programs have been well-documented, especially for children from low-income families (Halpern, 2002; Hausner, 2000) and for children with low academic performance (Cosden, Morrison, Albanese, & Macias, 2001; Gentilcore, 2002; Hausner, 2000). However, only a few studies have focused on evaluating the effectiveness of these programs for Latino immigrant children (Riggs, 2006; Riggs & Medina, 2005). In general, these studies have reported that Latino children from immigrant families in rural areas who participated in

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structured, school-based after-school programs showed improvement in their academic performance and behavior. Researchers in these studies argued that parental involvement in children's school activities and in parent-teacher conferences was important.

The purpose of this study is to examine the connection between typical U.S. after-school programs and developmental outcomes, specifically in academic and behavioral areas, among Latino children from immigrant families using nationally representative data. This study also tests measures used in Riggs' studies (e.g., Riggs, 2006., Riggs & Medina, 2005; Riggs & Greenberg, 2004b) which had limitations that included a small sample size ( $N = 94$ ) and location (one rural county), as well as one type of program (school-based). Our study is unique because to our knowledge it is the first study to utilize a large national dataset with a large weighted sample size to investigate the relationships between after-school programs (community-based and school-based) and outcomes for Latino children from immigrant families.

### 1.1. Latino immigrant families' socio demographic characteristics

In addition to having different countries of origin and length of residency, which affect families' adaptation and their children's academic achievement (Portes & Rumbaut, 2001), Latino immigrant families encounter several other challenges that could lead to negative child development (Portes & Rumbaut, 2001).

#### 1.1.1. Educational background

Children's well-being and optimal academic performance are significantly related to parents' educational attainment (Portes & MacLeod, 1996; Zill, 1996). For example, 87.9% of native-born mothers have high school diplomas, as opposed to 59.9% of immigrant mothers who have high school diplomas (Hernandez, 2004). Furthermore, 32.4% of Mexican immigrant mothers and 30.9% of Mexican immigrant fathers have high school diplomas (Hernandez, 2004). Research findings indicate that a lack of familiarity with the educational systems in the United States and lack of access to public services due to language barrier significantly impede immigrant parents from supporting their children's educational attainment (Hernandez, 2004) and social development (Mather, 2009).

Latino immigrant children are also less likely to receive early childhood education services such as daycare, preschool, and kindergarten (Pérez, 2004). The absence of these services puts Latino immigrant children at an academic disadvantage considering that early childhood education is linked to educational success in elementary school and later (Gormley, 2007). There are several factors that contribute to the non-enrollment of Latino children from immigrant families in early childhood education services. First, Latino parents are more likely to leave their children in the care of relatives rather than in formal educational settings with nonrelatives (Liang, Fuller, & Singer, 2000). Second, parents with a low educational level are likely to be less aware of the importance of early childhood education (Hernandez, Denton, & Blanchard, 2010) than are native-born parents who have higher educational attainment. Third, there is a lower likelihood of finding accessible and affordable childcare settings, along with culturally sensitive and Latino-speaking programs, in low-income communities (Hill-Scott, 2005; Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000).

#### 1.1.2. Extended families, overcrowded housing, poverty, and language barriers

Children of immigrants are more likely to live in two-parent households than are children with native-born parents (Hernandez, 2004). However, immigrant families in which the parents have low levels of education are likely to have more children, live with other relatives, and live in crowded houses (Hernandez, 2004). It is likely that Latino immigrant children share limited resources such as space, money, utilities, and food, and are living in circumstances that contribute to poor

physical health, learning difficulties, and psychological distress in children (Hernandez & Charney, 1998).

Poverty is a significant risk factor that adversely affects child development (McLoyd, 1998). Latinos have the highest poverty rate among all immigrant groups, as they are likely to work in low-wage, low-skilled jobs such as agriculture, grounds maintenance, housekeeping, construction, and retail sales, which typically do not require a high school diploma (Mather, 2009). Further, given their lower proficiency in English, Latino immigrant families also have limited access to health care, as well as social and educational services (Hernandez, 2004). The poverty rate for Latino immigrant children under age eight is approximately 22%, which is significantly higher than the 17% rate for children in native-born families (Fortuny, Hernandez, & Chaudry, 2010).

Unlike their immigrant parents, whose success was determined by the labor market, the success of first- and second-generation immigrant children is linked to their academic achievement (Portes & Rumbaut, 2001). Therefore, it is crucial to examine how educational services from structured after-school programs could benefit Latino children who come from low-income families with limited resources.

### 1.2. Characteristics of after-school programs

The two most prominent types of after-school programs are community-based and school-based (Gootman, 2000). Community-based programs are implemented by community organizations such as the YMCA/YWCA, 4-H, public agencies, libraries, and youth organizations (Gootman, 2000). Some after-school programs contain specific goals to promote social skills, increase community involvement, or reduce substance abuse problems. Others provide a safe place for children during out-of-school time (Brecher, Brazill, Weitzman, & Silver, 2009; Riggs & Greenberg, 2004a). Since the No Child Left Behind Act was implemented in 2001, school-based programs have focused on improving children's academic levels (Riggs & Greenberg, 2004a). The Title I component of No Child Left Behind addresses improving academic achievement of disadvantaged children (No Child Left Behind Act, 2001). Therefore, most participants in after-school programs are academically disadvantaged children or racial/ethnic minority children (Latino and African American children) with lower levels of math or reading skills (Brecher et al., 2009).

The quality of the programs, instructors, and staff are key components of after-school programs because high-quality after-school programs provide a structured, safe, and supervised setting specifically tailored to the learning, friendship, and developmental trajectories of children (Chung, 2000). First, instructors and staff with appropriate training, experience, and expectations can best meet the needs of students and their families through appropriate activities and positive interactions. These in turn improve children's academic performances and social-emotional adjustments (Fashola, 1998). Second, after-school programs require partnerships with parents, educators, organizations, colleges, and public sectors, which facilitates access to school/community needs and resources, provides opportunities for children and families within school and communities, and assists hiring qualified instructors/staff (Brecher et al., 2009). Last, accountability and sustainability are other important components of after-school programs (Little et al., 2007). In general, formal enrollment and participation are necessary for evaluation and accountability of a program (Brecher et al., 2009). Children with the highest levels of attendance are less likely to fail and more likely to graduate than those with lower levels of attendance and participation. In particular, academic achievement is significantly associated with attendance rate in after-school programs (Huang et al., 2007; Jenner & Jenner, 2004).

### 1.3. Academic and behavioral development for Latino children from immigrant families

Riggs and Greenberg (2004b) examined how the after-school program Generacion Diez (known as G-10) affected elementary- and

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