



THE ALLIANCE FOR CATHOLIC EDUCATION
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A CATHOLIC SCHOOL PRINCIPAL'S GUIDE:

30 PROVEN STRATEGIES TO SERVE THE
LATINO COMMUNITY AND INCREASE
ENROLLMENT IN CATHOLIC SCHOOLS



Introduction

The history of Catholic schools in the United States is directly linked to the history of immigration. Through the first half of the 20th century, thousands of Catholic schools were founded to serve immigrant populations arriving from Europe. The Church has always given special care and made a commitment to serving immigrants and the poor.

Today, we are blessed with a crucial opportunity to continue this legacy of service to immigrant populations—most of whom are arriving from Latin America—through Catholic education. More than ever, this requires a thoughtful and deliberate approach to making Catholic schools available, affordable, and accessible.

What follows are proven strategies to recruit and welcome to Catholic schools many more Latino children and families, whether recent immigrants or those who have resided in this country for several generations. Not all of these strategies need to be implemented at one time. Pick and choose, explore ideas that are working for others, and do what you can do. And most importantly, ask for help when needed!

Before all else, pray to be open to where God may be leading you and your school community. Make a novena to Our Lady of Guadalupe, asking her to help you and your school in this work of making the gift of a Catholic education a reality for Latino children. Be aware of your own prejudices and biases—some which you may not even recognize—throughout this process. This is natural and part of being human, but not to acknowledge our assumptions and not to become aware of them can cause problems and limit our efficacy.

We sincerely hope that all who read this document will be inspired to “put out into the deep” for Latino families, employing the recommendations offered. So much is at stake.

May God continue to bless the work He has entrusted to us.



Getting Started

- 1.** Develop an openness of mind and heart to Latino peoples and cultures. Or to say it another way, in His providence, these are whom God is sending to our schools and parishes today. When we embrace this reality, the work of increasing Latino enrollment in our Catholic schools will not be work; it will become our passion.
- 2.** Research the demographics of your community. Is the percentage of Latinos in your community reflected in the percentage of Latinos in your school? When you begin thinking about recruitment, it is helpful to know where the majority of the Latino population in your area lives. The public school census can be an extremely helpful tool in finding out this information. Similarly, the (arch)diocesan office of research and planning should have this information for you.

Interested in a more detailed look at the demographics of your community? Check out Social Explorer (socialexplorer.com). Its sophisticated demographic visualization tools and simple online interface make it easy to access current and historical census data to see how and where the demographics in your community are changing.

- 3.** Become a student of your students' cultures. Learn all that you can about where your school's families come from, and use this information to make families feel welcome and at home in your school. Try to avoid assumptions. For example, don't assume that parents will find babysitters in order to attend meetings at the school; parents will often bring younger children with them.

4. Create a culture of inclusiveness. There may be parents in the school community who will view the school's increasing diversity as a problem rather than an opportunity. Some parents will be overtly negative, and others may feel uneasy about the school's transition. Speak to those parents individually about the mission of the Catholic Church and the mission of your school. Convene community forums focused on creating conversations across many diverse cultures. Be sure to engage the entire school community in everything you do, inviting parents of all cultures and ethnicities to participate in school events.

Be sure that the inclusive culture of the school is reflected in the composition of the school board and committees. There are numerous ways to get parents and community leaders involved in schools, but empowering a school board and other committees to share appropriately in the governance, development, and strategic planning can be a particularly effective way to invite and increase Latino ownership in Catholic schools.

5. Build relationships! Forging a sense of community—both within the parish and beyond—is critical to attracting Latino children and families to your school. The principal has arguably the most important role to play in cultivating these relationships. Effective schools capitalize on the strong social networks that often exist in Latino communities. Be present, personable, friendly, and hospitable. Most importantly, exude the joy of the Gospel, as Pope Francis encourages us all to do! Within the parish community, cultivate relationships with staff members, the director of religious education, Hispanic ministers, and leaders of the various groups that may exist in the parish, such as charismatic prayer





groups, young adults, faith formation groups, small faith communities, etc. Similarly, consider reaching out to members of the community outside your parish. Get to know the pastors and staff of neighboring and feeder parishes, the Hispanic Chamber of Commerce, or Latino support groups, to name a few.

