



UNIVERSITY OF  
NOTRE DAME



# THE MADRINAS MODEL

## ATTRACTING LATINO FAMILIES TO YOUR CATHOLIC SCHOOLS

A PROGRAM GUIDE TO ENROLL AND ENGAGE LATINO STUDENTS

THE ALLIANCE FOR CATHOLIC EDUCATION  
UNIVERSITY OF NOTRE DAME  
2015

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# INTRODUCTION

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Dear Friends,

Recruiting and welcoming Latino children and families into Catholic schools may be the biggest challenge—and greatest opportunity—for Catholic schools across the nation. The leaders of nearly every (arch)diocese in the country are asking: “With so many Latino children in our parishes and so few in our schools, what must we do to encourage them to enroll?”

For many reasons—historical, cultural, and financial—many Latino parents do not consider Catholic schools an option for their children. We believe they should be encouraged to do so. Our faith and our belief in the God-given potential of every child demand that we open our doors and offer these children the gift of a Catholic education. Demographics make it an imperative—the reality is that the majority of young Roman Catholics in this country are Latino.

By focusing on offering a strong academic program, expanding access, and continuing to form young people in the faith, Catholic schools can and will thrive.

In 2008, at the University of Notre Dame’s Alliance for Catholic Education (ACE), we began our intense focus on engaging Latinos with a task force on the participation of Latino children and families in Catholic schools. The task force’s 2009 report, *To Nurture the Soul of a Nation* (<https://ace.nd.edu/catholic-school-advantage/task-force-final-report>), revealed that approximately 70 percent of all practicing Catholics under the age of 35 are Latino, yet only 3 percent of school-aged Latino children are enrolled in Catholic schools. We subsequently launched an initiative, the Catholic School Advantage Campaign, to promote the unique value of Catholic schools for Latino communities and to help schools respond effectively to the unique needs of their Latino families.

As part of our work, we have developed a model for engaging Latino families through a team of Madrinas—“godmothers” in Spanish—who serve as liaisons, ambassadors, and translators between the Catholic schools and Latino families in the community. To date, the use of the Madrinas Model has resulted in Latino enrollment gains in many (arch)dioceses, including Camden, Chicago, Cincinnati, Joliet, New York, Orange, Richmond, and Toledo.

We developed this publication to answer your questions as you consider a Madrinas program for your school(s). This is your road map for identifying and organizing a team to reach out to Latino families.

What is in the word *madrina*, a much-beloved word that speaks clearly and powerfully to the Latino world? Above all, it evokes a relationship in which the *madrina* greatly cares for and looks after her godchild. Latina women are honored when asked to be a *madrina*, and when they say “yes,” they take the responsibility very seriously. We have found that designated Madrinas—individuals highly respected and influential in their communities, whether or not they are officially godparents—can lead families in the direction of Catholic schools. They invite parents to consider a Catholic education, underscoring the possibility of parishes offering financial assistance, and they accompany parents as they visit a Catholic school for the first time.

I am grateful to my colleagues at the Alliance for Catholic Education and to (arch)diocesan partners who have worked with me to develop this model and pilot its use across the country. I am certain that it will be an asset for Catholic school leaders interested in increasing Latino enrollment in their schools. May all who use this be inspired to serve the Church in its mission of inviting Latino parents to consider a Catholic school education for their children.

All best wishes and God’s abundant blessings to you from Our Lady’s University.

Gratefully,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Joe Corpora, C.S.S." The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned below the word "Gratefully,".

Rev. Joseph V. Corpora, C.S.C.  
Director, University-School Partnerships  
Alliance for Catholic Education, University of Notre Dame

UBLIC SCHOOLS  
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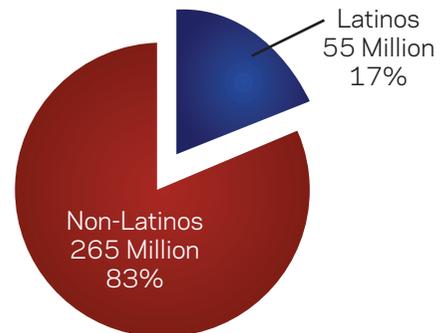


# LATINOS IN CATHOLIC SCHOOLS: ESSENTIAL CONTEXT

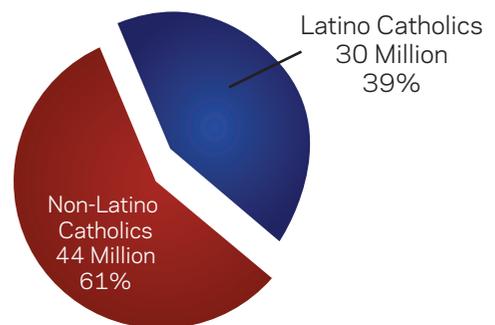
The unfortunate reality is that many immigrant Latino families have too little information—and too much misinformation—when it comes to Catholic schools in the United States. Since Catholic schools in Latin America typically serve only the elite members of society, many low- and middle-income Latino families in the United States consider them inaccessible and do not even consider them an educational option for their children. As a Church and as a school sector, we have also failed to convey to this community the facts demonstrating the considerable advantage that Catholic schools offer children. We know that a high-quality K-12 education is a gateway to college readiness; that 99 percent of our Catholic high school students graduate from high school and nearly 90 percent go on to college; and that Catholic schools in the United States have a long, proud, successful tradition of serving immigrants.

