

## Utah State University Extension Hispanic/Latino Families Education Network

Dr Hector Mendiola, Program Leader for Latino Communities, Utah State University, Logan, UT, 435-760-0581, [hector.mendiola@usu.edu](mailto:hector.mendiola@usu.edu)

### Purpose of Program Effort

The arrival of Conestoga wagons in Utah in the late 1840s has been replaced in 2009 by the ubiquitous taco wagons found on many street corners in Utah's urban centers. The face of Utah and the demographics of those who have migrated here over the years have been changing for some time. New census estimates show that minority populations in Utah grew by 55% between 2000 and 2008. Statewide, 18% of Utah residents are now minorities with nearly 13% being Hispanic/Latino. The Hispanic/Latino population in Utah increased 138.3% from 1990-2000, growing more than twice as fast as the Hispanic/Latino population nationwide. This shift of immigration concentration in Utah grew by a whopping 174% during the past ten years. Every county in Utah has experienced significant minority population growth during this past decade.

Utah State University Extension recognized early on the richness that diversity brings to Utah and launched programs to meet the needs of new immigrant and refugee populations. As Utah begins to demographically look more like the nation as a whole, targeted Extension programs are critical in helping new immigrants succeed in the world of work opportunities provided in the Beehive State economy. Growing minority populations in Utah are job seekers who also tend to be young. Once settled into Utah communities, they have children at a higher rate than the national averages. Current estimates indicate that Utah has the highest percentage of its population under age 5 of any state, with one of the lowest median age populations at 28.7 years of age. The youthful nature of this immigrant population is having a significant impact on Utah schools and communities.



Extension's assessment of the needs of this increasingly diverse immigrant population, particularly the growing Hispanic/Latino population, spawned the development and implementation of programs designed to help new immigrants learn to survive and thrive in their newfound Utah communities. USU Extension quickly recognized that of the 93% foreign born population who reported that they spoke only Spanish, over 40% indicated that they spoke English "not well" or "not at all." The issue of communication has become fundamental to the success of this diverse group. Eight years ago, Utah State University Cooperative Extension, in collaboration with Utah school districts, launched a program integrating USU-developed high-tech computer language learning systems and a touch of individual and

personal family interaction to learn English and Spanish literacy, computer literacy, nutrition and health, food safety, finance, family life, natural resources, agriculture, community and youth development, and workforce preparedness. Today that USU Extension program, through close collaboration and partnership with five Utah school districts, two western states, the National Government of Mexico, and Monterrey Technological Institute in Guadalajara, Mexico, has grown into the respected Hispanic/Latino Families Education Network.

The needs of this diverse immigrant population are many. With a 48% increase in Utah school enrollment by Hispanic/Latinos in the past five years, the ability to develop English language proficiency, Spanish literacy, and computer skills provided a much needed link to success for students and family members alike. Parents who also learn computer skills and English side by side with their children become better equipped to assist with the academic rigor of the schools. This multi-cultural learning environment is critical to stemming the tide of more than 25% of Hispanic/Latinos who drop out of high school before graduating. More than one-third of Utah

Hispanics/Latinos do not have a high school diploma, which seriously influences future employment choices and opportunities to pursue post-secondary education.

Utah State University Extension Hispanic/Latino Families Education Network is focusing on meeting the assessed needs of school-aged children and their parents. The characteristics of the Hispanic/Latino community served include those who have a low level of Spanish language education; those who are basically illiterate in English; those who have the ability to improve learning skills; those who have a desire to improve their economic situation; and those who are willing to work hard, but who are often undocumented and often feel that they are outside the educated, dominant culture in their communities. Working with these Hispanic/Latino audiences has created special challenges. Many of the boys drop out of school to work, the girls are at high risk for pregnancy, and often drop out of school to get married, parents frequently lack the ability to administer appropriate discipline or are exuberant disciplinarians with their children, and many believe that family needs are more important than formal schooling.

### **Basis for Nomination**

Utah State University Extension Hispanic/Latino Families Education Network directly and indirectly benefits participating individuals, families, and Utah communities in many ways. The education network lifts people, opens the door to better employment, greater self-respect, and confidence; and gives a more complete integration into new communities. Anna Maria Guadarrama Estrada, a recent participant in the Families Education Network and the valedictorian of Logan High School, said:

“I am honored to be seen as an example of hope and success by many of you who sit here today, specifically those whom my physical appearance and cultural background reflect. Both academic and non-academic success was never probable for me because I am a female ethnic minority student whose native language is not English and who struggles daily to find the balance between two different cultures, lifestyles, and living circumstances. Because I am the Mexican-American daughter of immigrant parents who reached a level of education no higher than the sixth grade, parents who could get jobs working eight or more hours a day, five to seven days a week for little more than minimum wage. Because I came from a place called “home” that was filled with violence, domestic abuse, alcoholism, financial instability, emotional breakdown and so much more... I was expected to fail. It is with great pride and respect that I have proven this expectation wrong. I have surpassed the stereotypical boundaries of inferiority set upon my race and immigrants of other ethnic minorities.”