6. Find a cultural mentor. This person can help you understand and appreciate a culture that is not your own. If you are unable to ask questions about another culture, you will assume why people do what they do, and you will almost always be wrong. Do your best to identify someone on whom you can rely for candid feedback, suggestions, and advice as you get to know more Latino families and work to engage them in your school community.

Preparing Your Faculty and Staff

7. Be upfront with your staff about the changes in demographics (cultural and economic) that teachers will encounter in their classrooms. Express expectations that all members of the faculty and staff share the responsibility of creating a welcoming environment for all of the school's families, and they also share responsibility for the retention of students.

8. Talk explicitly with the staff about how school culture and classroom management styles will need to be adapted to meet the changing dynamic of the school. Host professional development sessions that focus on the behavioral norms that Latino children bring from

their homes to the classroom. For example, research indicates that Latino students are more successful when they are able to build respectful, caring relationships with their teachers. A home visit from a principal and/or teacher can have a profound impact on building this strong relationship.

9. Educate teachers about the expectations that Latino parents often have for their children's school. For example, Latino parents who place their children in Catholic schools are often compelled to do so by their Catholic faith and the expectation that the school will aid in their efforts to transmit the religious, ethical, and cultural values of the family. This is not to say that a school's academic rigor does not factor into this decision, but this comprehensive view of the role that the school plays in a child's education (i.e. educating the "whole child") is immensely important to many Latino parents.

10. Educate your faculty/staff and current school families on the gifts that culturally and linguistically diverse children bring to the school community. Focus on the abundance model, not the deficit model. Celebrate what students bring to the classroom rather than become discouraged by what they seemingly cannot do at first.

Engaging Your Parish

11. Educate parish families about the many advantages of a Catholic education, and help them to know that our Catholic schools are available, affordable, and accessible. The educational achievement record of





Latino children in Catholic schools—commonly referred to as the Catholic school advantage—offers one of the strongest value propositions to prospective families. However, many Latino families are unaware of the benefits that children who attend Catholic schools accrue. Many families from Mexico and other parts of Latin America have never even considered a Catholic education because they view Catholic schools as elite institutions, only serving the upper class. Dispelling this misperception often requires a systematic approach to educating Latino residents of the community about the affordability and accessibility of Catholic schools in the United States.

When schools become organic parts of the community – and when people grow comfortable being in the building on a regular basis – the barriers to enrollment often begin to fall away. Misperceptions about cost and culture can be replaced with accurate information and a sense of belonging. Thus, successful schools in Latino communities often host evening and weekend events that welcome Latinos so that the school is seen more as a community center. For example, Holy Redeemer Catholic School in the Archdiocese of Portland had ESL, citizenship, and computer classes in the evening for Latino families. This brought families to the school who eventually inquired about enrolling their children there. As principal, you may consider encouraging the pastor to require that any parish formation or education classes for young families be held in a classroom, including all sacramental preparation classes (Baptism, First Communion, and Confirmation). This will give many parents the opportunity to see the school for the first time and begin to understand it as part of the parish community.

12. Engage the parish. An informed parish will be a supportive parish. Invite the pastor, the parish staff, and the director of religious education to visit the school and attend faculty meetings related to Latino



outreach and education. This helps to generate buy-in from the entire parish community and fosters greater collaboration between the school and the parish. Invite the pastors, parish staff members, and religious education directors from neighboring and feeder parishes to visit the school, as well.

Marketing Your School and Recruiting New Families

13. Set clear, high, and measureable goals with regard to enrollment, retention, and academic achievement. Revisit these goals regularly and allow them to drive transformation.