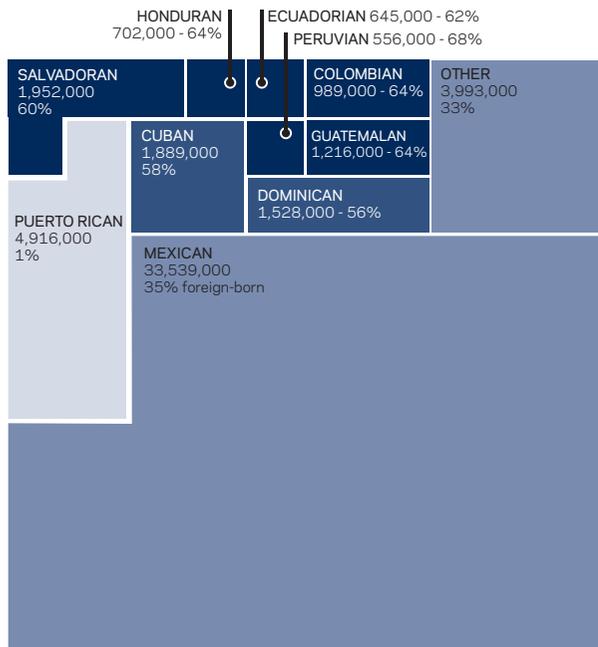
For many low-income Latino families, day-to-day survival and the establishment of a decent standard of living come first. With the median per-capita income for Latinos now at \$39,000 (compared to \$57,000 for whites), families struggle to invest significantly or, in many cases, at all, in education. College, too, can seem like an unrealistic and unattainable prospect for many Latino children. The trends are improving: the Latino high school drop-out rate has fallen from 32 percent in 2000 to 14 percent in 2013, and nearly 14 percent of all college students are now Latino (a percentage nearly aligned with their share of the general population). However, too many Latino children still attend failing schools and miss out on the opportunity for improved college- and career-readiness. Without appropriate outreach and guidance, the opportunity and benefits of attending Catholic schools will continue to be denied to this population.

### U.S. Population 2014



### U.S. Catholic Population 2014





While nearly two-thirds of the nation's Latino population trace their origins to Mexico, it is important to understand and respect the composition of the Latino population in your community, as they differ in important ways.

Consider, as a point of comparison, how the Italian and German cultures are different and distinct, each with its own national pride, though both are fairly grouped as European. A well-meaning attempt to welcome a group of Latinos to your school may fail to succeed if you serve a favorite Mexican treat to a group of Salvadorans.

Puerto Ricans are the nation's second largest Latino-origin group; following are Salvadorans, Cubans, Dominicans, Guatemalans, Colombians, Spaniards, Hondurans, Ecuadorians, Peruvians, Nicaraguans, Venezuelans and Argentinians.

For more information, see the Pew Research Center:

<http://www.pewhispanic.org/2013/06/19/diverse-origins-the-nations-14-largest-hispanic-origin-groups/>

The faith formation that Catholic schools offer is important to many parents, including Latino parents, the majority of whom are Catholic. Catholic education addresses the development of the whole person through spiritual and academic formation based on the Gospel of Jesus Christ. By deepening the faith of the young and serving as an environment where the values of Christianity are modeled and practiced every day, Catholic schools point their students not only to college, but also to heaven.

We have found that a lack of cohesion between the parish (the pastor) and the school (the principal) can also create a disconnect between highly devout Latino families and Catholic schools. Too often, parishes and their schools operate independently and provide little or no support for one another, setting a tone of isolation in the minds of Latino families active in parish life. Our Madrinan Model seeks to alleviate the tension, or lack of effective communication, between these two institutions and to build a bridge from the parish to the school for Latino families.

The myriad demands of the principal's job often keep him or her from doing the necessary community outreach to identify, recruit, and fully welcome new families. The Madrinan Model supports the principal by enlisting a group of motivated and respected people who will focus their efforts toward helping Latino families understand the importance, and then reap the benefits, of a Catholic education for their children.

## THE MADRINAS MODEL: AN OVERVIEW

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An outreach program to recruit and retain Latino families in Catholic schools, the Madrinás Model is designed to increase Latino enrollment by creating and strengthening the connection between Latino families and the school, while fostering a culture of support for children’s academic education and spiritual formation.