Anna, who is a recipient of the program's support, helps us to further understand that this program has the long term potential to reduce the social costs associated with under-education, and the under-employment of Hispanic/Latino populations. This program's courses assist those interested in preparing for post-secondary and other higher education experiences. Utah State University is a benefactor of the network's influences with the Hispanic/Latino community, admitting students prepared to continue their education and reach higher potentials. Educators, community volunteers, and others have been encouraged to become involved in this worthy program. The program has benefitted from university students and others in the communities who have used the network's programs as a place to apply service learning to its fullest extent.

Utah State University Extension Latino Families Education Network offers help in learning English and computer skills using Mexican education programs. The programs are taught in libraries, school computer labs, and in the homes of Hispanic/Latino families.

The program's classes and courses help children succeed in school and broaden horizons of opportunity for furthering skill development and post-secondary education. The program has been successful in helping

- Hispanic/Latino immigrants and families learn and maintain Spanish skills
- students learn techniques for improving the speaking and writing of proper English
- students frequently engage in the program which makes them better prepared academically as reflected in their higher grade achievements

- high school students in the program receive concurrent enrollment and AP credits that transfer to colleges and universities
- immigrant students become the recipients of graduation honors
- 91% of students enroll completely in high school
- participants become better positioned to compete for scholarships and grant opportunities
- parents learn English and computer skills to assist themselves and their children
- participants apply technology through computer skill enhancement that has improved communication in native and foreign languages
- families improve computer skills that has opened opportunities to compete for higher paying jobs in the community
- students taking online courses become better prepared for GED equivalency programs and other vocational skill building opportunities.



These achievements have made a real difference in the lives of more than 1,000 Hispanic/Latinos who have participated in the Families Education Network during the past eight years. A significant number of partnerships have been formed, which have made the Extension Families Network Program viable. The partnership with the Monterrey Technological Institute [Tecnologico De Monterrey prep@net], Red de Incubadoras Sociales, Instituto De Los Mexicanos En El Exterior, Centro de la Familia de Utah, Mexico Government Education Secretary (Plaza Comunitarias – Providence), and the Utah State University Credit Union has enabled the program to offer tutorial courses in Basic Computer Skills and Basic English for A Daily Life. The Mexican Government, through the Mexican Consulate in Salt Lake City, Utah,

has donated \$53,000 this year through an IME-Becas Grant, a program of the Institute of Mexicans Abroad program, to fund these Utah educational centers. Their recognition of the program's excellence, value, and worthiness has stimulated additional scholarships and stipends for Mexican and Latino adults who want to learn English, technology, and obtain a certificate of Mexican elementary and secondary school and vocational studies.

### **Nature of Efforts**

Using cutting edge computer technology, USU Extension is connecting university resources with communities, schools and families in support of the needs of the Hispanic/Latino community. Applications of technology utilizing the Computer Assisted Literacy Offering CALFNES© and a plethora of programs and lessons to assist immigrant populations through <http://www.ocw.usu.edu> network communication and literacy levels of Hispanic/Latino populations have been served. The marriage of Extension and university resources with those of the Mexican government and the Community Learning Centers CCA on-line programs are bringing together educational programs helping families to learn and collaborate with public schools in Utah and Idaho. The flexibility of program operational hours facilitates the collaboration of parents and children working together to improve literacy and bilingual learning of both Spanish and English. Children and parents are engaged in learning basic computer skills; word processing; developing spreadsheet applications; and learning how to use presentation software. Students and their families typically are engaged in five months of basic English immersion and five months of basic living skills and computer applications in this multi-cultural program.

Currently, twelve public schools have opened the doors of their computer labs and multi-cultural learning centers, allowing parents of students and migrant families to have permanent access to the resources of the Hispanic/Latino Families Education Network. Students help their parents become familiar with computer technologies, starting with basic typing skills and advancing to other internet applications including such programs as <http://www.mansioningles.com>, an instant immersion English software program that has a bilingual dictionary with pronunciation and a voice reader called "Talk It". These resources are critical to parents of students--70 % of whom have no more than a third grade education and limited proficiency in basic reading and writing of the Spanish language. Such learning centers have provided an invaluable resource to students and families. Together, parents and children mutually support one another as they learn together, exploring Spanish, English, technologies, and daily living skills necessary to adaptation in their new English speaking communities. Learning centers such as

these provide a place where Extension Specialists, Extension volunteers, teachers, tutors and others have a home to support on-going communication and technology skill improvement leading to successful completion of student coursework and improved job performance with parents and family members.

