

Child TRENDS FACT SHEET

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WHAT WORKS FOR LATINO/HISPANIC CHILDREN AND ADOLESCENTS: Lessons from Experimental Evaluations of Programs and Interventions

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OVERVIEW

Children and adolescents of Latino/Hispanic background often face challenges that differ from other subpopulations in the United States. Language barriers, issues related to parental citizenship status, and the economic disadvantages often faced by these children and adolescents can result in various negative outcomes, such as depression, substance abuse, gang-related violence, and suicide. While several programs and interventions targeting Latino children have been implemented over the last decade, data on what out-of-school time programs and approaches work among this population are scarce. Identification of *what works* for Latino children and adolescents is a critical step in furthering efforts to improve outcomes.

This literature review synthesizes findings from 33 random assignment experimental intent-to-treat evaluations of social interventions that specifically targeted Latino children and adolescents, or intervention programs in which Latinos/as made up a large proportion of the participants and separate data about impacts for Latino participants are available. The goal of this review is to identify programs that work, as well as those that don't, and the intervention strategies that appear to contribute to program success.

Overall, 18 out of 33 rigorously evaluated programs were found to have a positive impact on at least one child or adolescent outcome ("found to work"), of which only seven are manualized.¹ Ten had mixed reviews, and five were not proven to work.

Findings from the 33 studies on Latino children and adolescents are segmented by the outcome examined. The number of evaluations is modest, and while several themes emerge, we did not find that any approach that worked across all outcome areas. Overall, we find that:

- Programs that target families tend to work.
- Culturally infused programs have positive impacts across outcomes.
- Inclusion of Spanish-speaking program facilitators is a critical component for positive outcomes.

¹ [¿Cuídate! TeenSTAR LionsQuest "SKills for Adolescence" Keepin' it R.E.A.L. Success for All Teen Outreach Program \(TOP\), Tools of the Mind](#)

INTRODUCTION

All of the 33 random assignment experimental evaluations that provided data on social intervention program impacts for Latino children and adolescents were drawn from Child Trends' database of random assignment, intent-to-treat studies of social interventions for children and adolescents – LINKS (Lifecourse Interventions to Nurture Kids Successfully).² Findings for the programs in this fact sheet are reported in the following categories:

Not Proven to Work. Programs in this category have *statistically non-significant* or *marginally significant* impacts on a particular child or adolescent outcome as it relates to Latinos/as.

Mixed Findings. Programs in this category have *varied impacts* either on particular outcomes or at different times as it relates to Latinos/as. For example, a program that results in significant improvements on substance use for Latinos at post-test, but has no impact at a one year follow-up would be rating as having mixed findings. A program that works for Latinos (males), but not for Latinas (females) would also receive a “mixed findings” rating.

Found to Work. Programs in this category have *positive and significant*³ impacts on a targeted child or adolescent outcome as it relates to Latinos/as.

Six outcome areas were identified for this synthesis:

- Substance use (such as alcohol, cigarettes, marijuana or illicit drugs)
- Academic Achievement (such as vocabulary or reading; school performance, grades, and test scores)
- Reproductive health and sexuality (such as sexual activity, condom and contraceptive use, pregnancy or births)
- Physical health and nutrition (such as dietary habits, BMI, weight or physical activity)
- Externalizing behavior (such as aggression, hyperactivity, or violence)
- Social skills (such as getting along with others, conflict resolution, or empathy)

SUBSTANCE USE

The LINKS database contains **nine** rigorously evaluated social intervention programs that targeted and/or measured substance use among Latino children and adolescents. Six had positive impacts, three had mixed findings, and the remaining three programs did not work.

What Works for Substance Use

Interventions that teach resistance skills. As found in an earlier synthesis on effective strategies for substance use among all groups,⁴ the two programs that taught resistance skills resulted in positive impacts on substance use.⁵

² <http://www.childtrends.org/links>

³ Reported impacts are those reported by the evaluators to be significant at the $p \leq 0.05$ level. Note that this literature review does not focus on the magnitude or duration of the impact, though this information is generally included in the LINKS program summaries.

Programs that incorporate parent education and training. Of the three programs that provided substance use education for parents, two had positive impacts.⁶

In-school programs. Of the five programs that were implemented in schools, four worked.⁷ In comparison, of the four programs implemented in a community or clinic setting, only two had positive impacts.⁸

Needed Research for Substance Use

Video- based curriculums. Given that only one program used this strategy, we cannot draw conclusions about whether or not using videos rather than facilitators work. In general, more research is needed, because the number of rigorous evaluations is modest at best.

ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT

The LINKS database contains **nine** rigorously evaluated non-school social intervention programs that targeted and/or measured education outcomes among Latino children and adolescents. Four had positive impacts, two had mixed reviews, and the remaining three programs did not have significant impacts.

What Works for Education

Bilingual education for younger children. Of the two programs that infused Spanish and English language into the curriculum, both had positive impacts on language development.⁹

Certified instructors as facilitators. Of the four out-of-school time programs that had positive impacts, three were implemented by certified teachers.¹⁰

School-based interventions. Three of four interventions that had positive impacts were delivered in a classroom setting.¹¹ In comparison, none of the five interventions that were administered in the community or in a home-setting worked.

Mixed Findings for Education

Provision of education grants. Two of four interventions that provided education grants to schools attended by low-income children, or to low-income families to improve school outcomes, had positive impacts.¹²

⁴ Bandy, T., & Moore, K. A. (2008). *What works for preventing and stopping substance use among adolescents*. (Fact Sheet). Washington, DC: Child Trends.

⁵ [Adolescent Alcohol Prevention Trial](#), [Keepin' it R.E.A.L.](#)

⁶ [Adolescent Alcohol Prevention Trial](#), [Keepin' it R.E.A.L.](#), [Life Skills Training \(LST\)](#), [LionsQuest "SKills for Adolescence"](#)

⁷ [Gimmie5 Hip-Hop to Health Jr.](#), [Lifestyle Education for Activity Program \(LEAP\)](#)

⁸ [Brief Strategic Family Therapy](#), [Nuestras Familias](#)

⁹ [Arthur - Television Program](#), [Success for All](#)

¹⁰ [Arthur - Television Program](#), [Success for All](#), [Tools of the Mind](#)

¹¹ [Arthur - Television Program](#), [Success for All](#), [Tools of the Mind](#)

¹² [Early Head Start](#), [Progresa Poverty Program](#)

REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH AND SEXUALITY

The LINKS database contains **eight** rigorously evaluated social intervention programs that targeted and/or measured reproductive health and sexuality outcomes among Latino adolescents. Five were found to work, and the remaining three had mixed findings.

What Works for Sexuality and Reproductive Health

Programs administered by well trained facilitators. Of the 5 programs that were implemented by highly trained facilitators, four had positive impacts on sexual initiation.¹³

Programs that infuse abstinence education with contraceptive education. Two of three programs that taught abstinence along with contraceptive use had positive impacts on pregnancy prevention.¹⁴

Programs with civic engagement activities. Both programs that incorporated volunteering and service learning in their interventions had positive impacts on sexuality outcomes.¹⁵

Mixed Findings for Sexuality and Reproductive Health

Interventions that promote family bonding. Only two programs sought to promote closer bonds between parents and children, and both had mixed impacts.¹⁶

PHYSICAL HEALTH AND NUTRITION

The LINKS database contains just **four** rigorously evaluated social intervention programs that targeted and/or measured physical activity and nutrition among Latino children and adolescents. Two had positive impacts, and the other two had mixed findings.

What Works for Nutrition and Physical Activity

Distribution of newsletters. Of the two programs that sent informational newsletters about physical health and nutrition to families, both had a positive impact on at least one outcome.¹⁷

Health education in combination with exercise. Of the two programs that provide nutritional information, promoted healthy eating, and incorporated physical exercise, both worked.¹⁸

Mixed Findings for Nutrition and Physical Activity

Longer duration programs. Both programs lasting six months or longer had mixed impacts on physical health and nutrition outcomes.¹⁹

¹³ [¡Cúidate! Teen Outreach Program \(TOP\)](#), [TeenSTAR](#), [Reach for Health Community Service \(RFH CYS\)](#)

¹⁴ [¡Cúidate! TeenSTAR](#)

¹⁵ [Reach for Health Community Service \(RFH CYS\)](#), [Teen Outreach Program \(TOP\)](#)

¹⁶ [All Stars Character Education and Problem Behavior Prevention Program](#), [Teen Talk](#)

¹⁷ [Gimmie5](#), [Hip-Hop to Health Jr.](#)

¹⁸ [Gimmie5](#), [Hip-Hop to Health Jr.](#)

¹⁹ [Bienestar Health Program](#), [The Family Health Project](#).

EXTERNALIZING

We have identified only **four** rigorously evaluated social intervention programs that targeted and/or measured externalizing among Latino children and adolescents. Two of the four programs had positive impacts, and the remaining two had mixed findings.

What Works for Externalizing

Family therapy-based programs. Of the two programs that provided therapy to families and children to improve child behavior problems, both had positive impacts.²⁰

Program delivery by ethnically similar facilitators. Of the two programs that worked, Latino facilitators implemented both programs.²¹

SOCIAL SKILLS

The LINKS database contains only **two** rigorously evaluated social intervention programs that targeted and/or measured social skills among Latino children and adolescents. Only one had a positive impact, the other had no impact.