A network of Madrinás can assist Catholic schools by taking on three vital roles:

- Marketing
- Recruiting
- Mentoring new families

**MARKETING:** The Madrinás help school leaders develop a set of messages and a plan to convey them in person (through visits and at events in their communities) and through written materials that are distributed more broadly. Working closely with the team of Madrinás, the Catholic school must articulate its “value proposition” for Latino children, including the key facts and figures of academic achievement data, the robust Catholic environment, the availability of financial aid, and the process to enroll. The Madrinás must be conversant with these facts; they will serve as the primary communicators.

**RECRUITING:** With the messages and materials prepared, Madrinás identify and reach out to Latino families, educating them on the advantages of Catholic schools, inviting them to visit the parish school, serving as tour guides on open-house days, explaining the process of applying, and helping prospective families with the application.

**MENTORING:** Madrinás serve as mentors to parents interested in becoming involved in their Catholic schools. By providing parents with the proper tools and resources, Madrinás can help them take full advantage of all the school has to offer. They also become additional advocates for the benefits of a Catholic education to their community. As a result of their work, a wide network of people who are generating interest in Catholic schools is built in the community.

Retention is just as important as recruitment, and the attention must continue once the child is enrolled. We believe there are several important steps to take to underpin retention—starting, of course, with giving the child an excellent education and engaging the parents as full participants in a strong school culture of pride and family ownership. Close mentorship supports retention.

## ADVANTAGES OF THE MADRINAS MODEL

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School principals gain access to a network of highly-motivated and well-respected Latino parents who are prepared to engage new families throughout the school enrollment process, bolstering the school's marketing efforts and freeing its leaders and teachers to focus more of their time on instructional priorities, and attracting a broader group of prospective students.

The model employs a grassroots marketing approach, strengthening existing relationships and building strong, lasting relationships with new families. Madrinas connect Latino children to a strong neighborhood Catholic school. By spreading the good news of Catholic education and its impact on the educational and personal successes of Latino children in America, Madrinas become ambassadors who can create a positive ripple effect for the school within the Latino community. Latino families will be invited to take a greater sense of ownership of their Catholic school, increasing their motivation and desire to see the parish school thrive.

Madrinas not only help new Latino families as capable guides during the enrollment process, but they also continue to serve as a resource for new families as they navigate their first year in a Catholic school. Known as *acompañamientos* (Spanish for "accompaniment"), they serve as a support system, pledge to stay with the new family throughout the first year, and lend help and guidance as long as necessary.



"The Madrinas operate like a peer-to-peer marketing team. In many Catholic schools, parents are already the most effective driving force bringing in prospective families by sharing their experiences and encouraging them to tour the schools. The idea is to create opportunities for school parents to talk with more families: play-dates, reading nights, community birthday parties, neighborhood fair booths with activities for children, and visits to local parks. It takes word-of-mouth to a more engaged level of participation. In the Latino community, this approach is especially meaningful. Parents involve other adults in family life as stewards of their children's faith formation (Baptism, First Communion, and Confirmation), developing a relationship of *compadrazgo* (Spanish for "a warm camaraderie"), where all are invested in the children's well-being. In a Madrina-and-prospective-parent relationship, they are all invested in the children's education and faith formation."

Anahí Lazarte  
Director of Development & Marketing  
Our Lady of Grace School  
Archdiocese of Chicago





# A PRINCIPAL'S GUIDE

## TO IMPLEMENTING THE MADRINAS MODEL TO RECRUIT, ENROLL, WELCOME, AND RETAIN LATINO FAMILIES

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The most important factor in attracting new families to a school is the quality of that school. Students and families flock to a school when they know it has an excellent school leader who supports teachers to be talented instructors, creates an environment focused on continuous improvement and students' academic growth, and builds a positive and loving school culture grounded in Catholic identity. Catholic schools are special: every student is valued for being made in the image and likeness of God. Catholic school educators, believing in every student's potential, are thus called to ignite their students' God-given gifts. If students are succeeding academically, socially, and spiritually, and schools can present evidence of that success, families will line up to enroll their children.

The Madrinas Model was designed to support Catholic schools' efforts to recruit, enroll, welcome, and retain Latino families. This section is written for principals but could easily be adapted to a leader at the diocesan level who wants to launch a Madrinas program for a set of schools.

### #1 BUILD THE TEAM

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- Identify or recruit a faculty or staff member to be the point person for the Madrinas and to be accountable for their efforts. (If this initiative is taken at the diocesan level, then one person should coordinate efforts across schools.)
  
- Identify potential parent-leaders deeply rooted in the school, parish, and surrounding community. A parent-leader may be identified by the principal and/or any combination of people, including the pastor, faculty members, trusted parents, alumni families, and advisory boards. Approach these parents about the opportunity to serve as Madrinas. Though every culture produces and recognizes leaders, cultures do this differently. When looking for a lead Madrina, recognize that identifying this leader in the Latino community will often be different from finding a leader in the Anglo community. As you think about who might be the best person to lead your Madrina initiative, consider the following:

The Anglo culture, for the most part, accentuates these questions in the search for leaders:

- Who will accomplish the task?
- Who are the skilled planners and goal-setters?
- Who are the skilled facilitators, enabling the contribution of all talents?
- Who has earned the appropriate credentials or degrees?
- Who will keep track of a specific timeline?

