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Mamás as Policymaking Partners? A Case Study of Latina Immigrant Mothers of Emergent
Bilinguals Engaged in Districtwide Decision Making

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree Doctor of
Philosophy in Education

by

Diana Alicia Porras

2019

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Mamás as Policymaking Partners? A Case Study of Latina Immigrant Mothers of Emergent Bilinguals Engaged in Districtwide Decision Making

by

Diana Alicia Porras

Doctor of Philosophy in Education

University of California, Los Angeles, 2019

Professor Patricia C. Gándara, Co-Chair

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Participatory policymaking has been promoted as an approach that can help address inequities within public education systems. In theory, it disrupts traditional hierarchies of power by distributing decision-making authority among a broader group of stakeholders (Anderson, 1998; Fung, 2004). Through meaningful dialogue and deliberation, participatory policymaking can lead to better informed, responsive policies (Fung, 2004; Olivos, 2006; Trujillo, 2012). This theoretical perspective is reflected in California's Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF). An important provision in LCFF is the Local Control and Accountability Plan (LCAP). Each public school district in the state is required to create these three-year plans that describe the goals, programs, and investments made to support student learning and outcomes (Cal. Educ Code § 52060). In creating, evaluating, and updating their LCAP document, district officials are required to include historically marginalized parents. Moreover, superintendents are mandated to include

District English Learner Advisory Committees (DELACs), parent-led committees focused on the needs of EL students, in their district LCAP processes (California Department of Education, 2018a). Yet, scholars have found long-standing trouble schools have had communicating with, connecting to, and involving parents of EL students (Gándara & Contreras, 2009; Gándara, Maxwell-Jolly, & Driscoll, 2005) and the habitual devaluing of Latin@ immigrant families (Olivos, 2006; Yosso, 2006). It is within this context that LCAPs are being developed.

This dissertation centers 14 Latina immigrant *mamás* (mothers) active in their district's DELAC. Drawing on meeting observations, interviews, *pláticas*, and document analyses, this yearlong case study examines the involvement of *las mamás* during 2016-2017. What emerges are accounts of struggles to preserve in the face of suppression and control. Findings highlight factors that prompted these particular *mamás* to become involved in district committees: their aspirations for their children's success in school, their desires to understand how to navigate the U.S. education system, invitations from staff and colleagues, and the initial experiences many of them had with Head Start and/or the Migrant Education Program. *Mamás* recognized their role and purpose as parent *representatives* who were at these meetings to advocate for the needs of EL students districtwide. *Las mamás* were also cultural brokers (Ishimaru, 2006), who through a variety of ways were building capacity and capital among Latin@ parents in the district. While district officials expressed an interest in wanting to involve parents in LCAP processes, their actions created barriers that ultimately overtook the efforts of *mamás* who wanted to be heard and included. Findings from this study can inform future research and practice on ways to create meaningful processes that bring in Latin@ immigrant parents as policymaking partners.

The dissertation of Diana Alicia Porras is approved.

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2019

Para mi familia

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Preface

My understanding about the world is grounded in the knowledge I inherited from my parents. These insights I acquired through countless talks, stories, interactions, and observations made with and about them. Our *pláticas* (fluid two-way conversations; Fierros & Delgado Bernal, 2016) were especially influential, exposing me to my parents' knowledge and beliefs about religion, politics, horticulture, history, cooking, finance, and pop culture among other areas. It is through these *pláticas* that I have learned my parents' personal histories, their struggles growing up *en la pobreza* (in poverty), toiling in the fields as farmworkers, meeting and marrying, and finally becoming small business and homeowners. I carry with me my father's stories about the discrimination and injustices he faced as a young Oaxaqueño living in the Salinas Valley. One of the first immigrants from his Mexican home state of Oaxaca to arrive to Salinas, my father was able to carve out a stable, successful life for himself and his family. His example has taught me the meaning of hard work and perseverance.

It was my mother, however, who instilled in me the importance of being involved in schools and advocating for our community. From preschool until my final years in high school, my mother was always engaged in my schools. She was a teacher's aide in my kindergarten classroom, an active booster at my high school, and a member of the district advisory committees throughout my schooling. My teachers and principals knew her, and she knew them. My earliest memories include scenes of my older sister and I being dropped off at the on-site childcare rooms, so that my mother could participate in PTA and school site council meetings. An even more vivid memory I carry with me is of the time when my high school principal asked my mother to provide Spanish translation at a large school-wide meeting. I felt so proud seeing her at the front of the cafeteria, next to the principal, exercising her critical bilingual skills to bridge the linguistic and cultural differences among attendees. It was through action that *Mamá*

(Mom) taught me how to be an advocate for one's own children and those of our Latin@¹ community.

From our *pláticas* in the home, I learned how my mother first became a teacher's aide, a job that would help her escape the work in *los files* (the harvesting fields). The account begins when a fellow fieldworker asked my mother for her help enrolling her children into school. My mother's colleague only spoke Spanish, but she knew my mother was bilingual. My mother agreed to help and accompanied her colleague to the local school to enroll the children. It was during that visit that the school secretary urged my mother to apply for a job at the school. Recognizing my mother's skills as a language and cultural broker (Auerbach, 2006; Henderson, Mapp, Johnson, & Davies, 2007; Ishimaru et al., 2016), the secretary pointed out the school's need for bilingual Spanish speakers to help support the work of its teachers. My mother's powerful account illustrated to me both the importance of service to our community and the salience of bilingualism in our struggle for justice. Later, my mother's involvement in schools as an aide and an engaged bilingual parent would expose her to the whispered discriminatory comments made by teachers and administrators about farmworker families. Listening and learning from my mother's example has shaped my knowledge and understanding about the public school system and its historic deficit framing of Chicana/Latina families. These critical lessons fuel my passion to engage in the struggle for social justice through civic engagement. These experiences have also provided me with a unique "insider" (Keating, 2006) perspective, bringing me closer to *las mamás* (the mothers) in my project.

The education I gained from my mother inspires me to want to understand what motivates Latina mothers to push for their voices to be heard and to be included in policymaking

¹ Striving for inclusion, I use '@' to signify female, transgender, male, and non-gender conforming people. Intertwining "a" and "o" is also a way to challenge the gender hierarchy present in the Spanish language (Fierros & Delgado Bernal, 2016). I use "Latinas" when referring to persons who identify as females.

processes. It also moves me to enlist methodological tools that respect and honor the wisdom and sensibilities of *mamás* (Villenas, Godinez, Delgado Bernal, & Elenes, 2006).

Through this study, my intent is to center the insights and experiences of Latina mothers, and bring into focus important life aspects about *mamás* as they take up their roles as advocates of emergent bilingual children in parent advisory committees. By shedding light on their experiences and the consequences of their engagement, my work strives to challenge historically held hegemonic notions about who can and should be recognized as legitimate contributors in education policymaking.

Chapter 1: Introduction

Creating and upholding a just and responsive public education system continues to be a leading issue in the U.S. Our nation's education leaders have an obligation to develop and maintain a system that promotes excellence and equitable access to *all* students (U.S. Department of Education [ED], 2011). Yet, when it comes to immigrant and emergent bilingual² youth of color, leaders have failed to deliver the “kind of public education that arms people with an intelligence capable of free and independent thought” (Darling-Hammond, 2006, p. 13), the very training needed to participate in a global, knowledge-based economy (Darling-Hammond, 2006) and to constructively engage in U.S. democratic systems (Rogers, Saunders, Terriquez, & Velez, 2008). In fact, researchers have found that schools in the U.S. are “among the most unequal in the industrialized world in terms of both inputs and outcomes” (Darling-Hammond, 2006, p. 13).

Inequalities in spending, curriculum offerings, and access to qualified teachers have been linked to achievement disparities found along racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic lines (Darling-Hammond, 2006). Moreover, immigrant youth and students classified as English learners (ELs) have typically been consigned to “curriculum tracks and services that provide little more than an impoverished version of a rudimentary education in English” (Gándara & Rumberger, 2009, p. 775). As a result, emergent bilingual students have been found to be one of the lowest achieving student groups in the country (Chrispeels & Rivero, 2001; Gándara & Rumberger, 2009). Recently adopted policy reforms attempt to correct these inequalities by using participatory

² Following García (2009), Menken (2013), and Bale (2015), I have adopted the term *emergent bilingual* to refer to students who come from homes where a language other than English is spoken and, by adding English to the linguistic skills and knowledge they already possess, are becoming bi/multilingual. I use this term interchangeably with English learners (EL) and am reminded of Dr. Eddie Fergus, an accomplished scholar of education, who said, “I am an English learner; always have been, always will be...because I’ve been existing in duality, in my head and also verbally” (2013, 5:24). I chose to use emergent bilingual alongside EL to recognize the linguistic skills these students are developing.

decision-making processes that give historically marginalized parents of emergent bilingual students a greater say in local decision making.

Participatory policymaking has often been promoted as an approach that can help achieve equity within public education systems. In theory, it disrupts traditional hierarchies of power as it distributes decision-making authority among a broader group of stakeholders (Anderson, 1998; Fung, 2004). Scholars have argued that including parents, a key stakeholder group, in school governance can lead to the adoption of policies and practices that are more responsive to the learning and engagement needs of underserved children (Fung, 2004; Olivos, 2006; Trujillo, 2012). Rogers, Freelon, and Terriquez (2012) reasoned, “the unique experiences and perspectives of parents can inform decisions about how best to allocate limited resources and how to shape educational programs” (p. 58). Moreover, with proper support and training, parents engaged in a shared governance process feel empowered to hold institutional actors like school board members and superintendents accountable for policy decisions that lead to poor student outcomes (Fung, 2004; Olivos, 2006; Trujillo, 2012) and bring fresh perspectives and types of information to policy discussions (Nabatchi, 2010).

Still, many of these participatory decision-making processes have been imposed upon schools and districts by outside federal and state legislatures, often times assuming administrators and their staff have the know-how and are willing and ready to collaborate with emergent bilingual and immigrant families. These top-down approaches ignore important historical and local contexts. Scholars have found low-income, racial, and language minority parents have historically been framed as inferior, culturally flawed, and as incapable of making a valuable contribution to schools without first receiving help from *experts* (Ishimaru, 2014; Lightfoot, 2004; López, & Stoelting, 2010). These perspectives about immigrant families, and more specifically about Latin@ immigrant families, persist today (e.g., Olivos, 2012; Suárez-

Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2013). For instance, Gándara, Maxwell-Jolly, and Driscoll (2005) have found that schools often have trouble communicating with, connecting to, and understanding emergent bilingual students and their families. According to Auerbach (2012) and others, many educational leaders are unprepared to meet the challenges of collaborating with families, especially in districts with a legacy of distrust and marginalization (Bryk & Schneider, 2002; Henderson et al., 2007).

Scholars have also identified numerous barriers that are known to obstruct participatory policymaking processes (Anderson, 1998; Fege, 2006). For instance, they have found that “voices of minority, less educated, diffident, or culturally subordinate participants are often drowned out by those who are wealthy, confident, accustomed to management, or otherwise privileged” (Fung, 2004, p. 5). According to Anderson (1998), collusion, stacking of committees, retaliation, and tokenism have also been uncovered in shared governance efforts. A lack of appropriate and consistent interpretation and translation has also constrained effective communication (Chrispeels & Rivero, 2001). These and other concerns often go unaddressed by faraway officials who have passed regulations mandating parent inclusion at local levels.

Still, participatory efforts that include Latina immigrant mothers could lead to policies and practices that transform the current academic experiences and outcomes of emergent bilingual students. But according to researchers, to be truly effective, decision-making processes would have to take Latina mothers’ ideas and insights into account through deliberative actions (Anderson, 1998; Olivos, 2006), where participants make decisions through a process of structured reasoning in which they offer proposals and arguments to one another (Fung, 2004, p. 4). District officials would in turn have to recognize the value and capacities of Latina mothers (Henderson et al., 2007), and demonstrate their respect and regard for them (Henderson et al., 2007). They would also have to be equipped with the skills and knowledge to carry out processes

that elicit meaningful engagement of Latina mothers (Auerbach, 2009). Moreover, Latina mothers would have to see themselves as “critical coinvestigators involved in dialogue, reflection, and action” (Olivos, 2012, p. 111), and recognize that their own knowledge and skills hold value. Legislation championed by some federal and state policymakers also seem to recognize the importance of parent voices in decision-making processes. In fact, direct parental involvement in district policymaking processes is a function that is protected by federal (Rogers et al., 2008) and state regulation (California Department of Education [CDE], 2014).

California’s Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF) legislation signals policymakers’ support for direct parent involvement in school governance. Designed to create more equitable educational opportunities and outcomes for poor and minority public school children (Brown, 2013), LCFF was carefully crafted to include parent involvement as a tool to help district administrators construct, implement, and evaluate the effectiveness of their district-wide policy decisions. The provisions in LCFF for parent inclusion were also intended to increase accountability in district governance.

Returning decision-making power to the local level, California’s new LCFF law provides additional funding at the school district level³ to support low-income, foster, and English learner youth (CDE, 2016c). At the same time, through a provision in the law called the Local Control and Accountability Plan (LCAP), the legislation requires that districts include families and community members in deciding how to spend the \$48 billion in education funds⁴ (CDE, 2019a) distributed by the state. Each district must develop a three-year plan, called an LCAP, outlining how they will invest their funds (i.e., in which programs, for which students, with what goals)

³ California’s Local Control and Accountability Plan and accompanying provision known as the Local Control Funding Formula apply to county offices of education, charter schools, and public school districts (CDE, 2016c).

⁴ A little over \$48 billion in LCFF funds were distributed to school districts during the 2015-2016 fiscal year, one year before the start of this study. During the 2016-2017 fiscal year, the year of observation, school districts were distributed more than \$50 billion in LCFF funds (CDE, 2019a).

and how they have included families in their decision-making processes. Moreover, the law specifically calls for the direct input from historically marginalized families, including Latin@ parents of emergent bilinguals, in planning and evaluation processes (CDE, 2016c). According to the regulation, “the superintendent of the school district shall present the...plan or annual update...to the English learner parent advisory committee...for review and comment” (Cal. Educ Code § 52062). At the district level this would be the District English Learner Advisory Committee, or DELAC, a parent-led group that existed well before the passage of LCAP⁵, and a group whose responsibilities already included advising district officials on English learner programs and services (CDE, 2018a).

Prior to the passage of LCFF in 2013, school districts throughout California were required to form DELACs if they served 51 or more ELs in their districts (CDE, 2018a). DELAC areas of responsibility included advising district officials about master plans for ELs, needs assessments, teacher and teacher aide compliance requirements, reclassification procedures, and written notifications sent to parents and guardians (CDE, 2018a). With the adoption of LCFF, DELAC responsibilities were expanded to include advising district officials about the goals, actions, and expenditures contained within their LCAP. The LCAP would detail the programs and services that would be provided for all students in the districts as well as those explicitly for specific targeted subgroups of students, including ELs (Cal. Educ Code § 52060).

While the language in the legislation is clear about the inclusion of DELAC in LCAP formulation and evaluation processes, LCFF is ambiguous in describing to what extent parent involvement must take place. The policy stipulates school districts must “consult with...parents...in developing a local control and accountability plan” (Cal. Educ Code § 52060)

⁵ In 1977, Article 3 of the Bilingual-Bicultural Education Act of 1976 was added to the California Education Code, formally requiring school districts with more than 50 ELs to establish a districtwide advisory committee (California Legislative Information, n.d.).

and must seek “parent input in making decisions for the school district and each individual schoolsite” (Cal. Educ Code § 52060). Also, before the school board can adopt its LCAP plan, the superintendent must present a draft plan to parents for their “review and comment” and the superintendent must “respond, in writing to comments received” (Cal. Educ Code § 52062). Ultimately, LCFF leaves open to interpretation *how* parents, school districts, and staff officials conceptualize and operationalize parent input and participation in the process. Through close investigation and analysis, the actions that are undertaken to involve parents in the LCAP processes could reveal who is participating in the process, under what conditions, and toward what ends (Anderson, 1998).

This dissertation centers on Latina immigrant mothers who are active in the DELAC of the *Rancho los Nietos Unified School District*⁶, a highly regarded district in California. I have selected to focus on Latina mothers because of the important role they play in Latin@ families, as their children’s first teachers, and as holders of unique knowledge about their children and their community (Delgado Bernal, 2001). Moreover, with 1.2 million emergent bilingual students in the state, of which more than 80 percent speak Spanish at home (CDE, 2018b), Latina mothers hold a potentially powerful position in the state’s participatory decision-making processes as their input is critical in developing district LCAP plans. Plus, as a Chicana mother and daughter of a Latina mother who was also active in school and district committees, I have a deep interest in wanting to understand the ways in which Latina mothers in particular understand their roles in this process and the contributions achieved through their sacrifices of time and effort.

⁶ Names of all persons, organizations, and locations have been changed to protect identities and ensure anonymity.

The high academic outcomes of most of its schools have led *Rancho los Nietos* to be considered one of the most successful urban districts in the nation. Administrators from across the state and around the world visit the school district every year, curious to learn how they could replicate the successes found in *Rancho los Nietos*. However, a closer look at student data reveals an unequal level of success between emergent bilingual students and the general student population in the district. During the 2013-2014 school year one quarter of students in the *Rancho los Nietos* school district were classified as English learners. Approximately 90 percent of those EL students spoke Spanish at home (DataQuest, 2013). That proportion has remained comparatively consistent over the last five years (Education Data Partnership [Ed-Data], 2018). The redesignation⁷ rate has also remained relatively flat, hovering between 10 and 12 percent since 2009 (Ed-Data, 2018). Annually, few students designated as EL have been able to demonstrate the level of English proficiency required to be reclassified out of EL status, impacting the type of classes they are eligible to take, effectively steering them away from a college path. For instance, *Rancho los Nietos* is a “school of choice” district, meaning students in the 8th grade apply for the high school and/or high school program they want to attend, but their choices are restricted to only those schools and programs where they have met the qualifying criteria. The most competitive high schools and programs require a minimum score on the state’s standardized test in English Language Arts. The minimum score is also the minimum score students need to be considered for reclassification out of EL. Also, enrollment data for the district’s various high schools show very few EL students attend the most competitive schools (ranging between 1 and 2 percent of the entire student population at those schools) and a larger

⁷ Redesignation (also called reclassification) refers to English learner students who have met their district’s requirements demonstrating they have attained a level of English proficiency comparable to their native English speaker counterparts (CDE, 2016a).

portion of EL students attend the less competitive high schools and alternative high schools (ranging from 11 to 32 percent of the entire student population; DataQuest, 2013).

Compared to their mainstream peers, emergent bilingual students in the district also have poorer academic outcomes. For example, in 2015-2016 school year, only 9 percent of EL students met or exceeded the state standards in English Language Arts/Literacy (ELA), compared to 50 percent of English Only (EO) and Initial Fluent English Proficient (IFEP) students (Ed-Data, 2018). In the math portion of the exam, 8 percent of EL students met or exceeded the state standards, compared to 36 percent of EO students and 45 percent of IFEP students (Ed-Data, 2018). In 2013-2014, 36 percent of EL students in the district passed the English portion of the California High School Exit Exam (CAHSEE), this compared to the district's overall passing rate of 80 percent (Ed-Data, 2018). Only 59 percent of EL students passed the Math portion of the CAHSEE, compared to 85 percent of the general student population (Ed-Data, 2018). Additionally, only 74 percent of EL students graduated with their cohort in 2015-2016, less than the non-EL student graduation rate of 87 percent (Ed-Data, 2018). During the same year, 15 percent of all EL students left high school without completing their studies, compared to 8 percent of the overall student population (Ed-Data, 2018). Moreover, EL students comprised 33 percent of those students who dropped out of high school, when they only comprise 23 percent of the overall student population (Ed-Data, 2018). The school district also has a large "long term" EL student population. These are students who have been enrolled in U.S. schools for six years or more years and are still classified as EL. During 2015-2016, 22 percent of EL students at *Rancho los Nietos* were "long term" and another 11 percent were at risk of becoming "long term" (DataQuest, 2013).

Given the educational outcomes of EL students in the district, *Rancho los Nietos* offers an interesting and important context in which to carry out research on the experiences of Latina

immigrant mothers in their local district's participatory decision-making processes. Close examination of the development of the *Rancho los Nietos*'s LCAP provides an opportunity to understand how DELAC mothers conceptualize and actualize their role in LCAP, and with what consequence.

Central to my study are 14 Latina immigrant mothers who are active in DELAC. By active, I mean they consistently attend every DELAC meeting. The 14 participants are diverse in the sense that some are more outspoken than others; some are officers in DELAC while others are at-large members; and some are very involved in the building capacity and capital among other parents, while some of my other participants are less involved. (Selection criteria and recruitment processes used in this study are explained in chapter 3. Portraits with more details about each *mamá* are provided in chapter 4.) I refer to the 14 participants as *las mamás* to recognize and honor their heritage, identity, and shared history as Latinas. Moreover, this is how they describe themselves and what they call each other. Choosing to use the Spanish word *mamás* is an attempt not to other them, rather to highlight their unique positions and import in a space that was not constructed with them in mind (i.e., school district governance committees). Their active participation in school and district advisory committees disrupts the historic hegemonic notions that Latin@ families do not value education (Gándara & Contreras, 2009; Ishimaru, 2014; Lightfoot, 2004; Valencia & Black, 2002; Yosso, 2006).

Research Questions

Through this project, I seek to uncover the lived experiences of *las mamás* active in the *Rancho los Nietos* DELAC, and to learn what led to and informs their engagement in the committee. Striving to contextualize the experiences of *las mamás* of *Rancho los Nietos* also necessitates understanding how district officials involved in the LCAP process (e.g., DELAC Coordinator, LCAP Director, LCAP Asst. Director, and Superintendent) perceive and carry out

their work with the Latina DELAC members. Drawing on participatory policymaking theory and family-schools partnership literature (Olivos, 2006; Anderson, 1998; Fung, 2004; Henderson et al., 2007), ethnography (Anderson-Levitt, 2006), Chicana/Latina feminist epistemology (Fierros & Delgado Bernal, 2016), and qualitative case study design (Yin, 2005; Merriam, 2009; Creswell, 2013), the purpose of my project is to bear witness to social and political change experienced and accomplished by *las mamás* as they engage in LCAP governance processes in the *Rancho los Nietos Unified School District*.

This research is guided by the following questions:

- What prompts Latina immigrant *mamás* to become involved in school and district committees?
- What are the understandings of Latina DELAC members about their purpose and role in LCAP?
- What are district officials' understandings of the purpose and role of Latin@ parents of emergent bilinguals in LCAP?
- How are *las mamás* participating in LCAP? What are their experiences in the process? What are the personal, interpersonal, and programmatic consequences of their participation?

These questions are especially critical given LCFF's goals of improving current educational outcomes of emergent bilinguals through parent involvement. The findings and implications of this study hope to provide fresh data that informs and shapes the ways in which policymakers and practitioners understand, relate to, and create meaningful participatory opportunities for families of emergent bilinguals, a critical component to the success of the new LCFF law.

Purpose of the Study

My study closely examines and describes the role and experiences of Latina immigrant mothers engaged in district policymaking. This work seeks to make sense of the engagement of *las mamás* within official institutional structures sanctioned by government agencies, i.e., DELACs. I have elected to focus on Latina mothers because, as parents to 3.8 million Spanish-

dominant English learners (ELs) in the U.S. (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2016), Latina mothers represent a potentially influential stakeholder group in education. Historically, they have been left out of the decision-making processes that directly affect their children. Yet, state and federal policymakers seem to recognize the importance of including their voices in policies that are made at the local school district level. Few empirical studies, however, have examined their engagement in district sanctioned decision-making bodies such as DELAC. This area of inquiry is particularly important given the aims of California's LCFF legislation.

The purpose of my study is to uncover whether Latina mothers are included in LCAP processes as policymaking partners, why and how Latina mothers actualize their roles as school district parent representatives, and the consequences of their involvement. Centering the insights of *las mamás* brings to light the lived experiences that inform their understandings of their roles and the actions they take in advocating for emergent bilingual children. My study also brings to light of how district officials engage with *las mamás*. Exploring district representatives' understandings about the role of Latina mothers in LCAP provides an important complementary aspect of the LCAP process that unfolds in the *Rancho los Nietos Unified School District*. By closely analyzing the actors, actions, and interplay related to LCAP, this study reveals the complex dynamics of Latina parent sensibilities and agency, district practices and policies, and the potential implications of Latina immigrant parent engagement.

Significance of Study

The heart of my study explores why, how, and with what effect *las mamás* advocate for the educational opportunities of emergent bilingual students within institutional structures like DELAC. It also uncovers the approaches and responses made by district officials that enable or prevent the meaningful collaborative participation of *las mamás*. This study disrupts the mainstream storyline about who holds legitimate, valuable knowledge (Calderón, Delgado

Bernal, Pérez Huber, Malagón, & Vélez, 2012), and who is capable of engaging in education policymaking (Delgado Bernal, 1998). Ultimately, this work expands on what is known about a participatory policymaking process that strives to achieve educational equity by involving historically marginalized parents in district decision making.

Delimitations and Limitations

Given the purpose and goals of my study, I have chosen to carry out a qualitative case study using an ethnographic lens that is focused on the Latina immigrant mothers who are active DELAC members in the *Rancho los Nietos Unified School District*. Thus, the findings of this study are limited to the *Rancho los Nietos* school district. In striving to produce a firsthand understanding and experiences of *las mamás*, the findings may not apply to other educational institution. Still, the composition of the district, an ethnically, linguistically, and socio-economically diverse student body situated in an urban center, parallels the compositions of many other districts around the state and across the country.

By design, this project is focused on the Latina DELAC members, and effectively leaves out the perspectives and experiences of Latino men and non-Latina DELAC members (although I have rarely observed any Latino men, or any other group of parents participate in district DELAC meetings). Nor does it include the perspective and experiences of Latina mothers who are not DELAC members and those who do not attend DELAC meetings. It also does not include the insights of parents who are not involved in district advisory committees. Leaving out these other parents narrows my analysis to only those Latinas who are active DELAC members in the district.

I recognize that my study examines only one segment of the entire LCAP process, and it does not account for the interactions that district officials have with other parent groups whose input is encouraged in LCFF (e.g., Title I parent groups). However, collecting these additional

interactions would broaden the scope of my project and shift the focus away from the Latina immigrant mothers. While gathering the accounts of other parents involved in the LCAP would be important, I have chosen to begin here, with *las mamás* who are active in DELAC and center their wisdom, insights, and experiences as potential policymaking partners. My hope is to bring to light powerful counterstories, stories that recount the experiences and perspectives of *las mamás* that challenge hegemonic storylines and raise critical consciousness about social and racial injustice (Yosso, 2006, p. 10). These powerful accounts disrupt historically held notions about Latina *mamás* and the ways in which they engage with school districts. In the face of adversity, tension, and suppression, *las mamás* of *Rancho los Nietos* continue to participate in DELAC and struggle to have their voices heard.

The adoption of LCFF offers school district officials a renewed chance at cultivating meaningful collaborative partnerships with historically marginalized parents. Given their unique insights and understandings about the impact policies and practices are having on the ground, the engagement of parents of ELs in school governance can shape the decisions made to transform the success of emergent bilingual students. My study centers the voices and insights of Latina immigrant mothers and brings to the forefront the insights and experiences of *mamás* who struggle to influence policy and practice in the district. LCFF's call for collaborative policymaking and the known challenges districts face in creating meaningful partnerships with families of emergent bilingual students further signals the importance and urgency of my study.

Summary of Chapters

Chapter 2 analyzes the scholarship that informs the conceptual framework and design of this study. The chapter begins with a close reading of the LCFF policy, the provisions related to LCAP, and LCAP documents published by the California Department of Education (CDE), to grasp the intent, roles, and processes promoted in the legislation. Then, I turn to literature that

examines how Latin@ parents have been treated by schools, family-school partnerships, and the involvement of parents in local governance to gain a deeper understanding what is currently known about the experiences and inclusion of marginalized parents in schools and education governance. Barriers to parent involvement and parent empowerment are also discussed, as these are important concepts to unpack and take into account in relation to meaningful parent involvement in LCAP.

Chapter 3 contains a discussion about the methodology informing the design of this research, the data collection and analysis strategies used, and a description of my positionality as a researcher in this context and the relationship and connection I share with *las mamás*. Chapter 4 and chapter 5 contain portraits of *las mamás* (chapter 4) and district officials (chapter 5) who participated in this study. Chapter 6 provides background information about DELAC and the other committee spaces where LCAP discussions take place in the district. Chapter 7 contains the findings related to research questions 2-4 of this study. Finally, chapter 8 addresses the implications of the findings of this work and includes recommendations for policy and practice, and areas of future research.

Chapter 2: Literature Review and Conceptual Framework

In reviewing the literature for this project, I focused on understanding the context in which Latin@ immigrant families were being asked by state policymakers to engage in a participatory decision-making process. The following literature review includes examination of the key factors, concepts, and variables that have shaped family-school partnerships and participatory policymaking processes, and conditions that create effective partnerships and processes, and barriers that obstruct meaningful parent engagement. It also includes a discussion on the deficit framing of Latin@ families, unique challenges faced by undocumented and immigrant Latin@ families, and their experiences in exercising their voices in school decision-making processes.

The literature review begins with an examination of the LCFF policy, and its intent, roles, and processes as communicated through the California Education Code text and related LCAP documents published by the CDE. A close reading of these texts uncovered the broad and vague explanation of the role and purpose of parent inclusion in LCAP. Findings from recent studies published about the LCFF are discussed to understand what is known about the implementation process that had taken place so far in districts across California.

The chapter concludes with the conceptual framework that informed the analysis and interpretation of the data collected for this study. Specifically, participatory policymaking theory and family-school partnership theory were the theoretical perspectives that framed this study. Taken together, these theories provided guidance on assessing the nature and quality of the actors, actions, and outcomes of the LCAP process in *Rancho los Nietos*.

Local Control Funding Formula

LCAP is an important provision within the Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF). In 2013, when California Governor Jerry Brown signed into law the Local Control Funding

Formula (LCFF), he set out to create a more equitable public education finance system. In his “State of the State Address,” Gov. Brown (2013) explained the intent behind the new equity-minded funding approach:

This formula recognizes the fact that a child in a family making \$20,000 a year or speaking a language different from English or living in a foster home requires more help. Equal treatment for children in unequal situations is not justice. (Education section, para. 8)

In his speech, Gov. Brown acknowledged that specific students, including children who speak “a language different from English” require more help. One solution to this problem was reforming the state’s funding model. Streamlining the old distribution method, LCFF did away with the previous revenue limits and numerous highly restrictive categorical and block grants. In consolidating many of these funding streams into one, LCFF instead apportioned monies to districts based on student demographic data (WestEd, 2014). Additionally, the new formula paid special attention to the educational experiences and achievement outcomes of three targeted student groups: English learners (EL), low-income students (based on eligibility for the free or reduced lunch program), and foster youth (Cal. Educ Code § 52060). The new allocation process awarded a base amount of funding to districts for every student enrolled in their schools. Districts would then receive an additional 20 percent in supplemental grant funds for every student classified as EL, low-income, or foster (CDE, 2016c). Finally, another 50 percent in funding would be provided for every EL, low-income, or foster student making up more than 55 percent of a district’s entire student population (CDE, 2016c).

The substantial increases in funding specifically generated by students identified as EL, low-income, and foster youth acknowledges the additional challenges faced by historically marginalized students, particularly those who were attending high-poverty schools (Bersin, Kirst, & Liu, 2008). As Bersin, Kirst, and Liu (2008) have argued, students who attend high-poverty schools often experience far fewer learning opportunities, lower parental involvement, and

greater levels of disruption to their education than their peers who attend moderate or high-income public schools. The revised monetary distribution model within LCFF attempts to address the negative factors associated with poverty by providing districts with higher percentages and concentrations of emergent bilinguals, low-income, and foster youth, with additional funds, in effective providing “more help” as Gov. Brown put it (Brown, 2013, Education section, para. 8).

In addition to boosting resources for historically marginalized students, the education law also sought to improve the educational experiences and outcomes of all students and specific subgroups of students (e.g., EL, low-income, foster) through an important provision in LCFF known as the Local Control and Accountability Plan, LCAP (WestEd, 2014). Each school district is required to develop an LCAP that contains the district’s three-year plan for its students. Within its LCAP, each district has to address eight specific priorities developed by the state, which include school climate, parent involvement, and the access, engagement, and academic achievement of all students as well as students in each of the three targeted subgroups (WestEd, 2014). It is in the LCAP where districts explain how they plan to address the eight state priorities and discuss the explicit goals they have crafted for EL, low-income, and foster youth (CDE, 2016c; WestEd, 2014). The LCAP document is essentially an action plan that articulates a district’s measurable goals, the programs it will use as a vehicle to attain those goals, and how much money it will invest to support of those efforts.

Although the eight state priorities must be addressed, the language in the policy leaves it up to school districts to decide *how* it will address the priorities in light of the specific context in which their schools operate. Districts have substantial discretion on deciding what goals it wants to set that address the eight state priorities. This level of autonomy reflected Gov. Brown’s notion of subsidiarity (Brown, 2013, Education section, para. 6). Gov. Brown explained,

Subsidiarity is the idea that a central authority should only perform those tasks which cannot be performed at a more immediate or local level. In other words, higher or more remote levels of government, like the state, should render assistance to local school districts, but always respect their primary jurisdiction and the dignity and freedom of teachers and students. (Brown, 2013, Education section, para. 6)

LCAPs adopted by a district school board are then submitted to the superintendent of their county office of education for review and approval, who in turn files the approved LCAP with the State of California Superintendent for the Superintendent's review and approval (Cal. Educ Code § 52070-52070.5). While the new LCAP process provides districts with a renewed level of local control, it also requires that parents be included in the development and evaluation of district LCAPs (Fensterwald, 2014).

To meet the parent involvement mandate, district officials must share their LCAP plans with advisory committees that consist of parents and guardians. Districts are to obtain parent input prior to presenting the plan to their school boards for final approval (WestEd, 2014). Moreover, in districts where more than 15 percent of the student population is classified as English learners, their District English Learner Advisory Committee (DELAC) must be consulted (WestEd, 2014). The law specifies, "the superintendent of the school district shall present the...[LCAP] plan or annual update...to the English learner parent advisory committee...for review and comment" (Cal. Educ Code § 52062). Thus, the LCFF legislation expands opportunities for DELAC members to assert their voices in the budgetary and program decisions made by their local school districts. By incorporating the insights of historically marginalized families, such as Latina mothers active in DELAC, LCAP could potentially change the level and extent which these parent groups have been included in decision-making processes. It is important, however, to acknowledge the long-standing trouble districts have had in connecting with and involving parents of EL students in schools (Gándara & Contreras, 2009; Epstein, 2011).

Latin@ emergent bilingual students have experienced a long history of unjust treatment in the public education system. Discriminatory policies such as Texas Education Code 21.031 (a policy that allowed school districts to either exclude or charge undocumented children for attending Texas public schools, later declared unconstitutional by the U.S. Supreme Court), California's segregationist policy (where school districts were legally allowed to create separate schools for children of Mexican origin based on level of proficiency of the English language and phenotype, later found unconstitutional in federal court; Valencia, 2008, p. 30), and California's Proposition 227 (a policy in effect from 1998-2016, which attempted to dismantle bilingual education in California by mandating English only instruction) illustrate the long battle experienced by Latin@ emergent bilingual students in search of an equitable education. It is within this context that parents of emergent bilinguals, such as the active DELAC Latina mothers of the *Rancho los Nietos Unified School District*, are expected to make a meaningful contribution to district LCAP development and evaluation processes.

LCAP Policy Text

A close reading of the LCFF policy text reveals that during the annual update phase of the LCAP, districts are to assess how well they are doing in meeting the goals they have set forth for their students, including emergent bilinguals. During the annual update phase of the LCAP, districts are required to conduct a review:

Of the progress toward the goals included in the existing local control and accountability plan, an assessment of the effectiveness of the specific actions described in the existing local control and accountability plan toward achieving the goals, and a description of the changes to the specific actions the school district will make as a result of the review and assessment. (Cal. Educ Code § 52061)

The actual updated LCAP document must include “the changes to the specific actions made as a result of the reviews and assessment required” (Cal. Educ Code § 52061). A district, then, not only has to carry out an evaluation of the goals it crafted for students and the related

expenditures it made during the previous year, it also has to declare in its updated LCAP what changes it will be making in the coming year in response to the findings of its review. Moreover, parents must be given the opportunity to review and comment on the updated LCAP before the school board votes to adopt the new plan, and any comments made by parents must be replied to in writing (Cal. Educ Code § 52061). Here, and throughout the policy text, parents are described as playing a role in the construction and evaluation of district LCAPs. However, to be given the opportunity to “review and comment” does not mean districts must *do* anything else with parent input. Still, hints of a more involved role for parents can be found in other areas of the policy.

The eight state priorities that districts are required to address offer another example of the role the state envisions for parents in LCAP. This section states districts must address their,

Parent involvement, including efforts the school district makes to seek parent input in making decisions for the school district and each individual schoolsite, and including how the school district will promote parental participation in programs for unduplicated pupils [low-income, foster, and English learner students] and individuals with exceptional needs. (Cal. Educ Code § 52060)

Given that every district must devise an LCAP that describes the goals it has set for at least all eight state priorities and include the actions it will take to attain those goals, the state elevates the attention districts must pay to parents in both developing an LCAP and in engaging parents in programs for targeted student groups. The LCFF policy goes on to state, “districts shall consult with...parents...in developing a local control and accountability plan” (Cal. Educ Code § 52060). Still, the role of parents in the process appears to be broad and vague. The guidelines contained in the LCAP template published by the State Board of Education capture a clearer expectation of parent involvement.

The LCAP template is the official document developed by the State Board of Education. It must be completed or revised and submitted by every public school district in the state every year. It is in the LCAP where districts are required to document and describe the involvement of

parents (and that of all other stakeholders) in their processes, and the impact of parent involvement on the development of the annual update to LCAP goals, actions, services, and expenditures (CDE, 2016d, p. 12). While not prescribing specific steps or actions districts must take, the State Board provides guiding questions to help districts complete the LCAP document. Specifically, the state asks districts about the ways in which parents (and other stakeholders) have been included in the LCAP development process and consequences of their engagement by posing these seven guiding questions (CDE, 2016d, p. 21):

1. How have applicable stakeholders (e.g., parents and pupils, including parents of unduplicated pupils and unduplicated pupils identified in *EC* [Education Code] section 42238.01; community members; local bargaining units; LEA [local educational agency] personnel; county child welfare agencies; county office of education foster youth services programs, court-appointed special advocates, and other foster youth stakeholders; community organizations representing English learners; and others as appropriate) been engaged and involved in developing, reviewing, and supporting implementation of the LCAP?
2. How have stakeholders been included in the LEA's process in a timely manner to allow for engagement in the development of the LCAP?
3. What information (e.g., quantitative and qualitative data/metrics) was made available to stakeholders related to the state priorities and used by the LEA to inform the LCAP goal setting process? How was the information made available?
4. What changes, if any, were made in the LCAP prior to adoption as a result of written comments or other feedback received by the LEA through any of the LEA's engagement processes?
5. What specific actions were taken to meet statutory requirements for stakeholder engagement pursuant to *EC* sections 52062, 52068, and 47606.5, including engagement with representatives of parents and guardians of pupils identified in *EC* section 42238.01?
6. What specific actions were taken to consult with pupils to meet the requirements 5 *CCR* Section 15495(a)?
7. How has stakeholder involvement been continued and supported? How has the involvement of these stakeholders supported improved outcomes for pupils, including unduplicated pupils, related to the state priorities?

The state's guiding questions push districts to report the approaches, paths, and methods used to involve parents in their processes, and describe the impact of parent inclusion. The guiding questions convey important aspects of meaningful involvement, asking about the amount of time allocated for engagement (question two), the type of data provided to parents (question

three), and how the district included parent input into the LCAP template (question four).

Guiding question number five specifically addresses parents of students in the three targeted subgroups, including parents of emergent bilinguals, by inquiring how the district involved these specific parents and parents such as DELAC members in LCAP processes. Question number seven poses two important questions; the first prompts districts to discuss the actions they have taken to encourage and maintain parent involvement. The second asks how parent involvement has impacted student outcomes. Still, nowhere in the policy text does the state explain *why* parents should be included in the LCAP process, but guiding question seven suggests a connection between parent involvement in district policymaking and student outcomes. The LCAP template also states:

Meaningful engagement of parents, pupils, and other stakeholders, including those representing the subgroups identified in Education Code section 52052 [low-income, foster, and EL youth], is critical to the LCAP and budget process. Education Code sections 52062 and 52063 specify the minimum requirements for school districts...In addition, *EC* [Education Code] Section 48985 specifies the requirements for the translation of notices, reports, statements, or records sent to a parent or guardian. (CDE, 2016d, p. 12)

Again, the state declares parent involvement as important to LCAP, but it does not articulate a clear argument about the purpose or benefit of including parents. Instead, the text in the LCAP template states engagement of parents, including parents of students in the targeted subgroups, is essential to the process. The text within the LCFF policy itself states parents must be consulted, their input must be sought, they must be given the opportunity to review and comment on district plans, and parent advisory committees including DELACs shall provide advice to the school board and superintendent about the LCAP document. In a letter to county and district superintendents and charter school administrators about allowable uses for supplemental and concentration funds on districtwide teacher salaries, State Superintendent Tom Torlakson reiterated the role of stakeholders, writing,

The Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF)...gives power over the vast majority of spending decisions to those who are in the best position to know the needs and priorities of their districts — local school boards — while also requiring them to get significant input from their communities. (Torlakson, 2015, para. 1)

While these words broadly describe *how* parents are to contribute, they do not explain *why* districts should work to include parents in their planning and review processes. What contributions can parents of emergent bilinguals make to help improve the experiences and outcomes of students in the district? Moreover, how are districts to solicit the meaningful involvement of these parents? What understandings or perspectives need to exist and what conditions need to be present to support a meaningful exchange of ideas and actions? The LCFF policy leaves it up to districts to create the opportunities for parents to participate in the LCAP develop, evaluation, and revision processes, and seems to presume that both district officials and parents are prepared and have an interest in working together in these ways.

The collaborative goals suggested by the LCFF policy raise several important questions about the actors (historically marginalized parents and district officials) being called upon to engage in the development and updating of LCAPs. While the input of parents of emergent bilinguals is central to LCAP, researchers have found that their meaningful engagement in governance processes has been impeded by several factors including institutional structures, the beliefs, attitudes, and actions held by district officials, and the view parents hold of themselves and their role in education. As the literature discussed later in this chapter reveals, there are deliberate steps administrators and other district officials can take to involve parents of emergent bilinguals in budgeting and policymaking processes in meaningful ways. Understanding these actors and actions, then, is critical to making sense of the engagement experienced by parents of emergent bilinguals and the ultimate outcome of the process. The LCAP activities outlined for DELAC members appear to rely on parents' beliefs that their involvement in the process will result in improved resources and focus on emergent bilingual students. However, recent studies

analyzing LCAP processes suggest district officials are faced with several challenges when it comes to involving parents in the new LCAP process.

Analysis of Recent LCAP Publications

There have been a few studies published about LCAP since the adoption of LCFF in 2013. These studies have examined the implementation process taking place at the district level. The recent study by Wolf and Sands (2016) included 71 interviews with stakeholders from 10 districts across California. Their data collection took place during the fall of 2014, at the start of year two of the LCFF. One of their research questions examined how district officials were engaging parents and other stakeholders in the LCAP process. Interestingly, district officials reported a lack of capacities and skillsets among staff that was needed to engage with families from the targeted student subgroups (Wolf & Sands, 2016, p. 18). Many officials also reported low turnout among this subgroup of parents (Wolf & Sands, 2016, p. 27). A few officials attempted to remove barriers by holding meetings at different times, providing transportation to and from the event location, and offering food and childcare services (Wolf & Sands, 2016, p. 25). Still, many district officials did not know what to do with the input they did collect from the parents who had participated in their meetings (Wolf & Sands, 2016, p. 26).