Needed Research for Social Skills

Evaluated programs targeting or measuring social skills among Latino children and adolescents appear to be sparse. It is difficult to draw conclusions about what works, given that the two programs that had impacts on social skills were different in approach and format.

DISCUSSION

The results from this fact sheet suggest that, while research focused on the impact of experimentally evaluated programs for Latino children and adolescents is still in its infancy, the findings are promising. Of the 33 rigorously evaluated programs, a little more than half had at least one significant impact on one or more of the six identified outcome areas. Furthermore, positive impacts were found for all outcome areas. Still, our analysis reveals that more work is needed to develop and assess programs for Latino children and adolescents.²²

For example, we were only able to identify two experimentally evaluated social intervention programs that targeted and/or measured aggressive behavior or violence. Similarly, we could only locate two programs that targeted and/or measured social skills. Given the high rates of gang-related violence among some Latino youth, the lack of rigorously experimentally evaluated programs in these areas is troubling. With so few identified experimental evaluations, we are unable to successfully describe strategies that work within these areas. Also because most of the evaluations included primarily children and adolescents

²⁰ [Brief Strategic Family Therapy](#), [Nuestras Familias](#)

²¹ [Brief Strategic Family Therapy](#), [Nuestras Familias](#)

²² In addition, programs and strategies addressing other important subgroups such as those of Asian, Pacific Island, and Middle Eastern descent are needed.

who were identified as Mexican, low-income, and/or high-risk, our conclusions cannot be generalized to Latinos/as as a whole.

Nonetheless, the fact that many of the programs and interventions worked, and the fact that we were able to delineate some strategies that have been found to work within and across some outcome areas, shows potential. While it is important to note that the strategies identified are not exclusive to the Latino population, the findings from this synthesis will hopefully act as a catalyst for further experimental evaluations of programs that target Latino children and adolescents.

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**Summary Table: Review of the Research Literature on Programs
Oriented Toward Latino Children and Adolescents**

OUTCOME AREA	NOT PROVEN TO WORK	MIXED REVIEWS	PROVEN TO WORK
Substance Use	<p><u>Adolescent Social Action Program</u> is designed to reduce drug- and alcohol- related morbidity and mortality as well as empower youth to become leaders in their communities. No impacts were found for alcohol, tobacco or substance use among Latinos.</p> <p><u>Parent Targeted Intervention</u> is a prevention program that seeks to reduce tobacco and alcohol use in adolescents. Study findings at posttest and follow-up found no impacts on parenting behaviors, the onset of alcohol and/or tobacco use, or on Latino children's reports of parenting behaviors.</p> <p><u>South Oxnard Challenge Program (SOCP)</u> is designed for adolescents who have received probation as a result of a citation or an arrest or have violated their probation. There were no significant impacts on substance use for Latinos.</p>		<p><u>Adolescent Alcohol Prevention Trial (AAPT)</u> is a school-based drug prevention program. The program was found to significantly lower incidence of substance use for Latinos.</p> <p><u>Brief Strategic Family Therapy</u> is a clinic-based therapy program designed to improve the therapy contact and engagement rates of adolescents with behavior and/or drug problems. For Latino participants, the program was found to significantly reduce drug and alcohol abuse.</p> <p><u>Keepin' it R.E.A.L.</u>, a school-based prevention program designed to reduce substance use and promote anti-drug attitudes and norms among middle school students. The overall intervention was effective in reducing the use of gateway drugs and showed significant impacts on norms, attitudes and resistance strategies among Latinos.</p> <p><u>Life Skills Training (LST)</u> is a school-based drug use prevention program. Latino participants had significantly greater knowledge of smoking consequences and had less self-reported smoking behavior.</p> <p><u>LionsQuest "SKills for Adolescence"</u> is a comprehensive life skills and drug prevention curriculum for children. The program was effective in significantly delaying or preventing initiation to cigarette and marijuana smoking; reducing the progression to more</p>

