Expanding Latino Parents' Access to Child Development Research through the News Media

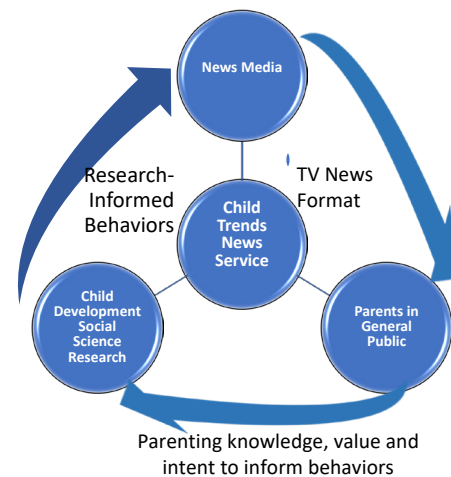Alicia Torres, Selma Caal, Luz Guerra, and Angela Rojas

Introduction

Despite the high level of wealth in the United States, children in this country are more likely to experience poverty than children in many other developed countries, including Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Japan, and most of Europe.[a] Social scientists have identified an array of evidence-based strategies that parents, teachers, and others can use to mitigate the challenges associated with poverty. But that research can only be useful if it is accessible to the people who can use it— and to those who need it most. To date, many efforts to communicate these strategies have not focused on audiences experiencing poverty.[b]

The Child Trends News Service project seeks to broaden access to research on child development among low-income U.S. parents, with a focus on reaching Latino parents. As the second-fastest-growing and largest ethnic group of children, Latinos represent one-quarter of all children in the United States, a proportion expected to increase to one-third by 2050.[c] While the prevalence of poverty for Latino children has improved since 2013, Latino children were still twice as likely as white children to live in poverty in 2016.[d] And despite some recent economic gains for a subset of Latino families, almost 10.3 million Latino children are growing up poor.[e] A focus on low-income Latino children is even more critical today, when families face greater instability and trauma—from possible family separation related to changes and uncertainties in immigration policy, to the increased stress of a more hostile national environment.[f]

Figure 1. Child Trends News Service Project—A Bridge Between Researchers, the News Media and Their Audiences

Funded by the National Science Foundation, the Child Trends News Service promotes the adoption of research-based parenting practices by building awareness of and appreciation for actionable child development research. The project ensures that this research is made available in English and Spanish through local TV news, the public's primary news source.[g] Comprised of an interdisciplinary team, the project is a partnership between the Child Trends Hispanic Institute

[a] Scott & Wilcox, 2015
[b] Southwell, Hamilton, & Slater, 2011; Southwell et al., 2014
[c] Murphey, Guzman, & Torres, 2014
[d] The Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2017
[e] U.S. Census Bureau & U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2016
[f] McCarthy, 2018
[g] Mitchell, 2015

and Ivanhoe Broadcast News, a national news syndication company. This collaborative team serves as a bridge between two very different professional cultures—scientific research and the news media—to ensure that news reports on child development research are scientifically accurate, while conforming to news media production standards.

The value of collaboration between researchers and news professionals lies in striking the right balance between scientific content and storytelling so that news directors and editors value the reports and use them in news programs to reach parents in their audiences. Every month, the News Service team produces eight news reports that feature child development news. One year after the launch of the project, more than 105 TV stations subscribe to the News Service, including 11 stations in the top 25 Latino-serving markets in the country. On average, each report generates more than 2.5 million views, according to Nielsen TV research data.

This research brief highlights findings from the proof of concept pilot year of the Child Trends News Service project. It explores what we have learned regarding best practices for communicating with and engaging Latino parents through short messages on research-informed parenting practices. The findings are grounded in research that substantiates the need to amplify access to child development research, particularly among low-income Latino families; and in communication science research that demonstrates the value of the news media as an information source for child development research.

Based on our findings, the prospects for producing short news stories on research-based parenting practices that engage Latino audiences are promising, suggesting that communicators who adhere to practices described in this brief can successfully engage parents. This brief provides communicators with six practical recommendations for engaging parents regarding social science child development research. The research findings are based on focus groups with Latino parents in three geographic areas. These focus groups explored how parents interact with child development research information to inform various stages of their learning that lead to behavioral decisions: triggering parents to acquire knowledge, then building perceived value for high-quality social science research, and finally fostering their intent to adopt the research-informed parenting behaviors featured in the news reports.

Audiences for this brief:

- **Social science and other science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) researchers** seeking to improve communication of their research to lay audiences, particularly to Latino and low-income communities

- **Service providers** seeking effective communication strategies to engage Latino families

- **News professionals** seeking research-based child development news stories

- **Communication science professionals** seeking research-based communication strategies to better reach and engage with audiences

- **Philanthropic organizations** funding research and programs aimed at improving outcomes for families in need

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Key Recommendations

Communicators who aim to engage parents with actionable research should:

1. **Continue to communicate and reinforce well-known, research-informed parenting behaviors**, even when you know that these behaviors have already received widespread public attention.