The Wolf and Sands (2016) study echoes many of the challenges cited in the literature as impediments to meaningful parent engagement in governance processes. Surveys were the most successful involvement strategy districts used to gather parent input, but it was unclear from the Wolf and Sands (2016) study what was the content of the questions posed. For instance, did district officials predetermine survey questions simply asking parents to support the priorities? At least one official reported working internally on the LCAP then simply asking for parents to support their plan (Wolf & Sands, 2016, p. 27), in essence having parents act as a rubber-stamp. Some officials also cited parents' lack of familiarity with curricular and budgetary matters as

obstacles in the process (Wolf & Sands, 2016, p. 26). Still, no details were provided describing the approaches that had been tried by districts to help parents get started. Finally, many districts reported a tight timeframe as a major obstacle impeding effective implementation of the parent engagement piece of the LCAP.

Unfortunately, Wolf and Sands did not include any of the findings from the 7 parent interviews they had conducted for their study, nor did they offer specific findings about DELAC or parents of emergent bilingual children engaged in the LCAP process. Thus, it is unclear from their study what were the perceptions and experiences of parents of emergent bilinguals in the LCAP process. Obtaining direct parent insights is a critical component to help make sense of how major actors (parents and district officials) understand the role and purpose of parents of emergent bilinguals in LCAP, and the conditions being created for parent involvement. Addressing this gap in knowledge could lead to creating opportunities for the meaningful engagement of DELAC members in the process.

Offering a different perspective, Fuller and Tobben (2014) carried out a study on eight school districts to develop tools that analysts could use to monitor the impact that LCAP is having on the ground. The districts selected for their study differed by enrollment size, location (urban and non-urban), and student demographics. They conducted site visits and phone interviews with district senior staff between March and June of 2014, right before first-year LCAPs were to be approved by their respective school boards. In exploring stakeholder engagement strategies undertaken in the different districts, Fuller and Tobben (2014) anticipated LCAP would spark wider involvement from parent groups, community organizations, employers, and civic leaders. Instead, they found district leaders limited their engagement efforts to existing parent groups such as DELAC and site councils (Fuller & Tobben, 2014, p. 10).

Although Fuller and Tobben did not explicitly reveal the extent or depth of parent engagement in the development of district LCAPs, they provided some clues about parent involvement by describing other aspects of the process. For example, most district leaders situated LCAP planning within preexisting strategies, such as those captured in their strategic plans (Fuller & Tobben, 2014). This approach seems to suggest the development of LCAPs was a closed process, restricted to what administrators had already determined would be the priorities of the district. While many LCAP coordinators expressed wanting a more public and engaging process with stakeholders, in larger urban districts “a significant amount of time was spent on cross-departmental coordination and deliberations” (Fuller & Tobben, 2014, p. 10). Thus, parents did not appear to have been involved in significant ways in the development of LCAPs in these districts.

Fuller and Tobben (2014) argued that distinct questions should be asked by state, counties, districts, and schools to understand whether greater civic engagement prompts the development of effective strategies that improve student outcomes. For instance, they suggested it may be important for state policymakers to ask questions about who was involved in shaping LCAP priorities and in devising LCFF budget allocations and how that engagement was constrained or encouraged by district officials (Fuller & Tobben, 2014, p. 14). At district and county levels, investigating how districts devised their budgets differently in light of the participatory process and whether the process resulted in new priorities, distribution of funds to schools, or programs, could reveal the impact LCAP was having locally (Fuller & Tobben, 2014, p. 16). Recognizing potential barriers to meaningful engagement, schools and communities may seek to examine which stakeholders, principals, and school leadership teams engaged in the design and implementation of programs (Fuller & Tobben, 2014, p. 17). Fuller and Tobben

(2014) also urged analysts to explore questions that could clarify the ways in which parent engagement were helping to narrow achievement gaps across districts.

Although Fuller and Tobben's study provides insightful and interesting suggestions for future areas of research, their monitoring strategy does not include nor promotes collection of parents' perspectives. Looking at engagement strictly from the district official's point of view leaves out critical insights parents have about their engagement in the process. Ignoring parent voice shuts out potential strategies that could be used to highlight the purpose and enhance the quality of the involvement of parents from targeted student groups, including parents of emergent bilinguals, in the develop of district LCAPs. The lack of data gathered directly from parents highlights the gap in knowledge that exists about how parents are understanding and actualizing their roles as advocates for emergent bilingual students in LCAP.

Affeldt (2015) offered another analytical approach to examine LCAP. As a civil rights advocate (an attorney for the group Public Advocates) and the president of a school board in the Bay Area, Affeldt (2015) framed the opportunities and challenges related to LCAP through these dual roles. A review of first year efforts statewide, Affeldt (2015) found no district had identified how all of their funds had been spent to address the eight state priorities. Instead, only a fraction of the funds had been accounted for in district LCAPs (Affeldt, 2015). Moreover, many districts had failed to identify where and how supplemental and concentration funds (the funds specifically generated by low-income, foster, and EL classified students) were being spent to support learning opportunities for high need students (Affeldt, 2015).

Turning to community engagement, Affeldt (2015) reported that district administrators around the state "embraced the new demands of local engagement willingly" (p. 10). However, community stakeholders themselves were disappointed in district officials' inability to engage stakeholders in meaningful ways. Basic engagement issues included: not offering meetings at

times convenient for most families; not providing sufficient advanced notice and explanation about meetings to underrepresented families; lack of childcare, food, translation, and interpretation services for participants; and not providing training on LCFF, LCAP, and budgets to prepare families to participate in meaningful ways (Affeldt, 2015, p. 10). Affeldt (2015) also found only a few districts had involved community stakeholders in developing the measurements that would be used to determine a district's progress in meeting the goals it had set for students.

Marsh and Hall (2018) also studied LCFF, analyzing the LCAP process that unfolded during the first year of the implementation. More specifically, they sought to uncover how districts had interpreted the requirement for democratic engagement, how community engagement was carried out, and what conditions shaped the way involvement took place (Marsh & Hall, 2018). Their multi case study included 10 school districts that varied by the size and level of diversity among student population, location (e.g., north, south), and urbanicity (e.g., rural, urban) (Marsh & Hall, 2018). Marsh and Hall (2018) found four factors influenced the quality and quantity of engagement: 1) institutional-political forces, 2) capacity, 3) trust, and 4) population characteristics.

They found most districts staff struggled to engage stakeholders in broad and deep ways. Specifically, Marsh and Hall (2018) uncovered something they called institutional-political pressures, which was comprised of a compliance mindset, protective posturing, and political strategizing. Additionally, the involvement approaches carried out in districts were narrow in scope and were dominated by one-way communication. Recruiting new participants (not the usual players) was a challenge as was ensuring the inclusion of "quieter voices" (Marsh & Hall, 2018, p. 271). Overall, it was "well-heeled" citizens (Marsh & Hall, 2018) who were participating, and not stakeholders from the target groups (EL, low income, and foster).

An additional challenge noted by Marsh and Hall (2018) was limited district and community capacity. Limited expertise, staff, and time affected the quality of engagement set forth by districts (Marsh & Hall, 2018). District staff were not familiar with multiple forms of engagement, overused jargon and acronyms, and in general struggled to implement two-way communication with stakeholders (Marsh & Hall, 2018). Moreover, Marsh and Hall (2018) found district leaders' held deficit ideas about parents' capacities to engage in LCAP discussions.

Some districts in their study had partnered with intermediary organizations, which led to improved community outreach, education, and grassroots organizing (Marsh & Hall, 2018). Some of these intermediary organization trained parents and advisory committee members on the new policy and provided background information on school quality and the role they might play in LCAP development (Marsh & Hall, 2018, p.272). Still other intermediary organizations helped districts collect, distill, and improve the collecting of community input. These districts that partnered with intermediary organizations were the few where broader and/or deeper engagement was noticed. Marsh and Hall (2018) also noted that in these districts there were also changing institutional mindsets, homogeneity among participants, and a history of trust between parents and districts.

Taken together, the findings of Wolf and Sands (2016), Fuller and Tobben (2014), Affeldt (2015), and Marsh and Hall (2018) highlight some of the challenges district officials have faced in trying to meet the parent involvement aspect of LCAP. This research provides a critical baseline of information from which emerging studies like mine can discuss district progress toward truly engaging parents in the development of LCAPs. It is also important to note that Wolf and Sands (2016), Fuller and Tobben (2014), Affeldt (2015), and Marsh and Hall (2018) did not directly examine the engagement of DELAC members, and provided limited data gathered directly from parents.

Given the elevated role and focus of DELAC members in LCAP, collecting, analyzing, and reporting from their perspective is essential to understanding how active parents of emergent bilinguals are making sense of their roles, purpose, and engagement in education governance processes. Looking specifically at the engagement of DELAC members clarifies the impact their engagement is having on the LCAP process and what affect their advocacy for emergent bilingual students is having in their districts. Moreover, understanding Latin@ parent involvement in schools, and identifying the explicit and implicit ways Latin@ parents have been characterized in policy and practice provides important historical context to keep in mind while seeking to understanding the context in which LCAP is unfolding.

Deficit Framing of Latin@ Parents in Schools

Fege (2006) has argued parental engagement is essential to achieving and sustaining educational equity. He goes on to explain that attaining equity is a multifaceted civic process where a person engaged in it:

Organizes and mobilizes the community; knows how to collect and evaluate school performance information; builds collaborations between the school and community; votes for education-oriented candidates; pressures the school board and decisionmakers; knows how to “work the system”; and understands the big public education issues such as equitable funding, teacher quality, instructional leadership, broad school curriculum, and modern school construction. (Fege, 2006, pp. 571-572)

Yet, even Fege acknowledged there were some parents that could more readily enact the strategies identified above. Many middle and upper-class parents, for instance, had significant control and influence in their districts. Fung (2006) and others (Ehrensall & First, 2008; Carlson, 2013; Gándara & Contreras, 2009) argued that the power, privilege, cultural capital (such as knowledge of and experience in the educational system), and personal resources of affluent parents were important factors fueling their political clout and ability to hold officials accountable. Working class Latin@ parents of emergent bilinguals, however, have had vastly

different experiences with schools. Exercising their voices in policymaking processes can be a much more difficult task to accomplish.

Scholars have argued that low-income, racial, and language minority parents have long been viewed by schools and districts as inferior, culturally flawed, and as incapable of making a valuable contribution to schools without first receiving help from experts (Ishimaru, 2014; Lightfoot, 2004; López, & Stoelting, 2010; Valdés, 1996; Velez, 2012). While some researchers have cited preparation (e.g., training) as an essential step leading toward meaningful engagement (e.g., Anderson, 1998), Lightfoot and others have uncovered the one-way thinking of some administrators, where the unique insights and knowledge of parents was overlooked, even disregarded. Lightfoot (2004) has further asserted terms such as *parent involvement* are steeped in historic, deficit-framed concepts that marginalize parents such as Latin@ immigrant parents. Formally educated, middle-class parents have been posited as model partners with schools by which all other parents have been habitually compared. Lightfoot (2004) argued this comparison played out implicitly in mainstream parent involvement literature where strategies often described how schools could grow parent engagement, not by altering school perceptions and practices, rather by changing parent behaviors to fit in with school ideals.

Echoing Lightfoot (2004), Yosso (2006) has argued that the dominant storyline used to explain the low educational outcomes of Chican@ students assumes equity of educational opportunities across racial and socioeconomic lines. The storyline attempts to portray the education system as neutral and objective, and faults Chican@ students and families for unequal schooling outcomes (Yosso, 2006). Yosso (2006) brought to the forefront the social structures, practices, and discourses that enable inadequate educational conditions to persist. Enlisting a community cultural wealth model, Yosso (2006) highlighted the important and impactful sources of capital found within low-income Latin@ families that in fact helped Latin@ students to

succeed in school. She argued that historically marginalized parents draw upon specific critical sources of capital, such as aspirational, social, and navigational capital, to survive and prosper even in racist institutions (Yosso, 2006). These sources of capital communicate important community knowledge and often go undervalued and discarded by school officials (Yosso, 2006). Like Lightfoot (2004), Yosso (2006) argued that in order to dismantle the inequities in the public education system, mainstream perceptions and treatment of Latin@ families and youth had to be transformed. The challenge, Yosso (2006) argued, was how to commence transformational dialogues with school officials. Moreover, even when officials do recognize the value and importance of parent involvement in governance processes, other factors must exist to create environments where parents engage in meaningful deliberation and have real influence over decision-making processes.

Similar to community cultural wealth, the theory of *funds of knowledge* postulates that children's homes, families, and communities are sources of deep knowledge and skill (Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 1992). Funds of knowledge emerged from an ethnographic analysis carried out by a team of teachers about their students' home and community environments (Moll et al., 1992). Teachers visited the homes of their students and interviewed important members in students' families (Moll et al., 1992). The intent of the study was to have teachers learn about, understand, and draw upon the sources of knowledge and skills found in the working-class Mexican communities where their students lived and learned (Moll et al., 1992). The information collected by teachers in the field represented historically accumulated and culturally developed "knowledge and skills essential for household or individual functioning and well-being" (Moll et al., 1992, p. 133). Moll et al. (1992) argued the research work of teachers dismantled teacher's stereotypes and deficit assumptions they had held about students' lives outside of school. The change in mindset transformed the relationships teachers shared with

students and parents and led teachers to develop culturally relevant pedagogical approaches that drew upon their students' lived experiences (Moll et al., 1992). While teachers were the focus of the Moll et al. (1992) study, the lessons and outcomes attributed to their exploration can inform the collaborative work of district officials. Perhaps taking the time to listen, learn from, and engage parents of emergent bilinguals in meaningful dialogue could potentially transform how policies and practices are constructed and carried out throughout the school district.

Still, Moll et al. (1992), Yosso (2006), and Lightfoot (2004) bring to light the habitual deficit framing of historically marginalized parents in the U.S. school system. They have also highlighted how assumptions of a neutral educational system and false constructions of an ideal parent can create barriers to meaningful Latin@ parent engagement. Still, these scholars and others (Elenes, González, Delgado Bernal, & Villenas, 2001; Olivos, 2006; Velez, 2012) have argued that if included in policymaking processes, Latin@ parents' unique insights have the potential to improve Latin@ student experiences and outcomes. Yet, the historic framing of Latin@ parents and their treatment in the U.S. system raise questions about how DELAC members will be included in LCAP processes and whether they will be afforded meaningful involvement.

Family-School Partnerships

Deficit framing of Latin@ families has marginalized parent voices and has excluded them from decision-making processes. Partnership frameworks attempt to disrupt those practices and offer alternative approaches that presumably encourage the meaningful involvement of marginalized parents in schools. One of the most widely cited scholars on parent partnerships is Joyce Epstein. Her works on family-school-community partnerships and parent involvement have also been referenced in CDE publications such as the *Family Engagement Framework* (CDE, 2014).

Relationships are at the heart of Epstein's (2011) theory. She has argued that there are three spheres that influence children: school, home, and community. When actors in these three spheres are aligned and communicate a common, caring message to children, those children are motivated to do their best in school (Epstein, 2011, p. 390). Devising a common message, and hence a strong partnership, begins with the connections that are created between groups (e.g., between districts and families) and between individuals (e.g., between a parent and an administrator). The interpersonal relations that are constructed lead to patterns of (in)action that help explicate where and how the three spheres of influence (home, school, and community) work separately or jointly to support the learning and developing of children (Epstein, 2011, p. 390). When the spheres overlap, schools become family-like and homes become school-like, meaning both environments recognize and take steps that make children feel special, important, and included in their education (Epstein, 2011, p. 391).

From her synthesis of the literature, Epstein (2011) found most families want their children to succeed in schools, most teachers and administrators want to include families in their programs, and most students want their families to be involved in their schools and education (p. 394). She also found barriers that prevent positive partnerships from flourishing included factors such as fear, insufficient information, and declining participation numbers. But these barriers could be eliminated through deliberate, continuous work (Epstein, 2011, p. 393). The most effective partnerships Epstein (2011) observed were those that had adopted clear policies (p. 403) and ones where leaders had played an essential role, leveraging their expertise to plan, implement, and evaluate partnership programs (p. 394).

Epstein (2011) argued administrators need basic knowledge and skills on how to develop and maintain effective partnerships with parents (Epstein, 2011, p. 10). This includes having a genuine understanding of the backgrounds, languages, religions, cultures, histories, structures,

racess, social classes, and other characteristics and goals of students and families (Epstein, 2011). She asserted it is impossible for educators to communicate effectively with the people who matter most to the children, such as their families, without having a fundamental understanding of them (Epstein, 2011, p. 5). Moreover, Epstein (2011) argued that involving parents in well-defined activities that inform and respect them has the potential to transform the interpersonal relationships cultivated between parents, students, and school officials. Centering understanding, knowledge, and skills, Epstein pushes administrators to get to know and work more closely with the families of students.

Epstein (2011) lays out important principles and guidelines to follow in order to help schools develop equal partnerships. Critics argue, however, that scrutiny of Epstein's parent involvement model reveals power-laden meanings and habitually characterize low-income, racial, and language minority parents as deficient (Lightfoot, 2004). For instance, by centering school leaders, Epstein's partnership model upholds the power and control exercised by officials (Lightfoot, 2004). Moreover, the strategies suggested by Epstein describe workshops and other activities to help parents' develop skills that they apparently lack (such as understanding their own children) and need in order to be good partners with schools. Epstein's seemingly contradictory message fails to articulate how to draw upon the unique knowledge and strengthens of parents to construct effective partnerships. Instead her framework seems to create partnerships that operate to support the goals and agendas preconceived by school leaders, calling into question how her approach would result in an improved educational system for marginalized students and families.

Given the ubiquity of Epstein's work, which is also referenced in state partnership publications (e.g., CDE, 2014), the shortcomings and blind spots contained within her work are important to recognize. Additionally, for immigrant and undocumented Latin@ parents,

becoming involved in schools let alone in governance processes presents a set of unique challenges that are not fully addressed by Epstein.

Undocumented and Immigrant Latin@ Parents and School Involvement

The struggle to achieve an equitable education for emergent bilingual children is especially complicated for Latin@ parents who are not yet U.S. citizens. As non-citizens they do not have the power to vote for their own representatives, including school board members who hold crucial local decision-making powers such as the distribution of funds to schools, adoption of district-wide policies and practices, and appointment of high-ranking officials such as the superintendent and school principals (EdSource, n.d.; Ehrensall & First, 2008). Although parents could engage in campaigns, grassroots organizations, and other forms of civic action (Kraft & Furlong, 2013), their citizenship status and electoral disenfranchisement diminishes their ability and power to hold elected officials and administrators accountable for the educational opportunities provided to their children. For some immigrant Latin@ parents, unfamiliarity with the U.S. public education system and limited English fluency create additional navigational and communication barriers, further inhibiting their abilities to effectively advocate for their children (Gándara & Contreras, 2009).

The citizenship status of undocumented parents may also influence their choice to not speak up or to simply avoid direct contact with a government agency (i.e., a district office or a school campus). For instance, in Petrone's (2016) research on the perspectives and experiences of Mexican immigrant families living in North Carolina, she found many undocumented parents saw schools as representatives of a higher government authority and therefore places to be avoided. As Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco (2013) have found, families with undocumented status face a formidable threat to their basic security. They explained, "the ethos of safety and security essential to healthy family dynamics is unattainable to millions of unauthorized families,

who face a pervasive fear driven by the constant threat of being hunted, caught, and deported” (Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2013, p.145). Participants in Petrone’s (2016) study reasoned that undocumented parents avoided schools because of their status and fear that involvement might lead to deportation. Gándara and Ee (2018) reported similar findings, where parent involvement decreased as the threat of deportation increased. Gándara and Ee (2018) specifically looked at the impact the election of Trump to the presidency and the subsequent increases in deportations had on undocumented students and families. Their findings are especially informative to this study as the year of observation coincided with the election Trump as president. The impact on parent involvement uncovered by Gándara and Ee (2018) undoubtedly impacted the conversations taking place in spaces like DELAC.

Still one survey conducted in Los Angeles County (cited in Rogers et al., 2008) found a substantial proportion of undocumented parents who were engaged in school-based civic activities. In fact, when compared to U.S. born citizen parents, Rogers et al. (2008) found undocumented parents participated in schools at very similar rates as their counterparts. These forms of participation included talking with their children’s teacher, attending a school event, volunteering in a classroom, and attending a PTA or other school-based meeting. Although they did not explore why undocumented parents felt compelled to get involved, Rogers et al. (2008) reasoned that for some undocumented parents, “school-based civic participation can lead to robust democratic activity – exercising their voices, setting agendas, [and] making decisions” (p. 213). Olivos (2006) also found that many of the Latin@ immigrant parents he worked with in San Diego schools came to realize that in the U.S., a parent must actively protect and advocate for their children’s educational rights. These parents noted being an active advocate led to greater educational opportunities for their children (Olivos, 2006, p.64). It is these forms of

activities that are central and important to the development of a meaningful LCAP that reflects the input of parents of emergent bilinguals.

Home country cultural practices, such as not questioning teacher and administrator decisions out of respect, can inhibit the involvement of Latin@ immigrant parents in schools (Gándara & Contreras, 2009). Olivos (2006) explained that the notion of parent involvement may present a contradiction for Latin@ immigrant parents who view schools as the realm of teachers and regard educators as professionals who are best equipped to teach their children. Further complicating this relationship is the mistreatment of Latin@ immigrant parents, where on paper a school might encourage parent participation, but in reality, they are push away by school officials (Olivos, 2006).

Similarly, when provided with a safe space, such as a Spanish language call-in radio program, a powerful exchange of knowledge can take place (Orozco, 2008). In Orozco's (2008) work, she found a radio program offered a space where Latin@ immigrant parents could share their knowledge and insights about various topics which led to a strengthening of networks, gaining new perspectives, a sense of motivation through mutual encouragement, and learning of indispensable resources like children's health insurance, services, and special needs of children (p. 34).

Bilingual and bicultural staff have also been found to play a significant role in how Latin@ immigrant parents feel about their school sites. For instance, the Latin@ immigrant families in Durand and Perez's (2013) study cited the bilingual, bicultural staff as creating a welcoming school environment, helping them feel as if they belonged to the school community. In contrast, Petrone (2016) found the lack of bilingual/bicultural staff created an unwelcoming environment for the Mexican immigrant families in her study. She found the lack of linguistic

and cultural support evolved into a perception among parents that parental involvement required English proficiency (Petrone, 2016).

Uncovering what precipitates involvement could shed light on parents' understandings of their role and purpose in the educational system and the type of involvement they choose in response to their perspectives. In the case of the DELAC members, it is additionally important to investigate what happens once they become involved in a formal school district advisory committee. How do they advocate for the learning opportunities and outcomes of emergent bilingual students? Moreover, does their engagement lead to a sense of empowerment and confidence to exercise their voices during policymaking discussions?

Cultural Ways of Knowing and Linguistic Expressions

As discussed earlier, Moll et al. (1992) uncovered the rich sources of knowledge and support (funds of knowledge) Latin@ homes and communities provided for Latin@ children. Yosso's (2006) research has also shed light on the multi sources of capital (community cultural wealth) that exist within families and communities that help Latin@ students find success in schools. Through her research on Chicana college students, Delgado Bernal (2001) found the many ways community and family knowledge was taught to Latin@ youth, including legends, *corridos*, and storytelling. She also found these transmissions of knowledge were handed down from generation to generation and served as everyday survival strategies (Delgado Bernal, 2001). Additionally, *consejos*, *cuentos*, and *la experiencia* were critical methods in which Latina mothers explicitly, implicitly, and strategically taught their daughters cultural knowledge (Delgado Bernal, 2001). In her seminal work on 10 Latin@ immigrant families, Valdés (1996) cited numerous pedagogies of the home, top among them *respeto* and *consejos*. *Respeto*, Valdés explained, meant more than the English translation of the word (respect).

Respeto, then, involved both the presentation of self before others as well as a recognition and acceptance of the needs of those persons with whom interactions took

place. It also involved a knowledge of the boundaries of roles and role relationships and of the responsibilities each individual had when acting in each role. Children were cautioned often not to be *irrespetuosos* (disrespectful); and, at the same time, older young people were warned to behave in the manner prescribed for their particular roles so that they themselves might not invite disrespect. (Valdés, 1996, p.132)

The concept of *respeto* and how one abides by its unwritten cultural norms was something the mothers in Valdés's work handed down to their children through words and actions. Valdés (1996) also found that the majority of teaching was carried out through *consejos*. "Spontaneous homilies designed to influence behaviors and attitudes," *consejos*, Valdés explained, were important because they transmitted important messages about right and wrong (1996, p.125). They were how mothers raised their children to be *educados* (educated, well-mannered). Understanding these cultural ways of knowing and linguistic expressions are important for policymakers and practitioners to know and understand to build relationships with Latin@ immigrant families. Elenes et al. (2001) argued these cultural ways of knowing and linguistic expressions could inform policy and practice, and could be used as a foundation to enhance the academic success of Latin@ students.

Language as a Barrier

Limited fluency in English can be a major barrier inhibiting the involvement of parents of emergent bilinguals in parent groups. Gándara and Contreras (2009) argued lack of a common language can create navigational and communication barriers between schools and some immigrant Latin@ families. Not having properly trained staff especially in front offices could create the sense of an unwelcoming environment and discourage parents whose dominant language is not English from engaging with or even entering schools. Parents can also become frustrated when letters and other important materials are not translated into a language they can read, or when there are no bilingual staff are unavailable to assist them. Also, the quality and consistency of translation and interpretation services can be unpredictable.

When it comes to involvement in parent advisory groups, not being fluent in English could dissuade parents from joining these groups. Yet, researchers have found this is not always the case. For instance, parents in Delgado-Gaitan's (1991) study believed their lack of English fluency barred them from participating in school and district governance activities. They came to realize, however, in order to effectively advocate for their children, they had to participate in schools. Parents in Terriquez's (2011) study experienced a similar realization about the importance of being involved in decision-making processes regardless of their fluency in English. Parents in both in Delgado-Gaitan (1991) and Terriquez's (2011) studies became active advocates in their respective school sites regardless of their level of English fluency.

Literature on partnership and participatory governance also discuss the importance of providing translation and interpretation for parents whose dominant language is something other than English (Anderson, 1998). Moreover, the California Education Code mandates that documents be translated into every home language for families where 15 percent or more of a school's students speak the same non-English language (Cal. Educ Code § 48985).

Latin@ Parent Empowerment

As districts promote opportunities for meaningful parent involvement in LCAP, they could simultaneously create conditions conducive for parent empowerment, an essential element leading to the cultivation of parent agency and continued involvement in governance processes.

Empowerment means the process of acquiring power, or the process of transition from lack of control to the acquisition of control over one's life and immediate environment. Therefore, empowerment is equated with the possession of power to act or to effect something by participating in a given activity, or by acquiring social status associated with the enjoyment of human rights and privileges universally and crossculturally recognized as universally accorded to all members of the human race. (Delgado-Gaitan & Trueba, 1991, p. 138)

Delgado-Gaitan and Trueba (1991) provide a seemingly straightforward yet compelling description of empowerment. They argued empowerment is a process of thinking critically

about knowledge acquired from a social reality (Delgado-Gaitan & Trueba, 1991). For immigrant Latin@ parents, the path to empowerment begins as families become literate in the norms and values of U.S. society. Constructed through a series of social interactions and events, empowerment prompts a recognition of an individual's place in society and her/his/their right to participate in the social, legal, political, and economic systems that control her/his/their destiny (Delgado-Gaitan & Trueba, 1991, p. 139). Extending this idea to parents of emergent bilinguals, empowerment could begin with the realization of needing to become involved in governance processes to advocate and secure just educational experiences and outcomes for their children. The sense of power or consciousness gained through the empowerment process, Delgado-Gaitan and Trueba (1991) argued, leads to enhanced self-esteem and self-confidence (p. 141). The more positive interactions experienced by immigrant Latin@ families' in democratic institutions, the stronger their sense of empowerment (Delgado-Gaitan & Trueba, 1991, p. 141). Empowered Latin@ families participating in democratic institutions can hold policymakers (i.e., elected officials and administrators) accountable for their actions (Delgado-Gaitan & Trueba, 1991, p. 140).

Delgado-Gaitan and Trueba (1991) offered a straightforward explanation about the importance of empowerment and cite positive interactions as critical to strengthening Latin@ confidence and involvement in public arenas. In "Involving Parents in the Schools: A Process of Empowerment," Delgado-Gaitan (1991) described the process of empowerment that took place among Spanish-speaking parents in the town of Carpinteria who sought to have their concerns heard by school and district officials. Calling it a *collective critical reflection process*, Delgado-Gaitan (1991) defines this as:

A process that engages people in careful examination of the assumptions that guide self, family and institutional norms, values, policies, and decisions that direct our lives including institutional policies and practices in government, education, and other social

services. As a consequence, the group's awareness of their shared experience (past and present) becomes the basis for collective action. (p. 34)

In fact, prior to the reflection process, parents in Delgado-Gaitan's (1991) study believed their lack of English fluency and knowledge of the U.S. school system prevented them from actively participating in school and district governance. It was through critical discussions in a parent group that they came to realize regardless of language or prior knowledge, advocating for their children meant participating in schools (Delgado-Gaitan, 1991). A form of positive interactions, the group provided a space where parents could support each other, raise awareness, and acquire the information and skills they needed to be heard by the district (Delgado-Gaitan, 1991). Delgado-Gaitan (1991) explained that in the meetings she later observed parents practiced good judgment, knowing when to compromise and when to be aggressive in order to accomplish their goals.

From her study of Latin@ immigrant janitor union members in Los Angeles, Terriquez (2011) found similar outcomes as Delgado-Gaitan (1991). Examining links between union activism and school-based engagement, Terriquez (2011) sought to understand whether and how civic skills transfer from one context to another. She found rather than involving themselves in plug-in forms of school participation (e.g., volunteering in the classroom and attending school-wide events), "active union members tend to become involved in critical forms of school engagement...that require them to voice their interests and exercise leadership" (Terriquez, 2011, p. 582) including in formal decision-making bodies. Moreover, for those who had participated in union activities such as outreach, campaigns, and meetings, Terriquez's (2011) participants had developed stronger self-confidence and enhanced their problem-solving, advocacy, and organizing skills. Like Delgado-Gaitan and Trueba (1991), Terriquez (2011) asserted that the empowering experiences gained by Latin@ immigrant parents could translate into parent action that holds schools accountable for the educational outcomes of children. In

short, Terriquez's study suggests that regardless of limited formal education and fluency in English, empowered Latin@ parents can develop their capacities to engage in meaningful ways in formal school decision-making processes like the LCAP.

Delgado-Gaitan, Delgado-Gaitan and Trueba, and Terriquez's findings demonstrate the importance of empowerment, particularly in relation to Latin@ immigrant parent engagement in education governance. Through the empowerment process, Latin@ parents came to recognize their strength and ability to exercise their voices. Moreover, parent participants in Delgado-Gaitan's (1991) study compelled school officials to listen and address parent their concerns about the education of their children. The findings of these studies lead to questions about formal district-based parent advisory groups like DELAC and their abilities to cultivate empowered sensibilities among parent members. Do DELAC members view themselves as agents capable not only of bringing attention to the critical resource needs of emergent bilingual students, but also of sparking change within the districts to address those needs?

While empowerment of parents leads parents to exercise their voices, the sensibilities of district officials must also be taken into account. The core beliefs and attitudes of school officials inform the actions and type of relationship they create and share with parents. Recognizing the powerful control district officials have over LCAP processes, the thoughts and perceptions they have about DELAC members and Latin@ parents undoubtedly shape the opportunities they create for parent inclusion. Exploring Henderson et al.'s (2007) theory of core beliefs, attitudes, and actions provides informative insights about administrator's perceptions about parents and furnishes another important lens to help explicate how officials understand the role and purpose of parents in the implementation of LCAP at the local level.

Core Beliefs, Attitudes, and Actions of Officials

Henderson et al. (2007) argued that a school's readiness to build collaborative relationships with families can be determined by measuring officials' embodiment of four core beliefs (p. 28): (a) all families regardless of class, race, or immigration status aspire for their children to be successful in school and in life (p. 28); (b) all parents have the capacity to support their children's education (p. 32); (c) parents and schools are equal partners in educating children and everyone has something valuable to share and gain from a reciprocal relationship (p. 37); and (d) the responsibility for building and sustaining strong partnerships rests on school staff, in particular school leaders (p. 39). Together, the four core beliefs serve as a foundation to engage with families meaningfully (Henderson et al., 2007, p. 28) and to forge effective partnerships.

The core beliefs developed by Henderson et al. (2007) describe notions held by school-level staff, but are applicable to any level public official, including district leaders. After all, how can superintendents and other district officials build meaningful partnerships if they do not agree that families from all backgrounds want their children to succeed (core belief 1), or if they underestimate the valuable knowledge and capacity all parents have to support their children's education (core belief 2)? Similarly, by not recognizing and treating families as equal partners (core belief 3) or failing to provide the necessary resources and leadership (core belief 4), officials at the district level will promote a lopsided power dynamic that marginalizes parents rather than one that fosters a mutually beneficial partnership. The four core beliefs are central to developing collaborative partnerships with parents, and the cornerstone toward engaging parents in meaningful ways.

Still, the beliefs district officials hold about parents of emergent bilinguals inform and shape the kind of participatory opportunities district officials create where parents can contribute in meaningful ways to policymaking decisions. Scholars have found some administrators are

skeptical about the capacities that immigrant Latin@ families have to engage in decision-making processes (Marsh & Hall, 2018; Olivos, 2006) and others have argued historic hegemonic notions exist that Latin@ families do not value education (Gándara & Contreras, 2009; Ishimaru, 2014; Lightfoot, 2004; Valencia & Black, 2002; Yosso, 2006) explained by their lack of participation in school events and parent groups.

Exploring district officials' beliefs about parents of emergent bilinguals can provide an important layer of information explicating the opportunities constructed for DELAC ember inclusion. The core beliefs promoted by Henderson et al. (2007) form an important foundation to partnership development and can be a lens through which to understand the (in)actions taken by administrators in LCAP. Trust is another essential element that helps to form and sustain successful family-school partnerships.

Developing Relationships through Trust

Developing relationships with families begins by building trust (Henderson et al., 2007, p. 47). Henderson et al. (2007) defined high-trust schools as places where people respect and have personal regard for one another; they recognize their shared competency and integrity. Trust also espouses greater rates of collaboration between families and schools and results in higher levels of student achievement (Henderson et al., 2007, p. 48). Moreover, trust translates into a family-friendly, welcoming school environment (p. 50), a place where the strengths and contributions of families are honored, parents' voices are included in all aspects of school operations (p. 58), and where schools work to connect with families while focusing on the educational achievement of children (p. 65). Henderson et al. (2007) explained when families and schools, "work together as equal partners in educating children, parents and teachers build trust and understanding" (p. 73).

As central as trust is to Henderson et al.'s partnership theory, the challenge is establishing trust. That is, developing a firm belief in the reliability, truth, skills, and strength of persons and/or institutions can be difficult particularly in an educational system that has tended to degrade and disregard the knowledge and lived experiences of marginalized parents such as Latin@ parents of emergent bilinguals. Upholding trust is also critical to sustaining a successful partnership, given that confidence can erode among parents who are continually let down and disillusioned when the time and energy they have invested in a process (intentionally or unintentionally) results in an inequitable outcome.

Like Henderson et al. (2007), Bryk and Schneider (2002) argued improving school cultures and student outcomes depends on the relational trust shared among adults, that is, when mutual respect, a sense of integrity, and genuine caring about one another exists between parents and schools. As primary gatekeepers of schools, principals play a central role in creating relational trust, and expanding social capital in schools.

Bryk and Schneider (2002) argued distrust arises when school principals and teachers have deficit-based views about poor families. When the culture and values of parents are perceived as barriers to student achievement, teachers lack trust in parents and parents, in turn, distrust teachers and believe schools do not understand their children. Through their case studies carried out in Chicago schools, Bryk and Schneider (2002) found schools with strong school-parent relationships also had high levels of trust between parents, teachers, and principals, and schools with adversarial relationships exhibited higher levels of distrust. This notion of distrust was echoed in the LCAP research conducted by Marsh and Hall (2018), where some district leaders distrusted parents and questioned parents' capacity to effectively engage in LCAP.

It is important to acknowledge that administrators' trust in parents and confidence in their abilities to engage in decision-making processes, can be mediated by the official and unofficial

systems of accountability administrators are bound to. After all, their employment, particularly that of superintendents, is often tied to student success, which is linked to the programmatic and budgetary decisions they make. When it comes to collaborative processes like LCAP, a need exists to create systems and environments where parents and officials have confidence in one another and that the policy and funding decisions that emerge are the result of fair, balanced, and deliberative activities.

Sharing Power

The engagement piece of the LCAP policy was written using very broad and vague terms, essentially giving school districts substantial power over how to construct and carry out involvement of parents in the decision-making processes. Thus, how parent input and participation are conceptualized and operationalized has been entrusted to district superintendents and governing boards (with limited oversight provided by county and staff officials). In essence, local officials determine how and to what extent they will involve parents, including DELAC members, in LCAP planning and decision-making processes.

The lack of specificity in LCAP imparts a significant amount of autonomy, discretion, and power to school districts. How parents are included in LCAP processes, then, is strongly shaped by district officials who have been situated as readers and interpreters of the LCAP policy text, and as on-the-ground policymakers. District officials can be viewed as street-level bureaucrats, defined by Weatherly and Lipsky (1977) as government actors who interact directly with the people and have “substantial discretion in the execution of their work...In a significant sense, then, street-level bureaucrats *are the policymakers* in their respective work arenas” (p. 172). In the case of LCAP, it is district officials who create and control the opportunities parents have to engage in the development and evaluation of LCAPs.

At the same time, successful LCAPs are dependent on the role and purpose parents have for themselves in the new policymaking process. Preexisting DELACs offer a particularly interesting case, as these district-sanctioned parent groups are responsible for advising district officials specifically on the experiences and outcomes of students who have been classified as English learners in the district. LCAP broadens these responsibilities by requiring districts to include DELAC members not only in policy planning, but in budgetary decisions as well. Thus, LCAP can be viewed as an opportunity for DELAC members to elevate their voices and influence in district governance processes.

Still, an imbalance of power clearly exists between parents and district officials. Creating the conditions that lead to meaningful parent engagement are dependent on the actions that district officials take. These include factors such as preparing parents by providing them with quality training, supplying parents with meaningful information, providing translation and interpretation services, and creating and sustaining safe forums for discussions and deliberations where every participant feels empowered. As Anderson (1998), Shatkin and Gershberg (2007), and others have noted, administrators can easily create barriers that obstruct meaningful engagement. Resistance and skepticism about parent participation in education governance (e.g., devaluing parent knowledge and capacity) have been cited as barriers to creating effective participatory processes (e.g., Marsh & Hall, 2018).

Henderson et al. (2007) describe sharing power as a form of democratic decision-making (p. 188). They assert, “democracy is a way of living together that promotes fairness and social justice” (Henderson et al., 2007, p. 187). According to Henderson et al. (2007), sharing power in a democratic school system means that all families are engaged in dialogue with teachers and administrators about budgets, programs, and practices *before* final decisions are made. Moreover, the questions and ideas raised by families are taken seriously by school staff and are

reflected in the final decisions adopted by administrators (Henderson et al., 2007). Henderson et al.'s description of shared power is partially reflected in LCAP, where districts must give parents the opportunity to review, comment, and receive a response to their comments before plans are adopted by school boards (Cal. Educ Code § 52061). The state's guiding questions, asking districts to describe the information, action, and impact of parent involvement in the LCAP process, seem to also follow Henderson et al.'s explanation of shared power. Still, Henderson et al. (2007) suggests officials create a dialogic space where they are engaged with parents in serious governance-based conversations. To review and comment, as captured in the LCAP text, does not seem to carry the same level of meaningfulness and could prompt passive interaction between parents and district officials. Whereas engaged dialogue suggests intentional inclusion, the language of LCAP leaves it up to district officials to decide the types and extent of parent involvement it will create for its participants.

Knowledge is pivotal to constructing a genuine power-sharing partnership. Henderson et al. (2007) argued, to be effective partners with schools, parents need access to meaningful information such as school budgets, student performance, and other data impacting educational outcomes of students. Providing worthwhile training on performance data and governance processes, allocating ample time to discuss topics before final decisions are made, and gathering insights from all families also help construct meaningful power sharing relationships between schools and families (Henderson et al., 2007). Likewise, the knowledge families bring with them “about their children, their culture and values, their understanding of the community, and their own interests and accomplishments” (Henderson et al., 2007, p. 193) should be learned by administrators and teachers. Moreover, Henderson et al. (2007) asserted, in addition to believing that parents and schools can create mutually beneficial partnerships, administrators, teachers, and

other school staff need the tools and training to be able to construct such relationships (p. 19).

Therefore, training is essential for both parents and officials.

Training

Training is an essential piece of participatory governance (Anderson, 1998; Shatkin & Gershberg, 2007; Fung, 2004). Shatkin and Gershberg (2007) argue proper training increases parent capacity to understand budgetary and educational issues and helps them more effectively articulate their positions. Moreover, Anderson (1998) sites a lack of training as a barrier to authentic participation. Failing to build parent capacity can result in parents simply serving as a rubber-stamp for administrators' agendas (Auerbach, 2010), which may help explain why some districts would choose not to training or adequately prepare parents for the LCAP. It could also be that districts themselves are not skilled on how to train parents, which can become even more complicated when working with parents who are immigrants (and unfamiliar with the U.S. education system in general) or whose dominant language is something other than English.

Yet training for district officials is not discussed in LCAP, suggesting the state anticipates district staff have already established meaningful partnerships or are at least prepared to engage in collaborative discussions about budgets and policies. Training for parents is addressed in other areas of the California Education Code, such as in the DELAC regulation (CDE, 2018a), but training for administrators on how to work with parents or on developing partnerships does not appear to be covered in the code. While numerous scholars cite the importance of administrator training in this area (e.g., Epstein, 2011; Henderson, et al., 2007; Brown & Hunter, 1998), Auerbach (2009) points out that even leadership preparation programs insufficiently address this domain. For district officials who are unsure how to include parents into LCAP processes in meaningful ways, as findings from Affeldt (2015) and Wolf and Sands (2016) suggest, the quality of engagement and inclusion could become superficial or ineffective.

The quality and extent of training provided to parents is an important condition to their meaningful engagement in LCAP processes. Developing, evaluating, and revising an LCAP is a complex task that should include budgetary, policy, and program discussions and deliberations. Interestingly, training is not mentioned in the LCAP policy text. In fact, the DELAC policy does specify “school districts shall provide DELAC members with appropriate training materials and training which will assist them in carrying out their required advisory responsibilities” (CDE, 2018a, Training section), but it does not give additional guidance about how or what districts should do to prepare parents for involvement in the LCAP. Given this missing mandate, how will districts prepare parents to engage in LCAP processes? Who will provide the training, under what conditions, and of what quality?

Parent Involvement in Participatory Governance

Several scholars have argued the benefits of parents’ direct involvement in policymaking processes (Anderson, 1998; Durand, 2011; Fung, 2004; Olivos, 2006). Nonprofessional citizen participants frame problems and priorities in ways that could contribute to the development of innovative approaches and strategies that perhaps are overlooked by experts (Fung, 2006, p. 73). Nonprofessionals, such as parents, possess local knowledge that comes from their lived experience. Fung’s assertions echo Moll et al. (1992), whose widely cited theory *funds of knowledge* supports claims that students’ homes are knowledge-rich resources that can be leveraged to create educational change (p. 139).

A governance process that includes parent involvement adds fresh perspectives and types of information to policy discussions (Nabatchi, 2010). Parents have valuable insights and unique knowledge about their children and communities that may be unknown to policymakers and school officials (McNeil & Coppola, 2006). The insights and knowledge that parents bring to the table could help construct public education policies that are more responsive to support the

learning and engagement of local children (Fung, 2004; Henderson et al., 2007; Olivos, 2006; Trujillo, 2012). In short, parents “can be the shock troops of democracy. Properly deployed, their local knowledge, wisdom, commitment, authority, even rectitude can address wicked failures of legitimacy, justice, and effectiveness in representative and bureaucratic institutions” (Fung, 2006, p. 74). Many scholars argue several important principles, practices, and features must be in place to achieve meaningful engagement.