The Latino community, for the most part, accentuates these questions:

Who holds high rank and status?

Who are the trustworthy and highly respected individuals?

Who is skilled at maintaining a sense of community and harmony within the group?

- Offer an orientation for prospective Madrinas to explain the purpose for launching this program for your Catholic school. Explain the goals, objectives, and activities. Assess carefully their level of commitment, in terms of investment of time and willingness to participate over the long term. Clearly explain roles and responsibilities, and confirm who will join the effort.
- Some schools offer Madrinas a small reduction in tuition and/or a credit toward required parents' volunteer hours in return for their service and as an incentive for meeting specific enrollment targets. Consider if this is feasible and would motivate your group to be even more successful. Even a modest incentive can help communicate how much the school community values their work. However, take care not to create any appearance that they are working "on commission" because this would undermine their effectiveness as trustworthy messengers.
- Develop a protocol for communication between the Madrinas and the front office staff so it is consistent and efficient. Madrinas need to keep the front office informed of all marketing and recruitment activities so that the school is prepared to field phone calls about these activities. The school office needs to welcome the Madrinas and share information as needed. It is critical to establish a careful process between the school office and the Madrinas for proper and expeditious follow-up with interested families.

## #2 DESIGNATE SCHOLARSHIPS FUNDS, IF POSSIBLE

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- In our experience, the most effective outreach programs incorporate offers of financial aid to families of prospective students. Explore whether existing funds may be reallocated to increase the pool of scholarship money available, and approach your donor community and local business community for additional resources. In states where public funding is available for parental choice in education, pursue these resources (vouchers, tax credits, scholarships, etc.) aggressively. You may also apply for title funds—federal money to which Catholic school students are legally entitled, but which is often untapped by schools on their behalf.
- Offer whatever you can as an incentive to enroll and to reduce the financial barrier for families: a free first month of tuition; a reduced rate for the first

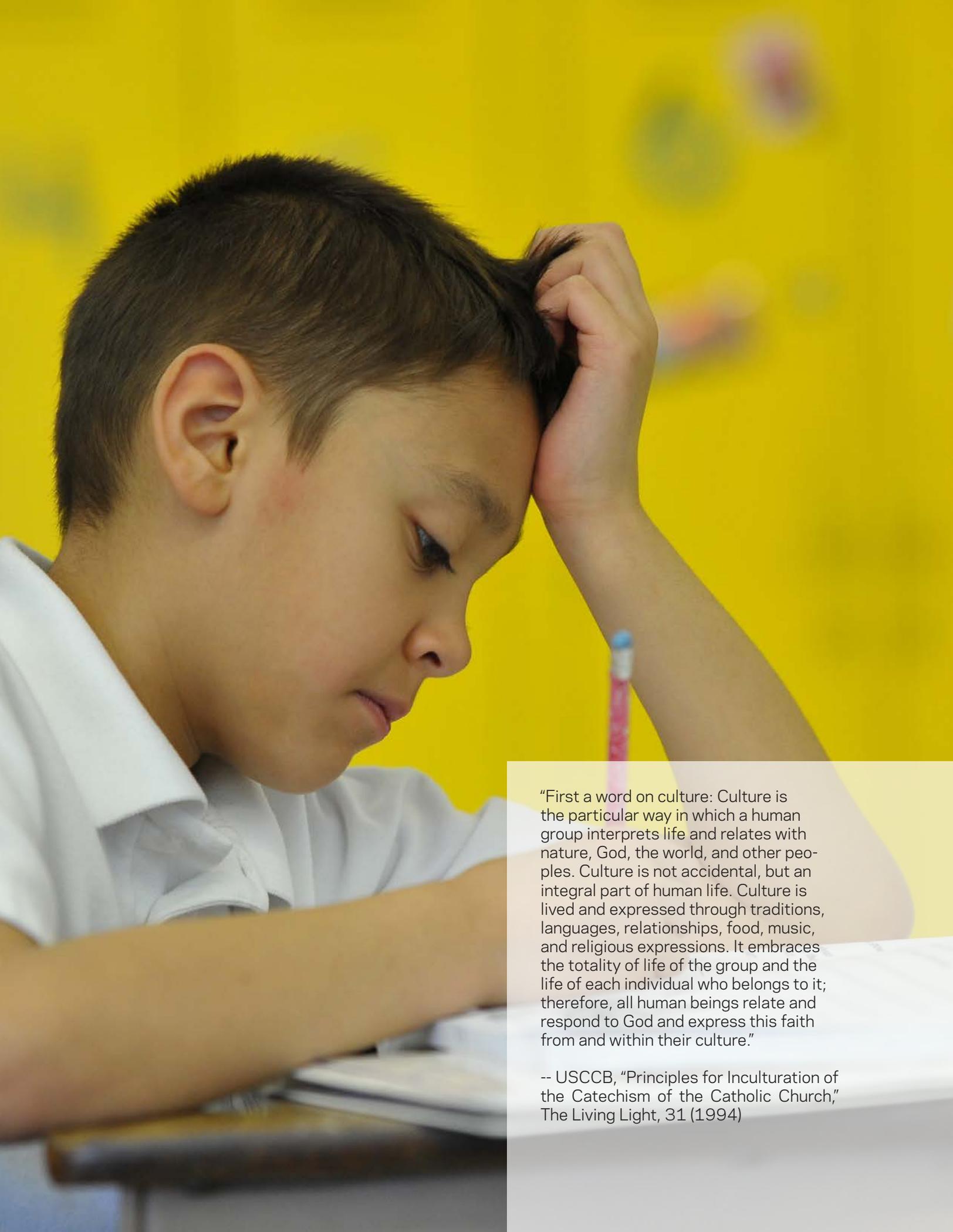
year (or two or three); a discount for enrolling more than one child in a family; and/or a discount for being among the first to enroll each year. Work to implement a “fair share” tuition model so that families pay what they can afford and scholarship aid is distributed based on financial need.