2. **Be cautious when relaying information that may elicit emotional reactions**. Emotions can get in the way of a person's ability to absorb the importance of recommended behaviors and their consideration as to whether to adopt them. Effectively communicating messages associated with difficult issues can benefit from repetition. Reinforce key points across a variety of local community settings, including community-based media outlets, service providers, and other venues that serve parents.

3. **Take time to understand your audiences' needs and interests, and consider how you can relate your messages to these interests.** Research findings suggest that messages that present novel information of interest to parents can trigger the stages of learning that lead to behavioral considerations: building their knowledge about the research, developing attitudes about the value of that research, and ultimately informing their parenting behaviors.

4. **Use visuals to emphasize the information you want to communicate and to depict relatable situations, activities, and outcomes**. The effective use of visuals can support successful communication of key messages and behaviors.

5. **Ensure that both the content and presentation of information is relatable to your audiences**.
   - Include the voices of parents and children, in addition to the voice of the researcher; show parents using the behaviors described, or depict children.
   - Provide concrete examples of actionable behaviors.
   - Depict people and places that reflect parents' own communities.
   - Consider the possible language and/or literacy barriers to adopting recommended behaviors.
   - Be sensitive to parents' financial barriers and provide low-cost options.
   - Provide access to additional resources at the community level that help parents adopt some of the research-informed parenting practices.

6. **Carefully consider whether and how to present information related to the achievement gaps between ethnic/racial groups**. Provide context and a rationale for the gap, including possible factors associated with low income and poverty conditions.

Ultimately, the responsibility for effective translation of research for the lay public lies with the research community. Research institutions can improve communications to lay audiences through partnerships with communications professionals. The Child Trends News Service's research findings provide insights into how to leverage the news media to expand the reach of research into the homes of millions of people.

Why Focus on Low-Income Latino Parents?

Latino children will soon make up one-third of all U.S. children, similar to the number of white children; however, Latino children are also disproportionately poor. Research finds that poverty experienced early in life is associated with negative outcomes for children. For example, children living in poverty frequently lack food security. Inadequate food intake is associated with serious and chronic health, behavior, and cognitive deficits that can continue into adulthood.[h] The impact of living in an impoverished neighborhood or community also significantly limits children's educational trajectories and opportunities for educational and economic advancement. One longitudinal study finds that poor neighborhoods could have "an even more profound impact on the lasting educational success of children than has been previously measured,"[i] suggesting that inadequate resources and access poorly prepare children for the future.

Given the direct impact of poverty on children's health and well-being, children from low-income households lag behind their peers not only on initial school readiness, but throughout their school years. The "income achievement gap," or the disparity in academic achievement between students from high-income and low-income families, has been found to be an even greater determinant of academic performance than race or ethnicity.[j]

For the first time in U.S. history, the largest group of children living in poverty is not white, but Latino.[k] Over half (56.1%, or more than 10.3 million) of Latino children live at or near the federal poverty level, compared to just over one-quarter (26.9%) of white children. Research finds that several characteristics of Hispanic households may buffer the impact of income instability and provide a firm foundation for emotional and economic well-being, but serious challenges persist. Latino populations in the United States place a premium on the value of education, and the eagerness of Latino youth (and their families) to do well in school is reflected in falling high school dropout rates and record rates of post-secondary enrollment.[l] At the same time, more must be done to secure the success of the nation's most impoverished group of children.[m] For reasons that are complex, many Latino children start school less prepared than their non-Latino peers, and early educational disparities often widen over time.[n]

While social scientists have identified strategies that caregivers can use to help children advance, studies find that knowledge about scientific developments is linked to parents' educational attainment. This research suggests that since many who live in or near poverty have attained lower levels of education,[o] they may not have much access to child development research to inform their parenting practices. Studies also find that parental education is a powerful predictor of children's academic success, health, civic engagement levels, and economic security as adults.[p] Despite increased high school graduations rates, Latinos trail their peers in attaining post-secondary degrees. About half of U.S. adults have (at most) a high school diploma; just 32.8 percent of U.S. adults hold a bachelor's degree and 10.8 percent have an associate degree. Among Latinos, comparable percentages are even lower, with only 16 percent of Latinos having a bachelor's degree and 8.7 percent an associate degree.[q]