OUTCOME AREA	NOT PROVEN TO WORK	MIXED REVIEWS	PROVEN TO WORK
			<p>advanced drug and alcohol use, and decreasing the rate of recent cigarette use.</p> <p>Nuestras Familias is an intervention designed to impact parenting practices of monolingual Spanish-speaking parents with middle-aged school youth at risk for problem behaviors. Program participants were found to be significantly less likely to smoke.</p>
<p>Reproductive Health</p>		<p>All Stars Character Education and Problem Behavior Prevention Program is a school-based intervention program designed to reduce adolescents' engagement in risk behaviors such as substance use, violence and sexual activity. Impacts were short-lived.</p> <p>Project CHARM is an HIV risk-reduction curriculum designed for pregnant adolescents and young mothers. Participants reported having significantly fewer sexual partners. However, no significant differences were found on frequency of unprotected intercourse.</p> <p>Teen Talk is a teen pregnancy prevention program. Sexually inexperienced participants were significantly more likely to maintain abstinence, and sexually experienced participants became significantly more consistent users of contraception. However, the program was more effective for males than females, particularly non-Hispanic males.</p>	<p>¡Cúdate! is an HIV risk-reduction curriculum designed for Latino adolescents. Participants were significantly less likely to have sexual intercourse, as well as unprotected sex, and significantly more likely to report using condoms.</p> <p>Reach for Health Community Service (RFH CYS) is an intervention designed to help youth develop the skills and knowledge to avoid high-risk behaviors, such as early sexual initiation. Latino participants were found to be significantly less likely than their peers to have initiated sex.</p> <p>Teen Outreach Program (TOP), an intervention designed to prevent adolescent problem behaviors by enhancing normative processes of social development. Latino students were significantly less likely than control students to have failed a course, been suspended from school, or gotten pregnant.</p> <p>TeenSTAR is a 14-session, abstinence-centered, pregnancy prevention program that delivers sex education to adolescents. Among Latinos, the program was effective in significantly delaying the onset of sexual activity,</p>

OUTCOME AREA	NOT PROVEN TO WORK	MIXED REVIEWS	PROVEN TO WORK
			<p>reducing the rate of pregnancy, and improving attitudes towards abstinence.</p> <p>The Video-Based STD Patient Education was designed to improve the health behaviors of patients seeking treatment from a STD clinic in the South Bronx. The video intervention had a positive impact on condom coupon redemption, knowledge about STDs/HIV and perception of risk, and attitudes about condom use.</p>
Physical Health and Nutrition		<p>Bienestar Health Program is a school-based intervention to prevent the development of diabetes in low-income Mexican American children. Significantly lower fasting glucose levels and had higher physical fitness scores and greater dietary fiber intake. No impacts on saturated fat intake were found.</p> <p>The Family Health Project is a family-based intervention designed to improve cardiovascular health among Mexican-American and Anglo-American parents and children. Results over the four-year follow-up period were inconsistent.</p>	<p>Gimmie 5: A Fresh Nutrition Concept for Students is a multi-component, school-based dietary intervention for high school students. Latino students at Gimme 5 schools significantly increased their knowledge of fruit and vegetable nutrition.</p> <p>Hip-Hop to Health Jr., a program which aims to promote healthy eating and exercise habits in children ages 3-5 years. The program was effective in preventing children from large increases in Body Mass Index (BMI), a measure of body fat relative to overall body size among Latino participants.</p>
Externalizing Behaviors		<p>Peer Coping Skills Training (PCS), a program designed for aggressive children in first through third grade to improve prosocial behaviors and interactions with peers. PCS was effective in reducing teacher ratings of aggression and increasing teacher ratings of prosocial coping.</p> <p>All Stars Character Education and Problem Behavior Prevention Program is a school-based intervention program designed to reduce</p>	<p>Brief Strategic Family Therapy is a clinic-based therapy program designed to improve the therapy contact and engagement rates of adolescents with behavior problems. The program was found to significantly reduce externalizing behavior.</p> <p>Nuestras Familias is an intervention designed to impact parenting practices of monolingual Spanish-speaking parents with middle-aged school youth at risk for problem behaviors. Program participants were found to be significantly less likely to</p>

OUTCOME AREA	NOT PROVEN TO WORK	MIXED REVIEWS	PROVEN TO WORK
		<p>adolescents' engagement in risk behaviors such as substance use, violence and sexual activity. Hispanic participants showed delayed changes in violence. Impacts were short-lived.</p>	<p>exhibit aggression and other externalizing behaviors.</p>
<p>Social Skills</p>		<p><u>Study of Mentoring in the Learning Environment (SMILE)</u> is a large-scale, randomized study of school-based adult mentoring for students 10-18 years of age. Inconsistent impacts were found boys and girls.</p>	<p><u>Adolescent Social Action Program</u> is designed to empower youth to become leaders in their communities. Results of the study indicate that Latino students in the ASAP program experienced an increase in social skills, competence, critical consciousness, knowledge, self-efficacy for social responsibility, and self-efficacy for prosocial behaviors.</p> <p><u>Tools of the Mind</u> is an early childhood education curriculum that focuses on both cognitive skills and academic skills. Significant improvements on social skills were found for Latino participants.</p>