

# Digital connections to link home and school:

what educators, librarians, and care providers can learn from studies of Hispanic-Latino families and digital media

Hispanic-Latino<sup>1</sup> parents are optimistic about the educational potential of technology. They believe digital media can improve learning and often cite academic success as a primary motivation for adopting technology (Rideout & Katz, 2016). But for many parents, lack of time, language barriers, and unfamiliarity with the school system may make it difficult to fully engage with their children's formal learning (Louie, 2012; Valdés, 1996). How can educators take advantage of parents' adoption of digital technologies to strengthen home-school connections?



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## be sensitive to parents' access to technology

**Most low- and moderate-income Hispanic families own a mobile device, and many use their mobile devices to access the internet at least occasionally (Rideout & Katz, 2016). There are several ways in which educators can meet families where they are:**

**Leverage the power of video modeling.** Learning from online videos is a common practice in Latino families, especially where literacy barriers and time constraints exist (Levinson, 2014). Free platforms with privacy settings like YouTube allow you to share videos created or recommended by you with specific educational goals in mind.

**Stay in touch through text messages.** Service cuts and data limits are common problems for families who connect to the internet primarily through mobile devices. Text messages may be a reliable way to reach parents with these kinds of limits. A study by Northwestern University found that among parents who participated in a pilot program to receive parenting suggestions via text, one third engaged in them immediately and another third saved the tips for later (Hurwitz et al., 2015).

## help families find and select high-quality resources to support learning

**Choosing the best apps can be overwhelming, especially for Hispanic parents lacking access to information on how to sort and use digital media effectively (Vaala, 2013). Educators and librarians can guide parents and help them gain confidence as they navigate the digital world. (For details on media mentorship, see Additional Resources.)**

**Recommend apps that build on school activities.** Lower- and moderate-income parents have difficulty finding media to practice what children learn at school (Katz et al., 2016). One way to help is by showing parents how to identify

keywords in children's homework assignments and use them to search for apps that develop those specific skills.

**Invite parents to use technology alongside children.** When parents don't trust media, technology-based home-school connections suffer. But when parents are aware of what their kids do online, they are less likely to worry (Lauricella et al., 2016). Investing in programs that show parents how to use digital technologies safely and effectively with their kids can go a long way towards supporting home-school connections.

### Intentional play with Apps en familia

This bilingual guide was designed to help Hispanic parents better understand the variety of ways apps can support children's healthy development and family learning. Read the full guide or share the condensed handout with the families you serve to review activities that help them choose apps and understand how to use them together.  
[www.cooneycenter.org/appguide](http://www.cooneycenter.org/appguide)



<sup>1</sup> Latino and Hispanic are used interchangeably to indicate parents of Hispanic-Latino heritage in this report.

## strengthen and expand cultural connections

When educators provide access to bilingual resources and share an interest in Latino culture, parents feel more empowered to help their children and to communicate with teachers.

**Recommend bilingual educational resources.** Technology can support learning for Hispanic-Latino families by providing access to nuanced explanations of academic topics in several languages and formats (Vaala, 2013). Guide families through bilingual educational sites

and apps and the online resources that review them, such as Khan Academy en Español and Common Sense Latino.

**Celebrate cultural sharing.** Get to know high-quality media from students' ethnic heritage and share it with parents. Examples include Spanish language resources from Juntos con Vroom, Colorín Colorado, and First Book. Encourage parents to share media they access at home and incorporate it in school activities.

## references

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- Rideout, V. J. & Katz, V.S. (2016). *Opportunity for all? Technology and learning in lower-income families*. A report of the Families and Media Project. New York: The Joan Ganz Cooney Center at Sesame Workshop.
- Vaala, S. (2013). *Aprendiendo juntos (Learning together): Synthesis of a cross-sectorial convening on Hispanic-Latino families and digital technologies*. New York: The Joan Ganz Cooney Center at Sesame Workshop.
- Valdés, G. (1996). *Con respeto: Bridging the distances between culturally diverse families and schools*. New York: Teachers College Press.

## resources mentioned

Click to launch in your web browser:

**Apps en familia**

**Khan Academy en Español**

**Common Sense Latino**

**Juntos con Vroom**

**Colorín Colorado**

**First Book**

**Becoming a Media Mentor**

**Digital Storytime: Kids, Apps, and Libraries**

**Family Engagement in the Digital Age**

**Tap, Click, Read**

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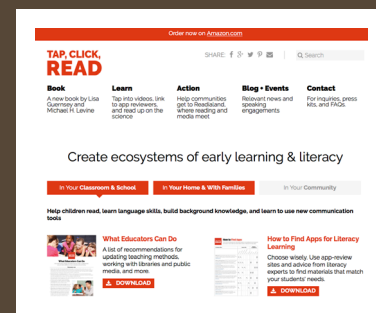
**Additional Resources: Educators and librarians can serve as media mentors, helping families find high-quality digital media.**

**Becoming a Media Mentor: A Guide for Working with Children and Families** by Claudia Haines and Cen Campbell has tips for librarians interested in new ways of integrating digital media in their programming.

**Digital Storytime: Kids, Apps, and Libraries** is a free online course from the Public Library Development Team at the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction about helping parents choose high quality apps.

**Family Engagement in the Digital Age**, edited by Chip Donohue, offers best practices and case studies that link early learning, family engagement, and digital technology.

The website for **Tap, Click, Read: Growing Readers in a World of Screens** by Lisa Guernsey and Michael H. Levine offers downloadable tip sheets for educators, practitioners, and community leaders.



This tip sheet, produced by Amber Levinson and Alexia Raynal at the Joan Ganz Cooney Center at Sesame Workshop and based on research affiliated with the Aprendiendo Juntos Council, is part of a series of Research-to-Practice guides providing recommendations for various stakeholder audiences on how to better serve young children's healthy development and learning needs. For more information, please visit [joanganzcooneycenter.org/researchtopractice](http://joanganzcooneycenter.org/researchtopractice).