

The Latino Parents-Learning About College (LaP-LAC) Program: Educational Empowerment of Latino Families Through Psychoeducational Group Work

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Abstract:

Parental involvement is crucial to facilitating a child's high school success and enhancing their post-secondary opportunities. Unfortunately, the ability for Latina/o parents and guardians to engage in parental involvement is hindered by a general lack of familiarity with U.S. educational systems and post-secondary options. With these barriers in mind, the Latino Parents-Learning About College (LaP-LAC) program was developed. The LaP-LAC is a psychoeducational group work experience wherein Latina/o parents with high school-aged children learn to understand the high school curriculum and become more familiar with post-secondary options (including financial aid), in an effort to empower themselves and their families.

Keywords: college | high school | Latino | parental involvement | psychoeducational

Article:

The college-going rate of Latinos remains relatively low, in spite of the fact they are now second only to Whites as the largest ethnic group in the United States. Comparing all 18–24-year-olds in the United States, 31.9% of Latinos were enrolled in college in 2010, as compared to 38% of all Blacks and 43.3% of all White students in the same age range (Pew Hispanic Center, 2011). Latino students, even those who are high achievers, are over-represented in 2-year colleges where degree attainment is typically lower (Gonzalez, 2012; Kurlaender, 2006; National Postsecondary Education Cooperative [NPEC], 2007). The Latino Parents-Learning About College (LaP-LAC) program is intended to address some of the barriers to college (e.g., financial costs, historically limited exposure to post-secondary opportunities, compromised preparation for college entrance exams) experienced by Latino adolescents living in the United States, through engaging and educating their parents and guardians about post-secondary options and processes using a psychoeducational group format. Throughout the six sessions of the LaP-LAC program, parent participants are exposed to a variety of information to further expand their idea of post-high school options for their children; however, there is a focus on 2-year and 4-year college opportunities since the literature supports the idea that Latino parents are often very interested

yet lack knowledge in regards to these options for their children (i.e., Auerbach, 2004; Pew Hispanic Center, 2011; Prospero & Vohra-Gupta, 2007).

Though the LaP-LAC program can be offered to parents and guardians with children in elementary, middle, and high school, the target audience for this article is Latino parents in the United States with high school-aged children attending private or public schools. Furthermore, although group workers in a variety of professional settings and specialties can offer the program, school counselors are best positioned to present the program due to their familiarity with and daily exposure to tools, resources, and curricula aimed at facilitating the career and academic development of youth (American School Counselor Association [ASCA], 2013; Niles, Trusty, & Hutchinson, 2010). Specifically, they can combine their experiences with high school and post-high school educational trends, as well as their access to many of the career development tools, to conduct the LaP-LAC program. Furthermore, school counselors have the skills and disposition to increase parental involvement in schools, in addition to accounting for barriers to parental involvement such as language proficiency and cultural differences of parents and their children (Harris, Wierzalis, & Coy, 2010).

Parental involvement, across all race/ethnicities and socioeconomic groups, is a more powerful predictor of students' educational expectations than parents' educational level and student academic achievement (Bergersen, 2009). The key components of parental involvement are (a) parents' engagement with their children, such as discussing their expectations and helping their children with college planning; and (b) parents' engagement with their children's schools (Bergersen, 2009; Tierney & Auerbach, 2005). For Latina/o students, parental involvement in post-secondary choices is paramount since these students cite their parents as their most frequent source of support and say their parents play a significant role in motivating them in their education (Ceja, 2004; Sánchez, Reyes, & Singh, 2005). To emphasize this point, Zalaquett (2005) stated, "[r]emember that Latina/o parents are the driving force behind their children's success in high school and in college" (p. 44). Latino parents are a heterogeneous group which can span recent immigrants who are working to acquire English to families who have lived in the United States for multiple generations and know no other home. However, the common cultural values of collectivism and familism mean that parents are likely to be key figures in their students' lives and essential to any educational decision making process (Fuligni, Tseng, & Lam, 1999).

Unfortunately, school and community initiatives to facilitate parental involvement appear to be minimal (Tierney & Auerbach, 2005), with college planning services for parents often treated as "add ons" rather than a central focus of student preparation (Yamamura, Martinez, & Saenz, 2010). This issue is unfortunately compounded for some Latino parents, such as recent immigrants, by the belief that involvement in post-secondary planning is not a part of their role and instead is the school's role (e.g., Snell, Miguel, & East, 2009). Additionally, parents with no college experience or those in low income brackets may doubt their ability to assist their children with these tasks (NPEC, 2007). Despite these limitations and barriers, Latina/o parents of high

school-aged children can be alerted to the importance of their role in this process, particularly if this information is provided from a strength-based (vs. deficit) perspective of the Latino family (Bergensen, 2009). Strength-based approaches are those that take into account the cultural capital that all individuals have, based on their experiences, knowledge, skills, desires, interests, and worldviews (Bergensen, 2009). With regards to Latino children and families, cultural capital includes the collective worldview of the family, as well as a preference for bilingual and/or bicultural interactions (Villalba, 2007).