[h] Murphey & Redd, 2014; Child Trends Data Bank, 2016
[i] McGonagle, Schoeni, Sastry, & Freedman, 2012
[j] Sacks, 2016
[k] Lopez & Velasco, 2011
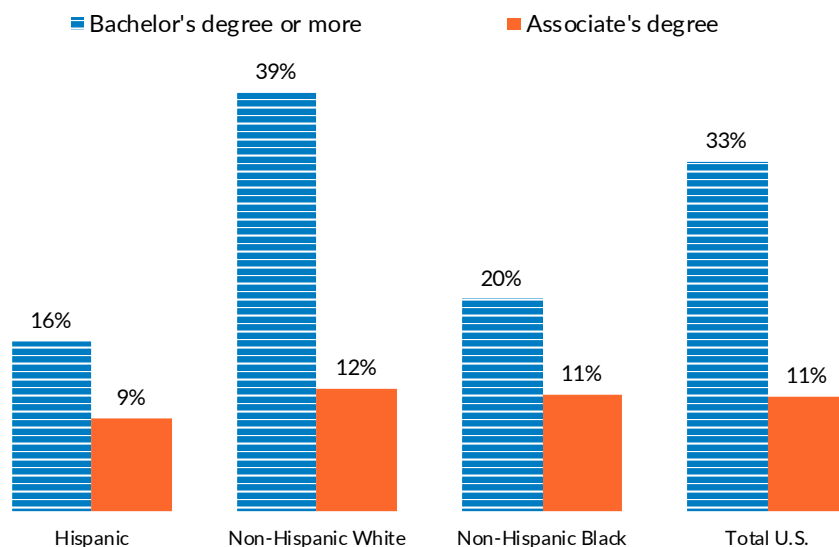[l] Murphey et al., 2014
[m] Padilla, Cabrera, & West, 2017
[n] National Center for Education Statistics, 2015
[o] DeNavas-Walt & Proctor, 2015
[p] Child Trends Data Bank, 2015
[q] Murphey et al., 2014

Figure 2. High School Graduation and College Enrollment
About half of U.S. adults have at most a high school degree

▪ Bachelor's degree or more   ▪ Associate's degree

Percent of young adults (25-29) who have completed post-secondary degrees

Source: America's Hispanic Children - Gaining Ground, Looking Forward https://www.childtrends.org/publications/americas-hispanic-children-gaining-ground-looking-forward

A recent study found that Latino parents are receptive to parenting information that can improve their children's outcomes.[r] Like other parents, Latinos are eager to support their children's growth and development and want to provide their children with a high-quality education. For parents to be able to adopt parenting practices that can best support their children's educational success, they must have access to high-quality research that is communicated effectively. The timing couldn't be more critical: by 2022, the United States will need one million more people working in STEM fields, but only 24 percent of all U.S. 12th-graders were found to be proficient in math; the comparable figure was just 12 percent among Latino and black 12th graders.[s]

Why Focus on Local TV News Media?

The Child Trends News Service programming is syndicated primarily to local TV news stations throughout the country. Mass media studies find that, despite decades of declining viewership, local TV news remains the primary source of information for the majority of people in the United States.[t]
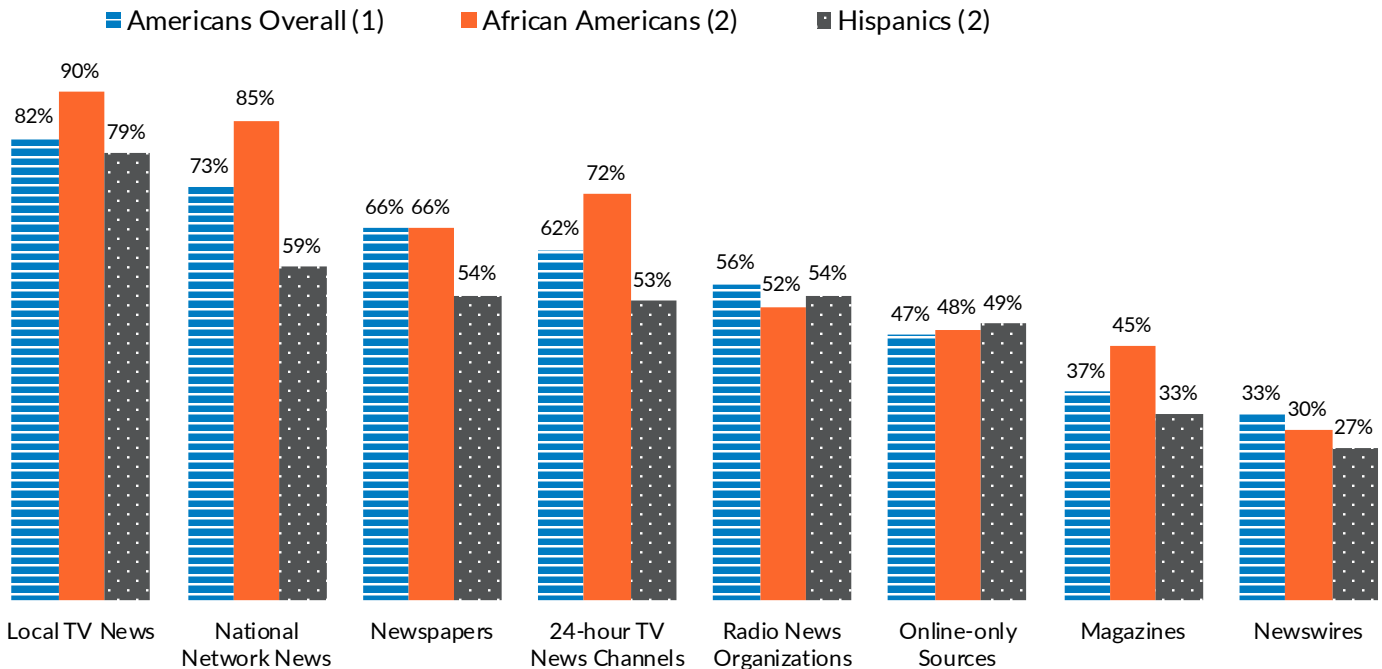
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[r] Torres, Guerra, Caal, & Weilin, 2016
[s] National Center for Education Statistics, 2015
[t] Mitchell, Gottfried, Barthel, & Shearer, 2016