In their work on parent participation in democratic processes in the Los Angeles Unified School district, Marsh, Strunk, Bush-Mecenas, and Huguet (2015) examined the design and implementation of the district’s school choice initiative. They created a two-dimensional graph divided into four quadrants to analyze the processes that unfolded. The vertical axis represents the *what* and *how* aspect of a participatory policymaking process. The more deliberative the process (the top of the axis), the more the decisions are based on public, two-way, reasoned discussions that are centered on the common good. The more interest-based the process (the bottom of the axis), the more decisions are based on competitive interests and are characterized by a one-way flow of information. Five categories describe the various degrees of involvement along the deliberative/interest-based axis: inform (the lowest), consult (next lowest), involve (in the middle), collaborate (second highest), and empower (the highest).

The horizontal axis of Marsh et al. (2015) model measures the number and type of participants involved in participatory policymaking. The left side (Participatory) represents a policymaking process where a maximum number of individuals engaged in the process are those who will be affected by a decision being deliberated. The left side of the axis also represents a process where participants share equal power in determining an outcome. The right side (Representative) indicates processes where the participants are limited to a few leaders who have been elected to represent the interests of larger groups of people. What is unclear is how to plot

a process on the horizontal axis. Marsh et al. (2015) called the horizontal axis a spectrum but did not fully describe how they decided where the different types of participants were plotted on their graph. Still, Marsh et al. (2015) found most processes remained interest-based (the lowest degree of involvement), citing structural constraints, limited access to information, and mistrust among the participants.

Using the term *authentic*, Anderson (1998) argued that participation is meaningful when all relevant stakeholders, including poor and minority parents, are brought together in a safe space where their diverse ideas are deliberated. Carried out, an authentic approach provides meaningful data that parents can analyze, training that prepares them to engage in district-level budgetary discussions, and collegial district administrators who facilitate a move toward a shared power structure (Anderson, 1998). Similarly, Shatkin and Gershberg (2007) found for shared governance structures that include parent participants to have a real impact on schools, three conditions need to be in place: a) parents needed to be given meaningful decision-making authority in schools, b) training and advocacy support had to be provided to parents, and c) administrators had to actively facilitate parent inclusion (p. 584). Anderson (1998) explained that by engaging participants in an authentic process, parents question the status quo and create a space where they can openly challenge, even transform, current school and district practices.

For Archon Fung (2004), to be engaged authentically means that all parents have genuine and equal authority to decide agency goals, priorities, and strategies. He asserted that lay people should have substantial and equal opportunities to participate directly in decisions that affect them, and an empowered participatory model of governance can accomplish this aim (Fung, 2004). Everyday people are empowered when, through an engaged, deliberative process, they help decide the actions that a public agency takes (Fung, 2004). For Latin@ parents of emergent

bilinguals, this could mean being involved in crafting policy decisions that directly affect the experiences and learning conditions of their children.

Olivos (2010) argued to create equitable educational communities district officials and administrators must view and treat parents as valuable, knowledgeable actors. At the center of Olivos's (2010) theory is a collaborative, reflective dialogic exchange between parents and administrators. Engaging in critical, thoughtful, and inclusive governance processes produces informed action that can lead toward a more equitable system for all students (Olivos, 2010). Terriquez (2011) described this level of parent involvement as *critical engagement*, where parents voice their interests and concerns about schools and contribute to the spending plans and policy decisions made by districts. When parents are engaged critically, they question and critique school policies, bringing to the surface alternative ways to think about and implement programs and practices (Terriquez, 2011). Together with students, teachers, and school administrators, parents of emergent bilingual children are involved in developing collaborative plans that support the collective learning of all students (Olivos, 2006).

Central to each of the characterizations described above is a critical dialogical, deliberative, and collaborative role parents play in helping determine district policies and practices. The term *meaningful* draws upon *authentic* (Anderson, 1998), *empowered* (Fung, 2004), and *critical* (Olivos, 2006; Terriquez, 2011) engagement, and describes the contributions, experiences, and consequence of parents, including Latin@ parents of emergent bilinguals, involved in school district governance processes. For the purposes of this proposed study, the term *meaningful* engagement will be used as an analytic lens through which the involvement of *las mamás* can be examined. For instance, what type of data and training are provided for parents by the district can help describe and characterize the opportunities for engagement constructed by officials. Moreover, the extent of which parents' ideas and concerns are taken up,

discussed, and deliberated can illustrate the depth of meaningful engagement of DELAC members in the LCAP processes. Although many benefits as have been documented about participatory governance frameworks, researchers have also uncovered significant barriers and pitfalls preventing meaningful parent engagement. Recognizing and understanding these obstructions will also be important to the analysis and assessment of the *Rancho* LCAP processes.

Barriers to Meaningful Parent Involvement in Local Governance

Barriers to meaningful parent involvement, such as tokenism, collusion, and other inauthentic approaches have often resulted in symbolic parent engagement where parents simply rubber-stamp administrator-led decisions that produce little change or accountability (Anderson, 1998; Fege, 2006). While government-mandated parent participation attempts to involve historically marginalized people in decision-making processes, Villegas (1988) asserts:

We pay much lip service to the notion of parental involvement in education, but in practice we continue to rely on “expert solutions” to local problems. What we lack is a process by which problems are identified and possible solutions are considered. Such a process must involve parents as well as educators, and ought to provide opportunities for open debate on the role of schooling in society, and teaching practices that would be appropriate to this role. (p. 259)

Villegas highlights how rhetoric often does not mirror actions. Although administrators may express a desire to involve parents in schools, Villegas (1988) asserted there is a tendency to look only to experts to help develop policy and practice. The knowledge Latin@ parents bring with them to the policymaking table can add a new dynamic to the ways in which the experiences and outcomes of emergent bilingual children are understood and addressed. It is not that parents have all the answers or that they should supplant research, rather parent voice could complement the policymaking process. By including parents in conversations where programs and policies are deliberated, their unique insights about their children could add a valuable dimension needed to create better-constructed, better-informed decisions.

The cultural context in which schools and districts operate, and the asymmetrical power structures inherent within them, can create barriers toward a process that includes parents as co-constructors of policy. Echoing Villegas (1988), Anderson (1998) maintained that a hierarchy of knowledge is embedded within the educational system, privileging professional expert input and minimizing parent knowledge. Many times, schools and districts have been framed as politically neutral sites, and their ideological and reproductive functions have been ignored (López & Stoelting, 2010). Indeed, a set of rules, norms, and identities regulate the operations and interactions that take place within schools and districts (Anderson, 1998). By not taking these important aspects into account, López and Stoelting (2010) argued that some collaborative theories mistakenly presume conditions exist that welcome parents into governance processes. Close examination of the LCAP policy seems to suggest this as well, that districts officials have created a welcoming space for parents to be involved in district-level funding and policy decisions. Moreover, López & Stoelting (2010) asserted that some of the parent involvement literature suggests that schools (and districts) are already structuring opportunities for parents to get involved and they are simply waiting on parents to join in, when in fact other researchers (e.g., Affeldt, 2015; Henderson et al., 2007) have found administrators lack the skills to create meaningful engagement opportunities for parents.

Even in cases where shared governance conditions have been put in place (e.g., diverse groups of parents are provided with training, policymaking authority, and protections), upon closer examination researchers have found groups such as site councils still lacked substantial influence (Anderson, 1998). For example, Anderson (1998) found ultimate decision-making control was still contained by high-ranking school officials who set meeting agendas, shared limited information with parent-participants, and restricted discussion topics to safe issues. Brown and Hunter (1998) found minority parent members on advisory committees were easily

co-opted by educators who were eager and able to protect their own interests (p. 114). Similarly, Malen (1999) found because principals are positioned as gatekeepers, “they can filter demands, stack councils with supporters, co-opt vocal critics, and ‘socialize’ parents into a sympathetic, at times submissive, role” (p. 211). Additionally problematic is the isolated approach district representatives have traditionally taken when creating, adopting, and evaluating public policies, which in turn preserves asymmetrical power relations that promotes mistrust and further marginalizes and inhibits parent involvement (Auerbach, 2009).

Anderson (1998) reported fears of retaliation and other negative repercussions prevent some people from fully participating in shared governance processes. Worries about being labeled a troublemaker or as argumentative, for example, can cause participants to restrict the extent of their sharing and engagement in discussions and deliberation (Anderson, 1998). Brown and Hunter (1998) also found a tendency for teachers and administrators to keep school problems private to protect themselves from criticism, attacks, and external threats. Also, administrators determined to follow their own instincts would quietly resolve conflicts, privately and in isolation (Brown & Hunter, 1998, p. 102). Nabatchi (2010) noted that deliberation that is perceived as unproductive, lacking any measurable improvement, frustrated parent-participants, leaving them feeling ineffective and powerless. Moreover, lay stakeholders may be reluctant to make additional sacrifices of time and energy if they do not see that their efforts are translating into action and change (Fung, 2006). Brown and Hunter (1998) offer strategies to minority parents: devise a focused agenda; form coalitions with teachers, principals, and students; and limit participation to select committees (p. 115). They reasoned this approach would help them conserve resources, energy, and time while reducing the chances of them being co-opted by officials or becoming distracted with insignificant issues (Brown & Hunter, 1998, p. 116).

Still, Malen (1999) concluded that enormous gaps exist between the rhetoric and reality of parent engagement in education decision-making. She argued, to further understand the forces that limit participation researchers need to investigate both opportunity structure and human agency (Malen, 1999, p. 214). Opportunity structure, defined as the formal and informal arrangements that restrict scope and substance of participation, can help explain decision-making processes that inhibit and prohibit expressions of dissent (Malen, 1999, p. 214). While there is scholarship, such as that discussed above, that explores the hindrances found within participatory governance arrangements (e.g., Anderson, 1998; Fung, 2004; Auerbach, 2012), Malen (1999) argues that these structural impediments must be investigated alongside human agency issues. Research into how people come to recognize, respond to, and overcome these barriers will expand our understandings about participatory reform efforts (Malen, 1999, p 214).

Anderson (1998), Brown and Hunter (1998), Malen (1999) and others (Fung, 2004) have uncovered some of the causes that have led to inauthentic forms of parent engagement in participatory governance structures. What is still unclear, however, is how the policy and funding decisions made through inauthentic processes could have resulted in different, perhaps better, policy decisions had parents been involved in truly meaningful ways. In the case of LCAP, it is important to learn what knowledge DELAC members want to share about emergent bilingual children that, through discussion and deliberation, could evolve into a change in policy, practice, and outcomes for students. Uncovering this important piece of data about DELAC members can highlight what motivates and shapes members' understandings about their roles and purpose in LCAP. It can also illuminate their innovative ways of thinking about and enhancing the educational experiences and outcomes of emergent bilingual children that get left behind by districts that carry out inauthentic engagement practices.

Participation in local school governance for historically marginalized parents, especially for Latin@ parents of emergent bilinguals, bears powerful potential to address and create real change in districts. Engaging parents in governance processes where root causes are discussed, prospective solutions are deliberated, actionable decisions are implemented, and progress is monitored on an ongoing basis could transform the learning conditions and outcomes of emergent bilingual students and create a path toward educational equity. As multiple researchers (e.g., Anderson, 1998; Delgado Bernal, 2001, Olivos, 2006) have asserted, parents have unique knowledge and insights that may be unknown to policymakers and administrators. The next section discusses the lenses through which the research questions for this study were analyzed.

Conceptual Framework

Maxwell (2013) explained the importance of a conceptual framework to research inquiry and design. He explained that a conceptual framework contains “the main things to be studied – the key factors, concepts, or variables—and the presumed relationships among them...it is primarily a conception or model of what is out there that you plan to study, and of what is going on with these things and why” (Maxwell, 2013, p. 39). This study examines subjects (DELAC Latina *mamás*) in a specific context (*Rancho los Nietos*), with a goal of wanting to understand their actions and the impact of their actions in a policymaking process (the LCAP process). Given the goals of this study, I employ participatory policymaking and parent-school partnership theories as lenses to analyze and interpret data collected.

Participatory Policymaking

Who participates and *how* they participate have been the central dimensions examined in participatory policymaking. Looking specifically at participants, Marsh and Hall (2018), found three types of participants took part in policymaking. The first was a broad number of individuals who were most directly affected by the policies being developed. The next was a small group of

well-informed representatives who represented constituents' interests (Marsh & Hall, 2018). The third was a narrow, hand pick group of appointees who might represent the interests of some stakeholders, but not all. At the same time, Marsh and Hall (2018) also found the extent of heterogeneity within a group affected engagement, where heterogeneity meant agreement in a group about a policy decision. The more diversity, the more conflicting interests existed and the less likelihood of reaching consensus.

To maximize the number of community member involved, and to engage new and different players, the California School Board Association [CSBA] (2014) suggested holding multiple meetings in different locations and at different times of the day. They also urged districts to collect comments online, conduct surveys, hold multiple small focus groups, and reaching out to community members by phone (CSBA, 2014). Providing childcare, transportation, and translation services have also been identified as important to involve a wide array of participants (Fairbank, Maslin, Mallin, Metz & Associates, 2013).

How participants are involved in processes was another dimension used to characterize the participatory nature of a process. For instance, Marsh and Hall (2018), described five levels of engagement: inform, consult, involve, collaborate, and empower. Inform described a process where participants were simply notified about policy and/or action. Consult meant a process where policymakers listened to participants, acknowledged their concerns, and provided feedback on how their input influenced final decisions. Involve consisted of consistent, ongoing input collected by participants, evidence of two-way communication and some shared authority, and decisions directly reflect input collected from participants. Collaborate was a higher degree of shared authority, where advice and recommendations were incorporated into final decisions. Empower was the highest level of processes, where participants had direct authority over decisions and were involved in deliberative communication.

Conditions that promote meaningful parent involvement in actual gatherings have included: training for both parents and administrators/facilitators; access to relevant and important data; sufficient time to discuss issues about student experiences and outcomes; forums to openly and critically deliberate concerns and potential solutions; and clear, established, and communicated degree of authority and influence over decisions (Anderson, 1998; Fung, 2004). In addition, all participants had the opportunity to voice their interests and question and critique existing policies and practices (e.g., Olivos, 2006; Terriquez, 2011).

Barriers to meaningful participation included: tokenism, collusion, retaliation, and rubber-stamping (Anderson, 1998; Fege, 2006). Additionally, scholars have found what led to these forms of participation were issues related to power, control, and/or deficit perceptions about the value and/or capacity of historically marginalized parents to contribute meaningfully to policy decisions (Anderson, 1998; Olivos, 2006). Other researchers have found meaningful engagement processes were negatively impacted by administrators' limited understandings and belief about parents and students of color, low-income families, and immigrants (Marsh & Hall, 2018). District norms also mediated the quality of participation, and top-down authority created barriers to community participation in participatory processes (Malen, 1999; Marsh & Hall, 2018).

Examining the conditions through the lens of participatory policymaking helps to characterize the LCAP process that unfolds in the *Rancho los Nietos Unified School District*. Moreover, it elucidates the ways in which *las mamás* participate in the LCAP process.

Parent-School Partnership Theory

The LCAP process necessitates some level of collaboration between district officials and parents. Ishimaru et al. (2016) have found that “families may be key partners for improving their own child’s outcomes as well as creating greater equity in educational systems” (p. 851).

Henderson et al. (2007) also found that effective family-school partnerships have ushered in school improvements. Still, minority families have often felt unwelcomed, powerless, and marginalized in their children's own schools (Ishimaru et al., 2016, p. 851). Moreover, Olivos's (2006) found the attitudes and expectations teachers and administrators hold of low-income bicultural parents could be traced to explicit and implicit devaluation of the home cultures and knowledge possessed by these families (p. 66). He argues this problematic position prompts school personnel to deem parents as inferior, and leads to paternalistic approaches to parent involvement (Olivos, 2006). "...The effort is placed on changing or 'educating' the parents instead of reforming the inequalities and inequities found in the school" (Olivos, 2006, p. 68).

At the center of Henderson et al.'s (2007) family-school partnership theory are relationships based on mutual respect and common purpose. They assert parents and schools are equal partners in educating children and everyone has something valuable to share and gain from a reciprocal relationship, however, the responsibility for building and sustaining strong partnerships rests on school staff, in particular school leaders (Henderson et al., 2007, p. 39). They reasoned that schools are powerful institutions that can intimidate many parents (Henderson et al., 2007, p. 40). Although teachers and school staff can proactively engage with parents to create a more welcoming environment, they need resources, energy, and guidance from principals and other school leaders to support their efforts (Henderson et al., 2007, p. 42). Ultimately, constructing caring and trustful relationships that treat parents as partners prompts parents to become and remain involved in schools (Henderson et al., 2007).

Trust. In their research on collaborative partnerships, Henderson et al. (2007) found when people feel liked, valued, and respected, they collaborate more readily (p. 49). Marsh and Hall (2018) have also found lack of trust eroded collaboration among co-participants and leaders. Bryk and Schneider (2002) found that respect, competence, integrity, and personal regard were

essential elements that comprised *trust* between parents and schools. Respect, Bryk and Schneider (2002) explained, existed when all sides genuinely listened to one and another and subsequent actions reflected views expressed. Even when people disagreed, individuals could still feel valued if others respected their opinions (Bryk & Schneider, 2002). Competence referred to the ability of partners to fulfill their roles (Bryk & Schneider, 2002), that they have the knowledge and know-how to do so. They (Bryk & Schneider, 2002) explained that allowing incompetence and negligence to persist would undermine trust among partners. Integrity meant a partner was both faithful to their word and that their actions were guided by a moral-ethical perspective (Bryk & Schneider, 2002). Trust would be weakened when promises were broken or when the commitment to the education and welfare of children were not placed as the highest priority (Bryk & Schneider, 2002). Finally, personal regard meant individuals whose actions went beyond their formal job description (Bryk & Schneider, 2002). Here, collaborators felt their colleagues cared about one another and willingly went out of their way to help others (Henderson et al. 2007).

Cultural brokers. Henderson et al. (2007) has stated, “cultural brokers are familiar with families’ cultural backgrounds but also understand the culture of schools” (p.123). Cultural brokers work bilaterally, sharing information and strategies with schools and parents so that they can learn how to work with each other (Henderson et al., 2007, p. 123). Importantly, cultural brokers are not always and only parent liaisons or other school staff. They can be found in many places inside and *outside* of schools, such as among family members who help relatives navigate the school terrain. They can be community volunteers or individuals from nonprofit organizations. “They are individuals who know the languages and cultures of the community as well as speak English and understand how the U.S. system works,” explain Henderson et al. (2007, p.123).

Ishimaru et al. (2016) further elucidated the concept of cultural brokers, identifying diverse practices that resulted in different outcomes. For instance, cultural brokering as authentic care described an approach that cultivated a more welcoming and trustworthy school environment for families. In these cases, cultural brokers used practices that demonstrated their care for “people — and their culture, language, social, and cultural resources” (Ishimaru et al., 2016, p. 873). Cultural brokering that resulted in the catalyzing of parent relationships and leadership described the sense of agency and leadership that emerged from the brokering approaches that engaged parents collectively. This model led to a strengthening of social capital among those involved in brokering practices, as well as changed the views participants had about themselves and those in their group; they began to recognize each other as leaders and change agents (Ishimaru et al., 2016, p. 874). Finally, Ishimaru et al. (2016) found cultural brokers whose actions aimed to build families’ participation and voice around community issues such as affordable housing, transportation, immigration, poverty, racism, substance abuse, and domestic violence (p. 874). These cultural brokers recognized the connections between student achievement and broader community concerns and took action that positioned parents as political change agents.

Parent Role Construction & Efficacy. Framing their study around role theory, Whitaker and Hoover-Dempsey (2013) reasoned the duties, rights, obligations, and expectations individuals create about themselves and others are generated through their personal experiences as students as well as the messages they receive from their children and their children’s schools. Specifically, they hypothesized four everyday interactions influence the beliefs parents construct about their role as involved parents: student invitations, teacher invitations, school climate, and school expectations of involvement (Whitaker & Hoover-Dempsey, 2013, p. 74). A fifth area, “valence toward schools” (p. 80), was also included in the Whitaker and Hoover-Dempsey

(2013) theory. The valence is a parent's own experiences with schools as a student (including observations they may have made of their parents' involvement in their education). Whitaker and Hoover-Dempsey (2013) argued the valence parents have toward schools also shapes the role parents later construct for themselves about their own involvement in their child's schooling.

They found what most influenced the understandings parents develop about their roles (what they should do) in relation to their child's education (i.e., school expectations) were invitations parents received from a child and/or a child's teacher, perceptions about school attitudes and practices (i.e., school climate), and communication received from schools (Whitaker & Hoover-Dempsey, 2013, p. 90). They also found, while valence toward school played a role in shaping parents' beliefs and behaviors, it was not the most significant factors shaping parent involvement.

Whitaker and Hoover-Dempsey (2013) concluded that schools should pay close attention to the frequency and content (tone, quality, etc.) of the messages they communicate to parents. Additionally, they cautioned administrators and teachers to not simply write-off those parents they perceive as having had poor educational experiences in the past (Whitaker & Hoover-Dempsey, 2013, p. 90). Instead, they urged more research to be carried out exploring how a parent's prior experiences have influenced and shaped the role they take on in their own child's education. They suggested that conducting more research into this area could help policymakers and practitioners better understand what motivates parents to become involved in schools and districts.

Henderson et al. (2007) also cited role construction as critical to understanding a parent's choice to become involved in schools. Echoing Whitaker and Hoover-Dempsey, Henderson et al. (2007) defined role construction as what parents think they should do to support their children and argued parents' ideas were also informed by their cultural background, their surroundings,

and the messages communicated to them from their family, friends, and schools (Henderson et al., 2007, p. 33).

In addition to role construction, Henderson et al. (2007) found a parent's perceived efficacy was also instrumental in choosing to become involved in schools. When parents maintain a high level of efficacy, and feel they have the knowledge and skills to make a positive difference, they are more likely to be involved in their children's schools (Henderson et al., 2007, p. 33).

Collectively, the literature on family-school partnerships and the specific key elements that lead to effective collaborations (attitudes and beliefs, trust, cultural brokers, and role construction and efficacy) provided guidance on assessing the nature and quality of relationships and roles constructed and carried out by DELAC members and district officials in the LCAP process. Combined with participatory policymaking theory, these frameworks helped to disentangle and interpret the complex actions and outcomes that made up DELAC involvement as prospective policymaking partners.

Conclusion

The LCFF clearly encourages parents to be involved in various forms of shared governance within schools and districts. The LCFF text and guiding LCAP-related documents from the California Department of Education also expand the duties of DELAC members and elevate the voices of parents of emergent bilinguals to be included in important budgetary and policy decisions. But, as is asserted in the literature reviewed above, a major concern becomes the potential disconnect between the rhetoric contained within the LCAP policy text and what actually happens on the ground.

Although much of the scholarship on family-school partnership and participatory policymaking discuss the experiences and outcomes of parents in general or those of minority

parents, only a few are specifically focused on Latin@ parents of emergent bilinguals, an important and leading parent group highlighted in LCAP. Still, reviewing these bodies of literature highlight important aspects that create meaningful parent engagement opportunities and those that construct roadblocks to such efforts.

Acknowledging the current hostile climate toward Latin@ immigrants could influence how, when, and where Latin@ parents choose to involvement themselves with their children's education. Threats of deportation could lead some parents to disengage with committees. At the same time recognizing known deficit framings of Latin@ parents, as discussed earlier, the attitudes and beliefs informing administrator actions are critical to take into account when exploring the role and purpose these actors envision for parents of emergent bilinguals in the LCAP process]. These views shed light on how and why opportunities for parent involvement are structured in the LCAP process. Equally important is understanding the ways parents view themselves, whether as spectators or as empowered actors with important insights to share about children and voices to exercise that knowledge. These perspectives can lead to clearer understandings about what informs parents' ideas about their role and purpose in advisory committees and in LCAP processes, how these ideas are reflected in their actions during DELAC meetings, and ultimately, the consequences of their participation.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Ethnography is an approach to the study of people in every day life. It focuses on culture, that is on people making and sometimes contesting the meaning of their experiences, but without ignoring the material, economic, and political contexts of that meaning making...[Ethnographic research] is an ideal research strategy for seeking to understand real human behavior in all its complexity and, therefore, provides important background for any research that seeks real and lasting solutions to human problems. (Anderson-Levitt, 2006, p. 290)

Ethnography, as defined above, is a powerful approach to understand the cultures people create through their actions and interactions with others in a particular place. As an analytic lens, ethnography can be used to unpack how people, such as Latina immigrant mothers and district officials, make sense of the world around them. Following McCarty (2015), I identified a setting and participants that would yield the answers I sought to uncover. Moreover, as McCarty (2015) explained, “although ethnographic research questions are context-specific, they should have transferable lessons...broader applicability...beyond a single context or site” (p.83). I wanted to examine the beliefs, values, and attitudes mothers and district officials had about parents’ role in LCAP, and the actions they took actualizing their roles in the process. Exploring these experiences revealed the multiple layers of impact the LCAP policy has had in a real-world setting. The following questions guided my study:

- What prompts Latina immigrant *mamás* to become involved in school and district committees?
- What are the understandings of Latina DELAC members about their purpose and role in LCAP?
- What are district officials’ understandings of the purpose and role of Latin@ parents of emergent bilinguals in LCAP?
- How are *las mamás* participating in LCAP? What are their experiences in the process? What are the personal, interpersonal, and programmatic consequences of their participation?

Given the research questions and the goals of this study, using an ethnographic lens helped to unpack the meaning of action and interaction that transpired as the *Rancho los Nietos* LCAP process unfolded. Anderson-Levitt (2006) has found “ethnography is useful, first, for

discovering what meanings different actors are making of a situation...Second, ethnography is useful for developing a valid understanding of local situations in all their complexity...Third, because ethnography takes time, it gives us the opportunity to observe and understand processes as they happen” (Anderson-Levitt, 2006, p. 282). The key strengths of ethnography outlined by Anderson-Levitt (discovering meaning, developing a valid understanding of local situations, and processing events and interactions as they happened) were what I sought to answer through my research questions. Taking an ethnographic lens to my study helped me distill the actions and interactions that were taking place in the district, and the meaning individuals were making about those interactions.

My study was also a bounded system; the school district I named *Rancho los Nietos*. I wanted to “illuminate a particular situation, to get a close (i.e., in-depth and firsthand) understanding of it” (Yin, 2005, p. 112). I wanted to understand the case of *Rancho los Nietos*, and more specifically active DELAC members involved in the district’s LCAP process over the course of one year. There were multiple reasons for selecting *Rancho los Nietos* as the case study. First, it was the location of my community engagement. I knew and already was familiar with DELAC and some of its members. Second, the district serves a substantial number of EL students, and therefore was well positioned to include DELAC in its LCAP process. Yin (2005) states that case study design enables the researcher to address questions that seek to answer *how* and *why* something has happened, and those were the types of questions I sought to answer through this research. Additionally, multiple sources of evidence were collected to triangulate data and produce robust findings (Yin, 2005, p. 386). Descriptions of each data source collected for this study are discussed later in the chapter.

My approach to this work was also strongly informed by a Chicana/Latina feminist epistemology. As Fierros and Delgado Bernal (2016) argued, a researcher’s epistemological

orientation (their worldviews) is closely tied to the methodologies employed in their work (p. 101). An epistemological orientation is a whole system of knowing, linked to a person's lived and learned experiences (Fierros & Delgado Bernal, 2016). In this work I drew upon my cultural intuition (Delgado Bernal, 1998) as Chicana researcher, melding my own personal experiences, my professional experiences, the literature on Latina immigrant mothers, and the analytic process of this study. Who I am informed the ways in which I engaged with *las mamás* in my study, and how I analyzed and interpreted their insights and experiences. Moreover, I knew factors such as immigration status, bilingualism, and limited English proficiency (Delgado Bernal, 1998) would play an integral part to their unique lived experiences in the *Rancho* LCAP process. My way of looking, being, and seeing in the field was then shaped by my epistemological orientation and lead to the incorporating *pláticas* as part of my methodology.

While *pláticas* can be regarded as a Chicana/Latina feminist method – a strategy to collect data, we argue that *pláticas*...are part of a Chicana/Latina feminist methodology that is an extension of particular ways of knowing. (Fierros & Delgado Bernal, 2016, p. 102).

Explained more fully in a section below, *pláticas* are a “space of theorization” (Fierros & Delgado Bernal, 2016, p. 108). It is through its fluid two-way conversations that *pláticas* construct a sense of trust and respect between participants and the researcher. The conversations cultivated through *pláticas* recognize and honor the understandings that *mujeres* (women) themselves construct from their everyday lived experiences; they affirm their sense making as legitimate forms of knowledge (Fierros & Delgado Bernal, 2016). Weaving together *pláticas* with Seidman's (2013) three-interview series strategy (explained in more detail below) offered the collection of rich first-hand accounts of the experiences and sense making of *las mamás* in the LCAP process.

Study Design

The design of this study centered on my goals to investigate the understandings that active *mamás* and district officials had about the purpose and role of parents in LCAP, how *las mamás* were actually engaged in the *Rancho los Nietos* LCAP process, and the consequence of the active engagement of *las mamás*. In-depth interviews, observations, *pláticas*, and document analyses were the primary sources of data collected to answer my research questions. These four sources of data were gathered at different times and in different places enabling for triangulation (Merriam, 2009, p. 215; Yin, 2005, p. 386) that strengthened the internal validity and trustworthiness of the findings of this study.

The next section begins with a description of the study setting and participants selected for this project. Then, a description of each data source is described as well as the analytic process used to distill the information that had been gathered. Finally, my positionality within this study is discussed.

Study Setting and Participants

Setting. The setting for this study is the *Rancho los Nietos Unified School District*. *Rancho los Nietos* district officials take pride in the numerous local, national, and international accolades the district has received (Rancho los Nietos Unified School District, 2013). As mentioned above, the *Rancho* district has been awarded the Broad Prize for Urban Education (Lepping, 2008, p.1), and many of its schools have earned federal and state awards of distinction (ED, 2015a; ED, 2015b; CDE, 2015). In addition, four of its twelve high schools are in the *U.S. News and World Report's* (2015) top 400 high schools in the nation.

In many ways, the student body mirrors the demographics of the city it served. According to 2010 Census data, 40 percent of the population identified as Latino, 30 percent identified as White, 13 percent identified as Black, and another 13 percent identified as Asian/Pacific

Islander. Approximately one-third of people living in the *Rancho* area were foreign-born (U.S. Census Bureau, 2014), and a recent report estimated the undocumented population in city of *Rancho los Nietos* was as high as 24 percent of the entire immigration population (New American Economy, 2018). An estimated 44 percent of the population also reported speaking a language other than English at home (U.S. Census Bureau, 2014). While Spanish was the most common non-English language spoken by residents of the City of *Rancho los Nietos*, nearly 10 percent of the population spoke an Asian or Pacific Island language (U.S. Census Bureau, 2014). More than one-third of households included at least one child under the age of 18. In addition, 22 percent of families with children under 18 earned incomes below the poverty level (U.S. Census Bureau, 2014). Ultimately, the areas served by *Rancho los Nietos* were highly diverse – ethnically, linguistically, and economically, with a significant immigrant and potentially undocumented population.

Looking more specifically at the student demographics in *Rancho los Nietos*, during the 2013-2014 school year one quarter of students were classified as English learners in the *Rancho los Nietos* public school system (DataQuest, 2013). Approximately 90 percent of those EL students spoke Spanish (DataQuest, 2013). That proportion had remained comparatively consistent over the last five years (Ed-Data, 2018). The reclassification⁸ rate had also remained relatively flat, hovering between 10 and 12 percent since 2009 (Ed-Data, 2018). That meant that annually few students that were designated EL had been able to demonstrate the level of English proficiency required to be reclassified out of EL status. Holding onto the EL classification impacted the type of classes they were eligible to take, and in a “school of choice” district, where students had to compete to enter the more selective middle school and high school programs, EL

⁸ As mentioned in chapter 1, reclassification (also called redesignation) refers to ELs who have met the criteria, standards, and procedures that demonstrate they have attained a level of proficiency in English comparable to their native English speaker counterparts (CDE, 2016a).

students were effectively steered away from the most selective programs available in the district. In fact, in the district's most competitive high schools EL enrollment ranged from 1 to 2 percent of the entire student body at those schools, where EL enrollment in the district's less competitive high schools, including alternative high schools, ranged from 11 to 32 percent of the entire student body at those schools (DataQuest, 2013).

Compared to their mainstream peers, emergent bilingual students in the district also had poorer academic outcomes. For example, in 2015-2016 school year (the year before the year of observation), only 9 percent of EL students had met or exceeded the state standards in English Language Arts/Literacy (ELA), compared to 50 percent of English Only (EO) and Initial Fluent English Proficient (IFEP)⁹ students (Ed-Data, 2018). In 2013-2014, 36 percent of EL students in the district had passed the English portion of the California High School Exit Exam (CAHSEE), this compared to the district's overall passing rate of 80 percent (Ed-Data, 2018). Only 59 percent of EL students had passed the Math portion of the CAHSEE, compared to 85 percent of the general student population (Ed-Data, 2018). Additionally, only 74 percent of EL students had graduated with their cohort in 2015-2016, less than the non-EL student graduation rate of 87 percent (Ed-Data, 2018). During the same year, 15 percent of all EL students had left high school without completing their studies, compared to 8 percent of the overall student population (Ed-Data, 2018). EL students comprised 33 percent of those students who had dropped out of high school, when they only comprise 23 percent of the overall student population (Ed-Data, 2018).

Also, one year prior to the observation year more than one fifth of EL students in the district were designated as long term ELs, meaning these students had been enrolled in U.S. schools for six or more years, had remained at the same English proficiency level – or regressed

⁹ An Initial Fluent English Proficient (IFEP) student is someone whose Home Language Survey indicates a language other than English is spoken in the home, but upon initial assessment is determined to be proficient in English (CDE, 2016a).

in level -- for the last two years, and, if the student was in 6th through 9th grade, had scored “standard not met” in the state-wide standardized exam (CDE, 2016a). Another 11 percent of the EL student population was “at risk” of becoming long-term EL (DataQuest, 2013). Combined, 33 percent of EL students in the district were long-term ELs or at-risk of becoming long-term. EL students in the middle and high school grades were also more frequently suspended than their non-EL peers. For instance, during 2016-2017, 8 percent of EL students in 7th and 8th grades were suspended compared to 7 percent of non-EL students (DataQuest, 2013). Seven percent of EL students in 9th to 12th grades were suspended compared to 4 percent of non-EL students (DataQuest, 2013). EL students were also disproportionately represented among students suspended in the middle and high school grades. For example, in 2015-2016, EL students made up 13 percent of the total high school student population, but they made up 16 percent of students suspended among those grades (DataQuest, 2013). In 2016-2017, EL students comprised 11 percent of the high school population in the district, but they made up 18 percent of all students suspended in those grades (DataQuest, 2013).

The educational achievement and climate outcomes signaled a need to change the policies and practices currently implemented for emergent bilinguals in the *Rancho los Nietos* district. Allowing the status quo to continue would undoubtedly have a negative impact not only on individual EL student lives, but also on the City of *Rancho los Nietos* and society as a whole. Given that part of the focus and intent of LCFF was to support and enhance the educational outcomes and experiences of EL students, *Rancho* was well positioned to benefit from the new governance structure that includes DELAC members as policymaking partners.

Participants. As mentioned earlier, active DELAC *mamás* and district officials were the primary participants of this study. Given that the purpose of the study and my research questions, identifying and obtaining the participation of “expert” informants was essential (Velez, 2012).

Prior to embarking on my dissertation study, I was already an established community participant in the district, and attended both school level and district-wide meetings including in DELAC. From my knowledge and familiarity with the group, I had a sense of the district staff I wanted to invite to be part of my study, based on who I saw as having direct conversations about LCAP in DELAC meetings. I also knew that I wanted to that I wanted to invite DELAC *mamás* who were *active* in DELAC, mothers who were consistent meeting attendees. Below I describe the selection process that I employed to identify and recruit *las mamás* and the district officials who eventually became participants in my study.

Las mamás. DELAC parent engagement is an important aspect of the new school funding and accountability approach. Therefore, collecting the experiences and understandings about the LCAP process from DELAC parents was essential to the analysis and contributions of this study. That meant securing the participation of active DELAC *mamás*. *Active* meant regular attendees of DELAC meetings, *mamás* who would be able to speak to their understandings, experiences, and the consequence of their participation in DELAC and in LCAP processes. To accomplish this, I employed a purposeful sampling technique.

Sampling. Purposeful sampling is “based on the assumption that the investigator wants to discover, understand, and gain insight and therefore must select a sample from which the most can be learned” (Merriam, 2009, p. 61). This type of sampling allows the researcher to identify possible “expert” informants, or collaborators that experienced key events or situations that may be particularly helpful in illuminating some aspect that the study is attempting to understand or address (Velez, 2012; Weiss, 1994). Using a purposeful sampling technique allowed me to identify particular DELAC members whose expertise would be crucial to this study.

As I mentioned above, I wanted to include *mamás* who were active in DELAC, mothers who had been attending the DELAC meetings regularly, and, therefore, had been exposed to

LCAP related conversations that had taken place. Additionally, I wanted to uncover the experiences of *Latina immigrant mothers*, therefore being Latina, an immigrant, and a mother were additional criteria in my sampling technique. Also, I wanted to capture the insights of the women I knew from my engagement in the district, but I also wanted to include other women who I did not know personally, but who were active in DELAC. I believed these two sets of active DELAC *mamás* would provide a comprehensive portrait of DELAC members, while allowing individual stories of advocacy to emerge.

I began by inviting the group six women who I knew from my earlier DELAC involvement. These women knew me as both a community member and as a doctoral student interested in parent engagement. We had many conversations about voice, advocacy work, and policymaking prior to the start of my study. I asked each one of my prospective participants separately, assuring each one anonymity and confidentiality.

I used the same criteria to identify the second group of prospective DELAC *mamás* to participate in my study. I wanted to make sure they were regular attendees of DELAC meetings, so I began the recruitment process after the first three DELAC meetings had taken place. In my selection pool were women who were outspoken, meaning they asked questions during DELAC meetings; there were also women who were quieter, meaning they did not ask questions during DELAC meetings. My intent was to capture insights and experiences of both leaders (i.e., DELAC officers) and members at-large, and those of outspoken women as well as those who were less outspoken. I believed this would lead me to data that would more closely reflect the heterogeneity of participation that existed among DELAC members.

I approached each woman after a DELAC meeting, introduced myself to them, explained my study and my interest in recruiting them for the study. We exchanged phone numbers, and when I called them, I confirmed their regular attendance of DELAC meetings, and their status as

Latina mothers. I also explained the commitment I sought from participants, specifically being able to participate in three one-on-one interviews and in at least one *plática*. We then arranged a time and place to meet to conduct the first interview. It was during the first interview where I presented the consent form. Eight of the nine women I recruited through this process agreed to be part of my study. One woman did not answer my calls after we exchanged phone numbers.

In total, 14 *mamás* agreed to be participants in my study, which was approximately one quarter of the total DELAC representatives and parent guests that attended DELAC meetings during the observation year. Among my participants were two DELAC officials and 12 members at-large. Their level of engagement (how often they asked questions during DELAC meetings) ranged from asking 2-3 questions at nearly every meeting, to asking 1 question occasionally, to asking no questions the entire year. Portraits of each *mamá* are provided in chapter 4.

District officials. Because a core goal of this research is to understand the extent to which DELAC members are included in LCAP processes, district officials who interacted directly with and presented LCAP information to DELAC members were recruited to participate in this study. Specifically, four officials were identified: *Rancho los Nietos* Superintendent John Waldman, LCAP Director Eric Centeno, LCAP Asst. Director Michael Lopez, and DELAC Coordinator Silvia Coronado. (Pseudonyms were used in place of each district official's true names.) These individuals controlled the meeting agendas, discussion formats, and the quality and quantity of data shared with parents. They were powerful gatekeepers with tremendous authority over the LCAP process in the district. Gathering the perspectives of these particular officials about the role of parents in LCAP and observing their interactions with DELAC *mamás* enabled interrogation and interpretation of the approach they each took to involve DELAC members in the district's decision-making processes. In chapter 5, portraits of each district official are provided that include important background information about each person.

Obtaining district official's participation began with the district's Institutional Review Board (IRB) process the summer before the academic year of observation. The district's research director told me that very few outside studies received IRB approval, but, luckily, my study was approved. Although I had already been attending DELAC and other district level meetings as a community participant, I was not sure the district officials I wanted to interview for my study knew who I was. Rather than beginning with a cold email, I decided to first introduce myself in person to each district official at the end of a district meeting, what Seidman (2013) would call "making contact" (p. 50). During my introduction I gave a brief summary of my research, let them know I had received IRB approval from the district, and my interest in interviewing them. All agreed to participate in my study, and each gave me instructions on what next steps to take to arrange interviewing them. The Superintendent and the LCAP Director both asked that I email their assistants to schedule a date and time to meet. The DELAC Coordinator and LCAP Asst. Director asked that I email them directly, which I did, to arrange a time and date to meet. A description of the interview preparation, execution, and post-interview process is discussed in the next section.

Data Sources and Collection Strategies

Pláticas. As a Chicana/Latina feminist methodology, *pláticas* have been described as a way to develop *confianza y respeto* (trust and respect) with individuals (Fierros & Delgado Bernal, 2016). Fierros and Delgado Bernal (2016) further argued that *pláticas* are a space where experiences and stories shared through dialogue are recognized and honored as legitimate sources of knowledge. *Pláticas* have always been an important practice in my family. These organic conversations happen over dinner, during long and short road trips, over breezy afternoons in the park, and in countless other places. Similar to Fierros and Delgado Bernal (2016), *pláticas* continue to be an important source of family cultural knowledge for me. These

back-and-forth conversations have provided a space to engage my parents, family members, and friends in discussions about life experiences and values, thoughts, and insights about the physical and spiritual world. Becoming deeply personal at times, *pláticas* carry with them important messages or lessons, shaping my understanding of whom I am and the family I represent when I go out into the world.

Different than a focus group strategy, *pláticas* offer the researcher the opportunity to engaging in conversation with participants. In general, a focus group strategy emphasizes group interaction and communication, and allows participants to share stories, experiences, and points of view in a space where others are encouraged to comment and ask questions to examine how and why people thing the way they do, in a way that may not be possible in a one on one interview (Kitzinger, 1995). Focus groups also place the researcher in the position of conversation facilitator, whereas in *pláticas*, the researcher is an active participant in the discussions that take place.

Because at the center of my study are the experiences and insights of *las mamás* who are active in DELAC, collecting their ideas and interactions was essential to my project. *Pláticas* became an important tool in helping accomplish my data collecting goals because they allowed these stories to be collected while enabling me to participate in the meaning making. Moreover, *pláticas* were already happening before, during, and after committee meetings. These rich conversations were a place where *las mamás* would raise their concerns and express their ideas about programs and practices needed to support the learning of all children in the district. At times disagreeing with one another and with me, the *pláticas* often turned into an exchange of advice on how to navigate the system to resolve an issue, or to develop strategies and next steps to continue to push for changes in policy and practice with school and district administrators.

One of the most important principals in using *pláticas* is the recognition and respect of participants as holders and creators of knowledge (Fierros & Delgado Bernal, 2016). Fierros and Delgado Bernal (2016) argue that in *pláticas* participants transcend traditional roles of informants and instead are acknowledged as co-constructors with the researcher in the production of meaning making and understanding of Latina educational experiences. With its insistence on honoring the understandings *mujeres* (women) construct from their everyday lived experiences and engaging in a two-way fluid conversation (Fierros & Delgado Bernal, 2016), a *plática* methodology supported the intent of my work, to center the epistemologies of the *las mamás* participating in the research. *Pláticas* were also a way to help address my “blind spots” (Calderón et al., 2012), as *las mamás* taught me about their theoretical perspectives on the roles they played and wanted to play in setting school and district policy decisions.