Scholars have demonstrated that Latino parents prefer to receive educational information in a format that is personal, informal, and includes culturally similar peers with whom they can relate, which is well suited for a group format (Auerbach, 2004; Downs et al., 2008; Fann, Jarsky, & McDonough, 2009). More importantly, psychoeducational group work has often been championed as an effective and culturally relevant intervention for serving individuals from marginalized groups (DeLucia-Waack & Donigian, 2004; Merta, 2006; Start-Rose, Livingston-Sacin, Merchant, & Finley, 2012). At its core, the principle objective of the LaP-LAC program's approach to group work is to increase parental involvement in the post-secondary options of their children by improving the familiarity, knowledge, and self-efficacy of Latino parents as related to helping their children consider and pursue as many post-secondary opportunities as possible. Psychoeducational group work is particularly appropriate for this population and this topic, as Latino parents and students have empirically benefitted from group work, and appreciate the role of experts when imparting information on topics about which they are less familiar and are willing to learn more about (Sanchez, Reyes, & Singh, 2005; Villalba, Amirehsani, & Lewis, 2011). Beyond information, the Lap-LAC group can provide culturally congruent support, effective modeling, and a sense of universality.

Although some members of the public may hold the misperception that Latino parents do not value higher education, researchers have dispelled this stereotype by directly asking Latino families about the value of college. Immerwahr (2000) conducted a survey of White, Latino, and Black parents regarding their attitudes toward education. Whereas 57% of White parents of high school students and 67% of Black parents said that a college education was absolutely necessary for their child, 78% of Latino parents of high school students endorsed that statement. In addition, the same Latino parents were very worried about their ability to pay for college expenses (43% as compared to 29% of Black parents and 26% of White parents). Thus, many Latino parents place a high value on college and also have concerns about their ability to help their child prepare and gain access. Sosa (1997) documented that Latino parents experience barriers to involvement in their children's academic and scholastic endeavors, including limitations related to logistics (e.g., lack of time, financial pressures), attitudes (e.g., uncertainty about their role in academic matters, home-school communication problems), and expectations (e.g., perceptions of bias from institutions such as schools). Positive opinions towards higher education on the part of Latino parents, plus the barriers faced by many, serve as the foundation for the LaP-LAC psychoeducational group work intervention.

PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS AS A FOUNDATION FOR GROUP WORK DEVELOPMENT

The LaP-LAC program applies a group work approach to helping Latino parents and guardians, particularly those caring for high school students and/or first-generation college students. The LaP-LAC intervention was designed to be psychoeducational in nature, drawing on the historical use of these types of groups in school settings and their usefulness in conveying new information to participants (Gladding, 2012). The LaP-LAC group intervention brings Latino parents together in an environment where they not only learn about the myriad post-secondary options for their children but also are provided with a forum to share their frustrations and successes with other Latino parents and guardians interested in helping their children achieve their post-high school dreams. As a result, school counselors providing the LaP-LAC group work program in their school or in a community setting must be capable of providing concrete information about financial aid, the college admission process, and explaining the differences between community college and 4-year colleges, in addition to processing parents' and guardians' feelings of stress, anxiety, pride, and satisfaction regarding their children's post-high school options or their ability to participate in college planning.

Content for each of the six sessions in the LaP-LAC group intervention was derived from practitioners and educational resources and illuminates the typical information needed to prepare to apply to college (e.g., College Board, CFNC.org). In addition, the interpersonal process of each session was developed with two theoretical frameworks: Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT; Lent, Brown, & Hackett, 1994) and the Model of Parental Involvement (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005). These theoretical frameworks were selected to guide the group intervention because they identify self-efficacy beliefs as important to generating interest and involvement. These scholars posit that simply providing information to parents is not sufficient if the goal is to increase parental involvement in their children's educational endeavors. Rather, parents must feel confident that they could engage successfully in the educational planning tasks and that their involvement would lead to positive outcomes for themselves and their children. They would need social persuasion, mastery experiences, vicarious modeling, and an opportunity to regulate their emotions associated with the educational planning tasks (Bandura, 1997). Thus, the LaP-LAC group seeks to generate a chance for such interactions to occur, which in turn fosters relevant learning experiences for participants.

For example, an immigrant Latino parent might not have any personal experience with institutions of higher education in the United States, and thus may feel a low sense of efficacy about preparing his or her child to complete a college application. Alternately, the same parent may have noticed that his or her child responded well to emotional encouragement and motivational statements, and thus may feel a high sense of efficacy about his or her ability to provide caring and support to the child for attempting new tasks. It is more likely that parents will enact behaviors for which they have high self-efficacy beliefs than behaviors for which they have low self-efficacy beliefs (Lent, Brown, & Hackett). The LaP-LAC group format is designed

to give parents information about completing a college application as well as time to receive encouragement, modeling, and attempts at mastery. The specific group therapeutic factors of guidance, universality, and cohesion (Yalom & Leszcz, 2005) complement SCCT's focus on self-efficacy as parents participating in the LaP-LAC intervention can learn from each other (i.e., "guidance") while supporting each other and banding together in their struggle to balance positive influence on their children's post-secondary opportunities, even though they may be confused and frustrated as to how to help their children in this arena (i.e., "cohesion" and "universality").