14. Attend Masses in Spanish and share information about your school and Catholic education. If you do not speak Spanish, learn a few Spanish phrases and use them at Mass, or even solicit the help of a Spanish-

speaker to develop a script in Spanish that you can deliver from the pulpit. A demonstrated willingness to learn and at least try to communicate with families in their native language, even if imperfectly, can go a long way. Consider inviting students and their families to speak about their experience in the school. Parents from the community who send their children to Catholic schools can deliver powerful testimonials. After Mass, be available to answer questions, be prepared with bilingual marketing materials, and collect contact information for all prospective families. Do this several times a year, not just during Catholic Schools Week.

15. Extend personal invitations to prospective students and their parents. Blanket invitations and “open houses” may not work as well as personal invitations. Be prepared when you do extend invitations to welcome the extended family and to provide hospitality with culturally responsive food and refreshments.

16. Develop a team of *madrinas*—“godmothers” in Spanish—to serve as liaisons, ambassadors, and translators between your school and Latino families in the community. A network of *madrinas* can assist your school by taking on three vital roles: marketing, recruiting, and mentoring new families. When a new Latino family inquires about the school, have the school secretary connect the family with a *madrina* who will guide them through the admission process and provide ongoing support throughout their first year in the school. Find other ways to involve existing school parents so that they can contribute to the school. This will make them feel like a valuable part of the community.

The use of the Madrinas model has resulted in enrollment gains in many schools and (arch)dioceses throughout the country. For an in-depth look at this highly effective, grassroots marketing approach, check out *The Madrinas Model: Attracting Latino Families to Your Catholic Schools*, available on the Catholic School Advantage Campaign website (catholicschooladvantage.nd.edu). This step-by-step guide provides concrete strategies and helpful suggestions for Catholic school principals, diocesan leaders, and madrinas themselves to implement a robust recruitment and marketing plan.

17. Use the Catholic School Advantage video to aid in communicating the value of a Catholic education to prospective children and families. This video can serve as an effective recruitment tool and is available on the Catholic School Advantage Campaign website (catholicschooladvantage.nd.edu).

Creating a Culturally Responsive School Environment

18. Focus on creating a positive first impression for inquiring families visiting your school. First impressions are extremely important. A welcoming front-office staff person is essential, even if she or he does not speak Spanish. A smile is universal. This person must be personable, must know how to engage people, and like this part of her/his job. If possible, hire a Spanish-speaking secretary in your office—even if it's only a part-time position.

19. Incorporate culturally responsive imagery and a lot of color in the school building. For example, consider placing images of Our Lady of Guadalupe in prominent locations throughout the school, especially

at the entrance where inquiring families have their first impression of the school. Hang welcoming signs in Spanish on the school's bulletin board or on the school marquee. Consider doing a walk-through of the school with a madrina or current school family, and ask them to offer feedback on the overall feel of the school and its environment. Make note of what is welcoming and what is not, and make any necessary changes.

Familiar iconography that resonates with students' home culture can strengthen connections between the home and school. Our Lady of Guadalupe, patroness of the Americas, is widely recognized as a symbol of Hispanic Catholicism and is particularly important to the 66 percent of Hispanics in the U.S. who are of Mexican origin. Catholic schools that effectively serve Latino communities make use of this icon of Latino Catholic culture, as well as many other physical manifestations throughout the school building that reflect the students' home culture, faith, and language.



20. Create Spanish-language versions of all registration forms and school information. Translate all marketing and enrollment materials into Spanish, including flyers, applications, registration and financial aid forms, medical authorization forms, and emergency contact forms. Similarly, make sure that your school's voicemail message has a Spanish option, and that your school's website includes information in Spanish.

In addition to translating all application and registration materials into Spanish, consider reviewing the amount and nature of paperwork and forms to make sure that they are as user-friendly as possible. Perceived bureaucracy is often a major disincentive to attracting new families, so simplifying the process and having someone available to walk families through the essential paperwork is critical.

21. Begin to integrate Spanish into the school Mass—songs, responses, and general intercessions can all be done in Spanish.