- At a minimum, if you can, waive or reduce the registration fee; we have found that waiving the registration fee can have a big impact on increasing applications.

### #3 DEVELOP THE MARKETING MATERIALS AND STRATEGY FOR OUTREACH TO LATINO FAMILIES

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- To create a compelling case for your school, it is important to have a clear picture of the demographics of your community, the number of empty seats in your school, and a list of all other schools and grades with open capacity.
- A straightforward explanation of the financial parameters—tuition, financial aid available from the school, and assistance from the (arch)diocese, along with other sources, both public and private—is also vital. The Madrinas must be able to make the case for Catholic schools overall, and for your Catholic school in particular.
- Include in your marketing messages the special strengths and qualities of your particular school. Do your students excel in the arts, or sports, or math? Are your students’ test scores substantially higher than their peers at neighboring public schools? Do you attract children from a range of backgrounds? Are your teachers recognized with awards or honors? Does your curriculum feature elements that parents will value? Do you organize special events and after-school programs that vivify the school community?
- Lead the development of effective communications materials and a marketing strategy, involving key stakeholders such as teacher-leaders, parents (including current Latino parents), and the Madrinas, together with any others involved in school recruitment. Encourage your group of Madrinas to be creative, considering written materials and the effective use of social media, but remembering that personal connections are the most effective.
- Consider conducting a survey of currently enrolled families to gauge the level of parent satisfaction, asking: Would they recommend the school to another family? If so, why? If not, why not? What do they value most in a school? You might also survey families in your parish or diocese whose children are not enrolled in Catholic school to learn more. For examples of these surveys, go to our website, <https://ace.nd.edu/catholic-school-advantage/>.



"First a word on culture: Culture is the particular way in which a human group interprets life and relates with nature, God, the world, and other peoples. Culture is not accidental, but an integral part of human life. Culture is lived and expressed through traditions, languages, relationships, food, music, and religious expressions. It embraces the totality of life of the group and the life of each individual who belongs to it; therefore, all human beings relate and respond to God and express this faith from and within their culture."

-- USCCB, "Principles for Inculturation of the Catechism of the Catholic Church," *The Living Light*, 31 (1994)

## #4 CREATE A SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT THAT IS WELCOMING TO LATINO FAMILIES

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We cannot overemphasize how important it is to create a welcoming school. Here are some small, but important, suggestions for a school to make itself more welcoming:

- Include a broader range of religious imagery than that which might currently adorn the lobby, hallways, and walls, such as a picture of Our Lady of Guadalupe.
- Hire a front-office worker who is bilingual.
- Be sure that the front-office staff person is personable, someone who knows how to engage people and likes that part of her/his job.
- Create Spanish-language versions of all registration forms and information.
- Don't forget your online, digital presence: websites should include information in Spanish, including the marketing messages that have been prepared.
- At open houses with Latino families, consider serving foods of the culture along with the traditional refreshments like donuts and juice.
- Devise a system to follow up with every Latino parent who calls or stops by the school office to inquire about the school.
- Hang welcoming signs in Spanish on the school's bulletin board or on the school marquee.
- At a first meeting with a family, get to know them without jumping first to "bottom line" data and details. Discuss financial matters when asked.
- Be sure that the inclusive culture of the school is reflected in the composition of the school board and committees. Invite parents and local Latino community leaders to serve the school community in various capacities. Make sure that they have a genuine sense of ownership.

- Learn to say at least a few words and phrases in Spanish. Full command of the Spanish language is not necessary to begin connecting with the Latino culture, but it is helpful to be able to begin a conversation or offer a greeting in Spanish.

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Learn a few Spanish words and phrases now! There are many websites and books which will help you, for example:

- Rocket Languages
- Essential Spanish Phrase Book for Teachers
- Ed2Go

Do your best to identify someone who can serve as an informal cultural mentor, 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.