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Figure 3. Television is the Preferred Means for Most People in the United States
to Receive News

*Response to: Did you watch, read, or hear news from the following types of news
reporting sources in the last week, or not?*

Legend: ■ Americans Overall (1)   ■ African Americans (2)   ■ Hispanics (2)

Local TV News: 82%, 90%, 79%
National Network News: 73%, 85%, 59%
Newspapers: 66%, 66%, 54%
24-hour TV News Channels: 62%, 72%, 53%
Radio News Organizations: 56%, 52%, 54%
Online-only Sources: 47%, 48%, 49%
Magazines: 37%, 45%, 33%
Newswires: 33%, 30%, 27%

Sources
1. The Media Insight Project. (2014, March). The personal news cycle. Retrieved from http://www.apnorc.org/PDFs/Media%20Insight/
News%20Cycle/The_Personal_News_Cycle_Final.pdf
2. The Media Insight Project. (2014, September 16). The personal news cycle: A focus on African American and Hispanic news consumers.
Retrieved from https://www.americanpressinstitute.org/publications/reports/survey-research/african-american-hispanic-news-consumers/
single-page/

Individuals increasingly access information via the internet and studies find that they turn to the online platforms of their trusted news sources—particularly the online platforms of local TV news stations or local newspapers. Studies suggest that the short news format of local TV news may be particulary useful to communicate with audiences who mainly follow the headlines. The Media Insight Project found that most people do not generally delve beyond the headlines when accessing information.[u]

**Only 40% adults delve
in behind the headlines**

Latinos: 24%
Whites: 44%
African Americans: 37%

Media Insight Project 2014

The demographics of local TV news viewers reveal a cross-section of underserved parents, offering the possibility of reaching parents who likely have limited access to child development research.

People who regularly watch local TV news include:

• Almost half (47 %) of U.S. adults with a high school degree or less, compared to 26 percent of those with a college degree

• Almost half (46 %) of adult of child-bearing age

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[u] Media Insight Project, 2014

- Almost half (46 %) of U.S. adults who make $30,000 a year or less
- Forty-one percent of people of color[v]

In addition, we know that Latino news consumers are interested in scientific developments. According to a 2014 study, Latinos are more likely to seek out news on STEM research (67%) than white (58%) or black (45%) audiences.[w]

Child Trends News Service—Proof of Concept Pilot Year Findings

While social scientists are eager for their findings to be shared broadly with those who can use the information to make a difference in people's lives, they often feel that the news media misconstrues their research.[x] A major innovation of the Child Trends News Service is its collaborative approach that leverages partnerships across diverse areas of expertise to inform the content, design, messaging, and dissemination of news products. The collaboration provides peer-reviewed, scientifically vetted news reports for commercial news media outlets in a format aligned with TV news industry standards.

The collaborative includes experts from a wide range of fields, including child development researchers, communication science researchers, news professionals, practitioners working directly with parents, and representatives from the philanthropic community who support child development projects. Child Trends' partnership with a leading news syndication company, Ivanhoe Broadcast News (IBN), ensures that the news reports are accurate and conform with commercial news media production standards. Child Trends' child development experts vet the scientific accuracy of the news reports, while IBN vets stories for newsworthiness and production standards. IBN markets the News Service to TV news stations and other news media throughout the country under the name Positive Parenting. The reports feature child development research with actionable research-informed parenting practices.

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[v] Gottfried & Shearer, 2017
[w] Media Insight Project, 2014
[x] Peters, H. P. 2013

TV stations adopt News Service, expose millions to child development research

In 2017, the first year of production, more than 105 local TV stations subscribed to "Positive Parenting." This includes a number of stations in top Latino-serving TV markets listed in the chart.