In addition, Hoover-Dempsey et al. (2005) described reasons parents may choose to become involved in their children's education, including (a) role construction and positive self-efficacy for involvement; (b) perceptions of invitations from the child and school for involvement; and (c) life context variables that permit or restrict involvement. Their model has a pyramid structure, with the foundation for involvement resting on the three areas just mentioned, with the forms and mechanisms of involvement described in the upper sections of the pyramid. The Hoover-Dempsey model underscores the importance of building parental efficacy for educational planning tasks, and also helps school counselors consider the barriers to involvement that may be present in the family life context and thus must be addressed in the group. Thus, the LaP-LAC group is intentionally structured to support formation of positive self-efficacy beliefs for parent participants first, moving to information and tasks afterwards.

THE LAP-LAC PROGRAM

Enhancing parent's self-efficacy for helping their children learn and providing them with the tools to teach their children are two ways that group workers can advocate for increasing the post-secondary options of U.S. Latino youth (Borders, Hines, Gonzalez, Villalba, & Henderson, 2011). Since Hoover-Dempsey et al. (2005) made a compelling case for parental self-efficacy and parent training as the foundation for enhanced parental involvement, the LaP-LAC program is a group work curriculum designed to help group facilitators make a positive impact on the post-secondary options of Latino youth through enhancing their parents' and guardians skills and knowledge on the matter.

The LaP-LAC program uses a psychoeducational approach to group work to demonstrate to Latino parents and guardians how they possess the capability to provide emotional encouragement to their children. The LaP-LAC intervention also increases information to help participants assist their children plan and provide post-secondary options, including but not limited to community/junior colleges, 4-year colleges, apprenticeships, etc. Group workers interested in using the program must consider parental ability to encourage and provide from a strength-based approach, which is fostered by a clinician's acknowledgement that Latino parents possess the ability to connect with their children, understand their children, care for their children, and guide their children, and that these abilities can be applied to helping them help their children explore post-secondary opportunities, even if they themselves are not very familiar

with post-high school options in the United States. To this end, the direct and overarching goals of the LaP-LAC group work intervention is to help parents identify their own strengths as advocates for their children's post-secondary opportunities while simultaneously building on parents' and guardians' skills and knowledge set as supporters and providers.

Consistent with a strength-based perspective, the LaP-LAC program also emphasizes the importance of the family unit in Latino culture (Sanchez et al., 2005). Given the importance of *familismo* in Latino culture, parents and guardians, siblings and cousins, grandparents and great-grandparents, and even neighbors and relatives in other countries all play some role or have some influence of the post-secondary options of Latina/o youth. As a result, the LaP-LAC program encourages Latino parents and guardians attending the small group activities to seek out resources and supports in their home, extended family, and communities, in an effort to educate the whole child and facilitate robust career development. In addition, the LaP-LAC group sessions help Latino parents realize their strengths, impacts, and influences on their children's choices, in spite of the college-specific information or experiences they may be lacking. The counseling literature (e.g., Downs et al., 2008; Zalaquett, 2005) stresses the importance of the Latino family to the success of Latino adolescents, and the LaP-LAC program emphasizes this in all aspects of its design and implementation.

The LaP-LAC program is focused on the following six objectives for Latino parent participants: (a) identify their children's values, skills, and aptitudes, and understand their own self-efficacy for helping their children set goals and plans; (b) discover how to get the most out of their children's high school experience; (c) differentiate and summarize their children's post-secondary options, including evaluating the best college choices; (d) prepare and help their children prepare for the college application and admissions process; (e) outline the financial aid process; and (f) prepare and evaluate their plan and their child's plan for a successful transition into college and/or post-secondary life. Latino parents and guardians who have been presented with these objectives should be better prepared to use their influence and relationship with their children to help them achieve as many of their post-high school dreams as possible. Therefore, although the direct goal of the LaP-LAC program is to increase parental involvement in exploring the post-secondary opportunities of their children, an indirect goal is to increase the pursuit of various post-secondary options of Latino high school graduates.

Intended outcomes for what parent participants can expect to gain from taking part in the LaP-LAC group intervention can be tied to each of the stated objectives, each making up one of the six sessions of the overall program. As for measuring the attainment of these objectives, no instruments specific to parents have been developed or implemented. Group workers are encouraged, however, to develop their own modes of assessing what participants learned or gained from group participation (ASCA, 2013; Gladding, 2012). Consequently, participants could be presented with a pre-screening or pre-test questionnaire of their knowledge of post-high school options for their children, their experiences with 2- and 4-year college options in their communities, and the process by which one goes about for applying for financial aid. This same

questionnaire could be presented to participants at the conclusion of the program to measure increases or decreases in knowledge about these topics.