22. Develop a cultural committee. Celebrate important cultural events, including: Día de los Muertos (Day of the Dead), May Crowning, Las Posadas during Advent, Día de los Reyes Magos (Three Kings Day), and Día de los Niños.

23. Celebrate Hispanic Heritage Month (September 15 – October 15). Capitalize on opportunities to connect school with home, as well as with local community organizations that reflect and/or support Hispanic heritage. Work with your faculty to create a plan surrounding Hispanic Heritage Month that supports curriculum objectives and builds community. Invite guest speakers from local Latino organizations and focus on project-based learning.



Serving a Linguistically Diverse Student Population

24. Educate your faculty and staff about the unique needs of English language learners (ELLs). If our efforts to attract Latino families to Catholic schools are not coupled with efforts to address the unique academic needs of English language learners (ELLs), then we risk the danger of falling short of our ultimate goal—to improve educational outcomes for Latino children. Help every teacher understand that he/she is a language teacher, regardless of his or her content area. The process of language acquisition is complex, so this will take time. Topics to include are teaching language and content simultaneously, understanding how languages are acquired, and valuing the role of culture in the lives of students through culturally inclusive pedagogy.

25. Administer a home language survey to all new families. This gives teachers a sense of the linguistic support new students will need in order to thrive in the school.

26. Set aside funding for ESL/ENL/ELL teacher training. Invest in a teacher leader with a deep expertise in ESL. Principals can often use title funds for this type of teacher training. Everything a teacher learns from ESL/ENL/ELL training can benefit ALL students. If a teacher participates in one of these trainings, he or she should be asked to share the lessons learned.

The Alliance for Catholic Education's ENL Hernandez Fellows program equips Catholic school teachers and principals with expertise in educating linguistically diverse populations through six courses at Notre Dame during the summer and online throughout the year. Learn more at ace.nd.edu/enl.

Next Steps

27. Encourage the superintendent to make Latino enrollment a major emphasis of the (arch)diocese. When the superintendent is committed to developing a strategic plan that identifies Latino enrollment as a priority of the (arch)diocese, enrollment gains often ensue.

28. Check out the “Bright Spots” map on the Catholic School Advantage Campaign website (catholicschooladvantage.nd.edu). Intended to draw attention to Catholic schools across the United States that have found ways to welcome and serve Latino children and families, this interactive map provides easily accessible overviews of Catholic schools—from rural to urban, both large and small—that have been successful in recruiting and serving Latino students.

The schools featured on the “Bright Spots” map are by no means an exhaustive list of all the great work being done throughout the country with regards to Latino enrollment. This map is a living catalog of successful schools who have found innovative ways to more fully engage Latino families in Catholic education, so if your school fits this description, we invite you to contact us to share your story!

