

## Chapter 33

# Parent Engagement Through Abriendo Caminos / Opening Pathways: Giving Back to the Community Through Teaching

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### **ABSTRACT**

*“Abriendo Caminos/Opening Pathways for Students of Color Into the Teaching Profession: Giving Back to the Community Through Teaching,” funded by an educational improvement grant, was designed to address the teacher shortage and demographic diversity gap between students and teachers in a largely urban public school district in the Southwestern United States. The research team at a large, minority-serving public research institution set to address the teacher shortage and diversity gap in three distinct ways—research, recruitment, and registration/retention—with a strong parental engagement component in every stage. Research shows that the engagement of multicultural families/families of color in schools and surrounding community initiatives may more expediently and reliably translate into improved student educational outcomes than does that involvement focused largely on their children’s performance in school. This chapter delineates practical hands-on methods to develop stronger parent partnerships using a social justice lens.*

## **ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS**

- How parents of color become engaged in the university?
- What are some specific action steps to build a genuine relationship with parents of color as they step onto a university campus?
- With parents, how can we increase critical inquiry while asserting their agency in educational settings?

*Teaching has always been, for me, linked to issues of social justice. I've never considered it a neutral or passive profession. -Bill Ayers*

## **INTRODUCTION**

“Abriendo Caminos/Opening Pathways for Students of Color into the Teaching Profession: Giving Back to the Community through Teaching” funded through an educational improvement grant by the Acme Department of Education (ADE), was designed to address the teacher shortage and the demographic diversity gap between students and teachers in Shark County School District (SCSD), a largely urban (with some rural and suburban pockets) public school district in the Southwestern United States. The research team at the University of Acme, Local Area (AULA), a large, minority-serving, public research university located in the urban Southwest set to address the teacher shortage and diversity gap in three distinct ways: research, recruitment, and registration/retention, with a strong parental engagement component in every stage. Research shows that the engagement and involvement of multicultural families/families of color/ minority parent(s) in schools and the surrounding community initiatives may more expediently and reliably translate into improved student educational outcomes, than when involvement is focused solely or largely on their children’s performance in school (Clark, Flores, Rivera, Biesinger, & Morgan, 2012). Efforts to engage parents must be purposeful and meaningful. Parental efforts and participation need to go beyond being a teacher’s aide or providing administrative help, instead offering involvement in all efforts to improve the academic outcomes of all students.

Historically, as Hidalgo, Siu and Epstein (2004) explain, low achievement rate among Latinx students are partly attributable to teachers’ and other school personnel’s prevalent deficit perspectives of Latinx families. In particular, this applies to those families’ culturally-specific child-rearing and school-involvement practices that often lead educators to perceive these (and other minority) parents as difficult to reach, uninterested in their children’s education, or as not valuing education altogether. The prevalence of deficit perspectives in schools creates barriers and impediments that preclude parents from feeling welcomed and their cultural capital from being recognized and valued. The parent engagement process implemented during the first year of Abriendo Caminos sought to dismantle these barriers by co-engaging school personnel involved with the project in rethinking parent involvement through an asset lens. We will delineate these engagement processes so that PK-12 teachers, counselors, and administrators, as well as teacher educators and educational researchers may learn to utilize approaches, strategies, and practical hands-on methods for developing stronger parent partnerships. We will also discuss how this orientation to parental engagement is consistent with the goals and objectives of social justice.

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