Group logistics

The LaP-LAC group is a closed group, due the notion that each session builds on the previous one. Because LaP-LAC is a psychoeducational small group program heavily focused on providing Latino parents with information and skills necessary to expand the post-secondary options of their children, rather than the type of group work activity designed to cope with stress, grief, loss, or other more emotionally charged subject matter, pre-screening of participants is not necessary (although group facilitators are free to pre-screen participants if they wish). The main factors that participants will need to consider are having the time and the transportation to attend the group meetings, per Hoover-Dempsey et al.'s (2005) life context factors. Each group should have 6 to 10 members, and the group sessions typically last about 45–60 minutes depending on the number of questions participants have for the presenters, per recommendations in the psychoeducational group work literature (see Brown, 1998). The entire LaP-LAC program lasts six sessions, which should be offered on a weekly basis. The LaP-LAC program also should be offered in the evenings, to allow working parents and guardians to fit the program into their schedules. In addition, school counselors might consider offering the LaP-LAC program outside of school, perhaps at a local community center or place of worship, which may be easier for Latino parents to get to or in which they may feel more comfortable. Finally, advertising the group can happen through high school teachers, English as a Second Language teachers in the school or school district office, places of worship in the local community, and leaders in the Latino community (such as small business owners, community organizers, and professionals), as well as agencies that provide outreach services to local Latino residents. In order to get clearance to advertise this kind of service in places of worship and service agencies, school counselors are encouraged to foster or enhance their relationships with religious clergy and local human service professionals. These individuals not only can help with advertising the group to their constituents and interested stakeholders, but also are instrumental in helping recruit participants.

School counselor preparation

The first criteria for school counselors offering the LaP-LAC program in their school would be understanding methods for enhancing self-efficacy beliefs (Bandura, 1997). They should be prepared to utilize every available opportunity to provide verbal encouragement, vicarious modeling, step-wise mastery experiences, and understanding of affective arousal (such as parent anxiety regarding tasks).

School counselors serve as the best-trained school professionals for conducting individual planning sessions with high school students (ASCA, 2013). Therefore, they are well-equipped for knowing and understanding the most effective ways for all high school students to get the most enriching school experiences possible. School counselors also understand the way their

schools function, from deadlines for important documents and forms, to places to meet, and resources in and out of school. Finally, school counselors should be familiar with district and state-wide education policies and standard courses of study for students, meaning they should be able to share these with parents in a clear and concise manner. High school counselors use all of this knowledge to help craft individual schedules and high school planning guides for their students. Sharing this information with parents through the LaP-LAC intervention, however, can help school counselors have a two-fold impact on Latino students: increasing Latino parent involvement, which may contribute to increased follow-through, and commitment to high school completion by Latino students (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005).

School counselors organizing and presenting a LaP-LAC group work intervention also must possess and be willing to share their post-secondary knowledge and college information in a format that is clear for Latino parents to understand. This would require the school counselor to assess what parents already know about post-secondary options for their children, as well as asking participants about their or their family's or their friend's experiences with high school graduation and/or the college-going process. As a result, the LaP-LAC group work facilitator must be attuned to what participants, particularly immigrant parents, bring to the group.

In addition, school counselors must consider limitations to offering the group beyond simply offering the group intervention in Spanish, or with a Spanish-speaking co-leader, but also acknowledging that academic jargon, acronyms, and expectations are not familiar to many parents, regardless of language preference or country of origin. Specifically, school counselors must have a working knowledge of, for example, the federal financial aid process, the college-application process, ways to maximize high school options for students, the most effective ways to find out about SAT or ACT preparatory courses, etc. In addition, many states have state-specific web-based databases designed and funded to help parents and children find information on how to find and apply to college and other post-secondary options, how to start a family college fund or how to find merit-based and need-based financial aid, and how to plan for post-high school and post college career success. For example, the College Foundation of North Carolina (see www.cfnc.org) provides comprehensive college and career planning information and resources in English and Spanish; Learn More Indiana (see www.in.gov/learnmoreindiana) provides similar services in Indiana, in English only. LaP-LAC group workers should be familiar with these websites. The Appendix provides a list of available state-specific college and career planning websites.

One final consideration is that of the participant's preferred language. Many Latino parents of high school students speak Spanish as their first language and indicate that Spanish is their preferred language (Pew Hispanic Center, 2007). Consequently, there is high probability that some or all of the interested participants will expect or prefer the LaP-LAC groups to be offered in Spanish. As a result, it is important that the school counselors are fluently proficient in Spanish and English. If the group facilitator is not capable of running a group in Spanish, it would be important to invite a bilingual co-facilitator to co-lead the group, which might include a

paraprofessional, an administrative assistant, or a parent/guardian affiliate with the counseling agency or school offering the LaP-LAC intervention. If neither of these options is a possibility, then school counselors interested in running these types of groups will want to make sure that advertising of the group is not misleading, and that it clearly states that the groups will be offered in English.

OVERVIEW OF SESSIONS

Session 1: Learning About Your Child's Interests and Skills

As this is the first group session, school counselors are encouraged to welcome all participants and allow time for introductions of all leaders and members. Group members also should be asked to share the age of their high school-aged child and their grade. Those leading the group also should review basic group logistics, such as the number of sessions, the start time for each session, and basic information about the meeting location. The main objective of the first session is to help parents realize all of the things they already know about their children in high school and build their efficacy for involvement. The key for school counselors, however, is to link for parents how their knowledge of their children's skills, interests, aptitudes, etc., are the basic building blocks for career and college planning. This is where the school counselor's understanding of career development and career counseling becomes helpful. Because the objectives for this session hinge on participants' realization that they already know many instrumental ingredients for their children's personal and professional future success, this session also sets the strength-based approach tone for the entire LaP-LAC intervention. Also, it is important with Latino families to establish a trusting connection from the beginning. Starting on time is perhaps less important than starting with *confianza* or trust (Villalba, 2014).