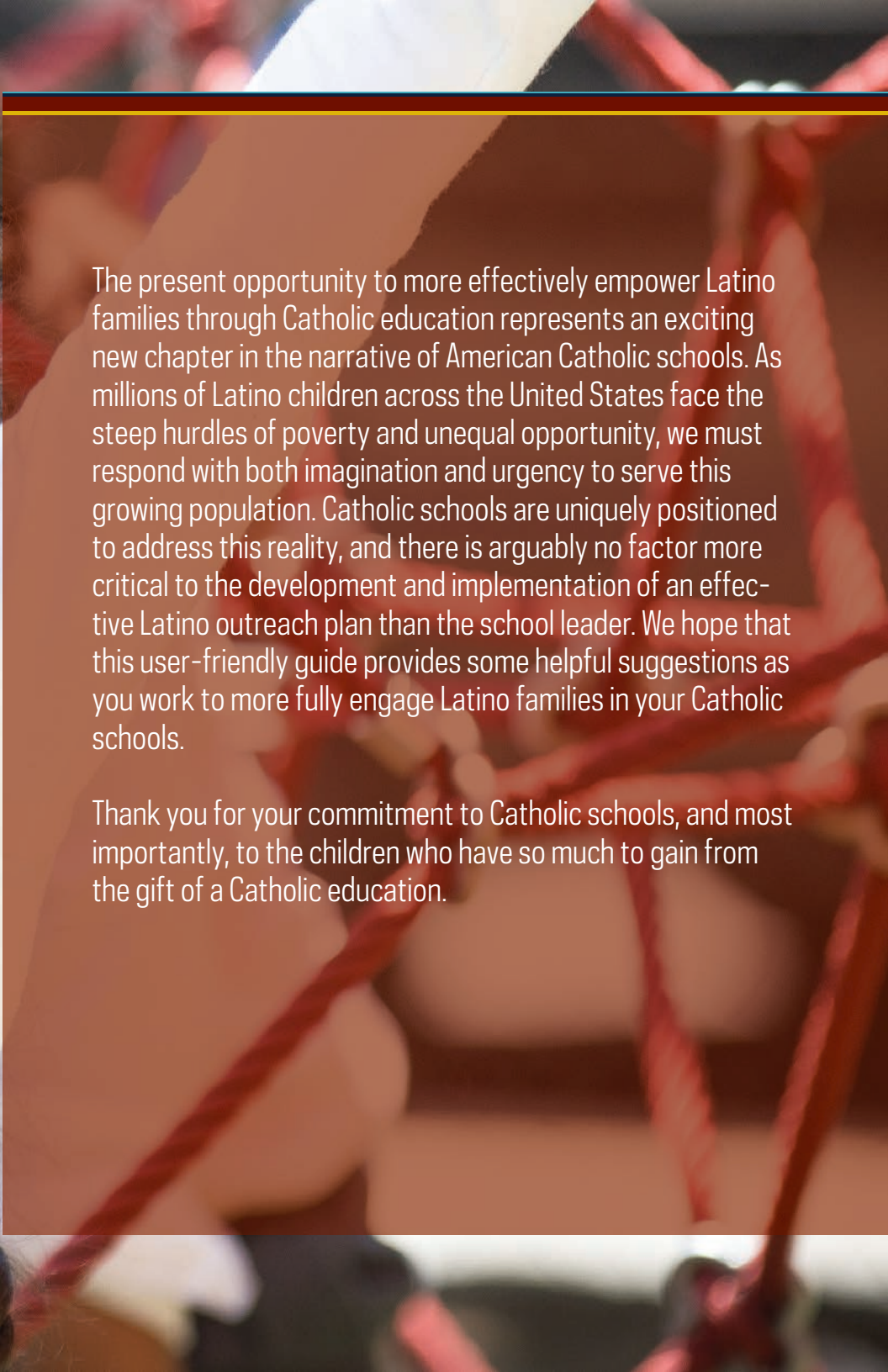
29. If you’re interested in learning more about all of these strategies and recommendations, consider applying to attend the Latino Enrollment Institute (LEI). This four-day program is offered each summer at the University of Notre Dame and includes lectures and presentations from school leaders with demonstrated success in developing innovative Latino outreach

programs. Additionally, participating schools will be assigned a mentor principal who will help guide them through the implementation phase during the subsequent academic year.

30. Be persistent! Know that increasing Latino enrollment takes time, effort, and missionary zeal. It certainly does not happen overnight, so don't be discouraged. Keep at it!







The present opportunity to more effectively empower Latino families through Catholic education represents an exciting new chapter in the narrative of American Catholic schools. As millions of Latino children across the United States face the steep hurdles of poverty and unequal opportunity, we must respond with both imagination and urgency to serve this growing population. Catholic schools are uniquely positioned to address this reality, and there is arguably no factor more critical to the development and implementation of an effective Latino outreach plan than the school leader. We hope that this user-friendly guide provides some helpful suggestions as you work to more fully engage Latino families in your Catholic schools.

Thank you for your commitment to Catholic schools, and most importantly, to the children who have so much to gain from the gift of a Catholic education.



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