## #5 EXECUTE/EVALUATE/ADJUST STRATEGY

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- Put the strategies discussed and developed into action, and support your Madrinas.
- Establish and track clear goals, and organize regular meetings to assess progress and make adjustments.
- As new families enroll their children, be sure there are activities to mentor and retain them, while the Madrinas team works to continue to identify and recruit new families.



Consider creating a Madrinas Corner at your school to welcome them, validate their role, and help them be most effective.

You may include:

- A bulletin board to post the Enrollment Management Tracking Chart announcements, meeting notices, reminders, and messages for Madrinas.
- Shelves or boxes to hold school marketing materials, blank Enrollment Interest Cards and financial aid applications. Include clipboards, pens, buttons, cards, etc. for the Madrinas to utilize in their recruitment activities.
- A small bookshelf for additional materials such as brochures, raffle tickets, information on activities in the diocese and surrounding neighborhoods, and copies of the "Catholic School Advantage Campaign" DVD from ACE.

Visit the ACE website for sample forms, cards, surveys, DVDs, success stories, and more:

*<https://ace.nd.edu/catholic-school-advantage/video>*





# A MADRINA'S STEP-BY-STEP GUIDE TO ENGAGING AND ENROLLING LATINO STUDENTS

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Congratulations and thank you for taking on the important work of sharing the gift of a Catholic education with Latino families!

Your ability to connect with friends, neighbors, and members of your community about the value of a Catholic education will result in more students having the chance to attend an excellent, faith-filled school. Moreover, the results of your efforts will include a stronger school for all of our families.

Included here is information to support you and fellow Madrinas in your role as recruiters and mentors for families who may send their child to a Catholic school. As you meet with parents and families in and around your parish school community, this guide will help you create a plan and keep track of progress.

While we have outlined a number of suggestions and ideas in this guide, the most important things you can do are to be a positive advocate for your Catholic school in every setting and at every event that you can attend, and be a friend to those parents who are trying to give their children the best chance in life.

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## THE ROLE OF THE MADRINAS

The lead Madrina:

- Assumes responsibility for the Madrinas' overall efforts.
- Serves as the primary liaison with the principal, pastor, and school administration.
- Offers insight and ideas as the school develops marketing materials and creates an environment that is welcoming to Latino families.
- Communicates with the Madrinas to schedule meetings for strategy and updates, to remind them of upcoming recruitment activities/events, and to track progress in enrollment.
- Tracks and shares progress in consultation with the school administration.
- Keeps the "Madrinas Corner" stocked with the latest marketing and recruiting materials.
- Acts as a role model in terms of reaching out to and welcoming Latino families.

She and other Madrinas also:

- Reach out to families and encourage them to consider your Catholic school.
- Assist the principal and front-office staff by conducting follow-up phone calls to families who have submitted an Enrollment Interest Card, who have come by the school, or who may have called and left a message for the principal because they are interested in learning more about the school.
- Make themselves available to join a family for their initial visit to a school.
- Assist the family in filling out all of the initial applications (if desired), especially all scholarship and financial aid applications available to qualifying families.
- Invite other parents to be involved in reaching out to talk to others about why they chose your school. They might also create a friendly competition between grades as current parents are encouraged to identify potential new families.
- Continue to serve as mentors to these families after they enroll their children, do regular check-ins either in person or on the phone, and attend school events.

As Madrinas, you can be the key to ensure that the families, especially the students, acclimate successfully into the school environment! Be proactive to make sure that the new students and parents have a general grasp of school procedures, policies, and requirements with regards to discipline, dress code, attendance and homework policies; parent volunteer hours and fundraising commitments; and the range of extracurricular opportunities.

## HOW TO IDENTIFY AND RECRUIT NEW FAMILIES

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- In partnership with your principal and his/her school team, develop the marketing and recruiting materials you will share with prospective families, including flyers to be posted, brochures to be shared, and a fact sheet about your school.
- Create a month-by-month plan, based on the ideas in this guide, with clear assignments to avoid duplication.
- Set goals for each Madrina and for the overall effort each year. Goals will depend on the size of your school, the capacity for new students, and the number of Latino families in your community.



### Reach out to families!

You were selected to be a Madrina for your school because you are good with people, so do what comes naturally to you, and talk to them as a trusted friend.

The steps to succeed are:

- Identify prospective families
- Introduce yourself to them
- Share information about the school
- Invite them for a visit
- Encourage them to enroll
- Help them with forms and/or communication with the school office, if requested

For example, each Madrina might:



- Distribute 150 flyers among their social circle and in the community—once in July and again in January.
- Collect 75 Interest Forms.
- Encourage 50 families to visit the school.
- Enroll 20 families each year.
- Build and distribute a Madrinas Recruitment Packet “Toolkit” for the team of Madrinas, including:
  - A directory of all of the Madrinas that includes the names of the Madrinas and their contact information, as well as the contact information for the school’s main office, pastor, principal, school secretary, marketing director, director of religious education, director of Hispanic ministry, and anyone else whom you will want to reach.
  - Marketing Materials in English and Spanish: flyers, brochures, and postcards to help promote your school in the community and to promote upcoming activities.
  - Enrollment Interest Forms or Student Intake Forms: these will be used to obtain the contact information of interested families.
  - Madrinas may be also be given an accessory, such as a pin, a scarf, an official name tag, and/or business cards, that will identify them as an official representative of the school.