I collected six *pláticas* over the course of the observation year. I invited small groups of participants (2-5) to local diners. Over coffee we discussed recent DELAC meeting topics, school related issues, and other current events. These intimate settings were important spaces where the women listened to each other and offered advice and support to one another. They also deliberated topics such as the treatment of Latin@ parents and students in the district and their experiences raising issues of concern at district-wide and school-level meetings. The *pláticas* were in Spanish and averaged about 2 hours each. I took jottings and audio-recorded our conversations, and later transcribed the recordings for coding and analysis.

Interviews. Anderson-Levitt (2006) has found that interviewing is an important tool to access participants’ ideas and feelings (p. 287). Additionally, Olson (2011) argued that interviews had “the potential to yield rich data that cannot be accessed any other way (p. 49). I chose to use semi-structured interviews with both *las mamás* and district officials, adapting Seidman’s (2013) three-interview series strategy for each group. Seidman’s (2013) approach

calls for three 90-minute interviews carried out over the course of three weeks. The Seidman (2013) three-interview series strategy begins by exploring a participant's focused life history during the first interview. During this interview, the participant reconstructs and narrates in their pasts that place their experience in the topic of focus in the context of their lives (Seidman, 2013, p. 21). The second interview explores the concrete details of the participant's present lived experience specific to the topic of the study. The series concludes with a third interview where the participant reflects on the meaning of their experience in relation to their life (Seidman, 2013, p. 20-25). Employing Seidman's approach complemented and expanded on the additional sources of data collected throughout the study. Below is a fuller explanation of the interview approach I employed with *mamás* and district officials.

Interviews with mamás. Taking place in their home, a local park, in school parent centers, and coffee houses, I carried out interviews with *mamás* in the settings the suggested and where they felt the most comfortable. The interviews were also conducted in Spanish and ranged from one to three hours in length each. With participant permission, the interviews were audio-recorded and were later transcribed, coded, and analyzed.

I adapted Seidman's three-interview series strategy (2013), I began the first interview by gathering background information about each *mamá*. It was in this interview when her focused life history was explored, including her own schooling experiences, young adulthood, early experiences with the U.S. school system, and the path that led to her to eventually become involved with DELAC. The second interview was centered on their present experiences in DELAC, with district officials, and in advocating for emergent bilingual students and their families. Reflective data was gathered during the third interview, which provided insights about how each *mamá* understood her role and responsibilities as parent representatives for families of

emergent bilingual children and as education policymakers, and her goals for her future engagement.

With each interview, I employed a semi-structured approach (Merriam, 2009, p. 90), using guiding questions to focus our conversations on the understandings and experiences of *las mamás*. Still, I wanted to have the flexibility to explore and dig deeper as each *mamá* began to share her perspective about and experience as a parent representative, working with district staff, and involvement with the LCAP process. Ultimately, I captured insights that helped make sense of *las mamás*' experiences through important first-hand accounts that were then triangulated alongside data gathered through meeting observations, documents, and *pláticas*.

Interviews with district officials. Seidman's (2013) three-interview series was also adapted with district officials, but in a much more condensed and modified format. This was because I conducted only one interview with each district official. Therefore, questions about their experiences working with parents and their thoughts about the LCAP would be prioritized over questions about their early childhoods and experiences in school. Using a semi-structured format, I designed guiding questions for each interview, but was flexible and probed by asking follow up questions throughout the conversation.

Interestingly, the LCAP Asst. Director ask that he and the DELAC Coordinator be interviewed together — which I agreed to. The joint interview with the LCAP Asst. Director and DELAC Coordinator took place immediately after a DELAC meeting. The interview with the Superintendent and the LCAP Director took place in their offices. They were conducted in English and averaged about one hour and twenty minutes in length. With their permission, all of the interviews were audio-recorded and were later transcribed, coded, and analyzed.

Documents. I collected and analyzed a select group of documents published by the district that I thought would capture the district's ideas about parent partnerships, parent

involvement in decision-making processes, and about the LCAP. The documents I collected included the official board policies, the superintendent's goals, the district's strategic plan, a brochure titled, "It Takes A Village: A Call to Action, Partnership and Community Empowerment," district press releases, and letters and resolutions published by the superintendent and school board members. All of the documents were collected from the district's website, except for "It Takes A Village" which was distributed at a DELAC meeting.

As I located documents online, I saved them as pdf files, stored them on my computer, and entered them into an excel spreadsheet to keep an inventory and brief description of each document. The spreadsheet included a hyperlink to each document in case I need to refer back to its online location later. I included analytic notes for each document in the spreadsheet and made note if the document related to parent engagement, policymaking, and/or LCAP.

Analysis of these documents was useful in supporting, elaborating, or contradicting the information provided during interviews and in meeting observations. Some, such as with the "It Takes A Village" brochure, became a point of reference during a *plática*, as *mamás* themselves brought up the document during one of our conversations. In the case of the press releases, they also captured the image of the district that it wanted to construct for the broader public.

Observations. The focus of this study was on the insights and experiences of Latina immigrant mothers active in DELAC, therefore, DELAC meetings were the primary location where observations took place. The LCFF law calls out DELAC as a source of parent input, and the meetings held by this group represent the leading district-sanctioned pathway where Latin@ parents of emergent bilinguals could take part in the LCAP process. All meetings were open to the public, and, as described above, they were coordinated and facilitated by the district's DELAC Coordinator Silvia Coronado.

I observed all nine DELAC meetings that took place for the academic year of 2016-2017. I was a participant observer in this space, and as such, I would sign in, put on a nametag, and collect the meeting materials before entering the meeting space. I would say hello to the district staff and, especially in the earlier meetings, I would remind them about the research I was doing. Then, I would take a seat at a table where I could get a good view of the entire room. I would begin my fieldnotes with an initial count of the number of participants in the room. I would take additional counts periodically throughout the course of the meeting.

As a participant observer (Merriam, 2009, p. 124), I would engage in activities and discussions that took place during the meetings. Most of my time was spent making jottings (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 2011, p. 29) and keeping a running record (McCarty, 2015, p. 86) of what was being said, by whom, to whom, and then adding my own questions, reactions, and other asides as observer comments (Merriam, 2009, p. 121). I also found myself going from wide angle (observing the entire room) to narrow angle (zooming in on a particular speaker and/or interaction that was taking place), especially when the group would be broken up into small table groups to discuss a particular piece of data presented at the meeting. I would share my thoughts with the small group, but most often I would listen and ask them follow up questions about their ideas. I wanted to make sure I would be interpreting their ideas correctly, and many times my follow up questions would spur comments from others at the table. I felt it was important that I create good rapport with DELAC members, and part of that meant whenever I spoke in meetings, it would be mostly in Spanish. I wanted to make sure that my questions and thoughts were communicated directly and not subject to possible misinterpretation or incomplete translation. At the end of most meetings, I would also take a moment to ask some of the *mamás* about their thoughts and reactions to the meeting. These conversations would happen as I would help district staff and others put away the tables and chairs used for the meeting.

In addition to DELAC meetings, I also observed the last two school board meetings of the year. These were held in the district central offices and, although open to the public, they had restricted access due to limited seating in the main chamber. Overflow seating was available in an adjacent cafeteria, where spectators would view the proceedings via a large TV screen. I made it a point to arrive early and I was able to sit in the main chamber for both meetings. The five school board members were seated at the front of the room, behind a crescent shaped elevated desk. There was a podium and a microphone in the center of the room, where presenters and member of the community addressed the board. At one side of the room, between the podium and the desk where school board members sat, there was a table where the superintendent and two other district officials sat. On either side of the podium, along the walls, were two cameras that were used to record the entire proceedings. The audience sat in blue plastic chairs that took up the remaining half of the chamber space. The chairs were arranged in rows, with an aisle down the center and the left and right sides, allowing a space where people could easily walk up to the podium. There were also two police officers that stood at the main entrances. They would always greet me with, “hello” when I would walk in. Stacked on a table in the back of the room were the meeting agenda, flyers announcing upcoming events, and the forms that were required to be filled out and submitted if someone wanted to address the board.

At the first school board meeting I observed, the LCAP Director presented a draft of the LCAP plan to the school board, highlighting the process used to gather input from parents, teachers, students, and other community members. He provided a very high-level overview of the plan itself, not delving into any details, as the assumption was that school board members had already read through the 200+ page document. It was at this meeting where the school board also took public comments about the plan. Local nonprofit groups had organized some parents and students to make public comments at this meeting.

The school board voted to adopt the LCAP at the second school board meeting I observed. At this meeting there was also time allocated for public comment and my purpose in attending this meeting was to collect any comments made at this meeting related to LCAP. At both meetings I wanted to record any descriptions or characterizations of DELAC participation in LCAP. I was also interested in knowing whether any actual DELAC members would attend and make public statements.

At the end of each observation, I created an audio memo that included details of what just had occurred and important interactions and discussions that took place. These audio memos, together with my fieldnotes, and the meeting minutes published by the district helped me develop elaborated fieldnotes (McCarty, 2015, p. 86). These fieldnotes were later coded and analyzed. The themes that emerged from the meetings were later discussed with *mamás* during *pláticas* and explored during meetings with district officials.

Analyzing and Interpreting the Data

Using an iterative data collection and analysis process (Merriam, 2009), I began constructing themes from meeting observations and initial documents gathered that in turn informed the questions I explored during interviews, and *pláticas*. That approach also helped narrow the focus of my observations. Throughout the data collection process, I also began to write notes, comments, reactions, and data bits along the margins of my fieldnotes, documents, and transcripts of interviews and *pláticas*. These notes became the start of category constructions (Bazeley, 2013, p. 126). As I continued analyzing the data, it became important to determine if any of the categories reflected concepts discussed in the literature, e.g., Anderson's approach to authentic participation or Henderson et al.'s (2007) theory about official's core beliefs, attitudes, and actions. The cyclical process also prompted review of earlier sources coded, refinement of codes, and informing future coding. As Bazeley (2013) has found, "the evolving understanding

that occurs as you move from data to description to analysis means that coding occurs in a cyclical, or recursive, process” (p.126).

Descriptive coding (Saldaña, 2013) was used to name pieces of data within interviews, documents, observations, and *pláticas* that captured the issues emerging from the data (Creswell, 2013, p. 75). “Language,” “parent representative role,” “compliance,” and “data-driven” are examples of some of the codes describing the LCAP process. Sample codes related to the issues emerging from the dialogue at the meetings included “strategy,” “concern,” and “data request.” Passages and codes were gathered into an excel spreadsheet further distillation. The spreadsheet included code name, excerpt from data source, analytic notes, and associated codes (other codes the entry was linked to). Some codes were larger umbrella codes that housed more specific codes. For example, the umbrella code named “barriers to participation” includes subcodes such as “childcare,” “location,” and “translation.”

In vivo coding (Bazeley, 2013, Saldaña, 2013) was another strategy used to more closely and accurately capture the expressions *mamás* used in interviews and *pláticas*. Bazeley (2013) explained in vivo coding is “using words or phrases used by participants as labels for codes to capture the essence of what the participants are saying in their own terms” (p. 166). In vivo coding was especially helpful as it enabled using the exact words and phrases said by my participants, in particular *mamá*-participants such as the words *vigilar*, *abogar*, and *hablar*. These were words *mamás* used to describe their roles as parent representatives. From my perspective, I felt that these words would lose a bit of their depth and intensity when translated into English. Saldaña (2013) has argued in vivo coding is appropriate for “studies that prioritize and honor the participant’s voice” (p. 91). He gave the example of educational ethnographies with youth, where researchers used the actual words spoken by children and adolescents to enhance and deepen an adult’s understanding of their cultures and worldviews (Saldaña, 2013, p.

91). By using in vivo coding in this study, I sought to bring to the forefront the words and expressions of *las mamás*, using their own words to help bring into focus their experiences and insights.

From the interviews, observations, documents, *pláticas* and I had a significant amount of text to analyze. Reducing the data using an inductive strategy (Seidman, 2013) helped me locate important and interesting passages that evolved into categories and themes. Interview data from each of *las mamás* and district officials were coded and analyzed individually to derive at meta-codes and themes for each. Cross comparative themes were conducted within each larger data set (e.g., for all *mamás*). This process was carried out for the parent and district official data set. A larger meta-analysis was conducted comparing the themes that emerged from the parent data set and district official data set. *Pláticas*, observations, and documents were also coded and analyzed for themes, providing context and description. My analysis lead to the construction of themes from individual data pieces as well as themes constructed from each data set group (i.e., parent interviews, district official interviews, *pláticas*, observations, and documents). Comparing themes across data sets lead to a growing universe of analysis and understanding of the experiences and consequences of *las mamás* involved in the *Rancho los Nietos* LCAP process.

To ensure internal validity, I also member checked (Merriam, 2009) my interpretations with some of my *mamá*-participants. Member checking is the act of soliciting feedback about the emerging findings from some of the people interviewed for a study (Merriam, 2009, p. 217). I wanted to ensure that my interpretations were consistent with the meanings *las mamás* were making about their experiences. I member checked (Merriam, 2009) by asking some of *las mamás* about the topics that I thought were salient from our conversations (interviews and *pláticas*) and from the meetings. I took an informal approach to member checking, periodically

checking in with *mamás*, when we would see each other at meetings or gatherings. They would always ask me how my study was going, and I would take the opportunity to share with them some of my interpretations and solicit their feedback. The feedback I received helped me to better capture the nuances embedded within their perspectives. Talking through my interpretations with some of them, for instance, helped me recognize the subtle differences about how and why each *mamá* fulfilled her role as parent representative (discussed further in chapters 4 and 7).

Researcher Positionality – Nos/Otras

Enlisting the feminine Spanish term for “we,” Anzaldúa’s theory of *nos/otras* acknowledges both diversity and commonality among differently situated peoples (Keating, 2006). Keating (2006) elaborates that *nos/otras* pushes beyond the historic binary of self/others by recognizing the connections that bridge people together. The partition within the word (the slash) preserves the unique differences between groups, yet both terms (*nos*=us, *otras*=others) remain joined, honoring the possibility of unity across groups (Keating, 2006). Reflecting on my own positionality in this project, I acknowledge my outsider status, as I am not a mother of an emergent bilingual student attending a district school. In seeking to bridge the divide between myself and *las mamás* from the district, I recognize that we live in the same or similarly situated neighborhoods, traverse many of the same streets and travel on the same city bus lines, are subjected to the same nightly helicopter police patrols and frequent the same neighborhood *tienditas*. And I, too, want to ensure parents of emergent bilinguals are being included in setting and evaluating spending and programming decisions per LCAP. From conversations I have had with some of *las mamás*, I also recognize our commonly held notion that parents should be viewed as partners with schools in supporting the education of children. Still, it is important that

I acknowledge the unique differences between myself and *las mamás* and the implications of those differences in relating and understanding one another.

In describing her work with immigrant mothers, Veronica Vélez (Calderón et al., 2012) raised insightful critical questions that materialized due to her difference in identity (not being a mother or an immigrant herself). She questioned her ability to challenge deficit work carried out by White male researchers without first confronting her own “blind spots” (Calderón et al., 2012, p. 532). Pointing to Chicana Feminist Epistemological (CFE) methodologies and the open discussions she had with the mothers in her project, Vélez described the emergence of a shared perspective she previously had not recognized. These shared cultural understandings were also at the root of the communally held goals Vélez and the women in her study sought to achieve (Calderón et al., 2012).

Like Vélez, I too questioned my ability to fully and accurately understand the experiences of *las mamás* of *Rancho los Nietos* as I was not an immigrant myself, nor was I ever classified as an English learner (although Spanish was the first language I spoke). These differences in identity were especially important to acknowledge given the heightened anti-immigrant, anti-Spanish language environment that had erupted the summer before the start of the observation year, in the wake of the Trump campaign and his eventual election as president. It is precisely because of these cultural differences that incorporating a CFE methodological approach was appropriate for this project. Developing a nurturing reciprocal relationship with *las mamás* in the district, conducting *pláticas*, and enlisting their help in interpreting their sensibilities was essential to more appropriately represent their insights, experiences, and actions. Important too was critical, meaningful, self-reflection and a personal commitment to accommodate other’s perspectives in an effort to shift toward a more inclusive point of view. Flores Carmona (2014)

reminds me of the important responsibility I have as a Chicana researcher, to use my tools and knowledge to work for positive social change in the community and the academy.

I also had to be particularly attentive to my positionality in this study given my previous experience working for elected officials. I wanted to be a careful observer (Merriam, 2009, p.117), listening attentively and being open to the information gathered during meeting observations, documents, and interviews with district officials. I wanted to be careful not to misinterpret the data due to some bias or presumption I held about the roles and responsibilities of public officials. Writing self-reflections throughout the duration of the study helped me think through my reactions to the data. It also helped to illuminate where and how my past experiences influenced my thoughts and feelings about the data I collected and analyzed for this study. My reflections were taken into account when writing up my final report, ensuring a complete and accurate study was presented to readers. The findings chapters follow.

Chapter 4: Introductory Portraits of Las Mamás

In this chapter I introduce each of the 14 *mamás* who participated in my study. I felt compelled to include this chapter, as their childhoods and young adulthood shaped and informed how they each became active *mamás* advocating for emergent bilingual students in the district. Their lived experiences are rich and unique, and provide answers to my research questions, in particular the first research question: What prompts Latina immigrant *mamás* to become involved in school and district committees?

Much of the impetus for including the portraits of each *mamá* came from reviewing literature that tended to make participants invisible, what Velez (2012) called “be rendered *sin nombre* [without name]” (p.99). I do not want to repeat that trend with this project. Instead, I want to illuminate the lived experiences of each *mamá* and bring forward her voice. From the many conversations I had with each *mamá*, she expressed a similar desire of wanting her story told. As Yaneli, a *mamá*-participants told me, “you do not know who you are talking to until they start sharing their life history with you – you do not know what people have gone through, you do not know what they know.” In sitting down with each *mamá*, I learned how her lived experiences shaped her perspectives about her role as a mother and as an advocate for emergent bilingual children, and the ways in which it informed the actions she took inside and outside of meetings.

Tables are included throughout this chapter to enhance accessibility of the information presented in the text. The table below provides an initial glimpse about each *mamá* that includes her roles in district and school committees, the number of children she, whether or not she was involved with Head Start or the Migrant Education Program, her level of formal education, and her employment status at the time of the interviews. (Appendix F contains more details about each *mamá*.)

Table 1

Background Information about Each Mamá: Official Roles, Work Status, Participation in Head Start and/or Migrant Education Program, Highest Level of Formal Education, and Number of Children in K-12.

<u>Mamá</u>	<u>Official Roles in District and School Committees</u>	<u>Work Status</u>	<u>Head Start (HS)/Migrant Education Program (MEP)</u>	<u>Highest Level of Formal Education</u>	<u>Number of Children in K-12 System</u>
Carla	Alt. DELAC Rep., ELAC Sec.	Freelance Caterer	HS	Some high school in Mex.	3
Monica	Title I Rep., Spec. Ed. Rep.	Homemaker	HS	Some high school in Mex.	2
Dolores	DELAC Sec., ELAC Pres.	Homemaker	MEP	Middle school in Mex.	3
Sofia	Alt. DELAC Rep.	Homemaker	HS	Some middle school in Mex.	1
Carolina	DELAC Rep.	Freelance Sales	HS & MEP	Technical college in Mex.	3
Alma	Former DELAC Rep.	Homemaker	MEP	Technical college in Mex.	2
Yaneli	DELAC Rep.	Homemaker	HS & MEP	Some high school in U.S.	2
Antonia	ELAC Pres., Former DELAC Rep.	School Rec. Super.		Technical college in Mex.	2
Tanya	DELAC Rep., ELAC Pres.	Homemaker	HS	Technical college in Mex.	2
Esperanza	Former DELAC Rep.	Homemaker	HS	Middle school in Mex.	1
Ana	ELAC Pres.	Homemaker		Some high school in Mex.	4
Lorena	Site Council Pres., ELAC Member	Housekeeper	MEP	Some college in Mex.	2
Blanca	ELAC Sec., Site Council Member	Homemaker	MEP	High school in U.S.	3
Elena	DELAC Pres., ELAC Pres., Site Council V.P.	Homemaker	HS & MEP	Some university in Mex.	2

Note. The data contained above was at the time of the interview, including the official roles held in district and school committees, work status, participation in Head Start and/or Migrant Education Program, her highest level of formal education, and number of children in K-12 system.

Using an adapted version of Seidman’s (2013) three-part interview process, I captured parts of their childhood, young adulthood, and early motherhood. It was in talking with each *mamá* during and after each interview that together we began to uncover the connections between her early life experiences with her present engagement in school governance. Their voices were powerful and insightful, and I wanted to present their words as accurately as possible – for this reason direct quotes are provided in the original Spanish followed by English in parenthesis.

Carla

I had met Carla two years prior to the year of my study. We knew each other from the middle school where I was a volunteer. Two of her children were enrolled at the middle school and she was a frequent attendee of the parent workshops and committee meetings. “Tienes que involucrarte. Tienes que aprender para poder luchar por algo que quieres.” (“You have to get involved. You have to learn to be able to fight for what you want),” she told me during my interview with her — and she was. I immediately took notice of Carla as she was outspoken and frequently asked questions during ELAC meetings. She was also a consistent attendee at DELAC and district level Title I meetings. Carla had been involved in school governance since her first child was in Head Start, 18 years ago. Now she was the ELAC secretary for her school site and the alternate DELAC representative.

Reflecting on her early life as a single mother, she explained she first got involved in her son’s Head Start program because, “quería que mi hijo tuviera el mayor éxito del mundo – cosa que tal vez yo no [tuve].” (“I wanted my son to have the greatest success in the world – something that maybe I did not have.”)

Young adulthood. Born and raised in Michoacán, Mexico, Carla was one of eleven children. Her mother stayed at home and took care of the children while her father worked to

support the family. She said they lived “con hambre” (with hunger) and it was a challenge for her father to provide for the family and pay for the children’s schooling. Carla explained that her older sisters chose to work instead of go to school because, she said, “no querian vivir con hambre. (They did not want to live hungry.)” She left school when she found out she was pregnant.

...mis padres, sobre todo mi padre decía, “No. No. No. Tienes un hijo, ya te arruinaste tu vida, no vas a estudiar más.”

(...my parents, mostly my father said, “No. No. No. You have a child, now you have ruined your life, you will study no more.”)

She was 17 years old and in the final year of high school when she became pregnant. She left school, moved out of her parents’ home, and she decided to immigrate to the U.S.

Era como el hambre de poder ser exitosa, o tal vez poder tener algo en la vida, de ser alguien...

(It was the hunger to be successful, or perhaps to have something in life, to be someone...)

Leaving her parents and siblings behind, Carla moved to the U.S. more than 20 years ago, living for the last 17 years in *Rancho los Nietos*. She worked on the weekends as a cook for a catering company and was a freelance baker and candy buffet planner. She was a mother of four children that ranged in age from 23 to 7. At the time of the interview, her eldest child was no longer in school. She also had a daughter in the 8th grade, a son in the 7th grade, and another son in the 1st grade. All of her children had attended Head Start, and, as she explained, the mandatory parent involvement part of the program was her introduction to parent involvement. She became very involved in Head Start, helping in the classroom and being part of the parent committee. Later she would become president of her child’s Head Start.

An invitation by chance. After Head Start, Carla took a break from her involvement in committees. It was not until her daughter was in middle school (six years later) that Carla resumed her involvement. Her reengagement was by chance. Carla and her husband happened to

be at the middle school one day; they had arrived to get help accessing the district's online system called ParentVue. While waiting for assistance, a staff member invited them to the ELAC meeting that had just gotten underway. Carla's daughter was still classified as EL, and the staff member explained that ELAC was for parents of children who were classified as English learners. "Entonces ahí fue que yo empecé a involucrarme...comencé a mirar. Por ella [la empleada de la escuela] fue de que comencé más a involucrarme." ("So that's where I started to get involved...I began to see. Because of her [the school staff person] I started to get more involved.") She credits the school staff member for not only reintroducing her to committee work, but also for the knowledge she gained as part of her involvement. In the quote above, Carla said she began to see (comencé a mirar) how she could contribute to her child's education by being involved at her school.

Committed, engaged parent representatives. "Es que necesitamos gente que en realidad jale, que vaya a las juntas, que hablen." ("It's that we need people that get along, that go to the meetings, that speak up.") It was only two years ago that Carla ran for an official post in ELAC. With the encouragement of another involved mother (Monica), Carla threw her name in the hat and won the position of co-president (along with Ana). No longer was Carla a member advocating for her own children, now she was "representando a todos los padres y a los niños" (representing all the parents and the children). Her role was now to "dar consejos para que nuestros hijos puedan tener más éxito y puedan ser reclasificados más pronto...tratar de que nuestros hijos aprendieran o realmente que dieran ese salto que necesitaban." ("Give advice so that our children can have more success and be reclassified faster...try to have our children learn or really give them that push that they need.") To fulfill her role of giving advice that would help students be more successful, Carla wanted to partner with teachers and district administrators,

like Silvia, the DELAC Coordinator, to come up with ideas about what she and other ELAC members could advocate for and how to be effective ELAC representatives.

Monica

I first met Monica two years prior to the year of my study, at the same middle school where I met Carla. Every Monday parents and community members would congregate in the school's Parent Center, to listen to the weekly announcements broadcasted across the school. Once a month, after those Monday announcements, the school would hold its ELAC meeting. I clearly remember one Monday, just as the announcements had concluded and an ELAC meeting was about get underway; sitting at one side of the small classroom Monica called out to the parents who were making their way out the doors. She urged them to stay for the meeting, telling them that their participation was critical to their children's success in school. She was outspoken both inside and outside of the school, and it was not uncommon to see her near the school steps in the mornings, recruiting mothers to come to the Parent Center to participate in the workshops and committees. She was also active in citywide organizations, participating in events such as police forums, town hall meetings, and other gatherings. I knew about her community involvement because in the Parent Center she would share information with us she had gathered in those other settings.

Schooling in Mexico. Monica had a long history of civic engagement that went as far back as when she was in high school in Mexico, where she was involved in student movements to improve teacher quality in her schools. Raised by a single mother, Monica said she saw her mother work hard to be able to support her and her brother and pay for their schooling. This inspired Monica to fight for a quality education, which she said she was not receiving at that time. She described her school as a place where the teachers were not inspired to teach, where

they were out of touch and taught in antiquated styles. But she left school before completing high school, when she got pregnant with her first child, a son.

Pelear, no pedir (fight for, not ask). Like Carla, Monica's introduction to parent committees was through the Head Start program. She became president of the program and a member of the policymaking committee. Through her engagement with Head Start she learned to "pelear" (fight) to for policy changes. As Monica explained, "yo siempre menciono la palabra 'pelear' porque realmente es lo que uno hace. No puedes decir que estas tratando de pedir porque eso ya no funciona." ("I always mention the word 'fight' because in reality that is what one does. You cannot say that you are asking because that no longer works.") Fighting was what she did beginning with her fight 17 years ago for culturally relevant programs in Head Start. Her "fights" were now in DELAC and the other committee meetings she was a part of, which included the district level Title I meetings, Special Education meetings, and Superintendent's Parent Forum.

Advocating for your own children. Married with three children, Monica had an adult son who graduated from a *Rancho los Nietos* high school, a daughter in the 9th grade who reclassified when she was in the 2nd grade, and another daughter in the 6th grade. Monica's 6th grade daughter was classified as EL and Special Education, and Monica was active in both DELAC and the district's parent group dedicated to Special Education. She told me, "cuando tienes un niño con deshabilidades aprendes que tú eres la voz de él. Entonces si yo no pido cosas para ella pues no se las van a dar porque ella no puede pedir las por sí misma." ("When you have a child with special needs you learn that you are the voice of that child. Therefore, if you do not ask for things then she will not receive them because she cannot ask for them herself.") Monica seemed to have embraced her role as an advocate for both EL and Special Education children and families.

Growing parent involvement and capacity.

Yo pienso que el distrito no se interesa tanto que los papás se involucren porque entonces lo que pasa que los fondos los pueden utilizar a como ellos mejor les convenga.
(I believe the district has no real interest in involving parents because then what happens is they can use the funds as they see fit.)

In addition to being an outspoken member of parent committees, Monica also actively recruited parents to join school and district committees. She would make calls to families' homes, reminding them to attend upcoming meetings, she would stand outside her children's schools talking to mothers about the importance of having their voices heard by administrators, and she would suggest ideas to administrators on ways they could get more parents to participate in committees. She explained that her purpose in getting more parents involved was so that they could exercise the power they had to change the status quo in the district. More than anything she believed parents had to be informed and know the power they held.

Porque los papás no saben hablar, porque los papás no hablan, no usan su poder de hablar, de preguntar. Y si lo usan, les tapan la boca.
(Because the parents do not know how to speak up, because the parents do not speak up, they do not use their power to speak up, to ask questions. And if they do use their voices, they [district staff] cover their mouths.)

Monica found that parents did not exercise their voices, and when they did, the district would try to shut them up. Her ideas came from her own experience in the district, and the retaliation she had experienced after she had spoken up at different parent meetings, the frustration she had felt trying to build bridges between diverse parent groups, and the apathy she had encountered among some parents.

Dolores

A mother of 10th grade twin boys and a 7th grade boy, Dolores was a soft-spoken woman who was the president of her high school sons' ELAC and vice president of DELAC. I did not know Dolores prior to her participation in my study, but I knew *of* her, after all, she was a

DELAC officer, and had a speaking role at every meeting. She also part of the district Title I meetings, the Superintendent's Parent Forum, and the Migrant Education Program.

It was through her participation in my study that I learned that Dolores had been living in *Rancho los Nietos* for the past 17 years. Even though her twins had attended district schools their whole lives, they were still classified as EL. Her youngest son had also attended district schools for most of his life, but during the middle of last year she decided to enroll him into a private Catholic school. She did not explain why her youngest son attended private school, but she did say she planned on having him return to district schools once he entered high school.

Working with youth. Dolores volunteered as a catechism teacher for her parish. She talked about her love of working with young people, and the importance of listening to them, saying, "Ellos se sueltan, dicen lo que traen, qué les está haciendo daño." ("They let themselves go, they talk about they are carrying with them, what it is that is doing them harm.") Her work with youth and being a careful listener came from her work when she was a young person herself in Mexico as a social worker. She also applied her listening skills to her work in ELAC, DELAC, and the other roles she had as a parent representative.

Invitation leads to committee involvement. In fact, being a good listener had led to her involvement in parent groups. In overhearing a conversation between a school staff member and another parent, Dolores learned about the district's Migrant Education Program. (The Migrant Education Program was a federally funded program that offered Saturday and summer classes for eligible students and parent trainings and workshops throughout the academic year.) That was 7 years ago, when her youngest son was in kindergarten. From the Migrant Education Program, she learned how to help her children. Later, a teacher of the Migrant Education Program would invite her to the district-wide Title I meetings and DELAC meetings. It was in attending the district-wide meetings that she realized her school sites had no one representing them, which also

meant their school site had no voting power at the district level. “No había quien representara [la escuela]; yo les dije [a los padres] pues nomínenme a mi.” (“No one represented the school; I told the parents, well, nominate me.”) And they did.

Al hablar (to talk). “En hablar es todo.” (“Speaking is everything.”) In addition to being a good listener, Dolores also discussed the importance of being able to speak up and talk to people. Reflecting on her young adulthood, she said that was when she first learned to talk with people and in public. One of her early jobs in Mexico was promoting a program that would help teachers obtain their credentials before retiring. This job required her to be outspoken and recruit teachers to join the program. But Dolores explained that as a parent representative, “hablar” meant more than simply being a good public speaker, “al hablar” (speaking) meant “que no tienes miedo” (you are not afraid) and “tú vas a decir las cosas como son” (you are going to say the way things are.) During meetings Dolores would make known issues she noticed impacting parent engagement, including when she stood up to say a major problem was the district’s use of acronyms and other phrasing in reports that were to be sent to parents. Few parents understood these words, adding, “En la política, pues, tú sabes que van a usar palabras más específicas, profesionales. Y pues, si no tienes esa clase de lenguaje de ellos pues se queda uno, pues quien sabe que dijo.” (“In politics well you know they will use more specific, professional words. And, well, if you do not have that level of language, well you are left wondering what was said.”) She also said this was part of the problem in the district meetings — the continuous use of jargon would confuse parents to the point where they would become disengaged during meetings.

Sofia

It was through middle school parent workshops and committee meetings two years ago that I met Sofia. At that time, she was a regular attendee of ELAC meetings and would occasionally attend site council meetings. In addition to DELAC, ELAC, and site council

meetings, Sofia would also attend the district's Title I meetings. I did not realize until her participation in my study, that her own children (two daughters and a son) were already reclassified. From my interviews with her, I learned that helping parents of emergent bilinguals is what motivated Sofia to be her school's DELAC representative, and to continue to be part of a committee that was focused on the achievement of EL students.

Teníamos que trabajar (We had to work). A common theme among nearly all of *las mamás* was their early entrance into the work force. Sofia left school at the end of the 7th grade and at age 13 began her first job, soldering circuit boards for an electronics company in her hometown of Ciudad Juarez, Mexico. She explained why she left school and began working at a young age,

Es que el problema fue que como yo no tuve papá, nos criamos no más con mi mamá, y pues teníamos que trabajar. Porque allá en México no es la educación como aquí. Allá tú tienes que pagar todo. Tienes que pagar los libros. Tienes que pagar todo. Y mi mamá pues no más ella trabajaba. Mi mamá lavaba y planchaba y ella no más podía darnos para lo que se necesitaba y yo me tuve que salir de la escuela y no porque yo no quisiera seguir estudiando, sino porque ella no podía. Y me salí de la escuela y me puse a trabajar. Tuve que ponerme a trabaja y pues, yo estaba chiquilla todavía.
(The problem was that I did not have a father, we were raised only with my mother, and well we had to work. Because in Mexico schooling is not like here. Over there you pay for everything. You have to pay for books. You have to pay for everything. And my mother, well she was the only one who worked, my mother washed and ironed [clothes] and she could only give us the bare necessities and I had to leave school and not because I did not want to continue studying, but because she could not [pay]. And I left school and well I went to work. I had to put myself to work, and well, I was still a little girl.)

The cost of attending school was too expensive for her mother, and although Sofia enjoyed going to school and wanted to continue going, she had to start working. Lamenting her early departure from school she said, “no pude llegar a donde tenía que llegar.” (“I was not able to reach where I was supposed to reach.”) *Llegar* has multiple meanings in Spanish, including arrive, reach, and get to. *Llegar* was what Sofia felt she was never able to do because she left school early. She felt she was not able to reach a particular level of success that she thought she

could have had she remained in school, and she was not going to let that be her own children's destiny.

Her children's success. "Aprovechen. Yo que no pude estudiar; ustedes estudien." ("Take advantage. I was not able to study; you study.") Like many of the other *mamás* in my case study, Sofia had a strong conviction that education would lead to financial stability and success. She told me she would constantly encourage her children by study. "Y los pucho y los pucho." ("And I push them, I push them"), she said of her efforts to have her three children be successful in school. As her persistent *consejos* (advice) seemed to be working as her eldest child, a daughter, had graduated from college, and her middle child, a son, was in college. Her youngest child, another daughter, was in middle school at the time of the interview and had just submitted her application to some of the district's most competitive high school programs.

A desire to learn and an invitation from other mamás. Wanting to learn how she could help her children succeed in school is what led Sofia to first get involved in her children's schools. She attended child development workshops as soon as her eldest child was enrolled in Head Start. But it was not until two years ago, when her youngest entered middle school, that she began participating in committees, specifically in ELAC and DELAC. It was with another mother's encouragement, Monica's, that led to Sofia's involvement:

Monica nos decía que fuéramos a los comités, que fuéramos a las juntas de ELAC, que fuéramos a DELAC para que aprendiéramos como se trabaja con el distrito y fue cuando yo empecé a ir con Carla. Me invitaba Carla y yo me iba con ella. Fue cuando yo empecé ir para allá.

(Monica would tell us to go to the committee [meetings], to go to the ELAC meetings, to go to DELAC [meetings] to learn how to work with the district and that is when I started to go with Carla. Carla would invite me, and I would go with her. That is when I started to go there [to the DELAC meetings].)

Both Monica and Carla played an instrumental role in Sofia's involvement in ELAC and DELAC. Monica encouraged Sofia (and many other parents) to get involved in parent committees, arguing that was where they could learn "como se trabaja" (how it works),

specifically, how to navigate the system. Carla enabled Sofia's involvement, by also inviting her to the meetings, and by driving Sofia to and from the district meetings. As was the case with half of *las mamás* in my study, Sofia did not drive, and the location of district meetings was not convenient for those bound to public transportation. As a former transit-rider myself, I knew well the length of time needed to reach the sites where DELAC and other district level meetings were held. For Sofia, Carla had taken away one major barrier: transportation.

Representing other parents' children. Sofia was unique among my participants in that her children were not classified as EL. In fact, her youngest daughter, the only one still in the K-12 system, had never been classified as EL. Yet, Sofia chose to participate in ELAC and served as alternate DELAC representative¹⁰. When asked why she committed herself to a committee for students learning English, she responded, “Yo voy porque me gusta aprender. Porque mi hija está bien al nivel que debe de inglés, pero estoy ahí para ayudar a otros [padres].” (“I go because I like to learn. Because my daughter is fine at the level of English she is supposed to be at, but I am there to help other [parents].”) She enjoyed learning about the various topics presented at DELAC, “por ejemplo cuánto dinero le dan a cada escuela” (for example how much money they give to each school) and gathering information about programs and practices that other schools have implemented, “te estás informando y te están trayendo mismamente las mismas ideas de las otras escuelas que los otros padres que están ahí. Te están trayendo ideas para tu misma escuela, para tu hijo.” (“You are informing yourself and at the same time they are bringing you ideas from other schools from other parents who are there [at the meeting].”) It was a place where she could share her input, “y también me gusta porque uno puede opinar ahí lo que no le parece a uno de la escuela.” (“And I also like it because one can say there what one is not in agreement with about a school.”)

¹⁰ Sofia's eligibility as DELAC representative seems to contradict the district's DELAC by-laws. Still, the state's policies do not bar parents of non-EL students from holding any ELAC officer positions.

Sofia felt strongly about the importance of being an active participant in parent committees. Although she rarely asked questions or made comments during DELAC meetings, so would consistently share her thoughts and opinions with a small group of *mamás* before, during, and after meetings. It was part of the benefit of being a part of DELAC and other committees, where parents grew their social and navigational capital and they shared with each other their insights and knowledge about the school system.

Carolina

I approached Carolina about being a participant in my study after the February DELAC meeting. I did not know Carolina prior to then, but I had noticed she was a consistent attendee at DELAC during the observation year. A mother of three, Carolina's two older daughters (one in 9th grade and the other in 6th grade) had been reclassified when they were in the 6th grade, but her son who was in 1st grade was still classified as EL. At the time of the interviews, she had been living in the U.S. for 15 years. She had completed high school in Mexico, and had also earned a GED degree in the U.S.

Carolina was the DELAC representative for her daughter's middle school and also attended the district's Title I meetings, the Superintendent's Parent Forum, and the Migrant Education Program gatherings. Through the interview and our *pláticas*, I learned about her long history of involvement in schools and with non-profit organizations. She attributed her interest in serving her community came from her parents.

Parent models. As a child growing up in a small town in Guanajuato, Mexico, she said both her parents were models she would later emulate, “Vi dos ejemplos, aunque no hacían mucho en las escuelas, pero sí en otras cosas.” (“I saw two examples, although they did not do much with the schools, but they did in other things.”) Her mother was a hard worker who was always attending to the family's farm, the family's corner store, or selling food in the

neighborhood. Carolina would follow her mother's lead and took on three jobs as a young woman (in a pharmacy, a pizza parlor, and as an assistant to a karate instructor). At the time of the interviews she still worked, as a representative for a beauty and health catalog-based company and had been a migrant fieldworker. Her father was a member of a cooperative nonprofit financial services organization. Reflecting on her early childhood, she thought his example had led to her later engagement in community nonprofits, but she was first involved with the Head Start program.

Head Start.

Head Start empecé y me empezó gustar...te enseñaban algo que no es normal...acá se aprende más...te van a enseñar más cosas y puedes apoyar a tus hijos.
(I started with Head Start and I started to like it...they show you things that are not common...here you learn more...they will teach you more things and you can support your children.)

Carolina took on formal roles in Head Start she said, “por saber más, por aprender más, por no estar nomás ahí” (to know more, to learn more, to not just be there). Carolina wanted to learn how she could better support her children, “me interesa siempre ayudar a mis hijos. Para aprender más, para tener yo más de dónde poder apoyarlos.” (“I have always been interested in helping my children. To learn more, to have more from where I can to support them.”) The role she took in Head Start expanded her knowledge about how she could help her children.

Charter school committee work. After Head Start, Carolina enrolled her children in a dual language immersion charter elementary school. She credited the fundraising she did for that school as central to her development and knowledge as an engaged parent.

Trabajábamos mucho para que la escuela pudiera conseguir fondos. Entonces si la escuela tenía una cantidad, entonces el distrito le daba la misma cantidad. Entonces trabajábamos mucho en eso. Yo creo que eso me ayudó mucho a que me involucrara más ahora en las otras escuelas, porque de ahí empezamos a hacer muchos proyectos y cosas. Y yo veía que aprendía y que decía, ‘ay que así lo podemos hacer’ y ‘podemos hacer esto otro,’ con ideas de las demás mamás y de la misma escuela. Entonces sí hacíamos muchas cosas y como siempre me ha encantado andar en todo lo que sea, que de eventos

y divertirme y todo, pues ahí yo estaba [risas]. Y aparte de que voy a aprender, me voy a divertir, pues, ¿qué más? Mejor.

(We would work a lot so that the school could get funds. Then, if the school had a certain amount of funds, then the district would match that amount. So then, we worked a lot on that. I think that work helped me get involved now with other schools, because from there we began to do a lot of projects and things. And I saw that I learned a lot and I would say, ‘we can do it like this’ and ‘we can do this other [thing],’ with ideas of the other mothers and of the school itself. Then, we did a lot of things and I have always enjoyed being in everything, in events, and have fun and all that, well there I was [laughter]. And apart from that I am going to learn, I am going to have fun, well, what more? Even better.)

Not only did she learn a lot as an involved parent with the charter school, but she also had fun. She also learned how to collaborate with other mothers and with school staff as together they came up with ideas on how to raise funds for the school. When the charter school lost its petition for renewal, Carolina enrolled her children into district schools.

Agarrando la onda (starting to understand), navigating site council. Eager to remain active in committees, Carolina became a member of her children’s school site council, telling me, “es donde manejan el dinero, donde toman las decisiones.” (“That is where they manage the money, where decisions are made.”) She soon learned the limits of her being part of the council, where agendas were already set, and discussions were limited to items on the agendas. “Me desanimaba” (I would get discouraged), but Carolina learned to navigate the council, and she began to form her understanding of her role as a parent representative, “Yo iba agarrando la onda...yo represento a todos los papás. No era nomás yo y mi familia, yo y mis hijos, no. Sino a todas las familias – a toda la escuela.” (“I started understanding...I represented all of the parents. It was not just me and my family, me and my children, no. Rather, all the families – the whole school.”) Later she would get involved in ELAC as well.

The Migrant Education Program. Moving around for work made Carolina and her children eligible for the *Rancho los Nietos* Migrant Education Program. Like Head Start, the Migrant Education Program seemed to have a powerful impact on the seven *mamás* who were part of the program. It was getting involved in the committees of the Migrant Education

Program where Carolina learned “que debemos ser padres participativos...tenemos que buscar y luchar por más cosas.” (“That we should be participatory parents...we have seek out and fight for more things.”) She said, along with tutoring and other classes offered to children, the Migrant Education Program’s adult workshops gave parents *herramientas* (tools) they could apply to their work as advocates for children and encouraged them to become members of other parent committees in the district, like DELAC.

Alma

I did not know Alma personally prior to her participation in my study, but I recognized her. She was a consistent attendee at DELAC and would frequently ask questions during the meetings. She was also a regular attendee at the district level Title I meetings and the Superintendent’s Parent Forum. A divorced mother of two, Alma had a daughter in the 12th grade and a son in the 6th grade. She also dedicated a substantial amount of her involvement working to organize parents at her son’s middle school and the surrounding neighborhood. Through our numerous *pláticas* and interviews, I learned about her parent organizing work, inside and outside of the district, and what led to her engagement.