An important concept that should be directly explained to participants, as well as underlie interactions in the group, is "self-efficacy." Because this concept can be confused with self-esteem or self-concept, it may be useful for school counselors to ask participants about the skills or abilities that each has, and how confident they are in these skills and abilities. Participants should then be asked about skills or abilities that each participant does not feel they have, in an effort to provide a contrast. School counselors are encouraged to share their own skills and limits, thereby modeling for participants that we all have things at which we excel, and things at which we do not. This is particularly important if leaders are members of the cultural majority and thus may have more socially derived power or status than participants. This line of questioning should culminate in the school counselor asking participants to share what they know about their children in general, and what they feel are their children's academic strengths and weaknesses. Each group member should be encouraged to take their time as they develop this list of strengths and weaknesses, while reminding participants that "academic strengths and weaknesses" also can include extracurricular activities, such as community service, work around the home, sports, and balancing work and school responsibilities. Participants also should be asked about their children's interests, even if these interests are not related to school specifically,

since interests often are related to post-high school options, from joining the military, to choosing a major, to selecting a college (Lent et al., 2008; Shim, Warrington, & Goldsberry, 2009).

By the end of this session, each participant should have ample “proof” of two main themes: that parents and guardians know a lot about their children, sometimes more than they think they know; and that this information serves as the basic building blocks to post-high school success (Roderick, Nagaoka, & Coca, 2009). Due to the typical cultural orientation of Latinos toward family and collective values, allowing members to share these descriptions of their children with each other can be a powerful way for vicarious learning to occur and group cohesion to begin. Before terminating this first session, school counselors should summarize with all participants the many bits of information shared about their children, and school counselors also might consider asking participants to continue to think about their children's skills and interests between sessions. Finally, school counselors will want to emphasize that the information shared during this session will be revisited in future sessions, so participants might want to write down the information they shared in order to facilitate future sessions.

Session 2: Enhancing Your Child's High School Experience

The second session of the LaP-LAC program should be used to provide Latino parents with an overview of the courses offered at the school, the extracurricular activities, sporting teams, and groups open to students. Furthermore, participants should understand what the district and state guidelines are for earning a high school diploma, and how specific coursework will prepare students for post-secondary success (e.g., 4-year college, 2-year college, military, etc.). School counselors should be familiar with the backgrounds of their participants (e.g., recency of immigration, comfort with English, college legacy, socioeconomic status [SES]), which would aid them in discerning if parents have a high or low degree of familiarity with the structure of secondary education in the United States. Parents also should understand the pivotal role school counselors play in developing and guiding students through their 4-year high school plan, as evidenced through the provision of individual planning services by school counselors to students (ASCA, 2013).

By this session, the therapeutic factors of cohesion, universality, and guidance associated with group work (Yalom & Leszcz, 2005) also should begin to manifest. Specifically, parents should all start to realize by this session that they are not alone in their experiences with helping their children explore post-secondary options, which will contribute to group cohesion throughout all remaining sessions. One advantage of having parents of children in different grades participate in the same group is that parents with children in older grades may be able to provide more relevant examples and experiences to parents with children in younger grades, thereby increasing the therapeutic factor of providing guidance and building efficacy for further involvement. As a result, care should be taken not to approach this session as an “information dump,” but to harness the power of group universality in this high school parent experience, while still personalizing

how each child and family can use resources in the school to stay on track with graduation requirements, take advantage of out-of-class opportunities, and develop their personal goals and plans.

Session 3: Learning How to Choose the Best Colleges for Your Child

In this session, the counselor's main objective should be to help parents link their responses and experiences from the previous two sessions to helping their children decide on their best post-secondary option, including college. It will be important to start by focusing on parent self-efficacy beliefs, providing verbal encouragement for their participation and gains over the past sessions and noting how they are demonstrating step by step mastery of the college planning process. Group members could be encouraged to address each other, listing strengths and gains they have noticed. This will help build confidence and enhance role construction for engaging in their children's education. In order for these connections to be made in a meaningful manner, school counselors also will need to share their knowledge regarding the differences between 2-year schools, 4-year schools, graduate school, professional school, apprenticeships, and the military. With regards to 2-year and 4-year schools, presenters may even want to list schools on a map to give parents an idea of the distance between their homes and possible school choices for their children. Inevitably, it is up to the school counselor to prepare some preliminary ideas and definitions for this collection of post-secondary options for high school graduates. The focus should not be on which college is best, but on which represents the best fit for the child's interests, skills, needs, and the family's values and resources.

Although it is not required for this session, if school counselors have access to or have administered career development instruments to the children of participants, it would be helpful to have those assessments and results available for this session. Copies of these results could be shared with parents and guardians at the beginning of this session, and the school counselor could reference this type of information throughout the session. However, it is understood that these types of career instruments and assessments might incur costs to the school counselor, parents, and/or school districts, and so they are only mentioned as an optional tool to facilitate this session.

School counselors will also need to help participants understand basic concepts of academia, including but not limited to “majors,” “credits,” “tuition,” “residence life,” “student health centers,” “merit-based scholarships/need-based grants,” and “academic advisement” (the Appendix includes some web-based resources to facilitate this process). Participants also should be instructed as to the importance of college visits with their children, even if it means visiting the closest colleges and universities, to familiarize themselves with a college campus, classrooms, student affairs, and residence life options. The term “first-generation college student” may also be shared if the presenter believes that some or most of the parents/guardians in the room are caring for children who will be the first ones in their family attending a college or university. As with the aforementioned map of nearby colleges, the presenters may want to

share a list of terms and their definitions for all participants to see. This information on basic academic concepts, coupled with the differences in post-secondary options, serves as the “educational” component of this session. The “psychological” component of this session comes next.