A personal connection is best, so seek opportunities to meet and talk to people about why your Catholic school is special. Share more about the excellent opportunities the school offers children, highlight chances to visit the school, and explain the details about how to apply for financial aid.

## STRATEGIES TO IDENTIFY, MEET, AND RECRUIT NEW FAMILIES:

### HOW TO REACH PARISH FAMILIES:

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- 1 Meet with parish ministries and religious education staff to talk about the school's initiative to recruit Latino families; identify opportunities to meet families and distribute materials.
- 2 Meet and talk to families at various parish-sponsored events throughout the year. When appropriate, organize and run a recruitment booth at parish events (i.e., Fiestas, Carnivals, Jamaicas, Tardeadas).
- 3 Include regular announcements and positive news items about your school in the parish bulletin, in English and Spanish.
- 4 Organize two annual Sunday Mass recruitment efforts in consultation with the pastor, arranging for speakers to give testimonies about the value of the school from the pulpit, and setting up and staffing a recruitment table with marketing materials and enrollment interest forms after Masses.

*You might also: Host a Parish Ministries Social at your school.*

### HOW TO REACH FAMILIES WITH CHILDREN IN LOCAL PRESCHOOLS OR DAY CARE CENTERS:

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Visit the preschools and day care centers in the community and make arrangements to give a presentation to parents, share materials, and invite them to school events including Open Houses or "Early Childhood Education Nights" at your school.

*You might also: Ask preschools and day care centers to share with their students and families a congratulatory letter or card from you around the time of preschool "graduations" that includes information about your Catholic school and an invitation to meet or visit.*

### TIP:

Don't limit your activities to the parish that is affiliated with the school. If yours is a parish school, expand your outreach to parishes that don't have schools, too.



## HOW TO REACH THE COMMUNITY AT LARGE:

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- 1 Post flyers at grocery stores, community centers, libraries, parks and recreation departments, YMCAs, police and fire departments, markets, and other well-trafficked places to promote the Catholic school overall and announce upcoming school events for prospective families.
- 2 Attend and meet people at events and programs in your local community, summer camps, health fairs, carnivals, concerts in the park, farmer's markets, and Fourth of July block parties/parades.
- 3 Place an ad in the local newspapers (and other media outlets that reach the community) and the diocesan newsletter congratulating eighth grade graduates and sharing a list of where the schools' graduates are going to high school. You should also highlight high school graduates and where they are going to college.

*You might also: Work closely with the principal and his/her team, contact local businesses and propose partnerships in which businesses help underwrite school events and promote the school by distributing flyers for upcoming school events, creating banners, sponsoring newspaper advertising, and supporting web-page design.*

### TIP:

We suggest one major effort to distribute flyers in the weeks before Catholic Schools Week in January, during which many schools have open houses, and another major effort in the weeks leading up to late-summer school registration.

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Because some families may be hesitant to visit the school after simply meeting a school representative, Madrinas need to offer other options for personal interaction.

- Invite new families to meet for coffee, either in their home or at a coffee shop.
- If you have a good relationship with the rectory staff, host a follow-up meeting there, where a family might be more comfortable.
- Depending on how much interest the family shows after their first visit or appointment, more interaction may be necessary before the family begins the application process.

## IMPORTANT REMINDER:

It is crucial that primary grade enrollment remain a priority every year. Sustaining full enrollment in grades Pre-K through second will sustain the overall growth of your school's enrollment.

Catholic schools have traditionally relied on open houses to reach new families, but as active recruiters, Madrinas look for opportunities beyond the school open-house sessions to invite families to visit their neighborhood Catholic school, including invitations for:

- A personal school tour
- Sunday Mass, followed by a breakfast in the parish hall
- An awards assembly
- A talent show
- A sporting event
- An interactive community event being held on campus, such as a college fair, health fair, job fair, or parish fiesta.

Every community is different and Madrinas should develop a plan to meet and talk to families based on where and when families congregate. Choose from these ideas for your plan, and be creative to develop others. Remember to invest time first and foremost on those activities that will help you build that important personal connection with as many families as possible.

Additional ways you might supplement your recruiting strategy:

- Conduct “door-to-door” campaigns to meet and deliver information about the school, choosing a time when people will be at home.
- Survey current school families and those parish families who do not send their children to Catholic school to identify misconceptions about the school and areas to emphasize in your conversations.
- Host Student Shadow Days during Thanksgiving week and/or public schools’ spring break week; publicize the event in advance and provide hospitality and guided tours for visiting parents.
- Host summer or weekend “office hours” at the school for families to visit and have a conversation.
- During Hispanic Heritage Month (Sept. 15 - Oct. 15), host a college and career day at the school that features successful college-educated Latinos who attended Catholic school; ask the local newspaper to cover the event.
- All Saints/All Souls/Día de Los Muertos celebrations are great opportunities to invite parish families and the community to visit your school; Madrinas can have a recruitment booth at the event.