Por un error (Because of a mistake). An incident at a school led to Alma’s engagement in parent committees. It happened when her daughter, the oldest of Alma’s two children, was erroneously enrolled in Special Education. Her daughter’s first grade teacher had instructed Alma sign a form without explaining to Alma what she was signing. It turned out that the form stated she agreed to have her daughter enrolled into Special Education.

Yo cuando me di cuenta fue cuando ya miré que [mi hija] iba formada ya con esos niños y pues yo dije que, ¿por qué iba mi hija ahí? Y ya fui y le pregunté a la maestra y me dijo que yo había firmado y ya fue cuando hable con el director y ya me dijeron que si la maestra me había dado un intérprete. Le dije que no, que no más ella me ...dijo que ella iba a dar tutoría y dije que ella nunca dijo que la iba a mandar a la niña [a clases de niños especiales] y dije que yo no estaba de acuerdo que la niña estuviera ahí.
(I realized it was when I saw that [my daughter] was grouped with those children and, well, I said, why was my daughter there? And I went and asked the teacher and she told

me that I had signed, and that is when I spoke with the principal and they told me had the teacher given me an interpreter. I said no, that all she told me was that she was going to give tutoring and I said that she never said that she was going to send the girl [to special children's classes] and I said that I did not agree that the girl be there.)

It took Alma two years to get her daughter out of Special Education, a process that involved taking her daughter to specialists to get evaluated and gathering letters from teachers affirming her daughter did not need special education services. “Yo tenía que demostrar que realmente era un error.” (“I had to demonstrate that it really was an error.”) It was in her dealings with getting her daughter back into mainstream classes that she met staff and became involved in the Migrant Education Program – which led her to involvement in district level parent committees.

Fue cuando yo conocí a unas personas que trabajaban para el Programa Migrante, que me enrolaron ahí, y la señora Silvia era la directora de ese programa. Y ahí fue donde yo empecé a saber de los comités, de DELAC, de [Título I], del [foro del] *Superintendent* y fue cuando ya me metí de lleno.

(It was when I met some people who worked for the Migrant Education Program, they enrolled me there, and Mrs. Silvia was the director of that program. And that's where I started to know about the committees, of DELAC, of [the district's Title I committee], of the Superintendent [Parent Forum], and that was when I got fully involved.)

As was the case with other *mamás* (e.g., Dolores, Carolina, Yaneli, and Blanca), the Migrant Education Program was Alma's pathway to district level committees, including DELAC. Moreover, her description of the workshops, discussed next, suggests the Migrant Education Program was also empowering parents to be *critically* (Terriquez, 2011) involved in district and school committees.

The Migrant Education Program's empowering practices. While children attended the Migrant Education Program's Saturday School Classes, parents were engaged in trainings and workshops where they learned not only about school and district committees, but also “cómo funcionaba el distrito” (how the district worked), “qué era lo que teníamos que preguntar” (what questions we had to ask), “cómo leer calificaciones” (how to read report cards), and “cómo preguntar en las conferencias” (how to pose questions in conferences). “Te están abriendo los

ojos. (They are opening your eyes),” Alma said of the Migrant Education Program, adding, “Para mi era la llave de conocimiento de la educación y del sistema.” (“For me, it was the key to knowledge about education and the system.”)

Alma explained that in DELAC and other committee meetings, the district did distribute important information, “pero no te dicen la profundidad para qué es cada programa ni lo que representan ni lo que te pueda ayudar.” (“But they do not tell you with depth what each program is for nor what it represents nor what can help you.”) Ultimately, Alma said, the Migrant Education Program helped her be an advocate and, in turn, helped her empower and organize other parents.

Transferring knowledge to other parents.

Les pregunto a los papás, “¿Saben qué significa DELAC? ¿Saben qué programas ustedes pueden obtener ahí para que lleven sus hijos a los que están aprendiendo inglés? ¿Saben por qué sus hijos no están reclasificados? ¿Saben en qué les va a afectar en un futuro?” y nadie sabe.

(I ask the parents, “Do you know what DELAC means? Do you know what programs you can get there to take to your children who are learning English? Do you know why your children are not reclassified? Do you know that it will affect their future? and no one knows.)

Alma’s daughter and son had both been reclassified when they were in elementary school. Still, Alma was an active member of ELAC and DELAC. She explained her interest was in helping parents whose children had not yet been reclassified. She was committed to empowering these parents with information about the resources and processes related to children in the English Learner program. Alma wanted parents to know and to understand the system, learn how to navigate it, and become effective advocates for their children.

Personal history. Like Carolina and Tanya, Alma had earned an associate degree in Mexico before coming to the U.S. She grew up in a beach community in the state of Guerrero, Mexico, where not many people were trained for jobs employers were seeking to fill. She entered the labor market at age 14 and worked as a cashier while also going to school. At age 15,

a local company recruited Alma, and offered her not only a job, but also to pay for her schooling.

It was a pivotal moment in Alma's life. Her boss at the company where she worked would become her mentor and provided her with important *consejos* (advice) that she would follow.

She said,

Él siempre me decía, 'fijate en esto, no hagas esto y pon atención en esto.' Siempre estaba bien alerta a cualquier cosa que pudiera pasar.
(He always told me, 'Look at this, do not do this and pay attention to this.' He was always alert to whatever might happen.)

In addition to supporting her develop by sending her to trainings in Mexico City and Guadalajara, her boss also taught her how to handle the difficult situation of being one of five women working for the company. His advice, for example, "fijate" (look at this), "pon atención" (pay attention), helped her learn how to handle working in a hostile environment.

Los hombres eran groseros...porque era como un celo que ellos tenían y se sentían que porque eran los hombres tenían más derecho a tener los trabajos. (The men were rude...because it was like jealousy they had, and they felt that because they were men they had more right to have jobs.)

Reflecting on her early work experiences, she said, "te tienes que avivar si no te lleva el tren."
("You have to smarten up, otherwise you will get into trouble.") Paying attention, listening to other's advice, and a love of learning were attributes that helped her as a young woman, and as a mother when she came to the U.S.

Grassroots organizing.

Lo que hice que ahorita estoy haciendo unas juntas fuera de la escuela para preparar los papás; que es lo que tienen que preparar, cuáles son los problemas, que tienen que hacer, y qué es lo que vamos a tratar [de hacer]. Entonces ya vienen preparados. (What I did right now I'm doing some meetings outside the school to prepare the parents; what they have to prepare, what the problems are, what they have to do, and what we are going to try [to do]. Then they are ready.)

Half way into the observation year, Alma had started to organize the parents at her son's middle school. She had taken the training she had received from the Migrant Education Program and the data she was gathering at district level meetings and was using them to support her

efforts. She described analyzing closely the state's standardized test outcomes to formulate critical questions she and other parents would then ask during ELAC and other meetings. She was building parent capacity and capital among the group,

Afuera de la escuela nos juntamos...Estoy diciendo a los papás que se tienen que tomar clases de liderazgo para pedir cómo se tienen que pedir. Y les voy a bajar los Títulos I [y] el III, qué significan, para qué son, qué realmente [que] es DELAC, qué son los servicios que tienen, qué es lo que *tienen* que pedir, cómo lo tienen que pedir...Mi propósito es que se preparen los papás con liderazgo, con el conocimiento, y a reunirlos antes de que hagan las peticiones para que ellos pidan las estadísticas que pidan los datos de los niños que no están reclasificados, cuáles maestros fueron los que dieron mejor rendimiento y si los maestros no están funcionando, pedir cambios del maestros.

(Outside of school we get together...I am telling the parents that they need to take leadership classes to know how to ask what they need to ask. And I am going to lower [make understandable] Title I and III, what they mean, what they are for, what DELAC really is, what services it offers, *what* they have to ask for, how to ask for it...My purpose is to prepare parents with leadership [skills], with knowledge, and to get together before they make requests so that they can ask for statistics, ask for data about children who are not reclassified, which teachers performed the best, and which teachers are not working out, ask for a change in teachers.)

Alma was driven to make changes at her school site using the tools the district had given her. She envisioned accomplishing her goals by organizing parents and developing them into participants who would ask critical questions and sought to hold school and district administrators accountable.

Yaneli

I had met Yaneli at a *Rancho los Nietos* middle school two years prior to the year of study. She was a frequent attendee of the school's parent workshops and ELAC meetings. She always had her toddler son with her, which, as a recent mother myself, inspired me. The school did not provide childcare, but that did not seem to dissuade Yaneli from participating in the meetings. In addition to her toddler son, she also had a daughter in the 1st grade, and a son in the 9th grade. During the observation year, Yaneli had slowed down her participation in committee meetings and was no longer a member of her site council. Still, at the time of the interview she

was the DELAC representative for her oldest child's school and regularly attended DELAC and ELAC meetings at the high school.

Former *Rancho los Nietos* student. While many of the mamá-participants in my study migrated to the U.S. as young adults, Yaneli was one of two *mamás* (the other being Blanca) who had migrated as a teenager, and actually attended high school in the *Rancho los Nietos* district. She dropped out of high school after 10th grade, and explained that mastering English was an enormous barrier for her,

Yo salí de la escuela por el idioma porque yo no sabía inglés. Me sentía muy frustrada entrando a la high school...No íbamos tan mal porque en México van un poquito más avanzados. Algebra era fácil, pero ya en el inglés--.
(I left school because of the language because I did not know English. I felt very frustrated entering high school. We were not doing that bad because in Mexico they are a bit more advanced. Algebra was easy, but in English—.)

At age 16 her mother gave her two options: stay in school or work. Yaneli chose to leave school and soon began working. She met and married her husband a year or two later and had her first child, a son, shortly afterward. At the time of the study, her son was a freshman in high school. It was with him when she first got involved attending parent workshops at his schools. He was born with a physical disability, and she wanted to ensure he would receive the best education regardless of his disability. She began as a volunteer in his kindergarten classroom, and then became involved in parent committees.

Tener una buena comunicación con los maestros (Have good communication with teachers). Yaneli believed when parents were involved in their children's schools and when they demonstrated to their children that they had a good relationship with teachers, it would motivate their children to do well in school and help them "que se sientan apoyados" (feel supported). Her belief in the connection between children's motivation and relationships and good communication with teachers prompted her to meet every one of her children's teachers:

Eso es algo que a mí me impulsa a ir a hablar con los maestros, presentarme, darles mi número de teléfono, ‘Ténganlo aquí bien porque es mi celular y si me ocupan voy a venir en el momento que sea preciso.’ No hay un horario específico, cualquier momento es bueno para tener una comunicación con los maestros.

(That is something that prompts me to go talk with teachers, to introduce myself, to give them my phone number, ‘Take it because it is my cellular [phone number] and if you need me, I will come at the moment when needed.’ There is no specific schedule; any time is a good time to communicate with teachers.)

It was in talking with her son’s kindergarten teacher that the teacher learned about the nightly family reading time Yaneli and her husband had created. All three, Yaneli, her husband, and their son would read together for 30 minutes every night. The teacher took Yaneli’s idea and implemented a Friday family reading time, where parents were invited to bring their favorite books from home and read with their child in the classroom. Yaneli pointed out that it did not matter if parents read in Spanish or in English, or that they brought in the same book every time, “es una motivación para los niños.” (“It is motivation for the children.”) She saw that children were eagerly awaited their parents to arrive for family story time. During these Friday gatherings, children would also introduce their parents to their friends at school, helping parents learn who their children were talking about when they were at home. Yaneli described the conversations she heard taking place in the classroom, “Mi papá sabe quien es Juanito o quien es Pedrito.” (“My father knows who is Juanito or who is Pedrito.”) “Mira, esta es María la niña de que hablamos o jugamos.” (“Look, here is Maria the girl we talk about or we play with.”) Yaneli explained that experiences like those the children had in the Friday family reading time, “les motiva mucho a los niños” (motivates children a lot).

Ser preparado (To be well educated). The notion of *ser preparado* (to be well-educated) was something a lot of *las mamás* in my study talked about. They aspired for their children to be *preparados* (well-educated); this included Yaneli. When she brought up wanting her son to be *preparado*, I took the opportunity to ask her what *preparado* meant to her. Here is what she said,

Pues prepararse para mí es como que tenga un poquito más de educación. Sí, que vaya a la universidad, que decida pues “yo quiero estudiar para,” no sé, “para doctor,” para algo que a él le motive. Le digo yo a él, “Si a ti te gusta la música, pues estudia para músico. Pero no puedes decirme “me gusta la música y voy a ser músico” sin esa preparación, sin ese estudio. “Tienes que estudiar para las notas, para que sepas, para que seas un profesional en lo que te guste, no importa qué sea. Si te gusta la pintura o te gusta el arte, prepárate para ser un pintor. Pero que lo hagas profesionalmente.” Para mí eso es a lo que yo me refiero cuando digo que tienes que prepararte. No importa lo que le guste pero que lo haga profesionalmente.

(Well, to be prepared to me is like to have a bit more of education. Yes, go to the university, to decide “I want to study to be,” I don’t know, “to be a doctor,” something that motivates him. I tell him [my son], “If you like music, you can study to become a musician. But you cannot say you like music and you want to be a musician without that preparation, without studying. You have to study to read music, so that you can know, to be a professional in whatever interests you, it doesn’t matter what it be. If you like painting or if you like art, study to be a painter. But you have to do in a professional manner.” That is what I am mean when I say to be prepared. It doesn’t matter what he likes, but that he does it in a professional manner.)

She wanted her children to pursue their dream professions, but through formal study. It was important to her that they study and learn whatever it was they wanted to become, but through professional preparation. She wanted her children to be better prepared, better educated than she was, and she continually encouraged them to study, as she said, “Voy a tratar de motivar a mis hijos para que estudien y se preparen y no estén como yo... que estén motivados al estudio.” (“I am going to try to motivate my children to study and be prepared and not be like me...to be motivated to study.”) Learning how to motivate her children and advocating for programs to best support them were what motivated her to remain involved in committees including DELAC.

Antonia

I did not know Antonia prior to her participation in my study, but I recognized her as a consistent attendee at DELAC meetings. I approached her after the February DELAC meeting, and asked if she would be interested in participating in my study. It was through our ensuing conversations that I learned about her experiences as an active *mamá* in the district. At the time

of the interview, Antonia was ELAC president at a middle school and a regular attendee at DELAC, the district's Title I meetings, and the Superintendent's Parent Forum.

Parent involvement in Mexico. Born and raised in Guadalajara, Mexico, Antonia was one of the few *mamás* who described parent involvement in Mexico and her mother's own involvement in her schools. Because her mother worked, Antonia explained her mother's involvement had been limited to volunteering during special celebrations that took place such as 5 de mayo and Independence Day. Antonia explained, when she was in school there were no parent groups,

Anteriormente no se usaba mucho eso. Era la junta pero nada más cuando tu niño estaba enfermo, cuando tu niño tenía problemas en la escuela. Era la junta pero nada más entre padre y el alumno.

(Before, [parent groups] was not used so much. There were meetings but only when your child was sick, when your child was having problems in school. It was a meeting but only with the parent and the student.)

It was a different kind of parent involvement Antonia explained, one where parents would come to schools to volunteer at some big event or when there was an issue with a child. It was much different than her involvement as a committee member at both the school and district level.

A trained nurse. Like her mother and all her other siblings, Antonia became a trained nurse after she completed high school in Mexico. She worked as a nurse for two years but stopped when she married. She said, “y ya sabes, el machismo de los hombres en aquel tiempo.” (“and you know, the machismo of men back in those days.”) Her husband preferred that she not work. (Interestingly, she also mentioned how times have changed and that her husband now encourages to work.) When her first son was one and a half years old and her second son was six months old, she migrated with them and her husband to the U.S. She would have a total of five children, her two sons who were born in Mexico, and three daughters, who were born in the U.S. Her two youngest daughters were still attending district schools at the time of the interview (one

in 12th grade and another in 5th grade). All her children had been classified as English learners and all but one (the 5th grader) had been reclassified.

From classroom volunteer to paid employee. Interestingly, Antonia's mother had encouraged her to become a teacher not a nurse, telling a young Antonia, "Maestra era mejor, que tenía vacaciones, que tenía los fines de semana libres, que tenía pues mejores cosas." ("Teacher is better, that they had vacation time, that they had weekends free, that they had, well, better things.") As soon as she enrolled her sons in kindergarten, Antonia did become a classroom volunteer,

Les leía, les hacía juegos, me dejaban cuidarlos ahí en la hora del recreo, los ayudaba en la cafetería a abrir...era voluntaria en el salón.

(I would read to them, I would make games for them, they would let me take care of them during recreation time, I would help open the cafeteria...I was a classroom volunteer.)

Like the other mothers in my study, Antonia learned that she could volunteer at her children's school through flyers that were sent home with her sons and the front office staff who would mention the opportunity to her. She continued volunteering until she was offered a paid position with the school, something unique to only her story. Twenty years later she was still a paid employee, working as a recreation supervisor for a district school.

By parent invitation.

"Deberías de ir. Mire, hay muy buena información. Le estarán hablando acerca de la ayuda, cómo podemos ayudar a nuestros niños, qué cosas nos gustaría, qué cosas nos gustaría que hicieran por nuestros estudiantes para mejorar su aprendizaje." "Okay, voy a ir."

("You should go. Look, there is a lot of good information. They will be talking to you about the help, how we can help our children, what things we would like, what things we would like them to do help improve our students' learning." "OK, I will go.")

Like many other *mamás* in my study, parent-to-parent encouragement was how Antonia first got involved in parent committees. The quote above was how Antonia characterized the conversation she had with parents that convinced her to finally attend a meeting. While she first learned about the meetings from flyers sent home from school, it was through conversations with

other parents that motivated her to go to her first meeting. It was when her oldest son was in the second grade, but she said, she was only an *oyente* (listener). When I asked what she meant, she explained, “Nada más vas y dices, puedes opinar, puedes dar tu opinión y la apuntan pero tu voto no cuenta.” (“That you only go and you talk, you can comment, you can give your opinion and they will write it down, but your vote does not count.”) It was unclear why Antonia chose to only be an *oyente* initially, but 4 years ago she became an official member of ELAC, and at the time of the observation year she was the president of ELAC for her youngest child’s school.

Fue decisión unánime (It was by unanimous decision). “Fue decisión unánime” (It was a unanimous decision), Antonia said about her election as president of her school’s ELAC. She said, although she had been only an *oyente* (listener) all those years prior, she would still share district information with other parents during school level meetings. “De no ser parte del comité, yo siempre he ido a las juntas, he traído informaciones, he estado contribuyendo.” (“For not being part of the committee, I always have also gone to the meetings, I have brought back information, I have been contributing.”) It was clear the parents at her school site had taken notice as they elected her as their ELAC president.

Tanya

Tanya had a total of seven children, and all of them except for her two youngest, six-year-old twins, had graduated from high school. With her first five children she was a school volunteer and she participated in parent workshops where topics such as child development and discipline were discussed. In describing her involvement in her older children’s education Tanya said, “Hasta ahí llegaba mi involucramiento.” (“That was the extent of my involvement.”) But her humble description did not capture all the other places where she was involved. These included the local YMCA parenting programs, where they discussed ways to strengthen the relationship between schools and families. In addition, she had been taking parenting classes and

English classes in the mornings and was involved in the PTA at nights. Still, her involvement was inconsistent because, as she explained, it was difficult with five small children and a lack of childcare offered at meetings.

Early childhood. Tanya grew up in a small town in the foothills of Guerrero, Mexico. Her parents separated when she was a young child and it was her mother who alone raised her and her two siblings. Selling and bartering fruits and vegetables, Tanya said her mother was able to provide all that they needed, including school uniforms, shoes, notebooks, but not much else. Tanya was able to complete her formal education with the help of a federal program known as CONAFE (Consejo Nacional de Fomento Educativo or the National Council for Education Development).

A kindergarten teacher and trained social worker. Just as Tanya was completing her schooling, she was recruited to become part of CONAFE, a program that would train her to become a kindergarten teacher. She was 15 years old when she began teaching. While she was teaching, Tanya also took classes that met for one week, once a month. After two years in the program, she had earned an associate degree in social work. Along the way she had married and was about to give birth to her first child, a daughter. One year after her daughter was born, Tanya, her husband, and their daughter migrated to the U.S.

From Head Start to DELAC. When Tanya's twins were two years old, she enrolled them in Early Head Start, and that was when her involvement in committees began. She was a member of the finance and planning committee as well as the program and evaluation committee. She was elected as the Head Start community representative. When her twins were enrolled in kindergarten, she became part of ELAC. She explained that her twins were classified as English learners and she joined ELAC “para enterarme de todo lo que había en ELAC.” (“To learn everything about ELAC.”) She soon started attending both ELAC and DELAC meetings.

“Este es mi segundo año en DELAC. Y este año soy la presidenta de ELAC y la representante del DELAC.” (“This is my second year in DELAC. And this year I am the ELAC president and the DELAC representative.”) She explained she was very busy with her first five children and she did not have a good understanding of what was happening in the meetings she attended back then, “no tenía tanto entendimiento de cómo funcionaban las cosas. Attendía y todo y escuchaba, pero no lograba conectar las cosas como lo estoy haciendo ahora.” (“I did not have a good understanding of how things worked. I would attend [the meetings] and I would listen, but I could not connect the things the way I am today.”) This time, with her twins, Tanya had a better understanding of how the district operated, how to navigate the system, and how to be a more effective advocate for her children and the community she represented. She, like Alma, was creating parent leadership workshops in the community featuring the knowledge she was gaining from her involvement in DELAC and other committees.

Esperanza

Since the early 1980s, Esperanza and her husband had been migrating between Mexico and California, working in the agriculture and landscaping industries. In the mid 1990s they settled down in *Rancho los Nietos*, where her husband took a job in a factory, assembling truck parts. She had five children, and there was a substantial 15-year gap between her oldest child (a daughter) and her youngest child (a son) who was the only one of her children who remained in the K-12 system. All of her other children had long completed their high school educations, and some were parents themselves. Esperanza had 5 grandchildren and 2 more on the way. I did not know Esperanza prior to her participation in my study, but I learned a lot about her life and her involvement in *Rancho los Nietos* schools from the information she shared with me during and observing her at DELAC meetings.

Engaged in Mexican schools. Interestingly, going back-and-forth between the U.S. and Mexico meant that for a period of time some of Esperanza's older children attended school in Mexico. She had the experience of being an engaged parent in both school systems. "Le llaman cooperativa" ("They call it cooperative"), she said of the parent group she was a part of in Mexico. Her description of the organized group of parents seemed similar to PTA groups in the U.S. The *cooperative* would fundraise for their children's school, "para que haya dinero para ciertas cosas que se necesitan para mejoras de la escuela o de la clase." ("So that there could be money for certain things that were needed to improve the school or the classroom.") She got involved she said, "me interesa mucho la educación de mis hijos y estar al pendiente de ellos y buscar la forma cómo los puedo ayudar. Por eso andaba ahí todo el tiempo desde que estaba allá." ("I am very interested in the education of my children and devote my attention to them and look for ways that I could help them. That was why I was there all the time since they were over there [in Mexico].") As part of the cooperative, Esperanza volunteered in the classroom and she took turns preparing lunches for all of the children. She pointed out that in Mexico one pays for everything to attend school and joked, "Allá no nos regalan ni los buenos días. No te creas." ("Over there [in Mexico], even 'good morning' is not given for free. I'm just kidding.") Her own parents were not able to pay for schooling, which led to her leaving after only completing middle school. Education was also one of the reasons why her and husband decided to migrate to the U.S.

Hay mucho más futuro aquí para ellos (There is more of a future for them here).

Like many other parents who have migrated to the U.S., Esperanza and her husband wanted to provide their children with a better future, and she saw studying in the U.S. public school system as a path toward that better future.

Se me hace mucho mejor aquí, fue una de las causas por qué decidimos romper barreras y dejar nuestra vida detrás allá, dejará nuestras familias, nuestros padres, toda nuestra vida.

Y vámonos buscando un futuro mejor para nuestros hijos, esa es la causa por la cual nos venimos, pensando en ellos. Porque aquí es diferente la situación – siento yo que hay mucho más futuro aquí para ellos, como yo siempre les dije y les he dicho y ahorita le digo a este niño, “el que quiere estudiar estudia y el que no quiere estudiar pues no estudia” porque las oportunidades ahí están, aquí. En México es bien diferente. En México tienes dinero estudias, si no tienes dinero pues no estudias porque allá todo es a base de dinero y aquí no. Entonces aquí pues yo veo que ellos tienen mucha más oportunidad para estudiar.

(It seems much better here, that was one of the reasons we decided to break away and leave our lives behind over there, leave our families, our parents, our entire lives. And let’s go look for a better future for our children, that is the reason why we came here, thinking about them. Because here [in the U.S.] the situation is different – I feel that they have a much better future here, like I have always told them and have told them and I tell this child [my youngest son] now, “the person who wants to study, studies; and the person who does not want to study, does not study,” because the opportunities are there [for you], here [in the U.S.] Mexico is very different. In Mexico if you have money you study, but if you do not have money you do not study because over there everything is based on money and not here. Therefore, here, I see that them have many more opportunities to study.)

They left everything behind, including their families, which has been the most difficult part for Esperanza to accept. Since settling down in the mid 1990s she has never returned to Mexico. Her father passed away and she was unable to return home for his funeral. It has been a great sacrifice she made for her children.

Darles una chequeadita. (Check on them.)

¿Dónde está el esfuerzo que hicimos nosotros? ¿Valió la pena dejar lo que dejé en México? Dejar toda mi vida allá, dejar a mis padres, mis hermanos, mis sobrinos — dejar todo atrás para venirnos para aquí. ¿Entonces pues para qué andar ahí? Para ver cómo van, cómo va con sus calificaciones. ¿Le están echando ganas o no le están echando ganas? En fin, a ver. Dice mi hija, “Darles una chequeadita.”

(Where is the effort we made? Was it worth leaving everything that I left in Mexico? To leave my life over there, leave my parents, my siblings, my nieces and nephews — leave everything behind to come over here. Then why be there [in schools]? To see how they are doing, how they are doing with their grades. Are they giving it their all or are they doing it half-heartedly? Ultimately, to see. My daughter says, “To check on them.”)

Esperanza explained she first became involved in her children’s education here, in the U.S., to ensure her children were doing well in their classes (“darles una chequeadita”). She had made a big sacrifice leaving her parents and siblings behind in Mexico, and she wanted to make sure it has been worthwhile (“valió la pena”). She would talk with teachers about her children’s

progress, and she would attend nightly events such as Back to School Night and Open House. She also attended gatherings where her children were honored with certificates, but when her older children were in school, she was working. In order to attend any daytime event, she would have to get permission from her employer first, “yo avisaba en el trabajo que iba a llegar tarde, pedía permiso y me iba.” (“I would let them know at my work that I was going to be late, I would ask for permission and I would go.”) It was not until her youngest was enrolled in Head Start when she became involved in parent committees.

Me involucré de lleno (I got fully involved). When Esperanza’s youngest son was in first grade that was when “me involucré de lleno.” (“I got fully involved.”) She began attending both ELAC and DELAC meetings. She was elected as the ELAC president and DELAC representative. Even after her son was reclassified (in the 3rd grade), she continued being part of both ELAC and DELAC. Later, when he son entered middle school, she became a member of the school site council as well.

She felt satisfied with the district and, as mentioned before, she felt opportunities for a good education were available in the district, it was up to students and families to take advantage of those opportunities. Moreover, Esperanza felt the district itself was open about its budget and where and how monies were being spent.

Aquí tenemos mucho apoyo, que hay muchos lugares disponibles para los padres dónde podemos tener información sobre la educación de nuestros hijos, participación. Como en este caso que vamos a las juntas de las escuelas, vamos al distrito, podemos ir a las juntas del superintendente, podemos ir a otras escuelas. Aquí hay demasiada información. (Here was have a lot of support, there are many places where parents can go to get information about their children’s education, participation. As in this case that we go to the meetings at schools, we go to the district [meetings], we can go to the superintendent’s meetings, we can go to other schools. There is a lot of information.)

Esperanza felt well supported by the district (“tenemos mucho apoyo”). Compared to the Mexican school system she was familiar with, at *Rancho los Nietos* a significant amount of information (“hay demasiada información”) was made available to parents. There were

numerous meetings (“juntas de las escuelas, distrito, del superintendente, otras escuelas”) where parents could obtain information.

Ana

During the year of observation Ana was the ELAC president for both a middle school and a high school in the district, and a consistent attendee at DELAC meetings. She had four children, a daughter who was a sophomore in high school, twins who were freshmen at the same high school, and a son in middle school. Her 10th grade daughter had been reclassified, but her three other children were still ELs. She explained that her children, especially her twins, “batallaban para aprender el inglés.” (“struggled to learn English.”) Their struggle motivated her to want to learn how she could support them, and it led to her involvement in their schools.

I met Ana two years prior to the start of my study, when her twins were in middle school. She was an active member of ELAC, consistently attended the meetings, and frequently asked administrators (the vice principals and the resource teacher) about the English Language Development (ELD) instruction provided at the middle school. She would also frequently recommend that additional instructors be hired, and that tutoring be offered for EL students. Her recommendations were based mostly on her understanding of her own children’s experiences.

During my interview with her, she told me that she sensed something was not right with the level of instruction that EL students were receiving at the middle school. She shared with me the conversations she had had with her twins. They described to her the instructional approach of their ELD teacher, who would return to teach the same content every time new students would join their class. They told her, they would return to “lo que ya habíamos oído” (what we had already heard). Her twins also told her about the college aides in the classroom, who did not seem to know how to help students. Ana pointed out that the college aides were constantly changing (“se los cambia cada ratito”), and the aides did not know in which areas (reading,

writing, comprehension) to help students. Ana's concerns about ELD instruction at the middle school seemed to be reflected in the student outcome data. For instance, during the years in which her twins were enrolled in the middle school, the reclassification rate at the school averaged six percent, below even the district's average of nine percent (DataQuest, 2013). Long term ELs also made up a majority of the EL student population at the school, comprising half of all EL students. It also seemed problematic that there be only one ELD teacher given that there were nearly 500 EL students enrolled at the school, 234 identified as long term EL.

Getting involved to support struggling children. Ana's first three children were born in the U.S., but her youngest was born in Mexico. She explained that after living in the U.S. for four years, she and her husband had decided to return to Mexico. She had her youngest child when they returned to Mexico. Then, a few years later, they decided to return to the U.S. Her husband and children returned first and two years later, in 2014, Ana joined them.

When she returned to *Rancho los Nietos*, Ana noticed her oldest daughter and twins, who were in middle school at the time, were struggling ("batallaban") and were giving up hope ("se desesperaban"). She wanted to support her children, which to her meant, "tengo que involucrarme en la escuela para ver cómo los están enseñando." ("I have to get involved in their school to see how they are being taught.") She also wanted to get involved to learn how to navigate the U.S. educational system.

By school invitation, in Spanish. Ana first learned that she could get involved in her children's schools through a phone call she received from the middle school inviting her to something called "Monday Morning Message." It was a Monday morning gathering where parents were invited to the Parent Center (a classroom on campus dedicated to parent meetings and events). The phone call had been in Spanish, and Ana reasoned if they had called to invite her in Spanish, perhaps translation would be provided at the Monday gathering.

The Monday message was a televised broadcast that consisted of announcements such as upcoming school events, the word of the week, attendance reports, and reminders about school rules. It was broadcasted to all classrooms and the Parent Center. The principal, vice principals, and a few students would participate in broadcast.

To Ana's surprised, after the English broadcast a school employee would then go to the Parent Center and provide in-person Spanish translation. Providing the broadcast in Spanish enabled Ana to understand what was being communicated in the Monday message.

Y o que sorpresa, todo era en español después de que lo dan en inglés. Y yo, "O, pues entonces sí lo entiendo. ¿Por qué no me voy a quedar? Si me lo están dando en español.

(And oh what a surprise, it was all in Spanish after they give it to you in English. And I [said to myself], "Oh, well, then I do understand it. Why wouldn't I stay? If they are giving it to me in Spanish.")

Having the Spanish translation motivated Ana to continue attending the Monday Morning Message. Having Spanish translation made a difference to Ana, as she explained, "Me sentí más segura y por eso me gusta esa escuela, porque todo lo entiendo." ("I felt more secure and that's why I like that school, because I understand everything.") But it was the phone call in Spanish that initiated Ana's involvement, highlighting the important role that Spanish language communication had in getting Ana to first step foot into the Parent Center.

Becomes an ELAC member to better understand school program. Attending the Monday Morning Message led to Ana's involvement in ELAC as the school's ELAC meetings were held once a month, on Mondays, immediately following the Monday Morning Message. She decided to become an official member (elected by other parents) with the encouragement of another *mamá*, Monica, and also because no one else seemed to want to do it, "nadie quería levantar la mano" (no one wanted to raise their hand). When no one else raised their hand to join ELAC and with Monica's urging, Ana nominated herself to the ELAC committee. Three of

Ana's children attended the middle school, all three were classified as EL, and all three were struggling in their efforts to acquire English. She explained to me,

Cuando yo vi que sí estaban batallando mis hijos mucho para aprenderlo [el inglés] dije, "Pues sí. Voy a ver qué es lo que les ofrecen o que programas o quién es el maestro que les está enseñando el inglés."

(When I saw that my children were struggle a lot to learn English I said, "Well, yes. I want to see what they offer or what programs or who is the teacher who is teaching English.")

Ana thought that in ELAC she would learn about the ELD program at the school, and more specifically what was being taught to her children and by whom. Over time she learned that her role as an ELAC parent member was not only to learn about the school's programs and services, but also to make recommendations for the benefit of all EL students at the school.

Aspirations for her children: defenderse (defend themselves).

Yo lo que más quiero es que aprendan el inglés, porque ya aprendiendo el inglés ellos yo sé que van a llegar a defenderse aquí.

(What I want the most is that they learn English, because after they learn English I know they will be able to defend themselves here.)

One of Ana's goals for her children was that they learn English. In the quote above, she said she knew that once they learned English, they would be able to defend themselves (defenderse), meaning they would be able to understand what was happening around them and to them, and they would be able to respond by taking informed actions. Ana wanted her children to have the freedom to pursue whatever career they wanted, and in order to achieve that goal they would have to go to college, which meant they would have to take college prep courses in high school. From information provided at DELAC meetings, she learned from that EL students, including her own children, were prevented from taking some of those courses because they still had not met the English proficiency

criteria. Her children also knew of the restrictions. She recounted the time when her twins were selected their freshman year classes,

Ahorita que no están reclasificados, tienen trabas, porque ellos ahora que escogieron sus clases decían “Esta no, porque todavía no domino el inglés”. Right now they are not reclassified, they have obstacles, because now that they were selecting their classes they would say, “No, not that one, because I have not mastered English yet.”

She remembered all the classes they wanted to take but were not eligible because of their classification as ELs. As ELAC president, Ana wanted to help students “dominar el inglés” (master English) and remove the *trabas* (obstacles) preventing them from achieving success in school and in life.

Lorena

A single mother of twins in middle school, Lorena who worked as a full-time housekeeper. Still, she carved out time to be a volunteer at her children’s school and to be an active member of several committees. At the time of the interview she was the president of her children’s site council, an elected member of ELAC, and a regular attendee at district level meetings including DELAC, the district level Title I meetings, and the Superintendent’s Parents Forum. Lorena was always encouraging other *mamás* to get involved in school and district level committees. On a weekly basis she would call parents to remind them of upcoming site council meetings. She would also organize carpools to various district meetings, arranging in advance an agreed upon time when she would pick up *mamás* in front of the middle school she represented, and she would drive them back to the school site after the district meeting. She also initiated occasional Friday morning gatherings at a pupuseria¹¹ near the middle school, where *mamás* would chat about school, the district, and life, over coffee and delicious, inexpensive pupusas.

¹¹ A pupusa is a thick corn tortilla stuffed with a savory filling such as beans, cheese, zucchini, and pork. They are served with pickled cabbage and salsa. A pupuseria is a restaurant that sells pupusas.

It was at the middle school where I first met Lorena. Two years before I started my study Lorena began attending ELAC and Title I meetings. Her twins had just entered middle school and she was an enthusiastic new face at the meetings. Always laughing, Lorena was a gregarious person, generous with her time (active in schools and the district) and with her knowledge (frequently sharing information with parents who asked for her advice). She had been an active *mamá* in the district since her children were in the third grade. Prior to that, they had been enrolled in Catholic school. When their scholarship was not renewed, Lorena enrolled her twins in a district elementary school. She immediately noticed how much larger the *Rancho* elementary school was compared to the Catholic school, “yo asustada por todos los 1,200 niños que tenía la escuela.” (“I was scared with the 1,200 children attending the school.”) She got involved in the *Rancho* elementary school as a way to get to know the school community. The purpose her involvement would evolve into advocating for emergent bilingual students in district schools.

Early adulthood. Lorena was in her mid 20s when she came to the U.S. She had finished high school in Mexico and had also taken some college courses. For 12 years she had worked as a general manager for a retailer of wines and spirits in Mexico. Lorena worked long hours and said of her boss, “entre más daba, más me exigía.” (“the more I gave, the more she demanded of me.”) She learned how to manage every aspect of the small chain of stores but was under a lot of stress due to a boss that demanded a lot from her. During the same period of time, many of her family members were migrating to the U.S., and one day Lorena decided it was time for her to migrate too. Her experience as a general manager helped her land an office job in the U.S., which she held for 5 years, until she became pregnant with her twins.

As a single mother she struggled to make ends meet, but still she wanted to provide her twins with the best possible education. When they were three years old, she enrolled them into Catholic school. She worked two jobs at that time and volunteered at the church, which earned

her a reduction in tuition in the form of a scholarship for her children. When her children were about to enter the third grade she was told that the Catholic school was no longer going to renew her twins' scholarship, so she enrolled her children into a public school.

Starting with the teacher. Lorena's involvement in district schools began by getting to know her children's teachers. "Me dedicué a eso, a conocer los maestros, me presenté...iba cada cuando recogía mis hijos del escuela y pasaba con el maestro." ("I dedicated myself to that, getting to know the teachers, I would introduce myself...I would go every time I would pick up my children from school and I would go see their teacher.") It was the start of her involvement, and how she found out her children were below grade level in math and English, and that her children were classified as English learners. This surprised her as they had been attending Catholic school and she had never been told that they were below grade level or that they were English learners. The teacher at the *Rancho los Nietos* elementary school told her about parent meetings on their campus, and soon Lorena began attending ELAC.

Eso es lo que motiva (That is what motivates). Lorena became very involved in school and district level committees. She explained that she fell in love ("me enamoré") with the work, and she especially enjoyed being part of a team, working with parents and teachers to improve school communities. She learned a lot through her participation, especially about the programs and services that were offered through the district. She took the information she was learning from DELAC and other district committee meetings back to her school and shared it with the parents and teachers. As Lorena explained, it was in being of service, successfully securing workshops and programs for parents at her school site, that motivated her to continue to be involved in committees, "Eso es lo que te motiva a seguir tú trabajando y seguir adelante, y que sabes que estás sacando un beneficio no nada más para mí sino para una comunidad." ("That is

what motivates you to continue working and to move forward and that you know that you are benefiting not only for yourself but for your community.”)

Dialogue, respect, and communication. Lorena’s twins were reclassified when they were in the fifth grade, yet she continued being an elected member of ELAC and during the year of my study, she had become the middle school’s DELAC representative. She was also the middle school’s site council president. She was in a unique position where she was involved in two committees that at times were in conflict with each other. She said, “Lo primordial es el diálogo, el respeto. El respeto, el saber cómo comunicarte con las personas.” (“Paramount is dialogue, respect. Respect, knowing how to communicate with people.”) Dialogue, respect, and communication were central to how she operated as a parent representative in both committees. She also had to learn how to navigate the tension that sometime arose when what ELAC members were advocating for was not approved by the site council. While she could lobby site council members to vote in favor of ELAC recommendations, she was not always successful. Those unsuccessful outcomes could have created a division between Lorena and the ELAC members, but she retained their friendship and trust through dialogue, talking with them about why a particular recommendation had not been approved and strategies they could use in the future. Mostly she encouraged ELAC members to attend site council meetings and display the number of ELAC members who were in support of a particular recommendation. It was her actions (e.g., going out of her way to arrange get-togethers and sharing her insights about the site council) that kept her connected to ELAC parents.

Blanca

I did not know Blanca personally prior to embarking on my study, but I saw her often at DELAC and other district level meetings. Although she had a soft voice, she was an outspoken *mamá*, often asking questions during DELAC meetings. Through the interviews and our *pláticas*

I learned that she was very active in the schools her children attended, including ELAC and DELAC even though all three of her children had been reclassified. At the time of the interview she had a son in elementary school and two daughters in high school. Her official posts were ELAC secretary for the elementary and high schools and site council member at both schools. She was also a regular attendee at DELAC, district level Title I meetings, and the Superintendent's Parent Forum, and was an active member of community organizations.

Experience as a *Rancho* student. Like Yaneli, Blanca migrated from Mexico to the U.S. as a teenager and attended high school in *Rancho los Nietos*. She graduated, but said, “no sé cómo lo hice” (I don't know how I did it), explaining that she struggled in school especially after “una burla que recibí en la escuela por parte del maestro” (a mocking I received at school from a teacher). She believed she had not mastered English at the level she should have, and still felt *pena* (shame) speaking English. She understood English, but she preferred to speak in Spanish at meetings.

Desde que iba en kínder (Since she was in kinder). Blanca had been involved in her children's schools since her oldest daughter was in kindergarten, 13 years ago. She explained that she did not work, and that enabled her to be involved in schools. Since enrolling her eldest child in kindergarten, Blanca had been a parent volunteer in the classroom, chaperoned field trips, participated in parent workshops, and attended school level committee meetings.

Saber más (Know more). “Empecé yo a ir más a las juntas, a saber más.” (“I started going to more meetings, to know more.”) Blanca's involvement in committees has led to her knowing the official rules of engagement. From trainings provided by the LCAP Asst. Director, she knew that members of site councils had to be *elected* not *appointed* by principals or other school staff (which she had observed happening at some of the schools she was involved with) and that translation needed to be provided to parents (which she also observed was not

happening at some schools). She called out the irregularities, and made it known during school meetings that they were not following the proper processes. This led to reform at those sites, where elections were implemented, and proper translation services were now being provided at meetings.

Es mi derecho (It's my right). From the district meetings she had been attending, Blanca also understood the role and purpose of committee parents was “para decidir cómo gastar dinero” (to decide how to spend funds) and not simply to sign-off on budgets, as a principal had been asking her to do in the early years of her involvement. While she knew all the rules, she said the difficult part was getting some school sites to follow them. In the past, when school sites refused to correct their actions, she escalated her concerns about irregularities at district level meetings. When I asked her about fear of retaliation, Blanca said,

No me gusta hablar mucho mal de las personas...pero sí hay veces que sí lo necesitas...Es mi derecho, es mi voz...siempre yo he dicho que sí es tu derecho, no estás haciendo nada ilegal y puedes hacerlo...estás hablando por todos los que no se animan a hacerlo.

(I do not like to speak bad about people...but there are times when it is necessary...It's my right, it's my voice...I have always said that it's your right, you are not doing anything illegal and you can do it...you are speaking for those who do not have the courage to do it.)

Blanca had exercised her voice, not only at DELAC meetings and other district committee meetings, but she had also made public statements at school board meetings. She said it might be scary, but sometimes those were the steps she had to take to make her voice and the voices of the parents she represented, be heard. Over the years, she learned that sometimes she had to escalate her concerns to see change happen.

Elena

I knew who Elena was prior to her participation in my study, but I did not know her personally. She was an active *mamá* who was an officer in DELAC, and she was also a regular attendee at the district level Title I meetings and the Superintendent's Parent Forum. She would

ask questions regularly, always in Spanish. From my interview with her, I learned that she was the mother of two young girls, one in third grade and the other in Head Start, both classified as English learners. In addition to her role as an officer of DELAC, during the year of my study Elena was also the president of ELAC, vice president of the site council, and a member of the Migrant Program.