Once all of this information has been shared, the group facilitator should now consider parents’ feelings and emotions regarding the shared information. There is a likelihood that many Latino parents in the LaP-LAC program have just heard these terms for the very first time (Auerbach, 2004), which may cause some confusion and consternation. Furthermore, the gravity of a child joining the military or going to a college 1,000 miles from home or not knowing how to pay for college may all be setting in. These feelings, coupled with perhaps not knowing enough about their children's hopes, dreams, desires, and long-term career plans, may mean that this rather innocuous “college readiness” information may result in high levels of anxiety for the participants. As a result, school counselors should consider asking participants how they feel about having received all of this information. Follow-up questions and scenarios, similar to the ones already shared, should be presented to the participants in case they cannot articulate the inherent stress about what will happen to their children after they graduate from high school.

Once participants have an opportunity to share their reactions to the information, the LaP-LAC presenter can then, finally, ask participants how they think their children's interests, skills, high school experiences, and aptitudes match up with the myriad post-secondary options shared. The school counselor may even encourage participants to do some “homework” with their children between the third and fourth sessions. Homework activities might include the parent and child looking at separate websites for local or regional community colleges or 4-year institutions, as well as the child and parent separately seeking out peers or colleagues who have personal experiences with a trade school, community colleges, 4-year college, and beyond. Once each person has completed the homework assignment, the parents can engage with their child around what each of them found out in an effort to process the exercise. These steps help build mastery for planning tasks and contribute to an overall sense of efficacy.

In the final part of Session 3, participants also should be reminded of their self-efficacy (or capacity) for understanding their children. Specifically, the presenter can help the parents and guardians link what they know about their children's plans and aspirations to the newfound information on selecting the best-fit college and/or post-secondary option. Lastly, before concluding this session, participants should be encouraged to share this new information with their children, as well ask their children about their preferred post-secondary options and the type of colleges they would like to attend upon graduation.

Session 4: Exploring the College Application and Admissions Process

The fourth session involves a shift from utilizing verbal persuasion and vicarious learning to help bolster participant self-efficacy to asking them to attempt mastery of some initial tasks

(Bandura, 1997). School counselors know a lot of details regarding the college application and admissions process. However, what sets this session (and the fifth) apart from the others is that parents attending the LaP-LAC program, particularly those who did not attend college, will have very limited information and experiences with this information. As a result, the school counselor presenting the LaP-LAC program has the responsibility to be as detailed as possible with attendees, while allowing time for questions and behavioral engagement with tasks. By attending to specific details of the application and admissions process, the presenter ensures that the primary objective of this session is met: to ensure that participants have a clear understanding of the steps for completing and submitting a college application, and the process used by college admissions officers to enroll an incoming freshman class. Presenters also are advised to save a few minutes at the end of the session to allow for processing feelings regarding how parents will process with their children a college's decision to deny or accept their child's admission.

In order to facilitate Session 4, school counselors may choose to have internet access and a projector to show and fill in an online college application. School counselors who can demonstrate to participants the navigation of the online college application process will be most helpful to parents and guardians less familiar or comfortable with using the internet or computers. Alternatively, facilitators also could bring blank paper copies of college applications and ask participants to start to complete them together. It would be most advantageous if websites or applications for at least one public, in-state 4-year school, one public, in-state 2-year community college, and one private in-state or out-of-state 4-year school were gathered, screened, and “bookmarked” on the web prior to the start of Session 4. This will facilitate the presenter's opportunity to present efficiently and effectively all of the relevant information. Presenters should have logistical information highlighted as well, particularly as it relates to submission deadlines, early decision deadlines, and costs for each application (including application fee waivers, when appropriate and available). Although a portion of the time for this session will be taken up by providing this information to participants, facilitators should consciously save time for allowing them to attempt this application task and answer parents' questions. Depending on the familiarity of the group members with U.S. college applications, it may build more efficacy to cover less material, but give them an experience of success, rather than covering all material but overwhelming participants and perhaps negatively affecting those with a lowered sense of self-efficacy. If the group is being held at a location other than the school, it also may be worth considering whether Session 4 could be relocated to the school environment, so that the facilitator can provide a tour of the student services area and encourage parent participants to become familiar with and return to utilize these resources.

It is strongly recommended to invite and secure the participation of an admissions officer from a local 2-year or 4-year college, when possible, in Session 4. Having these individuals co-present information on the application and admissions process will be particularly advantageous for participants, as it allows for direct question-and-answer possibilities between parents and the individuals responsible for admitting incoming freshmen. These admissions officers also would

help participants understand (and process) admissions decisions. Whether a child gets admitted to their college of choice, or not, can be a stressful event. Sometimes, youngsters can react negatively if they did not gain admission to the school of choice; feelings which often are also experienced by parents and guardians. On the other hand, securing admission to college also can come with its own level of stress if parents/guardians and students fear they cannot pay for the costs associated with post-secondary education. In either case, the information in Session 4 can lead to some feelings of stress and worry in participants, and presenters must be prepared to process these feelings when they arise.