- If your parish or community celebrates May Day, that is another opportunity to include a registration table and to meet prospective families.
- At Thanksgiving or Christmas, if currently registered families would collectively support two or three needy families from the parish, Madrinas could deliver the gift basket and thus convey the school's spirit and its love for the community. Alternatively, the school might sponsor a toy drive for children or for the pediatrics ward of the local hospital.
- Encourage the parish school leaders to send a personalized card to families at Baptism, inviting them to join the school community in the future and giving them a small gift, perhaps a bib or receiving blanket with the school's name and colors.
- Send a congratulatory card to all parish children who are receiving their First Holy Communion, and include a message about the Catholic school community praying for them and always being a place that welcomes them.
- In June, celebrate and publicize the accomplishments of your graduates, including placing photographs in the local paper.
- Organize a summer camp at the school.

## HOW TO MENTOR AND RETAIN NEW FAMILIES

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When new families enroll their children in the school, follow these steps to welcome—and retain—they in your school, coordinating with the principal and the school team.

### In July/August:

At the school's new family orientation before the start of the new school year, provide hospitality, lead school tours, and speak as part of the program.

*You might also: Add on to the formal orientation a Hora Social Para Nuevas Familias (Spanish for “New Family Social Hour”) to check in with new families and address any concerns and apprehensions, especially with regards to upcoming fundraisers and school events.*

### A month before school starts:

Assign a set of new families to each Madrina, who will call them to express welcome, offer encouragement, invite questions at any time, and provide information about the beginning of the academic year.

### On the first day of school:

Be present at drop-off and pick-up to welcome new families, help direct students in the hallways, and answer questions from parents and families.

### Throughout the school year:

Support the school administration and faculty in efforts to include elements of Latino culture, such as a special Mass for Our Lady of Guadalupe (Dec. 12), or a reenactment (performed by students) of the apparition of La Virgen to San Juan Diego, or commemorating the tradition of Las Posadas (Dec. 16). Invite prospective families to these events.

In September/October:

Host a Café con el Padre (Spanish for “Coffee with the Pastor”) or Café con el Director/la Directora (Spanish for “Coffee with the Principal”) for new Latino families.

Monthly throughout the school year: Reach out to new families about once a month to thank them for being part of the school community. Ask how the student(s) is(are) doing, build the family’s connection to the school, encourage their attendance at events, share information, answer questions, and help them resolve any problems they may be having.

*You might also: Send special letters to new families at Thanksgiving, Christmas, and Easter. Invite grandparents to a special picnic at school on Grandparents Day in September. Remind the school to have students write letters of thanks to their parents and families as part of Catholic Schools Week or for Mother’s Day/Father’s Day.*

In February:

Meet as a group to brainstorm ways to address any concerns of new families and to adjust recruiting outreach based on experiences from previous years.

In April/May:

Provide assistance to those families who could use help filling out registration or financial aid paperwork, especially those families who do not speak, read, or write English.

In May/June:

Make phone calls or personal visits to families who have not re-enrolled; learn why, encouraging them to reconsider, as appropriate.

*You might also: Encourage the school to create and present awards to new families who have provided great volunteer service to the school or otherwise been involved.*

## CONCLUSION

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Catholic schools have been one of the greatest engines of human formation and social transformation in U.S. history, serving as a ladder of opportunity for immigrants and for children from diverse backgrounds. Excellent Catholic schools provide high-quality educational opportunities and character formation, instilling in children strong values and a commitment to strengthen the common good.

Many millions of children across the United States today face the steep hurdles of poverty and inequality of opportunity, including many Latinos. A quality education that focuses on the whole child is the single best lever for putting these children on a path toward lives of fulfillment and dignity and for strengthening our communities and our country. We have an enormous opportunity to create a renaissance in Catholic schools by inviting Latinos into them, and the Alliance for Catholic Education (ACE) is dedicated to the effort.

We hope that this guide offers helpful suggestions as you undertake a program to attract Latino students to your schools, and that it will be the beginning of an ongoing dialogue. Our website (<https://ace.nd.edu/catholic-school-advantage/>) has an array of resources and tools to help you create a Madrinis program and to learn from the success of schools around the country. We will continue to build this site and will be adding more tools, including an online forum where good ideas can be shared. At ACE, we want to learn from you and your experiences. We will continue to create opportunities to exchange ideas and best practices, and we invite you to contact us with stories, photographs, and suggestions via email: [ace@nd.edu](mailto:ace@nd.edu).

Thank you for your commitment to Catholic schools and to the children who benefit from the gift of a Catholic education!



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