The educational model of Utah State University Extension Hispanic / Latino Families Education Network, <http://extension.usu.edu/latinonetwork> provides a wide range of online resources supportive of improving life skills, literacy and technology in both elementary and secondary schools. The school partnership for fully operable centers approaches \$50,000 per year in collaborative support of computer use, system maintenance, learning materials, software, and technical support.

The Utah State University Extension Hispanic / Latino Families Education Network would not be possible without the collaboration of partners such as the USU Credit Union who annually offset network membership fees in working with the Technological Institute of Monterrey, Nuevo Leon, Mexico, Social Services Direction. Monterrey Technological Institute, one of the best virtual universities in Latin America, has 150 centers in the USA, and offers to the program tutored courses in Basic Informatics Skills (Spanish) and English Basic for Daily Life, <http://www.cca.org.mx> Providing scholarships to students has also been a key to the programs success. This year the Mexican government has granted \$ 13,000.00 in EMI scholarships provided to Hispanic/Latino scholars providing stipends for continued education at the Logan High School, Technological Multicultural Center and program associated schools in Utah and Idaho. Additionally, the Ministry of Education is providing free access to programs on their network to support the USU Extension Hispanic / Latino Families Education Network.



### Evidence of Positive Changes

The sustainability of programs such as the Utah State University Extension Hispanic / Latino Families Education Network is critical to the Hispanic/Latino community. Since 2001 this program has been a lifeline to more than 1,000 program participants. From the inception of the program 30 children and parents participated in the program, using cobbled-together resources and facilities at Logan High School, Cache County, Utah. During each of the following seven years there has been steady growth in the program with more than 300 participants (2009) now engaged in network programs. Evidence of change as a result of the program includes:

- 91 % of enrolled students complete high school.
- More than half have completed the ten month program.
- A small cadre of participating high school students has now gone onto post-secondary educational experiences.
- Academic performance levels of elementary students participating have improved.
- Parent child interaction has had a measured effect on the drop-out rate of students.
- Community esprit de corp within the Hispanic/Latino community has been affected with fairs, dance groups and other culturally unique activities being developed with multi-cultural center sponsorships.
- A reduction in the number of Hispanic/Latino youth relying on gang activity to fulfill social needs is being turned around with many at-risk youth participating in the network's programs.
- The program attracts young mothers, 98% of whom are under age 38 who in turn impact their children with the values of hard work and educational achievement in newfound communities.



Centers and programs have been established in school districts in Utah and Idaho. Schools engaged in the program include Mountain Home Idaho and the Mountain Home Center; Logan School District and the Wilson, Woodruff, Bridger, Mount Logan Middle School and Logan High School; Granite School District and the Kearns Junior and Senior High Schools, Beehive, Redwood, and Eisenhower elementary schools and the Northwest Junior



High School. Leadership from the school districts involved believes that the program is having a positive impact on the students, families and communities.

*“...innovative approach in reaching out to the adult Hispanic/Latino community serves to educate parents regarding what their children are experiencing here at Logan High School. At the same time, the parents’ coming to the Multicultural Center during the school day allows them to learn using much of the state-of-the-art technology that their children are using... The Utah State University Extension Hispanic / Latino Families Education Network...Hector Mendiola gives Logan High School, the Multicultural Center, and its community outreach efforts credibility. Through these efforts, the Hispanic/Latino community will come to realize that Logan High School and the Logan City School District genuinely care about their schooling success.”*

Stuart Howell  
Logan School District  
Assistant Principal, Logan high School

*“I have great testimonies of mothers attending the Computer classes and especially the ones that have been able to sharpen their skills in Math with the GED classes to the fact that this is really making a great impact on the lives of their children.”*

Jose Roberto Alarcon  
Granite School District  
Coordinator Family Literacy Centers  
CCA Coordinator

## Innovation

The uniqueness and innovation of the Utah State University Extension Hispanic / Latino Families Education Network program is meeting the accessed needs of the Hispanic/Latino communities being served with a program that allows proud cultures to blend and also remain distinctively unique. The creative partnerships between Utah State University Extension, school districts, the Mexican government, the Monterrey Technological Institute and the USU Credit Union has brought to fruition a program supportive of parents, children and families in the Hispanic/Latino community. The program’s innovativeness in linking parents and children in learning centers, supporting one another though educational inquiry, computer technology, and spoken and written language skills acquisition can be found in no other place. This linkage has met with a high degree of success and promises to continue to provide social and economic advantage to those engaged.



Utah State University Extension is excited to be on the cutting edge of technology through meeting the critical needs of this community and providing the necessary infrastructure to support a growing Hispanic/Latino community in the state of Utah and Intermountain West.