Session 5: Learning About Financial Aid and Paying for College

Similar to Session 4, Session 5 will require the LaP-LAC presenter to have experience with the financial aid application process. However, because the costs associated with many post-secondary options are often too high for many Latino families to assume, this topic may be particularly distressful to participants (Paulsen & John, 2002; Schwartz, Donovan, & Guido-DiBrito, 2009). In order to help minimize some of the potential stress and anxiety related to paying for college, presenters are encouraged to plan this session in the following manner: (a) share with parents the expected and actual costs of attending a 2-year community college, 4-year state school, and 4-year private school, then discuss participants' reactions to these figures; (b) share the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) form and related information about need-based assistance, including Pell Grants and Stafford Loans, then discuss participants' reactions to FAFSA information; (c) share links to scholarship information for specific students (e.g., those who are undocumented; first-generation college students), as well as private schools offering merit- and need-based scholarships, then discuss participants' reactions to the scholarship information and other related questions and concerns. If a relevant Latino student or parent role model is available, it will be beneficial to the group members to hear about a personal experience with applying for aid or finding a way to make college affordable.

As with Session 4, facilitators will want to have access to the internet, as well as a projector to demonstrate to participants where to locate the information and what it looks like once they get there. In case technology options are limited or group members respond better to the opportunity to complete work themselves with paper and pencil, then printing off FAFSA forms and cost information prior to the session would be advantageous. Participants also should be encouraged to write down relevant information so that they may revisit this information with their children and/or loved ones after the end of Session 5. Also, school counselors should be familiar with and ready to share links such as Latino College Dollars (www.latinocollegedollars.org) and the Hispanic Scholarship Fund (www.hsf.net) with parents, perhaps even allowing time for each person to start a scholarship application. Finally, if the school counselors live in a state with a one-stop web resource for planning, applying, and paying for college (see Appendix), presenters should allow time for showing these resources to participants as well. (Some of these one-stop web resources require individuals to apply for an account, and presenters may need to allow additional time in Session 5 for helping all participants complete the application process).

Whereas Session 4 has the potential to be stress-inducing for some parents and guardians, due to their potential limited experience with the college application and admissions process, Session 5 has the potential to be stress-inducing for many, if not all, of the participants. Latino parents, in general, report more concerns than White, non-Latino parents about helping their children pay for college (Baum & Flores, 2011; Grodsky & Jones, 2007). The reasons for their concerns include, but are not limited to, lower average SES than other ethnic groups, inexperience with the required paperwork for the FAFSA, possible undocumented status in the United States, and unfamiliarity with scholarship procedures. Regardless of why many Latino parents and guardians feel like they cannot help their children pay for college, LaP-LAC facilitators will need to be able to process feelings of helplessness, low self-efficacy, and inferiority for helping their children attain their post-secondary goals (Baum & Flores, 2011; Grodsky & Jones). Facilitators also should be cognizant of any inaccurate information that may exist, such as having inaccurate ideas of how much college costs (Gibbons & Borders, 2010), and help correct misperceptions about who is eligible for aid so that parents are not feeling more helpless than need be.

Session 6: Keeping on Track and Transitioning to College

As reported earlier, Latino parents have a higher-than-average familial attachment level than other non-Latino Whites, which may lead to heightened levels of sadness related to children leaving home to go to college, or simply moving on to a different stage in their lives (Wolf, Sax, & Harper, 2009). This final session, therefore, serves as an opportunity for counselors to use the LaP-LAC group intervention (a) to remind parents of the information they learned in order to help them facilitate their children's post-secondary options, and (b) to allow parents to express their feelings about their children's post-secondary plans.

Often, Latino parents and guardians worry about the “negative influences” that non-Latino youth and U.S. cultural mores can have on their children (Villalba, 2007). These types of concerns can be exacerbated as their children prepare to move away from home and/or adjust to the added academic freedom that comes with going to college, such as setting one's own schedule and selecting classes. Just as Latino parents may have stress-related concerns about the future, Latino youth exploring post-secondary options also can struggle with adjusting to their newfound freedom and the responsibilities that come with them (Stephens, Fryberg, Markus, Johnson, & Covarrubias, 2012). Transitions between high school and post-secondary options, from community college to the military and entering the workforce to enrolling in a 4-year university, can be wrought with challenges and obstacles for all youth, regardless of ethnicity and SES (DeWitz, Woolsey, & Walsh, 2009). Unfortunately, transition difficulties can be more pronounced for first-generation college students and high school graduates, as well as students of color (Prospero & Vohra-Gupta, 2007). Increasing the level of parental involvement and understanding during this crucial transition stage can help mitigate the barriers to post-secondary success for Latino youth (Harper, Sax, & Wolf, 2012). For this reason, school counselors should consider using this final session to encourage participants to discuss transitioning plans with their children, especially when it comes to getting the most out of college or a new career. One way to

encourage participants to have these transition-related conversations with their children is to remind them of all of the facts and experiences they have been exposed to as part of the LaP-LAC program, the nature of discussing this type of information with peers in a group work setting, and their increased their level of efficacy when it comes to being more strategically involved with their children's secondary and post-secondary plans.