No sabes de dónde vengo (You don't know where I come from).

Yo he tenido gente que me dice, “¿Qué? ¿Estudiaste?” Y cuando digo estudie en la universidad, así como que, “¿Tú fuiste a la universidad?” Así como que, “Ey, ¿sí?” O sea, no porque esté aquí tú no sabes realmente mi historia atrás. Tú nada más me estás viendo aquí. A la mejor no me ves aquí así bien, pero realmente tú no sabes de dónde vengo.

(I have had people tell me, “What? You studied?” And when I tell them I studied at the university, it's like, “You went to university?” Like, “Really?” I mean, just because I am here does not mean you know my real history. You only see me here. Maybe you do not look at me right, but you really do not know where I come from.)

Like half of *las mamás* who participated in my study, Elena had completed high school. She had also studied social work at the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (UNAM), a premier public university located in Mexico. In the quote above, Elena described the encounters she had with people at district meetings, and their dismay upon hearing that she had studied at a university. She implied that they held assumptions about the level of education she, and perhaps the other Latin@ parents had achieved. In fact, like Carolina, Elena had also earned her GED here, in the U.S., and had studied English at the local community college. She said, “muchacha gente te pueden menospreciar; realmente no saben la capacidad que tienes.” (“A lot of people can underestimate you; they don't really know the capacity you have.”) In sharing with them that she had attended university, Elena wanted to dispel the presumptions being made about Latin@ parents.

Era mamá primeriza (I was a first-time mother). “Era mamá primeriza, no tenía aquí familia, no había nada, entonces yo necesitaba que alguien me orientara cómo se educa un niño.”

(“I was a first-time mother, I did not have family here, there was nothing, so I needed someone to orient me on how to raise a child.”) Elena became involved in schools because, as a first-time mother with no family around, she wanted someone to guide her. She was invited by a neighborhood mother to attend some of the school’s parent workshops. Later, when Elena’s older daughter entered kindergarten and had been classified as an English learner, Elena was introduced to ELAC and DELAC.

Fijate que soy de ELAC (Look I am from ELAC). Recounting her first year in ELAC, Elena pointed out she did not know what the committee was really about and her role in it. She explained that three mothers including herself, made up the entire ELAC committee at her daughter’s elementary school. Elena was elected as president and DELAC representative, another mother was elected as vice president, and the third mother was a member at-large.

“Pero ¿qué es ELAC? No sabía. Y, ‘te vas a ir a DELAC.’ Quedé igual, no sabía qué era.” (“But, what is ELAC? I didn’t know. And, “you are going to go to DELAC.” Again, I didn’t know what that was.”) Elena had no idea what ELAC or DELAC were and received very little information from her principal. All she was told was that she needed to attend the DELAC meetings and report back to the school ELAC and site council. At that time she did not know what site council was, but with time and the information provided at the district meetings, she began to understand the purpose of ELAC, its connection to site council, and her role in both committees.

Entonces es una lucha que te estás llevando (So it’s a fight that you’re carrying on). Elena understood that one of her primary roles was to inform parents about the programs and services that could help children in the district, but there were many barriers prohibiting her from fulfilling her role. For instance, Elena said there was a lack of understanding among parents about EL classification and reclassification process. She explained that some parents she had

spoken to thought she was misinformed as their children had been born in the U.S. and English was the language they spoke. But the fact was that according to school records, those students were classified as EL. Elena thought the children had been classification as EL as soon as their parents had indicated on their enrollment paperwork that the language spoken at home was Spanish. She knew school sites could clarify the misconceptions and misinformation held by parents about EL classification with a workshop or some other gathering, the trouble was getting parents to attend such an event. She knew, for instance, that some undocumented parents were afraid to attend school meetings thinking they would be asked for proof of legal status in the county. She could help recruit parents, but she found that some other parents mistrusted representatives like herself. “Creen que tú estás trabajando al lado del distrito.” (“They think you are work on the side of the district.”) They came to believe that she was no longer an advocate for the children. Elena herself had been accused of having sold out to the district, and said, “es una lucha que te estás llevando.” (“It’s a fight that you’re carrying on.”) Still, four years into her involvement with school and district committees, Elena was fully dedicated to her work as a parent representative.

Summary of Las Mamás

The fourteen *mamás* each had a unique and powerful life story. They were all active in DELAC, meaning they attended committee meetings regularly, and while they shared a common interest in advocating for emergent bilinguals at their school sites, there were also differences in the ways they carried out their involvement. Next, I discuss commonalities among *las mamás* and points of difference.

Familiarity with Each Other

I knew six of the *mamás* before I started my study. Carla, Monica, Sofia, Yaneli, Ana, Lorena, and I all knew each other from the middle school where I was a community volunteer.

As a regular participant in the middle school's ELAC and school site council meetings, I became familiar with this group of mothers, who were regular attendees at these meetings, too. Still, the *mamás* were not all friends, although they were respectful toward each other at meetings. Carla, Ana, and Lorena met at the middle school, and shared time together outside of school related events. Carla was also close with Monica as they had known each other for the past eight years. Their daughters were close in age and had attended the same elementary and middle schools. Sofia and Carla had also met at the middle school, and, as mentioned earlier, Carla would carpool with Sofia to the DELAC meetings, still Sofia and Carla did not spend time together outside of school related events. Yaneli was friendly with all the *mamás* at the middle school, and she knew Carla and Monica from when their children had attended the same elementary school. Still, like Sofia, Yaneli rarely spent time with any of the *mamás* outside of school related events.

I knew of Elena and Dolores one year before the start of my study, but only because they were DELAC officers, and I would see them at DELAC and other district committee meetings. I did not have any personal contact with them before I approached them to ask them to participate in my study. Through their participation, I learned that Elena and Blanca were close and knew each other from their participation in district committees. Carolina and Alma were also close and had met through their involvement in school committees. Antonia and Esperanza also knew each other as their older children attended the same schools at the same time. Dolores was familiar with some of *las mamás* participating in my study, but she was not close with any of them and her children did not attend the same schools as any of their children. Tanya was not close with any of the other *mamás* in my study either, although she knew of some of them from her involvement at district committee meetings. Still, prior to our *pláticas*, Tanya had not spent time with any of them.

Motivation for Involvement

As explained above, the fourteen *mamás* who participated in my study were not all friends and did not all know each other before the start of their participation in my study. Still, they shared a common goal of wanting to provide their children with the best education possible, and in order to achieve their goal it meant begin involved in their children's schools.

Head Start. Eight of *las mamás*, Carla, Monica, Sofia, Carolina, Yaneli, Tanya, Esperanza, and Elena, talked about how their involvement in schools began with Head Start and the required parent engagement that was built into the federally funded program. Some of these *mamás* such as Carla, Monica, and Tanya, became officers in Head Start. These *mamás* talked about how their experiences in Head Start was instrumental in helping them understand what a parent committee was and how to navigate within one.

The Migrant Education Program. The district's Migrant Education Program was another influential organization that half of *las mamás* had been a part of. Dolores, Carolina, Alma, Yaneli, Lorena, Blanca, and Elena all mentioned the Migrant Education Program during their interviews with me, often highlighting the parent workshops they were involved in while their children attended the Saturday School component of the program. Silvia, the district's DELAC Coordinator was also the administrator of the Migrant Education Program, so the seven *mamás* named above knew Silvia through the two district committees. Dolores, Carolina, and Alma spoke specifically about the knowledge they gained from the workshops, not only how the district was organized and how it functioned, essential information to understand, but also strategies on how to be an effective advocate within other school committees. Through their participation in the workshops, they learned what to ask and how to ask questions during committee meetings, also how to read basic information such as report cards. Moreover, for

Dolores and Alma, the Migrant Education Program was a gateway program that led them to get involved in to district committees first, and then to school level committees.

Invitations from staff and colleagues. Another common theme was the critical role invitations had on *mamás*. Nine of them mentioned being invited and/or inviting other parents to participate in ELAC and/or DELAC. For instance, school staff had invited Carla, Dolores, Alma, Ana, and Lorena to become part of ELAC or DELAC. Friends and family had invited Monica, Antonia, Sofía, and Elena to become part of committees. Some of these *mamás* in turn invited other *mamás* to either attend committee meetings or actually join committees. *Mamás* Sofía and Yaneli would invite others in a causal, unstructured way. Their invitations were one-offs, and happened spontaneously, as part of a piece of advice they would be sharing when a parent would approach them with a concern or issue. Monica, Elena, and Ana were more intentional in their approach. They took the initiative to call parents of emergent bilingual students, to invite them to upcoming ELAC meetings. Lorena also called parents, but she also enabled the participation of some *mamás* by arranging carpools to and from the DELAC meeting. Carla also invited parents, though in a more casual manner, similar to Sofía and Yaneli, but she too organized carpools like Lorena. Carolina and Blanca organized parents through the nonprofit organizations they were members of. Alma and Tanya were the most organized and intentional with their invitations, as they not only recruited parents to become involved in committees, but they were busy providing their own trainings outside of the school system, creating capacity among parents. The table below captures the invitations received by *mamás*, encouraging them to become involved in school and/or district committees.

Table 2 <i>Invitations Received to Join Committees.</i>			
<u>Mamá</u>	<u>Invitation From</u>	<u>Mamá</u>	<u>Invitation From</u>
Ana	Friend/Family	Dolores	MEP teacher
Antonia	Friend/Family	Carla	School teacher
Blanca	Friend/Family	Lorena	School teacher
Elena	Friend/Family	Tanya	School teacher
Monica	Friend/Family	Yaneli	School teacher
Sofía	Friend/Family	Carolina	Self-Initiated
Alma	MEP staff	Esperanza	Self-Initiated
<i>Note.</i> MEP stands for Migrant Education Program.			

Length of Time in the U.S.

As mentioned above, all of *las mamás* were immigrants from Mexico. All but three came to the U.S. as young adults, in their late teens to mid 20s. The exceptions were Yaneli and Blanca who both arrived as teenagers, and Ana who arrived when she was in her mid 30s. In fact, Ana was the *mamá* who had been living the U.S. the shortest amount of time, six years. Most other *mamás* had been living the U.S. from 15 to 25 years. Antonia, Tanya, and Esperanza had been living in the U.S. the longest, over 30 years. The table below shows the length of time each *mamá* had been in the U.S. at the time of the study.

Table 3 <i>Length of Time Living in the U.S. at the Time of the Study.</i>			
<u>Mamá</u>	<u>Years in U.S.</u>	<u>Mamá</u>	<u>Years in U.S.</u>
Alma	22	Elena	19
Ana	4	Esperanza	34
Antonia	30	Lorena	17
Blanca	20	Monica	17
Carolina	15	Sofía	25
Carla	23	Tanya	28
Dolores	20	Yaneli	16

Immigration Status

I never asked *las mamás* about their immigration status, but it is important to note that the year of my study coincided with the election of Donald Trump. His deeply revolting rhetoric about Mexican immigrants (BBC News, 2016), was made worse with an increase in visible immigration deportations (Schmidt, 2017; U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, 2017). Although I am not certain if any of *las mamás* in my study were undocumented, some did reveal to me they were from mixed status families. Even those who were not from mixed status families knew at least one undocumented person in their circle of friends and family. In fact, a recent report estimated the undocumented population in city of *Rancho los Nietos* was as high as 24 percent of the entire immigration population (New American Economy, 2018), EdSource (2017) estimated that 1 in 8 children in California schools has at least one undocumented parent, and a recent study conducted by Gándara and Ee (2018) found significant portions of immigrant students and families were being impacted by the threat of deportation. They also found parent involvement had declined due to the threat (Gándara & Ee, 2018).

While *las mamás* in my study talked with me about their worries and fears, they did not raise the topic during DELAC meetings. The one time when immigration and raids were brought up by district officials at a DELAC meeting it was to inform DELAC members of the board's recent resolution. The board took an official position, declaring its intent to protect immigrant and undocumented students and families and prevent raids happening in or near school groups. There was emerging evidence (Gándara & Ee, 2018), that the hostile climate was impacting the physical, emotional, and mental wellbeing of immigrant students, families, and friends. The school board's resolution seemed to be their way of reassuring students and families that the district was a safe place.

Still, there was a drop in DELAC attendance. Comparing the prior year's (2015-2016) attendance numbers to the observation year's (2016-2017) numbers, there was an observable drop among both DELAC parent representatives and parent guests. An average of 17 fewer DELAC representatives attended meetings and an average of 8 fewer parent guests attended meetings. It is unclear whether the hostile immigrant climate was to blame for the decline in attendance, or some other factor (such as ineffective meetings, something highlighted in the participatory policymaking literature, e.g., Anderson, 1998), or a combination of both. Still, some of the *las mamás* did describe to me the fear they experienced walking around in their neighborhoods and the stress and anxiety experienced by some children. But the threat of deportation did not seem to prevent *las mamás* in my study from continuing to attend DELAC or other committee meetings - either at the district or school levels.

An Array of Education Backgrounds

The educational backgrounds of the *mamás* varied from having completed a portion of middle school in Mexico to having earned an associate or other technical degree. Two *mamás*, Yaneli and Blanca, had attended high school in the U.S. Among *las mamás* were professionals trained in social work, accounting, and nursing. Also, Elena and Carolina had earned their GED in *Rancho los Nietos*. Many of *las mamás* had also taken English classes, either at their school sites (Yaneli and Lorena), at community colleges (Elena, Alma, and Carolina), or through nonprofit organizations (Monica and Tanya). Table 4 below contains the formal levels of education attained by each *mamá*, and list of degrees earned, if any.

Table 4

Level of Formal Education and Degrees Earned as of the Study Year.

<u>Mamá</u>	<u>Formal Education Attained and Degrees Earned</u>
Alma	Completed high school in Mexico; Earned technical degree in Mexico.
Ana	Completed first year of high school in Mexico.
Antonia	Completed high school in Mexico; Completed nursing degree in Mexico.
Blanca	Completed high school in U.S.
Carolina	Completed high school in Mexico; Earned technical degree in Mexico; Earned GED in U.S.
Carla	Completed 3 years of high school in Mexico.
Dolores	Completed middle school in Mexico.
Elena	Completed high school in Mexico; Completed 2 years of university study in Mexico; Earned GED in U.S.
Esperanza	Completed middle school in Mexico.
Lorena	Completed high school in Mexico; Some college in Mexico.
Monica	Completed first year of high school in Mexico.
Sofia	Completed part of middle school in Mexico.
Tanya	Completed high school in Mexico; Earned associate degree in social work in Mexico.
Yaneli	Completed 10 th grade in U.S. high school.
<p><i>Note.</i> The schooling system in Mexico is organized similar to the U.S. system in that there is <i>primaria</i> (grades 1-6), <i>secundaria</i> (grades 7-9), and <i>preparatoria</i> (grades 10-12). For simplicity, I use the terms “middle school” and “high school” to describe the level of education completed by each <i>mamá</i> even if it was in Mexico.</p>	

Fluency in English

From my observations, I noticed that some *mamás* communicated in both Spanish and English during DELAC meetings. Monica and Antonia were among this group of *mamás*. Although they were not fluent English speakers, they felt confident about asking questions in both English and Spanish. Interestingly, although Antonia seemed to have good command of English, she still chose to use the headset and listen to the Spanish translation of the DELAC meeting. Monica did not use a headset.

There were also *mamás* who I had heard speaking English in other settings, but they never spoke it at DELAC meetings, including Carla, Lorena, Carolina, Alma, Tanya, Elena, and Blanca. With their command of English, they were able to understand bits of meetings that would go under or un-interpreted. Except for Blanca, all of these *mamás* used the headsets.

There were also *mamás* who understood parts of what was being said in English, but they had less command of the language and missed parts of questions, answers, or presentations that were not fully translated. These *mamás* never spoke English in DELAC meetings and always used headsets, including Esperanza, Ana, Dolores, Sofia, and Yaneli.

Classification of Children

All *las mamás* except for Sofia, had children who at some point in their education had been classified as EL. Sofia was the only *mamá* whose children had never been classified as EL. Other *mamás* had children who were formerly EL, but had been reclassified, including Blanca, Lorena, and Alma. These *mamás* and Sofia were still active in DELAC and attended the meetings regularly. Most of the other *mamás* had mixed status children, meaning some of their children had been reclassified and some were still classified as EL. This group included Carla, Monica, Ana, Carolina, and Yaneli. All of Elena and Tanya's children enrolled in the K-12 system were classified as EL. There were also a few *mamás* who were unsure of the status of at least one of their children — they had not received formal notification from the school district informing them whether or not their children had been reclassified; this included Esperanza and Antonia. This seemed especially problematic as these *mamás* were involved in a committee that presumably armed them with information on how to verify whether their children had been reclassified or not. The trouble was that school officials would tell Antonia and Esperanza that their children had not been reclassified but according to the district, their children had been reclassified. The trouble seemed to lie within the district's bureaucratic system that led to this inconsistent information being disseminated.

Involvement in Other District Committees

While the scope of this study is on DELAC meetings in the district, some *mamás* were or had been active in other district committees including the Title I meetings and the

Superintendent's Parent Forum. Their involvement in other committees meant they potentially were involved in LCAP discussions in other district forums and perhaps these *mamás* were advocating for emergent bilinguals in these other spaces.

During the observation year, Carla, Monica, Dolores, Tanya, Carolina, Alma, Antonia, Lorena, Blanca, and Elena had been attending district Title I meetings on a consistent basis. Fewer *mamás* had been attending the Superintendent's forum, but there still were some who were going on a fairly consistent basis including, Monica, Dolores, Lorena, and Elena. Blanca and Elena also occasionally attended the LCAP Advisory Committee meeting. Table 5 below depicts the *mamás* that attended these other district-level meetings.

Table 5 <i>List of Other District-Level Meetings Attended by Mamás.</i>			
<u>Mamá</u>	<u>Title I</u>	<u>Superintendent's Parent Forum</u>	<u>LCAP Advisory Committee</u>
Alma	X		
Ana			
Antonia	X		
Blanca	X		X
Carolina	X		
Carla	X		
Dolores	X	X	
Elena	X	X	X
Esperanza			
Lorena	X	X	
Monica	X	X	
Sofia			
Tanya	X		
Yaneli			
<i>Note.</i> Title I district-level meetings are for low-income schools in the district, but meetings are open to the public and non-Title I representatives are allowed to attend. The Superintendent's Parents Forum is open to all parents in the district. The LCAP Advisory Committee meetings are put together for the LCAP Advisory Committee members, but meetings are open to the public and anyone from the community is allowed to attend.			

Translators were always present at district committee meetings and there was some overlap in presentations across the Title I, Superintendent's Parent Forum, and DELAC. A few

mamás including Antonia, Alma, and Carolina mentioned to me they felt they had a better grasp of programs and funding categories because they were able to listen to the same presentation multiple times. Attending these other committee meetings may have increased their social and navigational capital, but it also meant more of their personal time was being devoted to the district. Each of the other committee meetings was approximately 2 hours in length and met once a month, which may not sound like a significant amount of time, but when travel time to and from the meeting is added in, it could be a commitment of at least 2 and half additional hours on top of DELAC, ELAC, and other committee meetings. Moreover, DELAC was the only meeting that provided childcare; none of these other meetings provided childcare, so *mamás* would have to make additional arrangements for their little ones if they wanted to attend these meetings.

Conclusion

While they were a diverse group of mothers with an array of formal educational backgrounds and levels of involvement in the district, *las mamás* had a common goal of wanting to obtain the best possible education for children in the district. A desire to want to learn how to navigate the system was what initially prompted their interest to become involved in their children's schools. *Mamás* such as Sofia and Yaneli were motivated by their desire to have their children have better educational outcomes than their own. Others, such as Alma and Lorena, became involved when they became aware of a problem with their children's education (for Alma it was an erroneous enrollment in Special Education and for Lorena it was below grade level performance). Invitations by school staff, friend, and family led to their engagement in DELAC and ELAC. Also, for some *mamás* participation in Head Start and/or the Migrant Education Program was a catalyst to *critical* (Terriquez, 2011) engagement in committees. Finally, these portraits depict Latina immigrant *mamás* who were dedicated to consistent and continuous involvement in committees, despite living through a climate with elevated hostility

toward Mexicans and immigrants. Their portraits disrupt the miss held notion about the involvement of Latina immigrant mothers in school and district committees. Their accounts also add to our understandings of what motivates Latina *mamás* to become active in district committees and the contributions they make to parent and school communities through their engagement.

Chapter 5: Portraits of District Officials

Portraits of the district Superintendent, DELAC Coordinator, LCAP Director, and LCAP Asst. Director are provided in this chapter. The portraits are offered as a way to bring to the surface the perspectives and experiences of the district officials who worked most closely and frequently with DELAC members. Each district officer has worked directly with DELAC representatives, has given presentations at DELAC meetings, and, in their own way, had included DELAC members in the LCAP process. In my interviews with officials, they sometimes would talk about their perceptions about the LCAP process, which are also included here. Together, these portraits contextualize the meetings and methods of engagement constructed by officials during DELAC meetings. As with the *mamás*, pseudonyms have been created for the district officials. At the end of these portraits is a figure that depicts the reporting order among the district officials in this study.

Rancho los Nietos Superintendent

Superintendent John Waldman is the highest-ranking administrator in the district and appeared to have a good working relationship with the five-member *Rancho los Nietos* Board of Education. An older white man, Waldman had been the Superintendent for *Rancho los Nietos* for more than a decade, and including his time as a teacher and principal, had been with the district for more than 30 years. He had an even-tempered disposition; I never once heard him raise his voice not even when he was involved in a contentious conversation. Members of the school board often spoke highly of him and would always unanimously approve the proposals he made during board meetings. He also seemed to be liked by many parents who participated in district-level committees often receiving awes and cheers when he would announce big family events, like his daughter's forthcoming wedding.

Sharing personal experiences. Actually, talking about his own family, his childhood, and his experiences as a parent were not uncommon occurrences. Sharing bits about himself seemed to win over parents. Perhaps it was his method of making himself seem more approachable, likable, or relatable. At times during meetings he would mention some struggle he and his wife went through with their children, or the work his son, now a principal in the district, was doing, or some event his wife, a recently retired district teacher, had encountered. He would also share bits about growing up as a Catholic, in a large working-class family, and being raised in *Rancho los Nietos*. At the same time, he had no problem being firm about his decisions and, as he put it, being “the bad guy” when he had to overrule a site council’s proposal.

Belief in local control. He believed strongly in local control and explained that was what led to the decision to have schools control a portion of the LCAP monies that came to the district. He wanted schools to have control and decide how to spend their funds – with his oversight.

In our case we pushed some of the money down to the schools based on that formula of how many kids fall into subsets...because those schools know best what to do...We control a lot based on input from parents and others and based on the direction of the board, but schools also have to be responsible to look at their data, to analyze their data and to have an alignment of all their budgets.

He repeated his believe in local control multiple times during the interview, and his desire to have school site councils and principals make budgetary and program decisions based on data. He wanted schools to make data-driven decisions, and staff at DELAC meetings often repeated his message. The Superintendent further explained,

I’m a pretty hardline conservative when it comes to fiscal things...I don’t believe in big government...I believe that government has a responsibility to use people’s dollars wisely, and for their greatest output.

His stance on using “dollars wisely” and for “their greatest output” was reflected in his desire to arrive at program and policy decisions based on analysis of data. He expected this same mindset from principals and school site councils.

Decision-making power in the hands of schools with oversight. While Superintendent Waldman wanted schools to have more authority over their budgets, he found councils and principals were struggling. His goal was to have schools align all of their budgets, Title I, LCAP-related funds (i.e., LCFF), and others, and make decisions that “move that ship forward.” Schools were struggling in deciding where to put their monies. He mentioned the restrictions he had placed, telling them no more than 80 percent of their budgets could be spent on people and that budget decisions had to match the “data needs of their school.” He said there were also cases where schools did not spend all their funds because, “it takes longer to decide how to spend [their money],” which had led to some site councils with unspent funds at the end of the year. He also described denying some budget proposals, explaining, “I think people have a hard time getting rid of things that don’t work.” He also talked about having to explain to schools just because they wanted a particular program did not mean it would get funded, for instance, one school wanted to hire a school community worker. “You have to put something into serving this group [of students] and this group [or students] here, because they’re not doing well. So you have to go back to the drawing board,” he told them when he denied their request for a community worker. He didn’t see how a school community worker would improve the academic outcomes of the student groups that needed attention.

LCAP, a compliance document. Superintendent Waldman saw the LCAP as a compliance document mandated by the state and as a process that called for the involvement of parents. He was frustrated with the LCAP document itself saying,

LCAP isn’t going to be this document that’s going to govern every piece of information in the district. It’s not meant to. And it never can. It’s just – the document is too big. And

most parents don't understand it and won't read it. It's just a compliance document for the State of California.

The Superintendent felt the document's purpose was to provide evidence that the district was meeting the state's priorities layout in the legislation, and the sheer size of the LCAP, over 100 pages long, was something parents did not understand nor were interested in reading. In fact, during a few district meetings the LCAP Asst. Director would discourage parents from reading the full LCAP, explaining that was why they would only be going over a high-level 1-page summary of the document.

LCAP, a process.

The process of LCAP is good because what the LCAP says is that you get advice. It doesn't say that parents or teachers or administrators have approval power. It doesn't say that. What it says is the board does. What it does say is that you go to as many stakeholders as possible on a regular basis to get input about where you need to go...You could get input from 1000 people and not take any of their input and do something different if you felt that that was the right way to do it. The downside of that it is...that people won't come back and participate if you don't take some of their ideas or explain why you didn't take some of their ideas.

As a process, the Superintendent appreciated the call for parent involvement in the process. But, as he made clear in the quote above, input did not mean parents (or any other stakeholder) had the final say. The school board made final decisions, and, as he explained, with the board's "delegated authority," he too had approval power.

He said he wanted parent participation in the LCAP process, "we want all parents to be involved as much as possible," but recognized that school funding and budgets were complex topics. He explained to address this "we've done training with folks on a regular basis." Also, "you can break things down to understandable chunks, and what this district's done well is to say whatever money you spend has to match the data needs of your school." Moreover, he said that involving parents in decision-making processes was not something new, initiated with the implementation of the LCAP. He said the district had a long history of gathering parent input and

because of that history, activities in the district had not changed with the introduction of LCAP, “I think it hasn’t changed for us because we’ve always had these vehicles for our input.” In fact, parent participation was a point of pride for the Superintendent, “we never have a shortage of people wanting to get involved. So, you know, we have 9000 parent volunteers that work in our schools on a daily basis. So, there's always somebody willing to tell us the good, the bad and the ugly.” What kept parents involved, he argued, was his approach to partnering with them.

Listening, following-up, and agreeing to disagree.

People are really good about being partners if they feel they’ve been listened to. They may not like all the answers they’re hearing, which is totally acceptable, but they just feel that there’s actions, and that there’s accountability and [what] I’m going to call follow-ups.

In his 35 years of experience working in the district, Superintendent Waldman found what parents appreciated the most was being heard (“feel they’ve been listened to”) and receiving follow-ups about the ideas they had suggested (“then come back to them and say, based on your input this is what we did”). To him, it was not about appeasing parents, but about being honest, open, and transparent with them – and this meant following-up with parents about the ideas that they gave at prior meetings, “my experience is always when people are much more willing to come back and – even if they didn't get any of their ideas put in, that they just have heard why.”

Agree to disagree was a phrase district staff would also say, at meetings with parents and at school board meetings, when describing their work with parents. Superintendent Waldman said, “you may not all agree, because sometimes people think they want one thing and [want to know] ‘why can’t I have X?’ And then you just have to agree to disagree.” In the end, it was the Superintendent, with the board’s support, who had the final say about how and when input would be gathered, and which ideas would be included in the LCAP.

Colorblind about parents. Superintendent Waldman also expressed views of being colorblind to parents' races.

I don't group people into groups. I don't put people into Latina group or the Hispanic group or the African American group or so on. Those are subsets of parents. Every parent wants the best for his or her child.

He made the comment above at the start of the interview, but in our discussion, he talked about the ways in which he tried to bring distinct parent groups (e.g., Latino and African Americans) together, to recognize and take budgetary and programmatic actions that would help each group at their school sites. For example, at a school site where African American students were struggling academically and the Latino-dominated site council was failing to implement programs to support those students, the Superintendent had to step in. Getting the council to understand the issues, he asked, "How would you feel if you were one of those African American parents and that was your kid? How would you feel?" He reminded them that their role was to attend to the needs of low-performing students, which in this case were the African American students.

He also spoke at length about the changes in demographics in the city and in the school district he had experienced first-hand. Beginning with significant job losses due to manufacturing and military base closures, the "massive unrest" in the 1990s, the "major white flight" that followed, and finally "massive school growth" related to an influx of immigrants, he was aware of the changes that had been taking place in his district. Moreover, he seemed concerned about the impact that the housing crisis and the rising costs of rents were having on lower-income households, "we've lost lots of families." He attributed the enrollment decline in the district to the price of housing, and to the "political climate."

The election of Donald Trump and subsequent increased threat of ICE raids seemed to have prompted the Superintendent to make public declarations about the district's support of its

immigrant community. For instance, there was a letter he published ten days after the election, in which the Superintendent stated in part,

Some of our students have expressed concern about how immigration status might affect them, their families and their friends. I would like to reassure these students and their families that we [the school district] will not deny services, and we [the school district] will not participate in enforcement actions, based upon immigration status. That is not our role. In fact, our counselors and other staff at our schools stand ready to assist any child who is worried about any aspect of their future. We are here to support you, and we will not abandon you.

At the end of the year, the Superintendent published another letter to parents. The opening paragraph is full of important insights about the Superintendent's perspective about parents. He begins with "The American Dream is alive and well in our schools," and later in the paragraph implies education is the path to a better life. He goes on to state "many who arrive in our neighborhoods with little or nothing" view education as a path to a better life. He also stated, the district is "firmly committed to equal opportunity for all students, regardless of where they live, how much money their parents make, or any personal challenges they may face." The letter contained an implicit message about the district's commitment to immigrant, low-income families.

The messages contained in the Superintendent's letters appear to contradict his assertion that he does not "group people into groups." In fact, the letters provide evidence that he did recognize the need to make official statements about the district support and protection of immigrant and low-income families. Interestingly, he never brought up these statements or concerns during my interview with him. Still, his claim of not grouping "people into groups" raises questions about how then, could the district devise a plan, with parent input, that addresses subgroup student needs – if, as the Superintendent claimed, he did not put people into groups? Superintendent Waldman's interactions with DELAC members is discussed in more detail in chapter 7.

DELAC Coordinator

Throughout this study I refer to the district's DELAC Coordinator by her first name, Silvia. Everyone seemed to refer to by her first name including *las mamás* in my study, other DELAC members, and her district colleagues. In fact, she was the only district official in my study who was referred to by her first name. Interestingly, Silvia and the Title I Coordinator, Julie Nakamura, who was also a woman, were always referred to by their first names. Meanwhile, the Superintendent, the LCAP Director, and the LCAP Asst. Director, who were all men, were always called "Superintendent Waldman," "Mr. Centeno," and "Mr. Lopez." The DELAC Coordinator and the Title I Coordinator were simply called "Silvia" and "Julie."

As the DELAC Coordinator, Silvia facilitated all of the meetings and set all of the agenda items. Unlike Superintendent Waldman, LCAP Director Centeno, and LCAP Asst. Director Lopez, Silvia was fluent in English and Spanish and easily switched between the two languages during DELAC meetings. Still, she led most DELAC meetings in English and relied upon district interpreters to provide Spanish translation via headsets.

In addition to facilitating the monthly DELAC meetings, Silvia was also responsible for ensuring that schools were adhering to state regulations regarding the composition and activities of their site-level ELACs. She would provide in-person trainings throughout the district on how to organize and run effective ELAC committee. She was also the person who would go out to sites when complaints reached her regarding any aspect of ELAC (such as how officers were selected, how meetings were run, and if school site councils were not collecting ELAC recommendations). Given her direct and ongoing engagement with DELAC representatives and her position as the primary connection between the district and parents of emergent bilingual students, she was an important cultural broker (Ishimaru et al., 2016). At the end of every school year, she would present DELAC priorities and concerns (gathered during a DELAC meeting) to

the Board of Education.

The Migrant Education Program Administrator. In addition to DELAC, Silvia was also the administrator of the district's Migrant Education Program. Like DELAC, the Migrant Education Program also offered parent trainings and workshops, but unlike DELAC which met one Monday per month for two hours, the Migrant Education Program met on Saturdays, two to three times a month. As discussed in the previous chapter, the trainings and workshops offered through the Migrant Education Program appeared to have had a significance impact on its participants. Numerous DELAC members I spoke with often credited their knowledge about the educational system (and how to navigate and advocate within it) to the Migrant Education Program and more specifically to Silvia. In fact, seven of the fourteen *mamás* who participated in this study had been or still were active members of the Migrant Education Program.

Loved by most. “I really enjoy working with parents,” Silvia said during the interview. Based on the comments I heard from parents, many appreciated her dedication.

Yo le he dicho que la quiero mucho, que yo sé que ella trabaja mucho para la comunidad – porque trabaja más de lo que el distrito le requiere. (I have told her that I love her very much, that I know that she works a lot for the community – because she works more than what the district requires.) – Alma, mamá-participant

Like other *mamás* in my study, Alma spoke of the love she had for Silvia. She knew her from both the Migrant Education Program and DELAC. She respected her and told me of the sacrifices Silvia had made including not marrying, not having children of her own, and dedicating substantial amounts of her time to work with Latin@ parents in the district. Still, Alma and others talked about Silvia having “un carácter muy fuerte” (a strong personality) that could intimidate some parents and cause them to not ask questions during meetings. Ultimately, Silvia held what appeared to be a position fraught with potential contradictions, where on the one hand she was to train DELAC parents on how to be effective advocates at their school sites, and on the other hand she had to go along with the involvement processes constructed by her

superiors (i.e., the LCAP Director and Superintendent) at DELAC meetings.

Witnessing parent empowerment. Silvia had been working for the district for at least 12 years, as part of the central office. Over that period of time she had been working closely with migrant parents (through the Migrant Education Program) and families of emergent bilinguals (through DELAC and supporting ELACs). Over the past 4 years, (since the implementation of LCAP) Silvia noticed a change in parents saying, “they’re starting to see that they do have a voice, and they want to be part of that decision-making process.” She wanted DELAC members to understand that their role was to be an advocate *all* EL students, not just their own, and she felt her message was beginning to take hold as fewer and fewer parents were referring to, “mi hijo, mi hijo” (my child, my child) in the comments they made during DELAC meetings. She also noticed more and more parents were becoming members of their school site councils and, in the case of her Migrant Education Program participants some had become active members at the state level.

Silvia played a direct part in the empowerment of parents, especially through the strategies she shared during DELAC meetings, the messages of power and will she conveyed to DELAC members, and the learning opportunities she constructed for some of them. For instance, every year she organized a trip to the California Association for Bilingual Education (CABE) so that a group of 8-10 *mamás* could attend the annual conference.

LCAP Director

LCAP Director Eric Centeno has been with the district for the last 10 years. He oversaw many of the parent and community committees including DELAC, but one of his primary tasks was to oversee the LCAP process in the district. He occasionally attended the DELAC meetings to provide parents with updates and to gather their input about the district’s plan. He was also the district official who provided periodic LCAP updates to the Board of Education and presented

the final LCAP for the Board's approval at the end of the year. DELAC Coordinator Silvia and LCAP Asst. Director Lopez were LCAP Director Centeno's direct reports. In turn, LCAP Director Centeno reported to Superintendent Waldman.

Relationship with DELAC *mamás*. Unlike the Superintendent, who shared pieces of his personal life with DELAC members, the LCAP Asst. Director, who was always very energetic, and the DELAC Coordinator, who worked to empower parents, LCAP Director Centeno did not seem to enjoy a good rapport with DELAC members. He did not smile much and *mamás* in my study commented how it seemed to them that he was always upset. I think their impression of him was also partly due to the fact that he was absent from DELAC meetings for most of the year. During the observation year he had attended only two meetings, April and May. Although he had been the director of parent programs in the district for the past 10 years, his rare appearances led Elena to think, “Hay padres que entraron este año que yo creo que no saben ni quién es [Centeno].” (“There are parents who came in this year that I think they do not know who [Centeno] is.”) His absence seemed problematic to *mamás* like Elena and others, because, as she pointed out, Mr. Centeno was the person supposedly leading parent engagement in the LCAP process.

Drawing on his own experiences as an EL student, as a parent. During the interview, Mr. Centeno shared that when he first immigrated to the U.S. he had been classified as an EL student, and his parents were not involved with his schools. He was also a parent, with young children who were in elementary school. These identities seemed to inform his understandings about immigrant parents of EL students. He explained while he wanted “really engaged parents” he understood the demands on parents' lives. As a parent himself, he could relate to the limited amount of time available to participate in committees. He understood the amount of time it took to be an active parent leader and the reality was that many parents worked multiple jobs and had

other children-related obligations such as sports practice or school recitals. He also recognized that some immigrant parents might feel intimidated about getting involved in committees, like his parents had been.

Interestingly, while he drew upon his own experiences of being an EL student, uninvolved parents, and now a parent himself, he never spoke publicly about these perspectives or experiences. Had he shared more about himself and his experiences at DELAC meetings, he might have been able to create a more amicable relationship with DELAC members. Unfortunately, *las mamás* in my study did not see him as a partner.

Unique knowledge parents have. “They know their kids, that’s the bottom line,” that what LCAP Director Centeno saw as the strength and purpose for collecting parent input in district decision-making processes. He explained that while the district may be basing its policy decisions on “good practice, academic research, internal district research, the data,” he believed that parents could inform the district on the actual impact a policy was having on the lives of their students. At the same time, he said that parents also raised “very practical questions.” He used an example to illustrate his point, saying that administrators might be focused on academic programs and interventions, then parents will raise concerns about a lack of air conditioning at schools. Not that parents were not also concerned about programs and services for EL students, but their questions came from a different perspective, one that otherwise would not be accessible to administrators. “That’s valuable,” he said of parent engagement. Still, as will be discussed further in the chapter 7, the discussions he led at DELAC meetings did not elicit parent’s insights about policies and programs in the district; his actions seem to contradict the statements he made during his interview.

LCAP Assistant Director

LCAP Asst. Director Michael Lopez was the district official who most frequently attended DELAC meetings to provide parents with updates and information about LCAP funding. He also gathered parent input at DELAC meetings. He would provide presentations about other funding sources (such as Title I and Title III) and documents such as the Consolidated Application and the Single Plan for Student Achievement (SPSA). Like the DELAC Coordinator, LCAP Asst. Director Lopez also worked closely with school sites. He provided training to school site councils and was the person who would come out to school sites when problems were reported about irregularities happening with site councils. He reported up to the LCAP Director Centeno and worked closely with the DELAC Coordinator Silvia.

LCAP Asst. Director Lopez was a very energetic person who spoke very quickly. His fast talking gave the impression that he was always in a rush and hurrying through his presentations, even though they were each about one hour long. In reality, he was squeezing in a substantial amount of complex information into one presentation. The information he presented was critical to DELAC parents, as he would talk to them about the budgets, various funding sources, and allowable expenditures. He also made time to answer parent questions during and after his presentations. His approachable demeanor and sense of humor seemed to win over many of the DELAC members as they would applaud at the end of every one of his presentations.

Focusing on the needs of all EL students. LCAP Asst. Director Lopez had risen through the ranks in the district and had also been a principal in the district. For the last 15 years he had been working with principals and site councils but noticed that LCAP had created an opportunity for parents to exercise their voices even more than before. Especially with the district's move to push funds down to the school level, Mr. Lopez thought parents (especially those who were ELAC and site council members) were in positions with more power because

they had a say in how bigger pots of money would be spent. He saw also acknowledged that the change had not been as drastic at the district level, among DELAC members, noting that their “biggest charges” had always been “to provide recommendations to the board of education on English learners and programs, or policies, or philosophies around ELs in the district.” Still, what he noticed was a change in the way at DELAC spoke, “talking about all EL students” he said, rather than “talking about my own children.” During his interview with me he said he always advised parents to center their discussions about “a group of children” and “not about their child.” He also told them to analyze data to better understand the needs of students. This seemed like important advice to help parents be more effective advocates.

Talk to them. LCAP Asst. Director Lopez felt building trust with parents was one of the most important tasks for him and others in the district, and that meant talking to them and letting them know “their voice is important.” At the same time, parents had to feel empowered to share their insights and recommendations at meetings. He said that the point of parent involvement in committees such as DELAC, was for the district to learn parents’ perspectives, what they deemed as priorities, and perhaps highlight disconnects between parents’ priorities and district officials’ priorities.

A pledge to provide updates.

I'm here to give you a pledge...I believe that this committee and all families should have a voice about their child's education. That's my belief. I know you believe the same thing. Lately I've been hearing..."we give a lot of suggestions, but we never know what happens to them" 'cause nobody ever comes back and says, “hey, here's what we did based on your recommendations.” So I'm pledging this to you today. I *will* come back to this committee and talk to you about what we've done. Because for so long, and unfortunately, whenever rumors are out there about not coming back and giving you feedback. I'm here to say that I'm going to. Now does that mean that I'm going to have great news for you? I don't know. Maybe some of the things that you recommend don't happen. And maybe they do. But I want to be able to tell you that. — LCAP Asst. Director Lopez, April DELAC meeting

A common complaint LCAP Asst. Director Lopez heard from parents was that they felt they were not being listened to. DELAC and parents from other committees had been making recommendations for the LCAP, but district officials had failed to give parents updates on what happened with their recommendations. In response, LCAP Asst. Director Lopez was making a new pledge, captured in the quote above, to provide follow up to parents. During the interview he said parents were “getting frustrated at providing so much input but never having somebody come back to say where that input went.” He wanted to be more responsive and saw providing feedback to parents as part of being responsive, adding, “I really want them to know I’m listening to them, and hopefully they trust me to bring what they’ve asked me into the system. I think we’ve missed some steps in the past about giving feedback. If they’re giving us what they have, we need to come back to them and say, hey, here is what was the result of your feedback.” LCAP Asst. Director Lopez made his pledge to parents after reflecting on the input he had been receiving from them in light of the goals he had for including them in the process. It was April when LCAP Asst. Director Lopez made his public pledge to provide feedback to DELAC members, leaving only May and June meetings as possible times when district officials could provide parents with feedback on their input for the LCAP. Unfortunately, as is discussed in the findings chapter, district officials struggled to collect meaningful input from DELAC members.

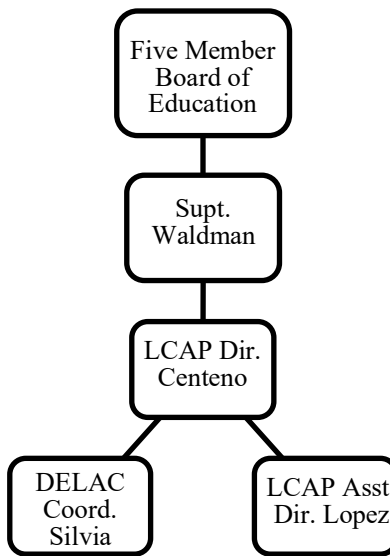


Figure 1. Partial district organizational chart depicting reporting structure among district officials.

Conclusion

The portraits above described district officials who said they wanted parent involvement in the LCAP. LCAP Director Centeno and LCAP Asst. Director Lopez both mentioned that parents could provide valuable insights that were otherwise not known to the district, echoing findings from Fung (2004), Nabatchi (2010), and McNeil and Coppola (2006). Specifically, LCAP Director Centeno and LCAP Asst. Director Lopez said that parents could speak to the actual impact programs and policies were having on students in the district. Listening to parents, talking with parents, taking action related to parent input, and updating parents were aspects that LCAP Asst. Director Lopez and Superintendent Waldman described as characteristics essential to being good partners with parents. While these ideas could have elicited the insights the LCAP Director and the LCAP Asst. Director knew parents had, Superintendent Waldman seemed to hold a different concept about parent involvement.

The Superintendent wanted recommendations to be based on data — and for the most part that meant addressing the achievement gap as measured by AP, SAT, and other academic

outcomes. He did not seem as concerned with important measures on student engagement such as school culture and climate. He also articulated his power and control over final decisions, which seemed to contradict his comments about local control and school sites knowing best the needs of their school communities.

