Core Qualities For Successful Early Childhood Education Programs

Overview
The National Council of La Raza (NCLR)—the largest national Hispanic civil rights and advocacy organization in the United States—works to improve opportunities for Hispanic Americans. Through its network of nearly 300 affiliated community-based organizations, NCLR reaches millions of Hispanics each year in 41 states, Puerto Rico, and the District of Columbia. To achieve its mission, NCLR conducts applied research, policy analysis, and advocacy, providing a Latino perspective in five key areas—assets/investments, civil rights/immigration, education, employment and economic status, and health. In addition, it provides capacity-building assistance to its Affiliates who work at the state and local level to advance opportunities for individuals and families.

Founded in 1968, NCLR is a private, nonprofit, nonpartisan, tax-exempt organization headquartered in Washington, DC. NCLR serves all Hispanic subgroups in all regions of the country and has regional offices in Chicago, Los Angeles, New York, Phoenix, and San Antonio.

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Introduction to the NCLR Core Qualities for Successful Early Childhood Education Programs
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The National Council of La Raza (NCLR) supports the efforts of early childhood programs to provide a high-quality education for young Latino* and dual language learner (DLL) children. By age five, English-proficient Latino children are about three months behind White children in their pre-reading skills. This early gap is already wide, but further disparity can be found as they progress in school; by the fourth grade, 80% of Hispanic children are unable to read at grade level.† Consequently, efforts to address Latino students’ academic outcomes must begin with early education.

Programs that establish high expectations for the school readiness outcomes of children and create an optimal bilingual education environment will contribute to reducing the national achievement and opportunity gaps. Latinos compose a significant portion of the U.S. population, having grown from 35.3 million in 2000 to 50.5 million in 2010, an increase of 43%‡. As the number of Latino and DLL children rises, it becomes more imperative to develop early childhood education (ECE) programs that provide academic rigor and cultural and linguistic support.

NCLR’s Core Qualities for Successful Early Childhood Education Programs will serve as a guide for the early education of DLL and Hispanic children, families, programs, and communities. The Core Qualities (CQ) tool kit highlights the system and practices that must be in place in order to offer appropriate education and services for these groups. The CQs outline eight areas: high expectations and high supports, collaborative leadership, cultural competence, bilingualism and biliteracy, sustained meaningful relationships, family engagement and community collaboration, continuous performance-based assessment, and relationships with institutions of higher education.

Each Core Quality includes indicators that early childhood programs should adopt and follow. Programs can assess how closely they are meeting the indicators through the measures that are connected with each indicator. Also matched to each indicator are examples of evidence that programs can use to demonstrate their adherence to the CQs. These may be found in the Core Qualities Matrix.

The Core Qualities tool kit also contains an overview of the CQs, a self-assessment checklist, and vignettes of schools that are demonstrating best practices in meeting the CQs and preparing children for a successful transition to kindergarten and later academic achievement.

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* The terms “Hispanic” and “Latino” are used interchangeably by the U.S. Census Bureau and throughout this document to refer to persons of Mexican, Puerto Rican, Cuban, Central and South American, Dominican, Spanish, and other Hispanic descent; they may be of any race.
† Margaret Bridges et al., Preschool for California’s Children: Promising Benefits, Unequal Access, Policy Brief 04-3 (Berkeley, CA: PACE and UC Linguistic Minority Research Institute, 2004).
The Core Qualities Defined

High Expectations and High Supports
The early childhood education program defines goals and establishes high-quality expectations for the social, emotional, cognitive, physical, cultural, and linguistic competencies of all its members: children, teachers, staff, parents, family, and the community.

Collaborative Leadership
The ECE program validates and benefits from each member’s contribution to its culture and development. The program integrates the diverse cultural perspectives of its members and fosters a strong sense of collective commitment to its success.

Cultural Competence
The ECE program respects and incorporates the Latino culture—its values, history, experiences, and traditions—in all of its aspects. It embraces its role as a cultural mediator and cultural institution that promotes the advancement of a vibrant multicultural community. The program engages in a continual process of discovery and learning regarding the cultures of the families, community, and staff.

Bilingualism and Biliteracy
The ECE program adopts an educational program that supports the goal of all children and families becoming bilingual and biliterate, and it establishes standards and expectations for children in both languages. The program uses research-based practices to facilitate language acquisition in at least English and Spanish. The program supports opportunities for monolingual staff to become bilingual and biliterate.