Figure 4. Latino-Serving TV Markets Subscribed to "Positive Parenting"

| TV Station	Region Served	Hispanic TV Households*
KABC TV	Los Angeles	1,933,480
KPRC TV	Houston	692,620
KXAS TV	Dallas - Fort Worth	553,080
Telemundo	Dallas	553,080
KSAT TV	San Antonio	458,930
KRGV TV	Harlingen	321,630
KFSN TV	Fresno	267,430
WFMZ TV	Philadelphia	257,300
KDVR TV	Denver	252,820
KLAS TV	Las Vegas	171,750
KING TV	Seattle	129,810

*According to Nielsen Research: http://www.nationalmediaspots.com/media-stats/Nielsen-2016-2017-Hispanic-TV-Homes.pdf

Some subscribing stations syndicate their content to others in their networks. In the first year of the project, the News Service produced 88 stories, which have been widely disseminated, according to Nielsen research tracking reports.

- More than 300 stations have aired 2,559 total broadcasts of the 88 reports.
- Nielsen research reports an estimated number of cumulative views of all broadcasts, at **211,793,090 views**.
- The average number of views per story is **2,647,414 views**.

Figure 5. Child Trends News Service Audience Reach
More than 300 stations aired 88 reports
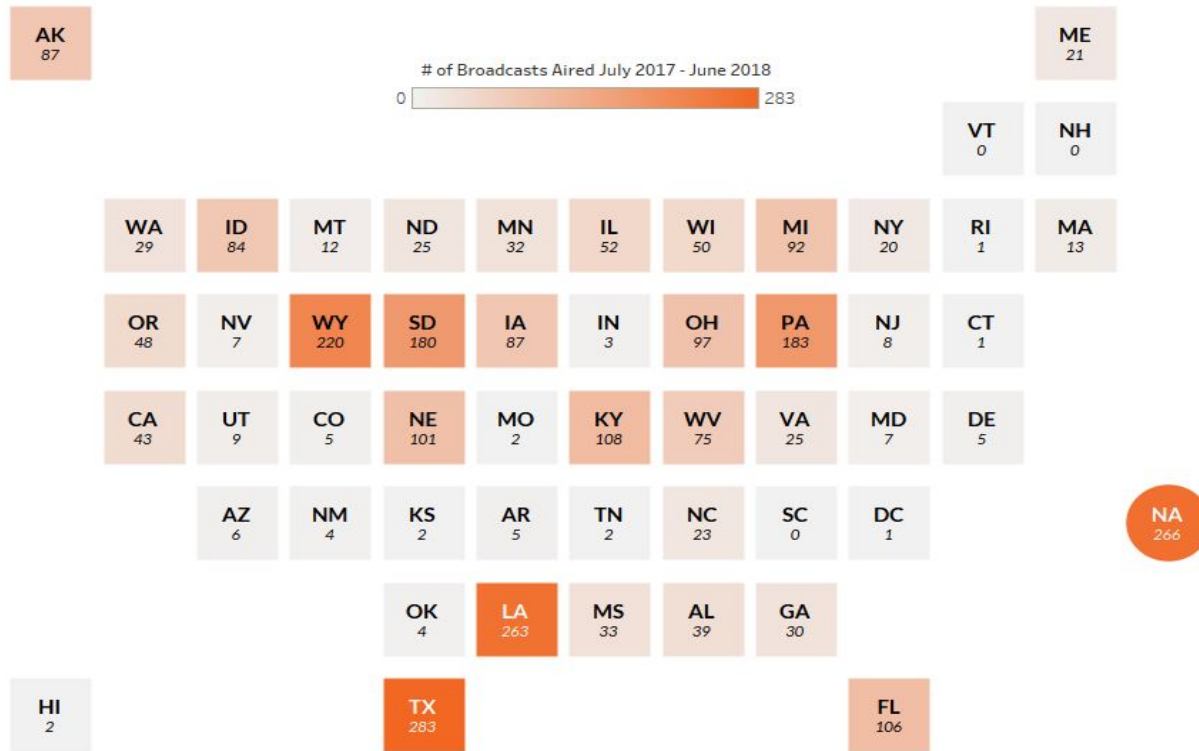
Qualitative Research Findings

In 2017, Child Trends conducted six focus groups with Latino parents in Los Angeles, Washington, DC and Maryland. These were designed to better understand how News Service programming can communicate child development research to Latino parents in ways that inform them, build value for the research, and trigger their interest and intent to adopt research-based parenting practices associated with positive child outcomes. Latino parents in each focus group watched three to four Child Trends News Service reports and responded to a series of questions about the programs' content.

According to qualitative data analyses of the focus groups, most parents generally indicated that the messaging and production of the news reports accomplished their intended purposes. The findings shed light on specific elements that may improve the successful communication of actionable social science research through platforms such as commercial news media. These findings inform the presentation and delivery of future Child Trends News Service productions. They also contribute to the field of communication science by building knowledge on leveraging nonacademic communication channels, known as informal learning channels, to improve learning about STEM research among Latino parents. Finally, the research findings also contribute to a future research agenda.

