

## Latino Parent Association

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*Washington Elementary School  
Whitewater, Wisconsin*

One school improvement goal set by Washington Elementary School was to fortify partnerships with minority families. A motivated parent, working with the school leadership team, began the Latino Parent Association (LPA) to help reach this goal. The LPA would provide better ways to collaborate with parents, create a sense of belonging for this group of parents in the school, and increase staff understanding of cultural and poverty influences on student learning. In its first year, the LPA organized Mexican holiday celebrations, meetings, and fun nights at school.

A leadership team of a parent, the volunteer coordinator, the principal, an Ameri-corps VISTA volunteer, and a national- and state-level advocate for Latino rights worked to launch the Latino Parent Association. The LPA president (the initial motivated parent) recruited parents for volunteering and meetings, spearheaded publicity efforts, and organized events. The Latino rights advocate came to the first two LPA meetings and explained to parents in Spanish what the Latino Parent Association could do for them and what they could expect of the school. The volunteer coordinator met with the LPA president weekly and served as the liaison between the LPA and the PTA.

Three to four parents attended the first official meeting of the LPA, and that number grew slowly, but steadily, over time into a dedicated group of families organizing activities. Personalized phone calls to Hispanic families helped to attract volunteers. The LPA conducted meetings in Spanish to create a welcoming environment and to foster a sense of ownership among parents.

The LPA's Mexican Fiesta was by far the most exciting event it organized this year. For weeks prior, students and staff made piñatas and filled them with fun trinkets. The leadership team distributed fliers to all three elementary schools in the district and created handmade, colorful posters to display. The PTA funded the materials and paid for the disc jockey, who was also the local Mexican grocery store owner. Adults paid a \$1 admission fee to the fiesta and children were admitted free. Participants paid \$2 a plate for the taco bar and buffet dinner of authentic Mexican food. Approximately 250 people attended, and the fiesta earned the Latino Parent Association \$300, which they used to fund cake and presents for a Mother's Day celebration. This event was held on a Saturday night, and had a tremendous turnout, being the first of its kind in the district.

The Latino Parent Association activities were publicized in English and Spanish through newsletters and other documents sent home in students' monthly folders. A section of the monthly school newsletter is now devoted to the activities of the LPA.

The future direction of the Latino Parent Association looks promising as the group builds on this year's successes and learns from its challenges. The LPA will continue to communicate with and seek increased participation from Hispanic families and the school community. Next year's LPA calendar of events has been set and is waiting for volunteers.

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