Sustained Meaningful Relationships
The program promotes authentic, meaningful relationships, respectful open communication, and participation among families, children, and ECE staff. These relationships contribute to the lifelong success of families and children.

Family Engagement and Community Collaboration
The ECE program encourages family engagement and community collaboration and creates structures and resources to promote them. Parents and families are empowered to be actively engaged in their children’s learning and development, their own learning, and the ECE program.

Continuous Performance-Based Assessment
The ECE program uses culturally and linguistically appropriate assessments to measure the acquisition of child knowledge and skills aligned with high expectations. Program members use data from continuous performance-based assessments to guide ongoing decision-making to improve the program. This reflective process assists program leaders in holding themselves accountable for child achievement and family, teacher, and program success.

Relationships with Institutions of Higher Education
The ECE program establishes relationships with institutions of higher education (IHEs) to foster a college-going culture and provides opportunities and support for staff to acquire competencies and meet the professional degree requirements of federal and state funders and accrediting institutions. Developing relationships with IHEs is necessary for children to enter school at or above proficiency levels and to inspire children to achieve higher levels of education.
Glossary of Terms

**Authentic tasks/measures:** A set of tasks used as a part of the evaluation process. Teachers provide children with the opportunity to engage in relevant, real-life activities to help them develop and demonstrate their knowledge and skills. For teachers and parents, this will provide a more holistic view of children’s capabilities.

**Continuous performance-based assessments:** The process of continually gathering data on children's strengths and progress. These data are used to individualize instruction and support teacher professional development.

**Culturally competent/appropriate:** Refers to the ability of program elements and members to effectively interact with people from other ethnic, linguistic, and cultural backgrounds. This includes being aware of one's own cultural views and practices, acknowledging other’s beliefs and traditions, and incorporating diverse beliefs into programmatic action.

**Latino Family Values Framework:** NCLR’s approach to ensuring alignment between state and federal early learning standards, dual language curriculum, and family cultural values.

**Parent Advisory Council:** A committee composed of parents whose children are enrolled in the ECE program. The purpose of the Parent Advisory Council is to organize and provide a voice for families on classroom, program, and community issues.

**Program director:** An individual who oversees the ECE program. At a center, this would be a site supervisor, manager, or director. For larger organizations, this would consist of administrative members with titles such as director of education, director of professional development, or director of family services.

**Program members:** All individuals who compose, work for, or benefit from the ECE program, including children, teachers, staff, parents, family, and the community.

**Program staff:** All staff hired by the program, including teachers, assistant teachers, parent educators, family support, and program administrators—a comprehensive term for all adults working with children.
Summary of Individual Core Qualities
Core Quality 1: High Expectations and High Supports

**Purpose**
Support growth by setting high expectations for young Latino and DLL children, as well as all members of the program community, and establish a structure for achieving these goals.

**Impact**
All children, teachers, staff, parents, and family members will have the essential resources to develop cognitive, social, emotional, physical, cultural, and linguistic competencies.

**Program Outcomes**
1. Ensure that DLL children are prepared for kindergarten and the school system.
2. Exceed federal and/or state standards for young children.
3. Employ and train qualified and effective bilingual teachers and staff.
4. Employ a qualified director or administrator to lead the program.
5. Provide strategic professional development that is responsive to issues among DLL children and families.
6. Attend to the cultural, linguistic, and developmental needs of the whole child.

**Role of Teachers, Staff, and Administrators**
- Provide rich bilingual curricula and materials and a culturally stimulating environment.
- Develop academic, social, and cultural goals for children in partnership with parents.
- Exceed standards for ECE and qualifications for one’s position.
- Use data from culturally and linguistically appropriate assessments and observations to inform curriculum and the teaching plan.
- Maintain a positive, culturally competent relationship with families and create continuity between home and the school.
- Offer high-quality health and nutrition services that reflect cultures in the community.
- For the director, provide leadership and set high expectations for children, teachers, and parents.
- For the director, advocate on behalf of children and families and engage the community.

**Role of Parents and Families**
- Develop academic, social, linguistic, and cultural goals for children in partnership with teachers.
- Collaborate with teachers to support learning at home.
- Participate in program activities, trainings, and workshops.
Core Quality 2: Collaborative Leadership

Purpose
Value and incorporate multiple perspectives, including those of Latino families, to strengthen the program, demonstrate collaboration to children, and found a collective responsibility and commitment to the children and program’s success.

Impact
All program members will be engaged, take leadership positions, construct culturally competent services, and advocate on behalf of children, families, and the program.