Overview of general findings

This section provides a brief overview of focus group findings and shares some parent responses to specific news report videos.

- **Parents in all focus groups expressed interest in the "Positive Parenting" topics**. For example, one parent commented, "We don't realize as parents how we affect our children. These are very good topics for the news." (*Building Resilience*)

- **Parents generally captured the intended messages**: "It's simply a way to show parents [how] to be more involved and interact with the child more while using technology. It showed me a new way to interact with my child, like playing a new game." (*Touchscreens and Toddlers*)

- **Parents indicated they had acquired knowledge and awareness of child development research.** For example, following a news report video (*Opening Doors for Latino Children*) citing research on how Latino children enter kindergarten trailing their peers—and offering parenting recommendations on preparing children for kindergarten—some parents responded that:

  - "It actually did bring up an alarming problem that's developing in our children."

  - "It's a problem that is happening as we speak but can still be corrected."

  - "It's critical information that affects us now and our future: I didn't know about the first part, the statistics about Hispanic students ..."

  - "The *developmental psychologists* recommended that stimulation at an early age is important. There should always be a space in children's routine for music." (*Music, Movement, and Preschool Readiness*)

  > "[The video] showed me a new way to interact with my child, like playing a new game."
  >
  > (*Touchscreens and Toddlers video*)

- **In each focus group, parents expressed their desire and intent to adopt the featured research-informed behaviors.** For example, in response to a news report on things parents can do to broaden their child's interest in science, one parent said, "I think it might trigger me to [ask], 'Do I do that with my kid?' And then it might make you start doing it." (*Overcoming the Science Gap*)

- **In some cases, the news report video triggered a desire to communicate with others about parenting behavior**—for example, in response to the *Touchscreens and Toddlers* news report on engaging with children while using touchscreens.

- **Some parents suggested that**, **in addition to viewing news reports on TV, they would like to see similar research-based news programs in other settings** (for example, in parenting classes in their communities). Others indicated an interest in programming being made available on social media (mentioning Facebook).

- **Throughout all focus groups, parents shed light on potential obstacles to adopting parenting behaviors, and helped identify which program elements make news report presentations on child development research more relatable to parents**. This is further detailed in the next section of this report.

Key Takeaways and Recommendations from Focus Group Findings

Latino parents' reactions to the reports shed light on how they interact with the scientific and story content. Parents identified a number of factors that influenced their reactions to the content: whether they had prior knowledge of the content covered, whether the topic covered something they wanted to know about, whether the content triggered an emotional response, whether the content was presented in a way that was relatable to them, and whether they thought they would be able to implement the featured research-informed parenting behavior.

Child Trends makes six recommendations based on the focus group findings for those who seek to communicate research to parents, particularly actionable social science.

Key Recommendations

Communicators who aim to engage parents with actionable research should:

1. **Continue to communicate and reinforce well-known, research-informed parenting behaviors, even when you know they have already received widespread public attention**. Parents explained that they welcome hearing about the benefits of specific practices (such as reading to their child), even when they are already aware. The repetition validates a practice that parents may already be using, or reminds them to practice the behavior.

Parent comments and perspectives

Participants indicated that even when already familiar with the content, they found the information useful.

- "It's not that I learned [something new] but it refreshed my memory." (*Touchscreens and Toddlers video*)

- "It becomes a confirmation that I've made a good choice … for his growth." (*Music, Movement, and Preschool Readiness video*)

> "[The information in the video] becomes a confirmation that I've made a good choice … for his growth."
>
> (*Music, Movement, and Preschool Readiness video*)

2. **Be cautious when relaying information that may elicit emotional reactions. Emotions can get in the way of a person's ability to absorb the importance of the recommended behaviors. Effectively communicating messages associated with difficult issues can benefit from repetition. Reinforce the key points across a variety of local community settings, including community-based media outlets, service providers, and other venues that serve parents.** When communicating information that may trigger a strong emotion (for example, how best to address childhood trauma), the emotional response can trigger viewers' interest in and desire to learn more about the topic. However, viewers may not be able to absorb additional content, such as behavioral recommendations, because those who are accessing this information must manage their initial emotional response. In these cases, it is important to reinforce messages and continue to expose people to the messages in a variety of ways.

Parent comments and perspectives

For a report on children and resilience, over half of participants indicated that, prior to watching the news report video, they had been unaware of the possibility of passing their stress

on to their children: "I know that stress affects the child, but didn't know the extent of how much it can affect their development." When exposed to these research findings, some parents said they became worried that their own levels of stress might be harming harm their child. Thinking about this, they said, made it difficult to absorb information about which behaviors could promote resilience.

