Ready for kindergarten:
An evaluation of Multnomah County Library’s Listos para el kínder program

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About Education Northwest

Founded as a nonprofit corporation in 1966, Education Northwest builds capacity in schools, families, and communities through applied research and development. We partner with public, private, and community-based organizations to address educational inequities and improve student success. While most of our work centers on the Pacific Northwest, our evaluations, technical assistance, and research studies have national impact and provide timely and actionable results.

This final report documents Education Northwest’s findings and recommendations resulting from an evaluation of Multnomah County Library’s Listos para el kínder program. This evaluation was made possible through grant support from the Library and Services and Technology Act.

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Cover Image

Photo provided by the Multnomah County Library Listos para el kínder program.
Executive Summary

*Listos para el kinder (Listos)* is a 12-week kindergarten readiness program offered by the Multnomah County Library for Spanish-speaking families. Through a culturally responsive curriculum delivered in Spanish, the program aims to prepare students with the academic and social skills needed to succeed in kindergarten and provide parents with the tools to support their children’s academic growth.

Education Northwest worked with *Listos* to conduct an external evaluation of the program from November 2015 through May 2016. We spoke with 25 parents in three parent focus groups to understand the experiences of families in the program and their perceptions of skills gained through *Listos*. In addition, we interviewed nine kindergarten teachers to gather their perceptions of the kindergarten readiness of former *Listos* students and the involvement of their parents in their schooling. Data gathered from parents and teachers led to the following findings.

Family experiences in and perceptions of *Listos*

- **Parents most often learned about *Listos* through the library and community outreach and referrals.** Of the parents that have participated in *Listos*, 86 percent reported learning about the program either through community outreach referrals or through library activities, such as storytime.

- **Students and parents felt comfortable participating in *Listos*.** Parents appreciated that the program leveraged familial linguistic and cultural assets by having the program in Spanish and infusing the curriculum with cultural symbols.

- **Facilitators made learning fun for children and parents.** Program staff’s enthusiasm and energy level was highly esteemed by parents. Parents expressed that their approach helped create high levels of engagement among parents and students. Furthermore, parents appreciated the high expectations that program staff placed on students.

- **Families embedded what they learned in *Listos* in home routines.** Parents used strategies learned in *Listos* to provide learning opportunities for their children throughout the day. They also reported reading more frequently at home using strategies learned in *Listos*.

- **Parents gained understanding of how children learn and their role in the process.** Through participating in the program, parents learned about their child’s learning process and the importance of their active involvement in that process. They expressed that they are now better able to advocate for their child at school.

- **Parents observed social and academic growth in their children during *Listos*.** Parents noted numerous social and academic gains made by their children, such as comfort being away from parents and the ability to follow directions, count, and write their name.
Kindergarten transitions

- **Listos participants experienced smooth transitions to kindergarten.** Teachers described the students as being familiar with school routines, exhibiting enthusiasm for learning, and overall socio-emotional preparedness for kindergarten compared to their peers.

- **Teachers perceived Listos participants to be more academically prepared compared to Spanish-speaking peers.** Compared to their Spanish-speaking peers, 9 of the 10 Listos students represented in the teacher interviews had higher literacy skills and 8 of 10 had higher math skills at the beginning of kindergarten. Teachers also reported that students made exceptional progress, especially in literacy.

- **Teachers perceived parents to be more supportive and involved than other Spanish-speaking parents.** Teachers believed that parents were supportive because Listos students had excellent attendance and high rates of homework completion. In addition, teachers expressed having regular and effective communication with parents.

Based on parent and teacher perceptions, Listos facilitators created a welcoming environment that enabled students to gain important kindergarten readiness skills and gave parents the confidence and tools to support their child. Teachers described the students as being more socially and academically prepared compared to their Spanish-speaking peers and their parents to be highly involved. As Listos moves forward and attempts to increase its impact, we offer the following recommendations:

- **More consistent training of co-facilitators.** Co-facilitators who help deliver the program vary in teaching experience and participation in Listos training. To deliver the program with consistent quality, Multnomah County Library should consider developing a core group of Listos facilitators with similar abilities/characteristics.

- **Continued recruitment of families outside of the library system.** The program should continue to give priority to students who are not already accessing library services. In addition, recruitment can be improved by collecting more data on program referrals and by coordinating outreach efforts across the library system.

- **Explore the possibility of differentiating sessions to parents depending on age of child.** Parents expressed the desire for their children to receive more targeted curriculum based on their age. Although separate strands may not be feasible in the short term given available resources, Multnomah County Library should consider differentiating some Listos sessions based on age. In the meantime, parent workshop offerings can be expanded.

- **Embed an evaluation component into the program.** While the program seems to be having a positive impact on students, a more robust evaluation is needed to accurately attribute this impact to the program.