At the same time, Superintendent Waldman expressed some colorblind ideals, where he said he did not put parents into groups. His colorblind attitude seemed to contradict his own actions, namely the letters he published supporting immigrant students and families in the district. Still, his colorblindness was a problematic stance as Latin@ immigrant parents and students have unique concerns and needs, as discussed in the literature review (e.g., Gándara & Ee, 2018; Olivos, 2006; Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco; 2013). It seemed especially important to be responsive to immigrant needs given the heightened hostile environment created by the U.S. President and ICE.

Silvia seemed to understand and respond, at least in part, to those unique needs through her work as the DELAC Coordinator and as the Migrant Education Program Administrator. Through her actions, she seemed to have created a trusting relationship with DELAC members, where she demonstrated her respect, regard, and genuine care for them. These were some of the characteristics identified by Bryk and Schneider (2002) as essential to building relational trust with parents. Her love for working with parents was translating into empowered Latin@ immigrant parents, who were beginning to involve themselves in other committees, including site councils. Still, she, the LCAP Director, and LCAP Asst. Director operated within a system that was controlled by the Superintendent, who *did* express a desire to have parents involved in LCAP but held a narrow view about how to engage parents in the process.

Chapter 6: District English Learner Advisory Committee (DELAC)

In this chapter I provide background information about DELAC, the way it is constituted and how it operates within the *Rancho los Nietos* school district. I also provide some information about how DELAC compares to other district committees in the district and some of the known administrative issues with ELACs in the district. Together, the contents of the chapter provide important context in which DELAC members interact with district officials at DELAC meetings, which is the subject of chapter 7.

Law and Regulations

The California Department of Education (2018a), states that a District English Learner Advisory Committee (DELAC) is:

A district-level English Learner Advisory Committee comprised of parents, staff, and community members designated to advise district officials on English learner programs and services.

In terms of its advisory role, the California Education Code and California Code of Regulations specify the specific areas of responsibilities of DELAC members (CDE, 2018a):

1. Advise the district's local governing board (e.g., in person, by letters/reports, or through an administrator) on programs and services for English learners.
2. Advise the district's local governing board on the following tasks:
 - a) Development or revision of a district master plan of education programs and services for English learners, taking into consideration the Single School Plan for Student Achievement.
 - b) Conducting a district-wide needs assessment on a school-by-school basis.
 - c) Establishment of district programs, goals, and objectives for programs and services for English learners (e.g., parental exception waivers and funding).
 - d) Development of a plan to ensure compliance with any applicable teacher and instructional aide requirements.
 - e) Administration of the annual language census (e.g., procedures and forms).
 - f) Review and comment on the district's reclassification procedures.
 - g) Review and comment on the written notifications required to be sent to parents and guardians.

In addition to these critical district responsibilities, DELAC members also have a new role through LCFF — to provide input in the development, evaluation, and updating of their district's

LCAP (Cal. Educ Code § 52060). These new areas of responsibility together with their preexisting areas of responsibility over the advisement of EL programs and services, place DELAC members in a potentially influential position within district decision-making processes. Given the distinct and important district level responsibilities of DELAC, its members could help transform the experiences and outcomes of emergent bilingual students throughout their districts.

Composition of *Rancho los Nietos* DELAC

In *Rancho los Nietos*, DELAC met once a month, for approximately two hours¹² each time. A majority of attendees were Latina *mamás* whose dominant language was Spanish. (Rarely was a Latin@ man who was not part of the coordinating staff ever observed in attendance.) The meetings brought together parent representatives from schools across the district, but the meetings were open to the public, so anyone from the community who wanted to join was allowed to attend. In the tally of attendees, official DELAC members were counted as “DELAC Parent Rep.” and other parents were counted as “Parent Guests.” DELAC attendees also included school staff, such as community workers and parent liaisons, who would attend on behalf of their school campuses. These individuals were counted as “School Personnel.” Most of the school staff were also Latin@ women, but there was one male Asian staff member. Finally, there was the coordinating staff who were present during the meeting including Silvia, the coordinator, and the staff in the lobby who would distribute agendas and other meeting materials. These individuals were counted as “Dist. members.” Table 6 below displays the attendance at each meeting.

¹² Most meetings were held from 9:30am-11:30am, except for the last one of the year, which was held from 11:00am-1:30pm.

Table 6
DELAC Monthly Meeting Attendance by Attendee Type.

<u>Month</u>	<u>DELAC parent reps</u>	<u>Dist. members^a</u>	<u>Parent guests</u>	<u>School personnel^b</u>	<u>Total attendance</u>
Oct. 2016	42	6	34	9	91
Nov. 2016	48	4	28	9	89
Dec. 2016	52	4	18	7	81
Jan. 2017	48	4	11	8	71
Feb. 2017	44	4	15	6	69
Mar. 2017	47	4	10	7	68
Apr. 2017	42	4	9	9	64
May 2017	39	4	3	6	52
Jun. 2017	42	4	9	4	59
<i>Average</i>	<i>45</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>15</i>	<i>7</i>	<i>72</i>

^a District members included Silvia, support staff, and translators.

^b School personnel included community workers and parent liaisons.

Absence of Non-Latin@ Parents of Emergent Bilingual Students

Interestingly, it appeared the only *Latin@* parents were the only parents of emergent bilinguals who attended DELAC meetings. This, even though more than 800 EL students in the district spoke Khmer as their primary language, hundreds spoke Tagalog, more than one hundred spoke Vietnamese, and more than 34 other languages were spoken by smaller groups of EL students in the district (DataQuest, 2013). It was unclear where and how those families were participating in LCAP discussions. What was clear was that DELAC was dominated by not only Latin@ parents, but more specifically by Latina *mothers*, and approximately half seemed to be Spanish-dominant as about half wore the translation headsets made available at every meeting.

Meeting Organization and Facilitation

Unlike all other district-level meetings, DELAC meetings were held off-site, not at the district central offices nor at a school, rather in a large public hall that was part of a local city park. Also, unlike other district level meetings, DELAC meetings offered childcare, a huge help to those attendees who had no other option but to bring their toddlers and babies with them to meetings. I counted an average of 4-5 children at every meeting. Spanish and Khmer translators were also present at every meeting, although I never observed any DELAC attendees using the

Khmer translation services. Meeting agendas and meeting minutes were also distributed at every meeting in English, Spanish, and Khmer, and were also published on the district's website in all three languages.

Meetings in English with Spanish translation. The meetings were facilitated and organized by Silvia Coronado, the district's DELAC Coordinator. Silvia put the meeting agendas together, decided discussion topics, scheduled speakers for each meeting, and controlled the flow and conversations during the meetings. Silvia was also the primary scribe whose notes would become the meeting minutes reviewed and approved at the next meeting. And even though Silvia was fluent in Spanish, and approximately half of the mothers attending the meeting were Spanish-dominant, she ran DELAC meetings in English, with translation provided through the use of headsets. It was not clear who had decided the meetings would be in English with Spanish translation, but this bothered some of *las mamás*, who talked about this during one of our *pláticas*. Carla wondering aloud why meetings were held in English if a majority of attendees were Spanish-speaking Latina mothers. Tanya thought it might be viewed as discriminatory if meetings were held in Spanish.

Meeting materials. At check-in, attendees would receive a copy of the agenda, minutes from the prior month's meeting, and sometimes flyers or presentations that would be discussed during the meeting. The agenda, meeting minutes, and most flyers would be provided in both English and Spanish, and so were most documents and presentation materials. Most guest presenters, however, were not bilingual, so the presentation slides that were projected on the large screen at the front of the meeting room would be in English. This made presentations a bit awkward, but for the most part DELAC *mamás* seemed to be able to follow along.

Flow of meetings. Every meeting would begin with Silvia providing a welcome, then the DELAC President would call the meeting to order. Next was the speaking role of the DELAC

Secretary, who would ask attendees to read and approve the meeting minutes from the previous month which were attached to the packet attendees received upon signing in for the meeting. The secretary would also ask if anyone wanted to make any changes to the minutes. Then, two DELAC representatives would be asked to make the official motions (approving and seconding the motion to approve the minutes) and then meeting attendees (not only official DELAC representatives) were asked if they were in favor and the motion was always carried by a unanimous vote. Next, the DELAC Vice President would make announcements (such as upcoming meetings or events in the district) and would provide a committee report about meetings or events that person had attended, such as the Superintendent's Parent Forum. Then, scheduled presentations would begin. After presentations, Silvia would ask attendees to fill out a pink feedback sheet if they had lingering questions that were not addressed during the meeting. Finally, she would ask for two members to make official motions to close the meeting, and then the raffle for door prizes would take place.

Silvia, district staff, the DELAC officers, and other members would stay after the meeting to fold the tables and chairs. Many times, attendees would stay after the meeting to ask Silvia and other district staff, including the English-Spanish translator, questions. There were also smaller groups of DELAC members who would be chatting about a variety of topics, sometimes about the information presented at the meetings, but not all the time. Sometimes they would be asking each other for advice on some matter they or some other parent they knew was dealing with. These small groups (2-4 DELAC members) would be gathered in the hall, in the lobby of the building, or just outside the main entrance.

A Space to Build Social and Navigational Capital

DELAC was an important space where advocates for emergent bilingual students would come together, not only to gather information from the district level officials, but also a place to

hear and learn about what was happening in schools across the district. It was the only space specifically focused on the needs of and issues related to EL classified students in the district. From the meetings, attendees would learn about district programs and policies, they were provided with parenting workshops, and, central to this study, they would receive and could comment on LCAP-specific information. The expectation from district staff was that parents would distribute the information gathered at the DELAC meeting to the parents at their school sites through their ELACs. The district staff also hoped that the DELAC meeting information would prompt ELACs (school-level advocacy groups focused on needs of EL students) to develop informed inquiries and recommendations they could then take to their school site councils and principals.

Additional District Committees and District-level Parent Forums

Aside from DELAC meetings, other district-level advisory committees existed in the district, hence other places where information about LCAP was shared and discussed with parents. These other advisory committees were led by district officials, and each committee focused on a specific student subgroup. These include a Title I parent advisory group whose focus was on low-income students, the Concerned African American Parent (CAAP) group, the Native American parent group, and the Special Education parent group. Any parent or community member could attend any of these monthly meetings as they were all open to the public. Committees met at different times during the day (some, like the Title I parent group, met in the mornings, others, like CAAP, met in the evenings) and at different locations in the district (some were held at district central offices, others were held at satellite district offices).

Superintendent's Parent Forum. The district Superintendent also facilitated his own meeting for parents, called the Superintendent's Parent Forum. These meetings were held once every-other-month. On the day of the forums, the Superintendent would host a morning (9:30am)

session at the district central offices and an evening (7:00pm) session at a school site. The location of the evening session would rotate from a campus in the northern part of the district, to the eastern, then western, and finally central part of the district. Both morning and evening forums were open to the public and offered an opportunity for attendees to ask the Superintendent questions. The morning forums were video recorded and later posted on the district's website for public viewing, as were the meeting agendas and sometimes presentation handouts. Spanish translators were also on-site during both morning and evening gatherings. During the morning sessions, headsets were used to provide translation. In the evenings, the translator would have parents gather around a table where he would translate in a low voice to them. (Lorena, a frequent attendee of the evening Parent Forum, mentioned her dislike for this translation format, as it made it difficult to listen to the translator while Superintendent Waldman or a guest speaker would be speaking simultaneously.)

Attendance levels at meetings. Where DELAC meetings were large (averaging 72 attendees during the 2016-2017 year), other district-level meetings were much smaller. Approximately 50 parents attended the Title I meetings and the morning sessions of the Superintendent's Parent Forum; about 10 attended the evening sessions of forums. The Title I and Superintendent's Parent Forum also seemed more ethnically diverse, and perhaps socio-economically as well. African American, White, even Cambodian and Pacific Islander parents as well as Latin@ parents attended the Title I meetings and Parent Forum. And, based on the schools they said they were from (at the beginning of every forum, the Superintendent would ask attendees to say their name and the school they were from), some attendees of the Superintendent's Parent Forum tended to be from the more affluent areas of the district.

LCAP Advisory Committee. In 2013, the school district created a new advisory committee called the LCAP Advisory Committee. Unfortunately, obtaining official information

about the LCAP Advisory Committee was difficult. Their meeting locations and dates and times were not posted on the district's website nor were they publicly announced. Moreover, the members of the LCAP Advisory Committee seemed to change from one year to the next. Initially it was a large group of approximately 60 members, but over time the LCAP Advisory Committee had become smaller and smaller. During the observation year, attendance at meetings ranged from 14 to 22. A majority of the members appeared to be district staff, a few (1-2) local university faculty members, 2 members from local non-profit organizations, a representative from the teacher's union, and a handful of high school students. Although it was not a parent-led or a parent-majority group, the district described the LCAP Advisory Committee as a major forum where they would gather input on the district's LCAP plan.

School board meetings. Another venue where information and input about LCAP was provided was at school board meetings. Held twice a month at 5:00pm in the district's central offices, these meetings were where Superintendent Waldman and other district staff presented reports and updates about LCAP to the school board. These school board meetings were also the sites where district-wide plans and policies, including the LCAP, were announced and voted on by school board members. While these meetings were not conducive to have an open two-way discussion between school board members and the public, the Brown Act ensured members of the public had the opportunity to make statements for the official record. Spanish and Khmer translators were present at every school board meeting, and members of the public were allotted extra time to make their comments when they used translators. School board meetings were video recorded and posted on the district's website, as were the board meeting agendas and minutes.

Participation of Mamás at other district meetings. As noted in their portraits, many of *las mamás* attended other district level meetings including Title I meetings, the Superintendent's

Parent Forum, and the Special Education meetings. Some explained, that listening to multiple presentations about the same information helped them better understand materials, policies, programs, and upcoming changes. To my knowledge none of them attended the African American or Native American meetings. However, some *mamás* had attended school board meetings, though infrequently. In fact, Tanya, Carolina, and Blanca had all made public comments during school board meetings in the past, and because of her position as DELAC president, Elena had presented DELAC recommendations to the board.

DELAC Attendance

During 2016-2017 (the observation year), average total attendance at DELAC meetings was 72. This included DELAC representatives, district members, school personnel, and parent/community guests. DELAC representative attendance averaged 45, district members (including the district Coordinator Silvia Coronado and support staff) averaged 4, school personnel (including paid district community liaisons) averaged 7, and parent/community guests (the group I was a member of) averaged 15. Although the number of parents attending DELAC meetings was smaller compared to the total number of EL students in the district (nearly 16,000 during the observation year,(DataQuest, 2013), when combined with guests, parent attendance averaged 60 per month, a large number, especially given that parents of EL classified students have been characterized as “hard to reach” parents (Epstein, 2011), who do not get involved in school events let alone district committee. In *Rancho los Nietos*, there was a group of 60 Latina mothers who were coming together every mother to discuss the needs of emergent bilingual students.

ELACs, School Site Councils, and Single Plan for Student Achievement

A school is required to create an ELAC if they have 21 or more students classified as EL. (A district is required to create a DELAC if they have 51 or more students classified as EL.)

ELAC is the primary parent committee advocating for the needs of emergent bilingual students at a given school site. Like DELAC, ELAC has its own legal tasks outlined in the California Education Code (sections 35147 (c), 52176 (b), and (c), 62002.5, and 64001 (a)) and California Code of Regulations (Title 5, Sec. 11308 (b), (c), and (d)):

1. The ELAC shall be responsible for advising the principal and staff on programs and services for English learners and the School Site Council on the development of the Single Plan for Student Achievement (SPSA).
2. The ELAC shall assist the school in the development of:
 1. The school's needs assessment
 2. Ways to make parents aware of the importance of regular school attendance

The first task, specifically the requirement that ELAC advise site councils, became a prominent topic in DELAC. Silvia and other district officials repeatedly told DELAC members that their school site councils *had to* take into account ELAC recommendations. They also asserted that each site council had to include their ELAC in the development of the school's Single Plan for Student Achievement (SPSA)¹³. Not being included in the development of SPSAs seemed to be a problem happening across district schools. In fact, during the first meeting of the year, Silvia acknowledged the rubber-stamping taking place on some campuses, stating, "You need to be part of the development of the single plans for student achievement...you must be part of writing the plan...many times they [SSCs] give it to you to sign."

The Superintendent urged ELAC members to get involved in the decisions made at their sites. He encouraged them, as did Silvia, to become members of their site councils. As Silvia often reminded DELAC members, ELAC was an *advisory* committee, but site councils had

¹³ Single School Plan for Student Achievement (SPSA) is an important document created at the school-level by School Site Councils (SSCs). SSCs are school-based groups whose members consist of parents, teachers, school staff, and the principal. The SPSA includes expenditure plans for the funds that schools receive from the federal government (including Title I and Title III funds). In developing its SPSA, and throughout the year, SSCs are to obtain recommendations from all school advisory committees including ELAC, the parent committee tasked with advocating for the needs of EL students (CDE, 2016b).

voting power. Site councils had decision-making power over many school level funds, but of course the Superintendent and school board made final approvals.

ELAC officers and elections. Each school with an ELAC had elected officers including a president, vice president, secretary, a DELAC representative, and an alternate DELAC representative. There were also at-large ELAC members. The ELAC president was the person responsible for presenting ELAC recommendations, questions, and concerns to the school site council. The DELAC representative was responsible for attending DELAC meetings and reporting back to their site's ELAC. At some school sites one person was both the ELAC president and the DELAC representative for their school site.

According to state law, the members of an ELAC had to include the same proportion of parents of ELs that EL students comprised of the school's student body. This meant if ELs made up 50 percent of the school's student body, parents of ELs had to make up at least 50 percent of ELAC members. Other ELAC members could include other parents, school staff, and community members. Finally, district's by-laws stated that only a parent of an EL student could be a school's DELAC representative, and only those individuals who met the district's eligibility criteria were allowed to vote and run for DELAC offices.

DELAC Officers

DELAC officers included the president, vice president, and secretary. In *Rancho los Nietos*, they were elected to two-year terms by DELAC representatives. There were no term limits, so the same person could hold their post as long as they continued to be reelected, continued to be the official DELAC representative for a school, and, at least according to *Rancho los Nietos* by-laws, as long as the child attending the school they represented had not been reclassified. While the state's law did not have this requirement, it did require that parents of ELs constitute a majority of the DELAC committee (CDE, 2018a). The state's ELAC regulation

allowed ELACs to elect anyone of its members to be their DELAC representative. The ELAC regulation did not say the DELAC representative *had to be* a parent of an EL student. Still, the district's by-laws stated DELAC representatives could only be parents of EL students.

The DELAC officers would meet with Silvia before DELAC meetings, to go over the agenda items that were scheduled to be discussed. As mentioned earlier, each officer had a speaking role during the meeting. The DELAC president would call the meeting to order, the secretary would ask members to read and make a motion to approve the day's agenda and minutes for the pass meeting. The vice president made announcements and committee reports, which were mostly about events that had taken place in the district. Once a year (usually during the summer) the president also presented the DELAC recommendations to the school board.

DELAC Nomination and Election of Officers

During the 2016-2017 year (year of observation), nominations for officer positions opened in December and elections took place in March. DELAC representatives could nominate anyone, including themselves, and Silvia would verify the eligibility of nominees and remove names of those who were ineligible along the way. In January and February, Silvia displayed the list of names of those who had been nominated for the various posts. Some names appeared for more than one post as the same person had been nominated to two or more positions. Silvia then announced nominees who were ineligible, stating the reason publicly. Most of the time it was because that particular person was not an official DELAC representative of a school. This caused much displeasure among nominees, and some pushed back on Silvia's decision arguing they were in fact eligible.

In March, Silvia read off the final list of nominees and asked that each person state whether or not they accepted their nomination. The names of every eligible nominee were preprinted on sheets of paper, grouped by post. If someone turned down their nomination, which

did happen, DELAC representatives were instructed to simply cross out that person's name from their ballot. Those who accepted their nomination then gathered at the front of the meeting hall and took turns explaining why they wanted to be elected to that particular office. Most talked about wanting to create change in the district and improve conditions for EL students.

Ballots were then distributed by Silvia, who called out each eligible DELAC representative and handed that person a ballot (the sheet of paper). If the DELAC representative was not present, Silvia would call out the name of the school's DELAC alternate representative. DELAC representatives were then asked to take a moment to review their ballot and put a checkmark next to the name of the person they wished to elect for each of position. Once they had made their final selections, DELAC representatives returned their sheets of paper to Silvia who placed them in a large letter-size envelope. Once all the ballots had been cast, Silvia asked if I could help her and her assistant count the ballots. I accepted and walked to a small room adjacent to the meeting hall to count the ballots. While we sorted the ballots, the DELAC meeting continued. On this particular day there was a workshop on how to be an effective leader.

Ballots were counted twice to ensure the correct results had been determined. The results were then announced after the leadership workshop was over. As the winner of each position was named, some people in the room applauded and cheered, but not everyone was happy with the results. I noticed some facial reactions of surprise and disapproval as names were read off, but no one questioned the validity of the results. At the very next meeting, in May, the newly elected officers took their positions at the front of the room to begin their speaking roles.

Administrative issues with DELAC and ELACs

One of the greatest challenges to participation in DELAC was the basic administration of DELAC and ELACs. The exchange between Antonia and Silvia captured below exemplified

some of the major administrative problems, including nebulosity about who were actual voting members in DELAC.

Y yo le pregunté, “Bueno, a mí me gustaría saber por qué ahora que fuimos a hacer las votaciones, ¿por qué yo no estuve electa para hacer una de las votaciones si yo soy representante de la escuela?” “Es que ya tenemos otra persona que está elegida, entonces tú no puedes hacer la votación por ella.” Y le dije, “¿Pero quién es esa otra persona?” La persona que nombraron jamás se ha presentado a las juntas.
(And I asked, “Well, I would like to know why now that we went to vote, why was I not elected to be one of the votes if I am the representative of the school?” “We already have another person who has been selected, so you cannot vote for her.” And I told her, “But who is that other person?” The person they named has never been to the meetings.) –
Antonia, mother-participant

To vote in DELAC elections, you had to be the official DELAC representative for your school site. If the official DELAC representative was not present, then the official alternate DELAC representative was allowed to cast a vote. Antonia thought that she was her school site’s DELAC representative as well as her site’s ELAC president, therefore, on the day when DELAC representatives voted for DELAC officers, Antonia was shocked when she was not allowed to vote. This difference of opinion on who was her school’s official DELAC representative signaled a breakdown in communication happening somewhere between Antonia and her school site and Silvia, the district’s DELAC Coordinator who was responsible for overseeing the operations of ELACs across the district.

Elections of all ELAC officers, including for the DELAC representative would ordinarily take place during the same meeting, normally near the start of the school year or at the end of the previous year, so it was unclear why Antonia would not know who was her elected DELAC representative. The vote for her site’s DELAC representative would most likely have taken place at the same time when she was elected as president. And she was not the only person to find out at a DELAC meeting that she was not the official DELAC representative for her school.

Only the official DELAC school representatives were allowed to vote for DELAC officers. Not surprisingly, some mothers became very upset when they were not allowed to cast

their vote. This meant that Antonia's school and others in similar situations, were left without an official vote because the person identified as their official DELAC representative was not in attendance the day of the election (and perhaps never had been to a DELAC meeting). There seemed to be multiple reasons that led to these issues.

Most often, it seemed school sites were not following the rules and regulations on how to constitute ELAC membership. During the first DELAC meeting of the year, Silvia would begin by reviewing the purpose and goals of DELAC and ELAC, and the rules and regulations for both groups. Antonia, paraphrasing Silvia said,

Cuando tenemos las juntas los primeros días siempre les entrego una información de los derechos, obligaciones y cosas y reglamentos que se pasan en la junta de DELAC. Si no lo leen o los agarramos y los ponemos en la almohada pues todos sabemos.
(When we have the meetings the first days I always given them information about the rights, obligations, and things and regulations that are handed out during the DELAC meeting. If you do not read it or if we grab them and put them on the pillow, well we all know.)

Antonia joked that probably what happened was that the rules and regulations were not read and perhaps instead were placed on the pillow, implying that reading them would put a person to sleep. Antonia's suggestion that the rules and regulations were not being read or reviewed at the school site, could have been led to irregularities in elections and other processes that were taking place at school sites.

During DELAC meetings, Silvia would talk about some of the issues happening within the district's schools. For instance, at some sites, principals were simply appointing ELAC officers instead of holding elections. During DELAC meetings at the beginning of the year Silvia would go over the ELAC election process. Appointing officers was not allowed, yet it was happening at some schools. Blanca talked about this problem at some of her schools and how she had to call out principals for this practice.

At other sites, officers had been elected, but they were not showing up to meetings. This was something that the *mamás* talked about in their interviews and *pláticas* with me. It was a problem, as Antonia says in the quote above. Silvia also talked about the problem briefly during my interview with her. At DELAC meetings, she encouraged members to amend their school's ELAC by-laws so that they could elect a new person if someone had missed a certain number of meetings.

Other sites had no ELAC group at all. This was a problem Silvia brought up during my interview with her and something she mentioned at DELAC meetings. She said principals at some of those sites told her it was a challenge to get *even one* parent to attend an ELAC meeting. Having no standing ELAC meant that EL students at those sites had no representation at their schools or at the district level.

Both Michael Lopez (the LCAP Asst. Director) and Silvia (the DELAC Coordinator) planned on taking action to help schools resolve their challenges. "I'll just have a personal conversation with the schools that [need help], and they'll make efforts to make it right," said Michael during my interview with him. He already worked closely with site councils and principals to create their school-level spending and programming plans. He thought he could easily have a conversation with principals about their ELACs as part of his work, "I'm working with the principals for SPSA [Single Plan for Student Achievement] purposes, we can also work with them for the DELAC representative, and their ELAC. How are their ELACs contributing to the SPSA? We need somebody for DELAC, and that somebody has to be an EL, a parent of an EL student." The problem seemed to have an easy solution (remind principals about the criteria for DELAC representatives), but difficult to correct in the district.

Silvia saw two problems, "for whatever reason they elected the wrong person, or for some reason they did elect, but for whatever reason the parents are just not making it here [to the

DELAC meetings].” Silvia also worked closely with school sites, providing direct support to ELACs. As part of this work, she suggested she could do “more follow up” with administrators to ensure they were sending elected representatives from their site to the DELAC meetings. She also wanted principals to play a more involved role, suggesting, “they themselves, too, to call parents.”

The administrative challenges had significant implications for schools and the district, for instance, a school that had mistakenly appointed a parent who was actually ineligible to be the DELAC representative or a school that had elected a parent who never made it to the DELAC meetings. These schools were left with no official voice when it came to running for and/or electing district level DELAC officers. Also, principals appointing parents to ELAC gave the impression that they were attempting to stack their committees with parents who they shared an amicable relationship with. Perhaps these parents would be unwilling to raise critical questions or talk about important issues that needed attention if they felt they would be going against the wishes of their principal. The most significant issue, however, seemed to be having no representative at all. At the March DELAC meeting, Silvia said 19 schools had no DELAC representative. This meant all of the formal and informal information sharing, networking, and other learning that was taking place at DELAC meetings was not reaching the 19 schools that had no DELAC representative. Moreover, these schools were being left out of the conversations related to LCAP that were taking place at DELAC.

Conclusion

Based on the comments *mamás* made to me describing the DELAC meetings as containing “muy buena informacción” (really good information), it seemed participants enjoyed attending the DELAC meetings. It was a place where they could learn from Silvia about their rights and roles as parent representatives, and how to advocate for emergent bilingual students at

their school sites. Still, there were some serious issues with the administration of ELACs in the district that revealed uneven access to information within the district. As will be discussed in the next chapter, *las mamás* found the meetings useful, but also disempowering at times.

Chapter 7: Findings

From the data collected over the course of the observation year, accounts emerged of Latina immigrant mothers who had a clear understanding of their role and purpose as parent representatives in DELAC, yet struggled to have their input (concerns, questions, and ideas) included in the district's decision-making processes. Issues ranged from a lack of reliable translation services and a paucity of authentic LCAP discussions focused on emergent bilingual students. Also, through their strict control over agendas, discussion topics, data, and discussion activities, the district officials seemed unwilling to create conditions that could elicit meaningful input from DELAC members. In this chapter I discuss each of these points in more detail, and how each addresses the remainder of my research questions. I begin with: What are the understandings of Latina DELAC members about their purpose and role in LCAP?

Mamás Understandings of their Purpose and Role as in LCAP

Each *mamá* in my study had her own unique experience that led her to become a parent representative and involved with DELAC. Still, they shared a common understanding about their role and purpose as parent representatives. They saw themselves as advocates for emergent bilingual students and parents across the district. They also understood their roles meant being consistent, reliable representatives traversing between the district and their school sites, being knowledgeable about rules, regulations, and programs in the district, and having a say in how funds were being spent by schools and in the district.

***Abogar*: Advocating for Emergent Bilingual Students and Their Parents**

Abogando (advocating) for EL students and their parents was a common understanding *las mamás* held about their role in committees. This sense of being the advocate for the EL community, however, developed over time. Their initial involvement in schools came from their desire to support and protect their children. However, over time and with invitations from

friends, family, and staff, their involvement evolved into engagement in DELAC and other committees.

Mamás found value in being involved in DELAC and connected their involvement to better educational opportunities for their children. Monica's powerful declaration at a DELAC meeting captured the sentiment of many of my participants. She said, "*No somos ricos. La herencia que dejaremos a nuestros hijos es su educación.*" ("We are not rich. The inheritance we will leave our children is their education.") Her pronouncement revealed her belief in the value of being involved in groups such as DELAC and school site council. Implicitly, she seemed to be conveying that the magnitude of the inheritance low-income parents would be leaving for their children, that is, the quality of education their children would receive, was dependent on their involvement.

Tanya echoed Monica's assertion about the importance of being involved. During one of our *pláticas*, Tanya shared, "*Yo siempre he pensado que cuando te involucras en la escuela, siempre tus hijos pueden tener más éxito.*" ("I have always believed when you get involved in [your children's] school, your children will always have a greater chance of being successful.") Like Monica, Tanya believed her involvement was a means towards securing better educational outcomes for her children. To these *mamás*, involvement went beyond volunteering in the classroom and attending school events (which many of them also did). Being involved also meant being a part the decision-making bodies at their schools and the district. As described in the portraits from chapter 4, the invitations from family, friends, and staff led many of *las mamás* to committees. For these particular *mamás*, being a part of committees became part of their idea of an involved parent.

Las mamás in this study recognized that by being involved they were also taking on roles as advocates and representatives for other parents and children in the district. Elena described her

advocacy for the EL community as part of her learning process; when she first joined her school committee her concern was her daughters. Over time she learned her role was to represent the needs of all EL students. Moreover, there was a strong sense of responsibility among *las mamás* for speaking up and speaking out on behalf of students and families who could not or did not attend DELAC meetings.

“*Poder hablar*” (“able to speak”) was the way Dolores described her advocacy and the reason for her involvement in committees. Central to her role and purpose was speaking up at meetings and reporting back to the parents she represented. Carla expressed a similar conviction:

Tanto para mis hijos, como para otros niños, verdad. Representar a los padres que tal vez no tienen el poder que tenemos nosotros de voz...Tienen poder, pero, no la hacen valer. No asisten a nuestras juntas. Yo pienso que más que todo es como, tienes que involucrarte, tienes que aprender para poder luchar por algo que quieres. Y, en este caso, son nuestros hijos.

(Both for my children and for other children, right. Represent parents who may not have the power like those of us who speak up...They have power, but, do not assert it. They do not attend our meetings. I think most of all it's like, you have to get involved, you have to learn to be able to fight for something you want. And, in this case, they are our children.)
— Carla, mamá-participant

To Carla, being an involved parent representative meant her role was to *luchar* (fight) on behalf of parents who did not exercise or assert their own voices. As a representative of emergent bilingual children and parents, Carla saw herself as a person *de voz* (of voice), whose role is to speak for those parents who were not there. She understood there were many reasons why parents did not get involved in committees (e.g., work schedules or other commitments outside of schools), but she was there for them and their children. Carla’s goal was to advocate for the “éxito de los niños” (the success of children) and the educational opportunities that led to “ese salto que necesitaban” (the release that they needed). By being involved in decision-making processes (i.e., in advisory groups at the school and district level) she could exercise her voice in support of her goals. Carla’s perspective about her role and purpose as a member in an advocacy group mirrored the understandings of all *la mamás* who participated in this study.

Brokers Traversing Between District and Parents

...Ir a las juntas, acumular la información y luego llevárselos y compartirlos con los padres de las escuelas...Y que los papás se sientan cómodos de que hay alguien que es mamá que habla su idioma y que va a poderles dar una explicación...“¿Cómo podemos hacer eso? ¿Qué clases hay? ¿Qué podemos tráeles? ¿Qué podemos ofrecerles?” Entonces se sienten cómodos de preguntar qué está pasando allá en el distrito, de qué se está hablando.

(...Go to the meetings, to gather the information and then take it to them and share it with the parents at the school...And for parents to feel comfortable that there is someone, a mother who speaks their language and can give them an explanation...“How can we do this? What classes are there? What can we bring them? What can we offer them?” So that they feel comfortable about asking what is happening in the district, what are they talking about.) – Yaneli, mamá-participant

As Yaneli expressed above, *las mamás* saw their roles as representatives who traversed between the district and school sites. They brought information back to their school sites and could answer the questions that parents had. As Yaneli pointed out, sharing information and answering questions was an important role that parent representatives fulfilled for their school community. But being a *Latina mother* who could communicate directly with parents, using a common language, strengthened the trust parents had in her. Being someone who made others feel *cómodos* (comfortable) came from being able to answer parent questions, but it also came from being seen as one of them, as a Latina mother of ELs who wanted to provide the best education for her children.

Las mamás also mentioned the conversations they had outside of school with parents who approached them with questions, asking for advice, or wanting information. Consequently, their knowledge was reaching beyond the school doors, to so called “unengaged” parents. But the exchange of information was not going only in one direction. *Las mamás* were carrying the concerns of the parents they came in contact with, back to DELAC meetings. They were brokering information back and forth, between parents and the school district, creating an opening where the district could access the unique knowledge and insights of *las mamás*.

Garnering Support

Las mamás in my study recognized how important it was to be united and to have the support of other parents. As Elena said, “Una sola persona no puede hacer el cambio.” (“One person by herself cannot create change.”) They wanted to ensure they were speaking on behalf of the parents they represented and wanted their site councils and principals to see that too. What they most needed was for parents to *show* their support by attending the meetings and advocating for the same recommendations. As DELAC Coordinator Silvia would tell them at the district meeting, there was power in numbers.

There was also a sense that the *mamás* sought out what parents wanted by asking them. For instance, Carla tried to make informed decisions by taking multiple steps.

Escuchar y analizar, y pensar, y tal vez preguntarle a otras personas, ‘¿tú qué piensas?’ ‘¿Por qué piensas esto?’ Y entonces, siento como que ya entre más votaciones o entre más acuerdos conmigo, es que entonces sí hablo.
(Listen and analyze, and think, and maybe ask other people, ‘what do you think?’ ‘Why do you think that?’ And then, I feel that with more votes or more people who are in agreement with me, that’s when I speak up). — Carla, mamá-participant

She wanted to make sure her actions reflected the will of the parents she represented, so Carla would listen (*escuchar*), analyze (*analizar*), think (*pensar*), and ask others (*preguntarle a otras personas*) before deciding what action to take.

During our interviews and *pláticas*, I asked my participants how they knew what they were fighting for was what other parents wanted. By listening and talking with parents, they told me. While I did not follow my participants out into the community, I would see them having conversations with parents just outside of the main entrances of schools. During interviews and *pláticas* they also recounted talking with their friends and family members who were not involved in school committees. They gathered pieces of information everywhere they went, adding them to their knowledge base and exchanging these pieces of knowledge with other parent representatives.

Creating Your Own Position

Apenas hace poquito un maestro de aquí...nos dijo, al estar buscando los representantes...el dijo algo que se me ha quedado grabado, dice, “Es que usted puede hacer su puesto o tan chiquito o tan grande como usted lo puede hacer.” Y yo dije, “Es muy cierto.” Porque si uno quiere trabajar mucho para la escuela, uno puede hacer mucho...Como que algo me hizo aquí [apuntando a su cabeza] un clic, de que, “sí es cierto.” Ahora viendo ya que él dice puede ser tu puesto lo más grande lo más chiquito que quieras – pues sí. Porque he visto unas presidentas que sí se mueven, que sí trabajan e involucran a los papás y traen a los papás y hace muchas cosas. Entonces digo, “Ah, entonces eso sí me gusta.”

(Just a little bit ago a teacher from here..said, while looking for representatives...he said something that has stayed with me, he said, “It’s that you can make your position as small or as big as you want to make it.” And I said, “That is very true.” Because if you want to work a lot for the school, you can do a lot...It was like something here [pointing to her head] a click, that, “it’s true.” Now seeing what he said you can make your position as big or as small as you want - well, yes. Because I have seen some presidents who do move, who work and involve parents and bring parents and do a lot of things. Then I say, “Ah, then that I like.”)– Carolina, mamá-participant

It was up to each *mamá* to decide how she wanted to put into action her responsibilities as parent representative. As Carolina mentioned in the quote above, *mamás* could make their role as big or as small as they wanted — they could choose to be very involved (*moverse*) or not. Carolina’s point was that representatives could be very active or passive in their roles.

The minimum requirements for DELAC members was stated at the bottom of each meeting agenda, “disseminate [DELAC] meeting information at your site’s ELAC meeting; invite parents to attend site’s ELAC meetings; provide recommendations as it relates to programs and services for English Language Learners and submit ELAC Recommendation Form to School Site Council.” How the requirements would be accomplished was up to the individual representative. Many of *las mamás* in my study constructed roles that went beyond the minimum requirements. They were actively working to involve other parents in committees. For instance, Monica, Elena, and Ana were calling parents to invite them to meetings. Lorena and Carla were arranging carpools, enabling more parents to participate in DELAC. Alma and Tanya were using

the knowledge they acquired from DELAC to train other parents on the rules and regulations of ELAC, DELAC, funding sources, and other topics.

Also, some *mamás* were using their role as parent representatives to ask critical questions during ELAC and site council meetings. For instance, Ana would ask about the progress of English acquisition among emergent bilinguals at her school sites. At DELAC meetings she would recount making recommendations such as asking that more qualified teachers be hired to teach EL students, and that additional instructional support be offered to students after school and Saturdays. She said her requests had been denied due to a lack of available teachers to provide additional supports at her school. At the DELAC meeting she asked Silvia for advice on how to move forward. Silvia told her to not give up and explained there was a shortage of teachers trained to work with EL students. Ana and other *mamás* had a clear interest in creating positions that would result in noticeable change, but as discussed later in the chapter, district officials often thwarted those efforts.

Vigilar: Keeping Watch

Part of their role as representatives was to keep watch on how the district and schools were spending funds. As Esperanza said during one of our *pláticas*,

Tratar de checar o vigilar sí un poco, porque a veces a las personas se nos olvida hacer lo que tenemos que hacer, realmente. Entonces digo yo, “Sí hay que estar detrás del distrito escolar para que se lleven a cabo las cosas, hay que estar.”

(Try to check or keep watch a little, because sometimes people forget to do what we have to do. So I say, “Yes we have to be behind the school district so make sure things are done, I have to be [there].) — Esperanza, *mamá*-participant

Esperanza explained that her role literally was to “estar detrás,” be behind, but more accurately to check (*checar*), to keep watch (*vigilar*), that the district was fulfilling its obligation that funds would be spent on the children they were intended for. She added, “Quieres asegurarte...de que se va a hacer, el dinero va a estar siendo usado para lo que está destinado.” (“You want to make sure...that it will be done, the money will be used for what it is intended for.”) There was a sense

among all *las mamás* that they needed to keep watch that funds were being spent correctly not only at their school sites, but as Esperanza expressed in our *pláticas*, at the district level too. There was a sense of mistrust, which was compounded by the complicated nature of the budgets and the rules and regulations about how and where funds could be spent.

Tanya: Es complicado el asunto, porque no nada más es un solo dinero que va para todos, sino que ellos especificaron que hay dinero para personas que reúnen las condiciones que reúnen nuestros hijos; están aprendiendo inglés, somos de bajos recursos. No es mi caso, pero va a haber otros que tienen niños que son foster. Y que son personas con necesidades que necesitan ser cubiertas, digo yo, no sé. ¿Tú qué crees?

Antonia: Pues, siento como que pues sí, porque en realidad porque tanto es el dinero.
(Tanya: It is a complicated matter, because it is not only one pool of money that goes to all [students], but they specify that there is money for people that meet the conditions of our children; they are learning English, we are low-income. This is not my situation, but there will be others with foster children. And there are persons with needs that are covered, I say, I don't know. What do you think?
Antonia: Well, I feel like yes, because really because there is so much money.)

In the exchange above between Tanya and Antonia, Tanya seems to know about the three specific student subgroups related to LCAP funds, but as she stated in the beginning of her remarks, “es complicado el asunto.” (“It is a complicated matter.”) Antonia appeared to agree with her, adding “tanto es el dinero.” (“There is so much money.”) To be able to fulfill the role of keeping watch would mean being knowledgeable about how funds were supposed to be used, and to know how the district was actually using funds. This meant they needed training to understand with some depth details about funds and expenditure regulations. Many of them, however, were relying upon the district to provide them with that training — but as stated earlier, there existed a sense of mistrust, as if the district was not being forthcoming and transparent with them. A few *mamás* including Carolina, Tanya, and Blanca were connected to nonprofit organizations that were helping them better understand school and district funding. Still, along with knowledge, they would also need to feel empowered to speak up if they had concerns over the use of funds.

El Hablar: Speaking up

As representatives, *las mamás* felt an obligation to speak up (*hablar*) at DELAC and other committee meetings, to say how things really were at their school sites or in the district, whether good or bad. Dolores explained, “Hablar es que tú vas a decir las cosas como son.” (“Speaking means you are going to say the way things are.”) As the eyes and ears at their school sites and the representatives for students and families, they felt compelled to speak up at committee meetings. Blanca’s quote below captured their sense of commitment:

He escuchado de otros padres de – no solamente de los de mis escuelas sino también de otras escuelas en [las juntas de] DELAC, en [Título I], en el superintendente también, donde han habido quejas del mismo tipo de que las de nosotros. Por eso te digo que son de otros padres. Siempre tenemos las mismas preocupaciones, sobre todo por nuestros hijos, pero nada más que muchos no nos atrevemos a decir las. Yo te digo, soy penosa, no sé hablar mucho pero cuando es algo injusto, hay que decir.
(I have heard from other parents - not only from my school but also from other schools at DELAC, [Title I], the superintendent [meetings]¹⁴ as well, where there have been complaints of the same kind as ours. That is why I tell you that they are from other parents. We always have the same concerns, especially for our children, but not many of us dare say them. I tell you, I am shy, I do not know how to speak up much, but when it is unjust, it must be said.) — Blanca, mamá-participant

From Blanca’s quote, we learned not only about her sense of responsibility (when it is unjust, it must be said), but also the exchange of information that takes place among participants at DELAC and other committee meetings. The quote above suggests that these *mamás* were interested in using their positions as parent representatives to hold school and district officials accountable if they saw an injustice happening. Blanca spoke out about the irregularities she saw in the way ELACs and site councils were being operated. In speaking up about these issues, she learned that irregularities were happening at other schools, too.

Speaking up also meant raising issues related to teachers and instruction at their school sites. For instance, at the February DELAC meeting, while Silvia, the DELAC Coordinator, was

¹⁴ The *Rancho los Nietos* Superintendent hosts quarterly meetings are open to all parents. These meetings are the ones Blanca references here.

presenting Title III information to member, Ana raised an ongoing issue at her school site. Ana asked what could be done at her school; they had funds to spend and wanted to hire qualified teachers to teach ELs as part of a summer program at the high school she represented. More than 400 ELs were enrolled at the high school, and nearly 200 of them were classified as long term ELs. Ana was frustrated that she was being told by her principal that no teachers were available. Silvia responded by saying there was a bilingual teacher shortage across the state, but then she suggested Ana “strategize as a[n ELAC] committee” and tell her school site council “there’s a great need.” Silvia concluded by naming another high school with the same problem — not being able to find qualified bilingual teachers. While this exchange happened during a discussion about Title III, it highlights the little bits of information that are learned at these meetings when members speak up about issues happening at their school sites. By asking her question, Ana created an opening where information about a bilingual teacher shortage was uncovered, and perhaps strategies members could use to advocate for the need at their site council.