Several parents indicated a desire to learn more about topics like this and to see these news videos during parenting classes or on Facebook. Parents also wanted more information about resources available in their local communities.

3. **Take time to understand your audiences' needs and interests, and consider how you can relate your messages to them. Research findings suggest that messages that present novel information of interest to parents can trigger the stages of learning that lead to behavioral considerations: building their knowledge about the research, developing attitudes about the value of that research, and ultimately informing their parenting behaviors.**

Parent comments and perspectives

Following the Touchscreens and Toddlers video, most parents reported that they had acquired knowledge. "It showed me a new way to interact with my child, like playing a new game." Another parent said, "… technology is not bad in itself, but it's about the way you use it. That misconception was cleared up for me." The report also prompted the intent to share information with other caregivers: "I want my mother who watches my child to understand that, in the long run, it's only going to hurt her [my child] [to leave her playing on the phone by herself]," indicating the mother's desire to adopt a behavior on behalf of her child.

> "LEGOS® can be your best friend because children can learn so much from building … spatial awareness, counting, sorting, and problem solving"
>
> (*Touchscreens and toddlers video*)

In the case of research on using building blocks to improve language and early math skills, one parent commented that the video had promoted value for the featured research: "LEGOS® can be your best friend because children can learn so much from building … spatial awareness, counting, sorting, and problem solving."

4. **Use visuals to emphasize the information you want to communicate and to depict relatable situations, activities, and outcomes. The effective use of visuals can support successful communication of key messages and behaviors.** When visuals emphasized the information presented, parents were better able to understand the video's messages.

Parent comments and perspectives

Across all six focus groups, most parents agreed that visuals were most effective when they helped them to better understand the stories' key messages. Parents also expressed the value of seeing examples of activities on how to adopt behaviors. On the other hand, one parent pointed out the challenge of paying attention when the visuals did not relate to content: "I kind of zoned out of the visual because it really wasn't that interesting, but maybe if one of the children had talked, I probably would have stopped and watched."

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Several parents commented on the visuals in Music, Movement, and Preschool Readiness. One remarked that the visuals supported the video's message:

- "The visual was connected with what they were saying. Also, there [are] social benefits because you saw at the end that the children hugged each other, so it helps them a lot."

Other parents' comments suggest that seeing positive child outcomes may inspire an intent to adopt behaviors:

- "It's like when your parents tell you what to do with your children but you don't actually follow their advice … But when you see it actually working, then you think maybe you should do that."

- "If the video shows us more hands-on activities, that would help us—if you show us, we learn."

> "…when you see it actually working, then you think maybe you should do that."
>
> (*parent comment on the value of visuals helping to reinforce the video's message*)

5. **Ensure that both the content and presentation of information is relatable to your audiences.** People interact with information within the context of their own worldview and experiences. Parents may struggle to interpret messages and formulate a response to information that they cannot relate to their own lives. Parents suggest that researchers, communicators, and programs should incorporate the following elements when communicating with them:

Include the voices of parents and children, in addition to the voice of the researcher; show parents using the behaviors described, or depict children.

- Provide concrete examples of actionable behaviors.
- Depict people and places that reflect parents' own communities.
- Consider the possible language and/or literacy barriers to adopting recommended behaviors.
- Be sensitive to parents' financial barriers and provide low-cost options.
- Provide access to additional resources at the community level that help parents adopt some of the research-informed parenting practices.

Parent comments and perspectives

Throughout the six focus groups, parents identified a series of obstacles to implementing the featured behaviors. These obstacles include the presentation of costly behaviors like enrolling children in music classes, the depiction of unfamiliar places such as expensive grocery stores, and the failure to include the voices of people that parents consider to be peers. In some cases, parents acquired new knowledge from the news report videos, but anticipated barriers to behavior adoption. Parents indicated that these were important factors in their intent to adopt (or not) the parenting behaviors featured in the reports.

6. **Carefully consider whether and how to present information related to the achievement gaps between ethnic/racial groups. Provide context and a rationale for the gap, including possible factors associated with low income and poverty conditions.** Parents had mixed views on stories that present research statistics highlighting achievement gaps among ethnic or racial

groups, or income levels. This raises a larger question for science communicators: What is the best way to present this kind of research so that findings and lessons learned are best understood by the general public?

Parent comments and perspectives

Parents responded to a report on new research finding that Latino children trail their peers in early math skills, and featuring ways for parents to help their children be better prepared.

Some parents indicated that reporting on these statistics had made the case for them to implement the featured recommendations (providing them with a "wake-up call"). Many parents reported that statistics on achievement gaps perpetuated stereotypes that Latino children do not do well in school and that Latino parents are not involved in their children's education, resulting in their lack of interest in adopting the featured parenting behaviors.

Parents suggested that news reports should do the following when communicating research on achievement gaps:

- Provide context for the reasons behind gaps, or a rationale for their existence (e.g., family income, poorly equipped schools, and poor neighborhoods).