Program Outcomes
1. Provide a system and support for Latino and DLL families to take leadership roles.
2. Ensure that teachers and staff engage in program planning and decision making.
3. Maintain a process of gathering member input to construct and refine the program.

Role of Teachers, Staff, and Administrators
• Provide leadership training for families.
• Maintain a culture of ongoing learning and development.
• Promote opportunities for professional development and educational achievement.
• Facilitate mentoring and coaching for staff.
• Engage in the program’s decision-making process.

Role of Parents and Families
• Actively lead initiatives and take on leadership positions within the program.
• Join the program’s decision-making process.
• Advocate on behalf of children and families to program leaders and the community.
Core Quality 3: Cultural Competence

Purpose
Cultivate a program that honors the Latino culture and other cultural heritages, thereby providing a healthy environment for children and families to engage in preschool instruction and/or adult academic learning while maintaining a strong sense of cultural pride and identity.

Impact
The program will be a cultural mediator that incorporates Latino history and traditions, promotes advancement of the community, and educates children and families through a rich, holistic approach.

Program Outcomes
1. Honor the culture and history of children and families.
2. Demonstrate understanding of family values and traditions and incorporate them into the program.
3. Intentionally reflect the culture and language of children and families within the curriculum, materials, and instruction.

Role of Teachers, Staff, and Administrators
• Engage in an ongoing process of learning about the cultures of the community.
• Construct a positive environment based on awareness, tolerance, and shared experiences.
• Acknowledge similarities, value different perspectives, and examine one’s own beliefs.
• Recruit and mentor staff who are culturally and linguistically competent.
• Provide opportunities to engage in authentic cultural traditions.
• Integrate culture, language, and family experiences into curricula, materials, and teaching methods.
• Obtain authentic materials to develop children’s knowledge of diverse cultural groups.

Role of Parents and Families
• Engage in focus groups to share family values, stories, and experiences.
• Contribute to the program’s development of authentic cultural materials and experiences.
• Participate in open discussions with staff to discuss cultural and familial practices, informing teaching and curricula planning.
• Assist, organize, and engage in cultural traditions at the program and classroom levels.
Core Quality 4: Bilingualism and Biliteracy

Purpose
Develop a curriculum and program service that utilizes research-based practices in supporting content knowledge in both Spanish and English, allowing children to acquire fluent language and early literacy skills in both languages.

Impact
Promoting bilingualism for all children, families, and staff will build a foundation of knowledge and cultural competence essential for life in the 21st century. Bilingualism and biliteracy leads to greater cognitive flexibility and academic achievement as well as improved communication, understanding, and cohesion across generations and cultural/linguistic groups.

Program Outcomes
1. Provide opportunities for children, parents, and staff to become bilingual and biliterate.
2. Assess children in both their first and second languages to determine skills and the level of support needed.
3. Utilize researched best practices to develop children’s language, literacy, and content knowledge in each language.

Role of Teachers, Staff, and Administrators
• Communicate with and instruct children in both Spanish and English.
• Utilize opportunities to strengthen one’s primary language and acquire new language skills in a second language.
• Advocate for the preservation of families’ home language.
• Gather data on children’s skills in both languages.
• Host staff and family meetings to develop a dual language plan and partnership approach for implementation.
• Utilize appropriate strategies to develop children’s language skills in both Spanish and English.
• Individualize instruction for children based on language ability and needs.

Role of Parents and Families
• Be involved in formulating and implementing a dual language plan for the child.
• Participate in parent education workshops on language acquisition and home support.
• Become knowledgeable about the child’s skills, growth, and needs in each language.
Core Quality 5: Sustained Meaningful Relationships

Purpose
Build authentic, meaningful relationships among families, children, and staff to encourage open communication, collaboration, and engagement based on mutual respect.

Impact
The development of respectful relationships that value child and family contributions will contribute to the positive development and lifelong success of families and children.

Program Outcomes
1. Build relationships based on dignity, care, and respect with children, families, and the community.
2. Honor and incorporate the contributions of parents and families in the program.

Role of Teachers, Staff, and Administrators
• Ensure that contact with families honors cultural values.
• Continually develop trusting relationships with parents and families.
• Provide opportunities for children to develop caring and respectful relationships with family, program staff, and other adults.
• Facilitate children’s emotional development and interaction with peers.
• Collaborate with parents to meet the needs of children and families.
• Engage families and their support network to foster child learning and growth.