Additionally, the sixth session of the LaP-LAC program also should serve as a chance for participants to ask additional questions of the presenter. Particularly due to the amount of information shared with parents, coupled with the emphasis on increasing parental involvement through the LaP-LAC program, presenters will want to ensure that participants are not left with lingering questions or feelings of low self-efficacy. Consequently, ample time at the end of the session should be devoted to final questions, and perhaps even pointing out two or three main points from each of the previous five sessions will serve as reminders for participant, and perhaps even prompt a few last-minute questions.

One final suggestion for this last session is to include a panel of local Latino parents/guardians and family members whose children have successfully enrolled in 2-year, 4-year, or technical school programs after high school. It is understandable that some school counselors may not have knowledge of these individuals in their communities, or there simply may not be enough time to invite and host a panel of Latino families to discuss their children's post-secondary experiences. However, from a vicarious learning perspective, it may be helpful for participants to interact with individuals like themselves who went through a similar process of helping their children graduate from high school and move on in life, but who lived through this stage 1–2 years ago (Bandura, 1997). At the very least, the group worker may want to gauge the interest of parent participants in hearing from Latino parents and families like themselves, and, based on the interest, set aside one additional meeting or forum after the sixth session to allow for this kind of activity to occur. If none of this is possible, then the group worker may consider asking parental participants if they would mind being contacted a year or more in the future to inquire about their children's post-high school experiences, and perhaps these very participants can assume the role of “expert panelist” in the not-too-distant future.

INITIAL RELEVANT OUTCOMES FROM LAP-LAC EDUCATIONAL PROGRAM

The LaP-LAC psychoeducational group intervention, as presented here, has not formally been implemented in the field. However, a more streamlined and basic version of the program focusing solely on tips for succeeding in high school and expanding post-high school options has been provided to Latino parents of middle and high school-aged children. In this version of the program, the same six sessions and objectives were shared with interested parents, but the sessions were shorter than suggested here, the groups were larger, and there was little time to process the information. These limits to the complete LaP-LAC intervention were necessary due to limited availability of time and space to conduct the full-fledged program. In short, the implemented iteration focused more on providing parents with information (the “educational”

part of a “psychoeducational” format) without much opportunity for processing the information in the group or with their children (the “psycho” part of a “psychoeducational” format).

With regards to feedback from parents who participated in this educational program on post-secondary options for their children, most were grateful for being presented with the content and many relayed that they had never been exposed to this information. Parents also shared a desire for longer, more “personal” and “informal” sessions. In addition, attrition rates were extremely low from week 1 through week 6 of the program. And, finally, the parents even took it upon themselves to organize a “pot-luck” for the last session, as a way to “celebrate” as a group all the things they had learned, and discuss their plans for the future with their children. In fact, many parents wondered during that last session pot-luck if there was an “advanced” set of sessions to be offered in the future. Taken as a whole, these “outcomes” seemed relevant to the planning and design of the current version of the LaP-LAC program, and their essence have been interjected into the proposed intervention.

CONCLUSION

Past outreach efforts have shown that a group of similar peers provides a culturally congruent and psychologically comfortable environment for Latino parents, one which encourages them to engage with trust in unknown tasks such as preparing to guide one's child toward college (Auerbach, 2004; Downs et al., 2008). Building on social cognitive career theory (Lent et al., 1994) and the Hoover-Dempsey (2005) model of parental involvement, the LaP-LAC is a psychoeducational group with a solid foundation in social learning frameworks which would be congruent with the strengths-based and developmental philosophies of school counselors as well as group workers in a variety of settings. The structure provided by the LaP-LAC group allows Latino parents to access needed information, and the understanding and facilitative style of the leader allows them to build confidence and self-efficacy that their efforts to help their children could succeed.

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APPENDIX

Web-Based Resources

General Resources (Selected)

The College Board

www.collegeboard.org

The Hispanic Scholarship Fund ^a	www.hsf.net
Career Explorer	www.careerexplorer.net
My Future	www.myfuture.com
Federal Student Aid ^a	www.studentaid.ed.gov
Scholarships.com	www.scholarships.com
Free Application for Federal Student Aid ^a	www.fafsa.ed.gov
My College Options	www.mycollegeoptions.org
Know How 2 Go ^b	www.knowhow2go.com
Latinos Rumbo al College ^a	www.latinosincollege.com

State-Specific Recourses (Selected)

NC—College Foundation of North Carolina ^a	www.cfnc.org
IN—Learn More Indiana	www.in.gov/learnmoreindiana
CA—Californiacolleges.edu	www.californiacolleges.edu
TX—College for All Texans ^a	www.collegefortexans.com
NY—NY Higher Education Services Corp.	www.hesc.nc.gov
GA—GA College 411 ^b	www.gacollege411.org
IL—What's Next Illinois ^b	www.whatsnextillinois.org
AZ—Arizona College and Career Planning System	www.az.kuder.com
TN—Tenn. College and Career Planning System	www.planningyourdreams.org
IA—I Have a Plan Iowa ^b	www.ihaveaplaniowa.gov

Notes

^a Signifies extensive resources also are available in Spanish.

^b Signifies limited resources also are available in Spanish.

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