- Consider communicating this research without highlighting racial and ethnic gaps.

Discussion

Providing access to high-quality social science research to populations that may not have access to this information through other means is the core mission of the Child Trends News Service project. By working with local TV news professionals, the News Service can deliver actionable social science news items that depict positive parenting behaviors to the populations most in need of this information. Because TV news is the preferred news source for a broad sector of the U.S. population, it reaches a low-income demographic across racial and ethnic groups, one in which the majority of viewers have, at most, a high school degree.

The pilot stage of the Child Trends News Service project showed that English language stations broadly use the news reports, and that Spanish-language media are starting to feature the stories as well. The qualitative audience research conducted in 2017 provides insights into how research news could be better structured and presented to improve the communication process by prompting the levels of learning that lead to behavioral decisions—triggering parents to acquire knowledge, then building perceived value for high-quality social science research, and finally fostering parents' intent to adopt the research-informed parenting behaviors featured in the news reports.

The efficacy of local TV news as a conduit for informal STEM learning was well-established by a previous NSF-funded program: Discoveries and Breakthroughs Inside Science TV.[y] By focusing on actionable social science research, the Child Trends News Service project builds on these previous studies and examines another aspect of learning—the intent to adopt behaviors.

This research advances the field of communication science—specifically, it advances the field's understanding of effective communication of social science in ways that are relevant and useful to the intended audiences. The project contributes to the knowledge base of how people learn

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[y] Southwell, Blake, & Torres, 2005; Southwell & Torres, 2006

about science through informal channels like mass media. The Child Trends News Service project's contributions to informal STEM learning literature include:

• Identifying STEM communication strategies for relaying actionable child development social science research to Latino parents

• Broadening the knowledge base on methods for employing communication science to improve lives

Evaluations of informal STEM learning projects rarely delve into learning and behavior. Most studies do not include long-term follow-up, which is essential for identifying sustained impact.[z] Only about half of the U.S. public perceives social science fields as "scientific," so there is a need to continue finding effective ways to raise the profile of high-quality social and behavioral sciences.[aa] There is still much more to learn, especially regarding the field's understanding of how people use science information to make decisions in their lives.

While many projects that promote learning about STEM research do not lend themselves to an examination of how the public uses and interacts with science information to make decisions about behaviors, the applied and actionable nature of social science child research offers an opportunity to advance this knowledge base. The Child Trends News Service project offers a vehicle for this research.

By better understanding how people access and use information to inform their own lives, researchers can more effectively relay relevant findings to decision makers—in this case, parents who can then use this information to improve their own lives and those of their children and families. The project will expand on this research agenda informed by the pilot year's findings featured in this brief.

[z] Toumey et al., 2010; Lloyd, Neilson, King, & Dyball, 2012
[aa] National Science Foundation, 2014

About the Authors

Alicia Torres is senior director of communication science and Hispanic outreach at Child Trends. She has more than 15 years of experience in the development of strategic, evidenced-based communication programs for scientific associations. Alicia has devoted much of her career to the public understanding of science and equity in access to STEM education, particularly among underserved communities. At Child Trends, she leads the Hispanic Institute's communication and outreach work aimed at shining a light on the evolving needs of Latino children to achieve their healthy development. She holds a PhD from the University of Texas, Austin, in strategic communications and mass media studies.

Selma Caal is the director of research at the Crimsonbridge Foundation, and a former research scientist at Child Trends. As a developmental psychologist, she has in-depth understanding of how various factors affect children and families' outcomes. Selma has extensive experience researching the factors that shape the educational outcomes of Latino students, and the role parents play in these factors. She is an expert in translating research findings to inform program development and improvement, and policy formation. As an educator and family counselor, Selma gained extensive experience working in the nonprofit sector serving diverse groups of Latino, immigrant, and low-income families across the United States. She received her doctoral degree in applied developmental psychology from George Mason University in Fairfax, VA.

Luz Guerra has worked with Child Trends as an independent contractor since 2014, lending her skills as editor, translator, and researcher to several projects. Her career spans over 35 years; she has worked with Latino communities in the United States, and with NGOs in Guatemala, Mexico, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Colombia, and Puerto Rico.

Angela Rojas is a senior research analyst at Child Trends. Before joining Child Trends, Angela worked extensively in the area of women's health and contributed to research at the Pan American Health Organization to improve implementation of the Millennium Development Goals. For her Master's thesis at The George Washington University, Angela evaluated the Empowering Latino Youth Program (ELYP), a teen pregnancy prevention program for Latino high school students. She designed survey questions for the ELYP, performed quantitative research analyses, and coordinated and evaluated the use of social media by Latino teens enrolled in ELYP in Washington, DC high schools. Her main research interests include reproductive health; after-school programs; teen pregnancy, particularly in the Latino community; and program development and evaluation.

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