Role of Parents and Families
• Participate in open, respectful communication with teachers and program members.
• Engage in and be involved in planning program conversations and events.
• Collaborate with staff to develop a vision for the child and identify necessary supports.
• Participate in decision making and problem solving at the center and community levels.
Core Quality 6: Family Engagement and Community Collaboration

Purpose
Authentically utilize and build on family and community strengths to add richness to the program environment, children's learning, and family growth and improve access to comprehensive services.

Impact
Child learning and development will be supported by family engagement within the program, and the family will gain advocacy skills and comprehensive services when community resources are linked to programmatic efforts.

Program Outcomes
1. Ensure that ongoing communication between parents and staff is in the language that parents understand.
2. Authentically utilize family and community assets to support children.
3. Acknowledge parents as the first and lifelong teachers of their children.
4. Work with parents to define goals and engage in ongoing dialogues on child progress.
5. Support the family's role as an advocate.
6. Develop partnerships with organizations to provide comprehensive services to children and families.

Role of Teachers, Staff, and Administrators
• Develop a structure for ongoing two-way communication between parents and staff.
• Identify family values and assets and embed them within all program elements.
• Establish a culture that facilitates family involvement.
• Foster family-to-family support networks.
• Build family advocacy skills to help families negotiate on behalf of the child and family.
• Provide information and strategies on transitioning to kindergarten.
• Maintain an ongoing relationship with program partners for the benefit of families.

Role of Parents and Families
• Collaborate with teachers to develop goals and continually review the child's plan.
• Communicate with teachers and staff about child progress.
• Contribute to the program through volunteering, organizing efforts, and sharing resources.
• Participate in interactions with other families to build the ECE community.
• Engage in advocacy trainings and advocate on behalf of the children.
Core Quality 7: Continuous Performance-Based Assessment

Purpose
Use culturally and linguistically appropriate assessments for Latino and DLL children to ensure accurate and complete measurements of development and inform decision making on instruction and program operation.

Impact
Appropriately measuring, analyzing, and applying data results on individual child growth and family capacities will assist program leaders and community agencies in holding themselves accountable for child achievement and family, teacher, and program success.

Program Outcomes
1. Use multiple culturally and linguistically appropriate measures to assess each child’s progress in all domains of development.
2. Collect data on the capacities, strengths, and needs of children and families and the effectiveness of the program to address those areas.
3. Analyze data to guide decisions related to resource allocation, funds development, and curriculum and program design.
4. Apply the results of program evaluations and individual child assessments in useful and transformative ways that improve program, teacher, child, and family outcomes.

Role of Teachers, Staff, and Administrators
- Align assessments to federal and/or state child outcomes.
- Utilize multiple assessments to measure and monitor growth in both languages and all content areas.
- Collect data from children and families in culturally appropriate ways.
- Review data with an advisory board to formulate a strategic plan and guide decision making.
- Apply data results to inform curriculum, instructional strategies, and program operations.
- Link professional development to program standards, child outcomes, and family needs.
- Share results with families on the effectiveness of strategic and individual child plans.

Role of Parents and Families
- Provide feedback and input on program services.
- Share home and community circumstances to provide the program with a complete overview of factors impacting and supporting the child.
- Engage in trainings as part of a program improvement plan.
- Discuss child growth and progress monitoring with teachers.
- Communicate the program’s vision and implementation of the program’s action plan with program leaders.
Core Quality 8: Relationships with Institutions of Higher Education

Purpose
Develop relationships with institutions of higher education (IHEs) to support staff in achieving their educational goals and professional requirements for their position as well as improving competencies in serving young Latino and DLL children.

Impact
Fostering partnerships with IHEs and collaborating with faculty will provide staff with access to technology and support services to complete their coursework, enhance their knowledge of early childhood content areas, and promote a career-oriented and college-going culture for children.

Program Outcomes
1. Establish a relationship with at least one institution of higher education.
2. Facilitate coursework for teachers and staff to meet professional certification, accreditation, and state/federal requirements.
3. Promote a career-oriented and college-going culture for children.

Role of Teachers, Staff, and Administrators
• Advocate that IHEs be responsive to teacher, staff, and program needs.
• Collaborate and plan trainings with faculty for the benefit of program staff.
• Complete degree and ECE coursework and utilize college support services.
• Provide a structure for the IHE to engage in learning and research opportunities to inform program services and develop coursework for teachers.

Role of Parents and Families
• Provide expertise to staff and IHE members, serving as informants on Latino culture and contemporary life with regard to coursework, curriculum development, and related research efforts.
• Offer feedback to the program as new approaches are implemented based on collaboration with the IHE.
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