Immediately after Silvia’s response to Ana another DELAC member (not a *mamá*-participant) spoke up, pointing out that at the previous meeting DELAC members had been presented with data that showed there were a significant number of long term ELs in the district, many who had poor academic outcomes. Silvia’s response was to urge parents to become voting members of their site councils, where budgetary decisions are made. Unfortunately, no DELAC member probed Silvia about the district’s role in attending to the needs of long term ELs, but EL student outcomes would be raised again at later DELAC meetings.

Hablando (speaking up) was not something every *mamá* did at DELAC meetings. For instance I never observed Sofia or Esperanza ask questions or make comments during DELAC meetings. They engaged in conversations with the *mamás* at their tables. Still, those who did ask

questions created an opening where information and knowledge was exchanged and issues happening at school sites across the district were revealed.

To Be Heard, To Give Informed Recommendations

Bueno, supuestamente estamos ahí para ser escuchados. Y si estamos ahí y estamos dando nuestras opiniones es para que tomen en cuenta más que nada a nuestros estudiantes, y si no son a los de nosotros, por lo menos a los del futuro. (Well, we are supposed to be there to be heard. And if we are there and we are giving our opinions it is so that they [district officials] take into account more than anything our students, and if not our students, at least future students.)— Carla, mamá-participant

Mamás also understood their purpose in the LCAP process was to be heard (ser escuchados) and to give opinions (opiniones), as Carla said during one of our *pláticas*. In the quote above, Carla implied that her recommendations might not be approved in time to benefit current students, but they might get implemented in time to reach future students. Still, Carla and the other *mamás* understood part of their role was to provide recommendations, and they expressed wanting to give those recommendations at both the district and school levels, but, as discussed in the section on experiences in this chapter, the district did not construct opportunities for *meaningful* engagement where informed recommendations could be developed.

District Officials' Understandings of the Purpose and Role of Parents in LCAP

Next, I will address my third research question: What are district officials' understandings of the purpose and role of Latin@ parents of emergent bilinguals in LCAP? Interestingly, what district officials communicated about the role and purpose of parents in LCAP — at least what they *said* in meetings and interviews seemed partially aligned with the understandings of *mamás*. From the Superintendent to the LCAP Director, from the LCAP Asst. Director to the DELAC Coordinator, they all spoke of the power DELAC parents had in budgetary and planning processes at their *school sites*. (As discussed in his portrait, Superintendent Waldman was an avid supporter of local control and, based on the spreadsheet the district presented during the May DELAC meeting, 10 percent of the district's entire LCAP

funds had been allocated directly to schools, where site councils and principals were put in charge of deciding how to spend those funds.)

Still, taking a closer look at the messages communicated by the Superintendent and in official documents (e.g., district strategic plan, board policies, and district handbook for parents and students), what emerged was an expectation that parents adopt district-approved ways of being and involvement characterized by one-way communication, particularly at the district level.

Listened to, Actions, Accountability, and Follow-ups

During my interview with the Superintendent, he discussed four-key aspects he considered essential when partnering with parents:

People are really good about being partners if they feel they've been listened to. They may not like all the answers they're hearing, which is totally acceptable, but they just feel that there's action, and that there is accountability and I'm going to call follow-ups.

He went on to explain that parent involvement was an important aspect of LCAP and in order to get parents to remain involved they needed to feel that they were listened to. To demonstrate that the district was listening, the district would have to follow up, and provide updates about what it did with the feedback and recommendations groups like DELAC had provided. He added, "People won't come back if you don't take some of their ideas or explain why you didn't take some of their ideas." He wanted parents to feel that their ideas were being at least considered, which he saw as the role of parents, to offer their ideas to the district.

LCAP Asst. Director Lopez expressed a similar concern about wanting DELAC members to feel as if they were heard and that their input was taken seriously. In fact, he made a public pledge at the April DELAC meeting, promising to return to DELAC to let them know what happened with their recommendations. DELAC Coordinator Silvia also expressed the importance of providing updates and follow up to DELAC members about the recommendations

they made during meetings. They understood the essential pillars of family-school partnerships, where the questions and ideas raised by families are taken seriously, gathered *before* final decisions are made, and are reflected in final decisions adopted by administrators (Henderson et al., 2007). Still, their words did not always match their actions.

Stakeholders with Input, Not Approval Power

The process of LCAP is good because what the LCAP says is that you get advice. It doesn't say that parents or teachers have approval power. It doesn't say that. What it says is the board does. What it does say is that you go to as many stakeholders as possible on a regular basis to get input about where you need to go. — Superintendent Waldman

Superintendent Waldman's understanding of the role of parents in LCAP was clear. As captured in the quote above, parents, including DELAC *mamás*, were to provide input and advice - but they did not have approval power. Still, the Superintendent wanted "all parents to be involved as much as possible" so that the school board could make decisions "based on input from parents" and from data.

Interestingly, when the Superintendent talked about wanting as many parents as possible to participate in the LCAP process, he also described the district as a place where "not one change at all" had taken place in terms of parent involvement pre and post LCAP. This struck me as an odd comment since the LCAP meant significantly more parent (and community) input was to be collected by districts to decide how a substantial portion of funds would be spent — and to evaluate the decisions made from previous years. The LCAP was an entirely new document that districts had to create and update every year with the input of stakeholders including DELAC members. Still, the Superintendent explained that *Rancho los Nietos* had a long history of parent involvement through its existing advisory committees. It was a notion that LCAP Director Centeno shared. LCAP Asst. Director Lopez and DELAC Coordinator Silvia,

however, had a different impression about LCAP and parent involvement noting, “there’s definitely a lot more parent involvement, feedback, as opposed to before.”

Parents with Power

Again and again the Superintendent spoke of his belief in local control. It was his philosophy that schools knew best the needs of the students at their sites. Putting his belief into action, the district decided to allocate a portion (10 percent) of its LCFF funds directly to school sites. As a result, schools were put in control of a substantial amount of LCFF funds, more than \$13 million. This led to principals and school site councils holding power and authority over even larger budgets. Site councils voted on how to spend funds, but their plans were then sent to Superintendent Waldman for final approval. The new funds now controlled by site councils was one of the reasons why Superintendent Waldman, DELAC Coordinator Silvia, and LCAP Asst. Director Lopez were constantly urging DELAC members to become members of their site councils. As LCAP Asst. Director Lopez explained during my interview with him,

...the money’s at the school. If the money’s at the school, then parent engagement becomes more—not only more powerful, but also more critical. Because now their voices are definitely paid attention to, as it should always be, no matter what. But in this case, it’s they have a vote, a powerful place in decision making at the school site.

In distributing a large portion of LCAP funds down to the school level, the district had increased the potential power of involved parents. DELAC members who were also members of their school site councils had potentially powerful roles to play in helping to develop their school’s budgets. That seemed to be the primary reason why the Superintendent and others at the district urged DELAC members to join site councils. Superintendent Waldman had described the planning and budgetary work of site councils as them putting together their own “mini-LCAPs.” But in all their exhorting, they did not seem to recognize the additional sacrifices of time they were asking parents to make, nor were they addressing the substantial power differential between DELAC members and principals.

Schools were required to create ELACs if there were 21 or more EL students enrolled in their school (CDE, 2017). The parent members of those ELACs had a *potentially* powerful position at those school sites – not as powerful as site councils as they did not have the direct control over budgets that their school site council counterparts did, but they did have the power to influence, question, and call to account councils and administrators at their school sites. That was the kind of critical involvement Silvia and other district officials conveyed to parents at nearly every DELAC meeting. Moreover, Silvia continually encouraged DELAC members to become members of their site councils telling them, “I’ve been encouraging you all to be SSC [school site council] members. Only council that has a vote. ELAC is an advisory committee, it only gives advice. You have to be part of SSC, there’s votes there.” The Superintendent and LCAP Asst. Director communicated similar messages to DELAC members, emphasizing the voting power of site council members.

At the same time Silvia communicated to DELAC members the power they *did* hold as ELAC members and stressed to not allow themselves to be pushed aside by their site councils, “When you have ELAC meetings, the information shouldn’t stay there, take it to SSC [school site council]. You need to advocate. Don’t let the site tell you they don’t have time...SSC must respond to ELAC! Get your recommendation form signed by principal and ELAC representative.” Moreover, Silvia wanted DELAC members to feel empowered to ask critical questions, as explained in more detail below.

Critical Parent Involvement

Your main purpose is to look at the achievement gap and how EL students are doing. Ask for data; don’t wait for the principal. Mr. [Superintendent] said it, everybody needs to be looking at EL data. How are students doing on the CELDT¹⁵? Ask for this year and last year’s. If you see no progress that’s a red flag. If you have 4th and 5th graders not

¹⁵ The California English Language Development Test (CELDT) was an assessment tool administrated on all newly enrolled students whose primary home language was something other than English. It was also administered annually to all EL classified students in a district (CDE, 2016a). In *Rancho los Nietos*, students had to score at least “intermediate” on the CELDT exam as part of the required criteria to achieve reclassification.

reclassified, that should be a red alert. Here we have a lot of long term ELs. You as parents have to advocate. Who is teaching ELD? When are they teaching ELD? How are they doing on SBAC? If kids are not doing well and there's funding, suggest to the SSC and principal could implement before, after, and Saturday school. — Silvia, DELAC Coordinator

District officials encouraged DELAC members to look at data, ask questions, and be aware of decisions and practices at their school sites. Silvia's remarks above were made at the very first DELAC meeting of the year, in October. At a DELAC meeting near the end of the year, the LCAP Asst. Director continued the same appeal telling members,

This committee [DELAC] has a voice. At the school level your ELACs have a massive voice. The majority of funds go to the schools... Your decisions should be made as a result of data about kids.

As the LCAP Asst. Director conveyed in his remarks above, and as other district officials had done during their presentations at DELAC meetings, the district wanted DELAC members to be asking critical questions at their *school* sites, but what about at the district level? After all, developing, evaluating, and updating the LCAP were described as district-level activities per the LCAP regulation (CDE, 2016c). But in *Rancho los Nietos*, district officials constructed a different role for DELAC members at the district level.

Participation, Experiences, and Consequence

In this last section, I address the final research questions: How are *las mamás* participating in LCAP? What are their experiences in the process? What are the personal, interpersonal, and programmatic consequences of their participation? What emerged from each sub-question was a complex account of DELAC engagement in LCAP. While the roles and purposes expressed in the section above suggested DELAC members were empowered to influence decisions made at their school sites, this next section reveals the multiple challenges that obstructed actual engagement at the district level.

How *Mamás* Are Participating in LCAP

DELAC was the premier committee focused exclusively on the needs of emergent bilingual students in the district. According to Silvia the primary function of DELAC was to advise the school board on the programs and services for English Learners. It was at these meetings where DELAC members were supposed to fulfill their responsibilities which according to the California Department of Education, included reviewing and commenting on the development or annual update of the LCAP (CDE, 2018a). They could participate in the other spaces such as the Title I meetings or the Superintendent's Parent Forum (described in chapter 6), but DELAC was the committee that was focused on the needs of emergent bilingual students in the district. It was in the DELAC meetings where they would receive information about budgets, programs, and rules and regulations related specifically to emergent bilingual students. The expectation from district officials was that DELAC members would apply what they learned at these district meetings to discussions and actions at their *school sites*. While *mamás* were also asked to provide their input and suggestions at the district level, those activities did not begin until April. Moreover, LCAP specific activities orchestrated by the district constrained and bounded DELAC members from having free and open discussions about policies and programs and expenditures related to EL student outcomes and experiences.

DELAC meetings were held once a month, for two hours. Each meeting had a consistent flow. They always began with Silvia, the DELAC Coordinator, greeting attendees. Then DELAC officers would have attendees review and approve the meeting agenda and the previous month's meeting minutes (distributed as part of the package attendees would receive as they signed in before entering the main meeting hall). Upcoming events would then be announced, including the date, time, and location of other district level meetings such as the Superintendent's Parent Forum and the Title I meetings. After the welcome and announcements, then formal

presentations would take place. Most of the time two presenters were scheduled per DELAC meeting. Silvia would present topics related to the legal responsibilities of DELAC (such as the discussing the rules and regulations of DELAC and ELAC, the Uniform Complaint Procedure, and the Williams Complaint Process). Silvia would introduce all other presenters such as the LCAP Asst. Director, LCAP Director, and the district Superintendent. DELAC members were allowed to ask questions at any time during the meeting, including in the middle of presentations, when they often asked clarifying questions. The meeting would then close with an official motion to adjourn the meeting, and then a raffle for door prizes would take place. A lot was packed into those two hours every month and many times Silvia and other presenters would run out of time and were not able to cover all the material or do the activities they had planned.

It was Silvia who would decide the agenda items, coordinated presenters, and facilitate meetings. None of the DELAC members seemed to question Silvia's authority over meeting agendas, as I did not observe any DELAC member raise questions about it at any of the meetings. Moreover, it seemed that the required tasks of DELAC (listed in the state's education code), filled the entire year's calendar. Every month at least one of the DELAC responsibilities, which Silvia called "legal advisements," would be covered.

There was also a laptop and projector set up at a small table at the center-front of the room, and a large screen that would project speaker's presentation slides. There was a stage at the front of the meeting room, but neither Silvia nor any of the presenters ever stood on it. Instead, they spoke from the front of the room, just in front of the stage. Only the gifts bags raffled off at the end of the meeting used the stage space. There was also coffee and *pan dulce* (Mexican sweet bread) provided at every meeting, set up a table off to the left side of the meeting room.

Nine large rectangular tables took up most of the meeting room, each with seating for 6-8 attendees. Additional folding chairs were set up along the left and right walls of the hall as well as along the back. At times, Silvia and other district presenters made use of the seating arrangements, integrating small table group discussions with whole group discussions. Those attendees sitting along the sides and back wall would be asked to move to a table so that they could be included in the small table discussions. It was through this process of small group and whole group discussions that LCAP input was gathered from DELAC members. But DELAC members also asked questions during presentations and most presenters allotted time for questions at the end of their presentations. While those moments did not generate formal input that would be included or considered for LCAP, they did offer a window into what were the concerns or insights of DELAC members.

As described earlier, Silvia would conduct most meetings in English with Spanish¹⁶ translation provided through the use of headsets. For most of the meetings, the Spanish-English translator would sit at the front to meeting room, speaking into a microphone that would transmit his words to the headsets worn by approximately half of *las mamás*. It was not clear why Silvia ran the meetings in English, as she never provided an explanation, but *las mamás* in my study expressed their dislike about this. In one *plática* Carla wondered out loud why Silvia chose to carry out the meetings in English with Spanish translation, adding most of the participants were Spanish-dominant speakers anyway. Actually, as will be discussed later in this chapter, the Spanish translation and the headsets created barriers for effective participation.

Synopsis of each DELAC meeting. Next, a synopsis of each monthly meeting is provided. As is reflected in the entries below, over the course of the year the amount and type of LCAP related information went from nearly no mention to nearly whole meetings dedicated to

¹⁶ Khmer translation was also available, as the Khmer translator attended every DELAC meeting.

LCAP. Explicit discussions on LCAP happened in April, May, and June. This degree of intensity is reflected in the entries below, where descriptions of earlier meetings are much shorter than those written about meetings late in the year.

October and November. In October, DELAC and ELAC rules and regulations were discussed as well as the recommendations DELAC presented to the school board the year before. Superintendent Waldman also gave a brief report to DELAC members where he discussed district purchases that were recently made such as Chromebooks, but he did not specify what funding source was used to make purchases. In November, DELAC by-laws were approved, the strategic plan was discussed, and LCAP Asst. Director Lopez provided a discussion on how to use data reports, and Index Report and an LCAP Report, to inform decisions made by school site councils. Unfortunately, other than mentioning the LCAP Report, he did not provide details about what this was or how DELAC members could use it to help them formulate recommendations to their site councils.

December. December was the first time in the year when LCAP was discussed at a DELAC meeting. In December, Silvia discussed the Uniform Complaint Procedure, the Williams Uniform Complaint Procedure, and categorical funds that are generated by EL students. Although not a categorical fund, Silvia did include LCFF funds in her talk, stating, “[*Rancho los Nietos*] LCAP plan identifies funding priorities and allocates funds from LCFF directly to schools to make decisions about spending that will meet the needs of their students.” She provided DELAC members with a list of all the schools in the district and the amount of Title I and LCFF funds they had been allocated. She did not mention supplemental or concentration funds (which were partially generated by emergent bilingual students in the district). Nor did she not describe DELAC's role in planning, evaluating, and updating LCAP at the district level.

January. The January DELAC meeting consisted of Silvia informing DELAC members about the three English development programs available in the district (structured English immersion (SEI), English language mainstream (ELM), and alternative program (ALT)) and the required notification process that informs parents of emergent bilingual students which program their child was enrolled in (either SEI or ELM) and the waiver process if they want to enroll their child in the alternative program, which in *Rancho los Nietos* were the dual immersion programs. Guest speakers presented on two other topics. One was on the district's middle school "School of Choice" policy and program. The other presentation was about public transit safety programs.

February. In February, Silvia discussed various pieces of the school-level needs assessment plans and requested any changes or additions (there were none). She also discussed the 37 college aides that had been hired to assist newcomer EL students throughout the district; aides were paid through with Title III funds and were assigned to Title I and non-Title I schools. DELAC officers were also nominated during this meeting, and a district staff nutritionist provided a talk about the district's policies and procedures related to meals provided on school campuses.

March. Nearly the entire meeting in March was taken up with the election of DELAC officers (described in fuller detail in the previous chapter on DELAC), though it started with Silvia providing copies of the school board's resolution to support undocumented and immigrant families in the district. There was also a presentation provided by Title III parent consultants on how to build effective leadership teams.

April. The April meeting was the first time LCAP was an explicit topic at DELAC. LCAP Director Centeno had DELAC members review and discuss the California School Dashboard, a data report recently released by the state. After less than 20 minutes of analyzing the data reports in small table groups, each table was asked to complete an "LCAP Data

Feedback Form," where they identified the strengths and weaknesses in the report and added questions or recommendations they wanted to share. It was a problematic process as no context was provided to DELAC members. The LCAP Director did not remind anyone what LCAP was, what DELAC's role was in the LCAP process, nor what the contents of the Dashboard had to do with the LCAP. Still, DELAC members did not ask why they were being asked to engage in the activity constructed by Mr. Centeno; everyone in the meeting went along with it. Interestingly, during the committee report portion of the meeting, the DELAC Vice President gave a report about the most recent Superintendent's Parent Forum that had taken place. At the Superintendent's Parent Forum meeting facilitators *had* discussed what LCAP was, the eight state priorities, and the measures used to determine progress toward district goals.

Also, it was not clear what the "LCAP Data Feedback Form" would be used for. The name of the form may make it seem obvious that whatever would be submitted would be considered DELAC's input on the LCAP, but that was never stated in the meeting. Moreover, the Dashboard report had very few metrics on EL students, which made it difficult for DELAC members to provide useful feedback -- the kind of meaningful feedback district officials had been urging DELAC members to give at their school sites.

The LCAP Asst. Director also presented at the April meeting. His presentation was on the ConApp (Consolidated Application) and the LEA Plan, which were budget and plans related to federal funding. During his presentation he briefly discussed the difference between the LEA Plan and LCAP, pointing out that the LEA Plan was a 5-year plan that was entrenched in old federal legislation (NCLB). The LCAP on the other hand, was a 3-year plan that was updated annual, and only included plans for state funds. But again, there was no mention of DELAC participation in the development and evaluation of the LCAP. It seemed again and again, district officials missed the opportunity to specify what LCAP was and DELAC's role in the process.

May. During the May meeting, LCAP Director Centeno returned to provide DELAC members with a distilled list of the strengths, weaknesses, questions, and recommendations that had been collected the month before. He explained that after the April meeting he and Silvia put all the comments together, then he reviewed each of them “one-by-one” with Superintendent Waldman. He said he then began to collect more data reports and budget information to share with DELAC members at this, the May meeting. He gave DELAC members 2 minutes to read through the summarized Data Feedback Form and then, without discussing any of the information on the sheets, he transitioned to another group of handouts LCAP Director Centeno had brought with him. These included a longitudinal suspension rate data report disaggregated by student subgroup, a two year look at Advanced Placement participation in the district that showed total district participation and participation among EL and reclassified EL students (i.e., RFEP) grouped together, and overall results of the district’s school culture and climate survey. The LCAP Director explained that he brought in these reports to address some of the questions that were raised at the previous month’s meeting. At that previous meeting DELAC members reviewed the state’s new Dashboard report, but most of the data for EL students simply read “N/A,” indicating the information was not available. He pointed out that according to the district’s data, suspension rates were down among all student subgroups, yet the state’s Dashboard reported a 0.3 percent increase. He explained that the state’s Dashboard was based on old data. He gave DELAC members 5 minutes to review the data handouts and then he regrouped to take questions and comments.

In all, comments from six DELAC members are taken. The first comment was from a school staff person who shared her experiences administering the CELDT test at a district high school where she had come across many students who were not fluent in their parent’s language, yet they were classified as EL. She told the LCAP Director that many of the students had been

EL for 10-12 years and still had not been reclassified, still some of them were also enrolled in AP courses. The LCAP Director restated her comments, saying they were important for everyone to hear. In his paraphrasing, he left out the first part of her statement and focused instead on the part about EL students enrolled in AP. Superintendent Waldman then stepped in to add his own comments about his new AP initiative, to have half of all 11th and 12th grade students, including student subgroups, at all district high schools enrolled in AP courses. He said they were “open courses” meaning no grade or class prerequisites were required to enroll in these classes, “you just have to have a willingness to work hard.” He then told DELAC members that at their next parent meetings they needed to review their school-level data and look to see how many students were enrolled in AP and, “if you don’t see half or more ask why.”

Next to be called was Alma who asked that principals send parents alerts when important exams such as the CELDT were about to take place. She also asked that the district provide parents with prep questions, similar to the prep questions they had received for the state’s standardized exam (the SBAC). The Superintendent directed the LCAP Asst. Director, who was also present at the meeting, to take notes. The Superintendent then reminded DELAC members of the importance of signing up for the district’s email system (ParentVue) and that Chromebooks had been purchased for them to use at their school sites. He encouraged them to use the Chromebooks to access the files he was going to send them with prep questions and other resources about the CELDT exam. At that point another DELAC member jumped in to say that at her school the principal was very responsive and provided parents with dates, reminders, and tips on how to support their children when exams were approaching. She said that was way it was so important for parents to attend school meetings and lamented that at her school it was always the same 10 parents who attended meetings.

Tanya then asked in English, “We have the data. We recognize where we have the problems. What are we going to put in place to fix those problems?” Unfortunately, rather than providing Tanya with an answer, the LCAP Director responded, “Great question. We’ll talk about that when we get into the budget, OK? But that’s a good segue into some details here that I want to show everyone.” He was ready to transition to the next part of his agenda, but the Superintendent stopped him, not to address Tanya’s question, but to point out a few more hands were still raised.

The next comment was in English from staff personnel who mentioned the training that she and others at her school were providing to parents on how to set up their district accounts so that they could access student information and other notices sent by the district. She said that parents did not know how to access those resources, but with the training being provided at their schools and the Chromebooks that they now had, they now could.

Then in Spanish, Elena asked, what interventions did the district plan on implementing to support EL students now that the state was replacing the CELDT with a new, more challenging exam? LCAP Director Centeno replied, “We’ll get to that right now.” At that moment Antonia raised her hand, but LCAP Director tried to move on, saying, “Sorry ma’am.” But Antonia persisted to report the problem she was having with her headset. She all she heard was “tick, tick, tick” and she missed most of what had been said. After a 5-minute interruption to get the headsets working again, the meeting resumed. The data reports were left behind and the LCAP budget summary would be discussed next.

The LCAP budget summary was a one-page spreadsheet of 36 line-items. The items on the spreadsheet were lists of things that would be funded using LCFF funds. There were four columns across the top of the spreadsheet that read, “Actions and Services,” “2016-2017 Revised Plan,” “2017-2018 Revised Plan,” and “2018-2019 Revised Plan.” Each row consisted of a very

broad phrase, for instance, “Provide support to English Learners and their families,” “Enhance the library education program for schools,” and “Provide additional support services for schools to cultivate student engagement.” Next to each line item were the expenditures for 2016-2017, 2017-2018, and 2018-2019. It seemed the list of items and related expenditures had *already* been decided, even though this was the first time the information was being presented to DELAC members. From the conversation that ensued, DELAC members wanted disaggregated data that clearly specified what programs and services were being provided to EL student across the district and at school sites, and what were the outcomes. Superintendent Waldman pledged to return to DELAC at a later date with programs and services information. Although the Superintendent returned for the June meeting, he did not any more information about the spreadsheet or specific information on EL programs and services, as requested by DELAC members.

The May meeting concluded with DELAC members providing their recommendations for Title III funds, federal funds to support ELs. The process of gathering Title III recommendations went quickly, a total of 10 minutes where DELAC members individually read through a list of late year's recommendations and filled out the feedback form Silvia had included in the meeting packet.

June. The June meeting was the only gathering that started at a different time (11:00am instead of 9:30am) and featured a potluck, where DELAC members brought in their favorite entrees, desserts, and side dishes to share. It was also when Silvia presented certificates to those members who attended every or nearly every meeting. Although it was the final meeting of the year, the agenda was full. Presentations included an update provided by the Superintendent, a presentation about EL student demographics and assessment outcomes by the district's research department, LCAP Asst. Director Lopez discussing the district's LEA Plan, LCAP, and strategic

plan and where and how they aligned, a moment where recommendations to the school board were updated, and a mention about the district's Parent Involvement Title I policy.

The meeting started with Superintendent Waldman announcing Chromebooks had been purchased to be used at district committee meetings (so that meetings could go paperless) and that soon all schools in the district would have a one-to-one computer to student ratio. Later he talked about wanting the state to grant the district permission to use the SAT and PSAT exams in place of the state's standardized text (i.e., SBAC). Then the district's research department director gave a presentation on the EL student population in district and the reclassification process, the rate of reclassification rate in the district, and EL student outcomes on the state's standardized test in English and Math for 2015-2016 academic year.

LCAP Asst. Director Lopez provided a talk about the LEA Plan and how it aligned with LCAP and district's strategic plan. He also provided data, specifically, outcomes on the state's standardized test in English and Math disaggregated by grade level, ethnicity, classification (e.g., EL, special education, low-income, etc.). Algebra enrollment and passing rates among 8th graders, graduation rates, college preparation coursework completion rates among high school graduates, and new and existing linked learning programs in district high schools. For each slide, he reported whether the district had met its goals. When a goal was missed, he would encourage DELAC members to investigate what led to the goal being missed. For instance, 8th grade enrollment rates had dropped. LCAP Asst. Director Lopez suggested sites find out who was and who was not enrolled, and whether students were exiting elementary and entering middle school on a path toward Algebra enrollment in the 8th grade.

After his presentation, he and Silvia had DELAC members review and update the recommendations the committee wanted to present to the school board. For nearly half an hour DELAC members talked out loud about specific recommendations. Some DELAC members

suggested more specific language be added to the existing recommendations. During this period, LCAP Asst. Director Lopez sat at the laptop in the front of the room and edited the recommendations per the comments being made by DELAC members, with the documented projected on the overhead screen so that the entire room could see the changes he was making.

Before the pot luck started there was one more guest who spoke, the district's Title I Coordinator, Julie Nakamura. She was there to discuss the district's "Parent Involvement Policy in Title I Funded Schools" and take questions from DELAC members regarding the policy. Unfortunately, she was only provided 1 minute, so she quickly told parents they had received a copy of the policy as part of the day's meeting packet. She reminded DELAC members that funds existed at their school sites for parent training and encouraged parents to request training at their school sites.

Finally there was an awards celebration, where Silvia recognized DELAC members who had attended every or nearly every DELAC meeting of the year. These individuals were called to the front of the room and presented with a certificate signed by Silvia, the LCAP Director, and the Superintendent. Then the meeting was formally adjourned.

The summary of the meetings reveals that district officials were not continuously providing DELAC members with updates or other information about LCAP throughout the year. Instead they waited until the last three months of the year to begin having conversations about LCAP. No explanation was ever provided by district officials as to the reason for waiting until the last quarter of the year, but at a June school board meeting LCAP Director Centeno provided a timeline to board members, outlining all the activities that had been taking place in the district throughout the year. The table below contains a list of LCAP activities named by LCAP Director Centeno at that school board meeting.

Table 7
Timeline of LCAP Activities Happening in the District Throughout the 2016-2017 Academic Year.

<u>Month</u>	<u>Activity</u>
Jun. 2016	Hearing and adoption of LCAP by school board
Aug. 2016	LCAP update with assessment data presented to the school board
Sep. 2016	LCAP and Strategic Plan alignment work taking place in the district
Oct. 2016	Site council institute, aligning district work with school level work
Nov. 2016	LCAP and Strategic Plan update provided to school board
Dec. 2016	Stakeholder focus group, small groups and one-on-one sessions ^a
Jan. 2017	Stakeholder feedback reviewed by LCAP Director's staff
Feb. 2017	LCAP goal development
Mar. 2017	LCAP development; California's new dashboard (assessment data related to 8 state priorities) presented at school board meeting
Apr. 2017	Development of main LCAP plan components [also in April, the first LCAP meeting with DELAC]
May 2017	Formal consultations with advisory groups throughout district
Jun. 2017	Hearing and adoption of LCAP by school board
<i>Note.</i> The timeline of LCAP activities is based on the LCAP Director's presentation to the school board during the June 12, 2017 school board meeting.	
^a Details about the participants or the activities of these focus groups not provided during LCAP Director's presentation.	

From the timeline presented at the June 12, 2017 school board meeting, it appears major work was being done to the LCAP (for instant, stakeholder feedback reviewed in January and goal development in February). These seem like important events related to the district's LCAP, and discussions that DELAC members were being kept out of.

The meeting synopsis also suggests that district officials, more specifically the LCAP Director, struggled to provide meaningful ways to engage DELAC members in LCAP activities. For instance, in April, when he had DELAC members complete the "LCAP Data Feedback Form" based on incomplete outdated data report. There was also the May meeting, when he distributed the one-page line-item budget that provided few details, then asked DELAC members to provide comments, seemed like an effective way to gather meaningful input from *las mamás*. While both of these instances "count" as gathering input from DELAC members, when analyzed

closely, they were activities that lacked context and substance. Moreover, what LCAP was (its goals and how it operates) never clearly stated, nor was what role DELAC members had in the process. It was not clear why the LCAP process had been carried out this way, but as is discussed next, *how* LCAP discussions were carried out in DELAC impacted the quality of engagement.

The Experiences of *Mamás* in the Process

In this next section I will address the experiences of *las mamás* during the DELAC meeting. The observations, interviews, and *pláticas* uncovered numerous challenges that inhibited participation of *las mamás* in the LCAP process.

No estamos unidos (We are not united). A common comment I heard from *mamás* was the lack of unity among Latin@ parents. They felt this division was impeding their ability to advocate for student needs. As Carolina said during my interview with her, “Pero si no nos unimos, si no tenemos una misma causa, pues no podemos hacer nada. (But if we don’t unite, if we don’t have the same cause, then we will not be able to accomplish anything.)” Meeting observations seemed to illustrate how disunity would occur between DELAC members. For instance, at one meeting the issue about parent involvement was raised by a mother. She asked Superintendent Waldman what the district planned to do to increase the involvement of parents of EL students. Instead of responding, another DELAC mother jumped in, stating it was incumbent upon parents to involve themselves in schools. At that point, Superintendent Waldman called on the next *mamá*. While these types of exchanges were not a constant, they did occur a few times and left a sense that not all DELAC members were in agreement about issues in schools or whose role it was to address them.

Obstructing informed recommendations. While *las mamás* understood that providing recommendations was their role and purpose, they also had doubts about the district’s support in

helping them fulfill their function. As Sofia said when reflecting on a recent meeting where they were asked to provide their recommendations to the board,

No estamos enfocados en – ellos mismos nos distraen con una cosita allá y una cosita acá. Saben que uno, si uno no está como familiarizado con ese proceso es difícil, no es fácil conectar una cosa con la otra y ver cómo ellos mueven las cosas. (We are not focused in — they [district officials] distract us with a little thing here and a little thing there. They know, if one is not familiar with that process it is difficult, it is not easy to connect one thing with another and see how they navigate things.)

They wanted to give *informed* recommendations, but also found there was not sufficient time allowed in meetings to develop recommendations. As Tanya and Antonia discuss below, they felt rushed at every meeting:

Antonia: No hay recepción.

Tanya: Exactamente, no tenemos recepción. No hay mucho tiempo de entender, de procesar la información que se nos da y ahora sí dar una opinión como informada. Estamos casi que obligados a dar una opinión apresurada que –

Antonia: Y si eso te lo permiten.

(Antonia: There is no reception. [Questions aren't allowed.]

Tanya: Exactly, we receive no reception. [We are not allowed to ask questions.] There is not much time to understand, to process the information that she gives us and now to give an informed opinion. We are almost forced to give a hasty opinion

—
Antonia: And only if they allow you.)

As Tanya and Antonia expressed in an idea of “no recepción” literally meaning there was not reception, but more specifically meaning they were not allowed to ask questions - there was no space allowed for that. Implied in their exchange is the interest in giving informed recommendations for the LCAP, but they were not provided with sufficient time to process data they were asked to provide recommendations about. Rushing through presentations and running out of time were common occurrences observed in DELAC meetings. The agendas were always packed, and the two hours allotted did not seem to suffice. It seemed more time was needed to unpack the materials that were being discussed.

Gaps in translation and interpretation support.

Siempre he pensado que el inglés te abre muchas puertas. (I have always thought that English opens many doors.) — Monica, mamá-participant

Language and English fluency were prominent themes that emerged from the mothers. Monica's quote above captures the spirit of the numerous comments that were made by *las mamás* during interviews and *pláticas*. Many of *las mamás* connected English fluency with power and access. For instance, Alma believed a parent who was fluent in English was treated differently from a parent who was not fluent in English. Describing English fluency as a form “de estar preparado” (to be prepared, to be formerly educated), Alma asserted when the district knows a parent speaks and understands English, they take notice and do not simply disregard them as they would a monolingual Spanish-speaking parent.

Some *mamás* discussed lack of bilingual staff as a major barrier preventing parents from becoming involved in parent committees in the first place. For example, Yaneli pointed out that the very lack of bilingual staff in front offices discouraged parents who may also be unfamiliar with the U.S. school system. A combination of unfamiliarity of the system and staff who do not speak your language creates an unwelcoming environment, Yaneli explained. Carolina agreed but added that some parents unfamiliar with the school system chose not to get involved in parent committees because they perceive English fluency as a requirement for participation.

Ana offered a different perspective, sharing her frustration when she realizes her comments made during meetings are not being translated correctly or fully.

Es difícil porque tú de das cuenta de que quién te está traduciendo no está traduciendo exactamente lo que tú quieres decir y se desespera uno porque el idioma siempre va a ser una barrera aquí. (It's hard because you realize the person who is translating is not translating exactly what you mean, and one feels hopeless because language will always be a barrier here.)

Ana understood English enough to be able to recognize when important pieces of her statements were not being properly communicated. The constant struggle to communicate effectively made

her feel a sense of hopelessness. Ana also discussed her appreciation for the bilingual principals at the high school and middle school her children attended. She asserted having principals who were fluent in Spanish was an advantage for parents. Ana described these principals making her feel “a gusto y tranquila” (satisfied and relaxed) because she felt they understood her. Ana explained that having a well-trained interpreter at meetings was also an advantage for parents, because it eliminated the worry of not being correctly or fully understood.

Incorrect or incomplete translations inhibited the few moments DELAC members were provided to communicate their concerns or insights about LCAP to district officials. Discussions were already limited in time (ranging from 4 minutes to 45 minutes) and in frequency (the LCAP was explicitly discussed at 4 of the 9 meetings held during the year). Members were eager to contribute when they were given the opportunity to provide their input, and they were left disappointed when their moment was spoiled by incomplete or inaccurate communication.

Tanya noted that the side comments that happened among English speakers were not translated, so those pieces of information were all left out:

Aquí la ventaja es aprender inglés para saber qué están diciendo. Yo quiero saber qué dicen. Cuando no están traduciendo y cosas importantes se platican fuera de lo que es la traducción y a veces no sabes qué están diciendo yo no me siento a gusto de no saber qué están diciendo.

(Here the advantage is learning English to know what they are saying. I want to know what they are saying. When they are not translating and important things are being talked about outside of what is being translated and at times you do not know what they are saying, I do not feel comfortable not knowing what is being said.)

Tanya wanted to understand all that was being said in meetings, even side bar conversations. It was those more exclusive conversations that were not being translated. Moreover, as the district's translator mentioned to a guest presenter during the February DELAC meeting, there were bits of information being left untranslated. These little bits of information could transform the meaning of what was being communicated at that moment, leaving DELAC

members who were dependent on translation, confused, frustrated, and perhaps discouraged some from returning to future meetings.

English as a source of power. An interesting phenomenon emerged from the observations I have made in relation to the use and non-use of the English language during meetings. Something that captured my attention was the way some *mamás* used English. For instance, a *mamá*, whose dominant language was Spanish, chose to ask a question in English, even though a translator is present. At the same meeting, the same *mamá* would later ask a question in Spanish. I wondered why they would fluctuate between the two languages and what would prompt a *mamá* to speak in English instead of Spanish. When I asked about this during interviews, many of the *mamás* talked about the power they perceived English speakers to hold. Monica explained,

Es como una defensa, yo lo uso como una defensa el contestarles o preguntarles en inglés, porque a veces siento que las personas...te ven como menos cuando no hablas en inglés, entonces por eso lo utilizo como una defensa.
(It's like a form of defense, I use it like a form of defense, responding or asking questions in English, because sometimes I think that people...look at you as lesser when you don't speak English, so that is why I used it as a defense.) —
Monica, parent-participant

Monica described being able to respond or ask questions in English as a form of defense she had against those who thought less of parents who were perceived as being monolingual Spanish-speakers. Those who altered between English and Spanish explained they did so to demonstrate that they were not dependent on translators to participate and were able to express their viewpoints at meetings. For these *mamás*, English was a source of empowerment.

Technology Glitches, Missed Information

At meetings, there were often problems with the translation equipment. Silvia, the district coordinator for DELAC, ran the meetings primarily in English and an interpreter would translate in real-time. With a cupped hand over his mouth, he would speak into a microphone that was

connected to wireless headsets worn by Spanish-dominant speakers in attendance. This meant a large portion of the participants were following along with the help of the interpreter and these headsets. At least once at every meeting there would be a point when loud static could be heard coming from the headsets. At times meetings were stopped to fix headset problems. But more than the annoyance of static were the important pieces of information that were missed when problems did arise with the headsets. Precious minutes would be lost as equipment was fixed, and at times individual participants would simply leave the hall to exchange headsets while the meeting continued.

In addition to technology troubles, the interpreter himself would miss information. This happened most often when presenters would speak quickly and would not break periodically, making it difficult for the interpreter to keep up. More than once the interpreter stopped a presenter and asked that they slow down and repeat what they had said. This would happen at critical moments when a LCAP Asst. Director would be explaining budgets or funding sources, such as the kinds of expenditures that were allowable and not allowable under LCFF.

Translation related problems seemed especially pronounced at the April DELAC meeting where I recorded four separate moments when issues related to translation were recorded. One such moment came when the LCAP Asst. Director was in the middle of explaining why parents should pay more attention to LCAP rather than Title I funds, “because there’s more state money than federal money...LCAP plans are adjusted every single year.” He then launched into a list of what had been funded with LCFF concentration and supplemental funds, the precise funds generated by EL and other subgroups of students. The LCAP Asst. Director spoke very quickly and was very animated, moving about the room as he spoke. The translator had been working non-stop for one hour when he interrupted the presentation saying, “give me a second. I got

lost.” The LCAP Asst. Director responded by slowing down a bit but did not repeat the points that had passed.

Leaving out critical pieces of information left DELAC members unclear and not properly armed with the full and correct information they needed to take back to their school sites. This would often result in confusion and disagreements between parents and their principals and school site councils. It also inhibited DELAC members’ abilities to effectively advocate for particular programs and services for EL students, eroding their voices and their role in LCAP.

An additional challenge made visible from an interview with the district’s DELAC interpreter was a severely understaffed district translator/interpreter office. Five employees were responsible for providing interpretation services at all the district-wide meetings (including DELAC, Title I, Superintendent’s Parent Forum, and Special Education), translating documents distributed throughout the district (including the LCAP and all minutes from the above mentioned meetings), being the point of contact for the Spanish-language news media, and providing translation and/or interpretation services for school sites. The five employees were stretched thin and the results were made evident when documents and presentation slides had not been translated in time for DELAC meetings. It was not clear why so few employees comprised the overloaded department, but during the interview the interpreter shared his frustration at sometimes being introduced at meetings as *just* the interpreter. He added that being a good interpreter took skill and training, and the value of his abilities was not fully appreciated by everyone in the district office. That sentiment seemed corroborated when the LCAP Asst. Director joked during that April meeting that the translator had not had his coffee yet, that was why he could not keep up.

Unanswered Questions, Lack of Follow Up

Following up with DELAC members was something both Superintendent Waldman and LCAP Asst. Director Lopez had identified as an important aspect to parent involvement. As mentioned earlier, Superintendent Waldman understood that parents would stop being involved if they never received follow up information related to the ideas, questions, and recommendations they would make during meetings. At the April DELAC meeting, LCAP Asst. Director Lopez made a public pledge to return to DELAC and provide updates about the recommendations the group made during meetings. Still, follow up was not happening, most notably with those questions DELAC members would submit on exit surveys, explained next.

The last page of every meeting packet was a pink sheet with “DELAC Meeting Exit Survey” written across the top. In English, Spanish, and Khmer, three questions were listed asking for members to rate: 1) whether the meeting was a productive use of their time, 2) were they provided with helpful information to work more effectively, and 3) they had opportunities to share their views. “Comments” appeared below the questions, with a very small space where members could write their feedback or questions.

On the back side of the pink form was a section called “Parent Representative Feedback.” In English, Spanish, and Khmer, DELAC members were asked to write the questions, concerns, and ideas they wanted to share. It also included a place where the person filling out the form would indicate whether they wanted to be contacted by phone with a response, or if they wanted their question answered at the next DELAC meeting. A person was then supposed to write their name and provide a phone number.

Silvia would call attention to these pink “DELAC Meeting Exit Survey” forms during meetings when everyone with a raised hand was not able to ask their question. Silvia would direct DELAC members to write their questions on this pink sheet. “Apúntenlo en su papel

(Write it down on your paper),” Silvia would say (in Spanish). The trouble was there was never any follow up to the questions, concerns, or ideas captured on those forms, and this frustrated some *mamás* including Elena who said,

Cuando quieres preguntar, “Apúntenlo en su papel.” Y nunca ha habido un foro que diga, “Okey. La respuesta a su comentario es tal.” Nunca la hay.
(When you want to ask a question, “Write it down on your paper.” And there has never been a forum where they say, “OK. The response to your commentary is this.” There never is [any follow up.]

Elena pointed out that there was never any follow up where what had been submitted was later addressed. She went on to explain that her frustration was not only directed at Silvia, but also at parents who never demanded a follow up:

Falta que la comunidad [diga], “Sabe qué, yo el mes pasado dejé apuntado esta pregunta. Denme la respuesta.” Pero nadie se para a decir, “Ey, ¿cuál es mi respuesta?” O, “sabe que, usted dijo ahí que me iban a llamar por teléfono y nunca me han llamado. Estoy esperando cuál es la respuesta.”
(What is missing is that the community [say], “You know what, last month I wrote this question. Give me the response.” But no one ever stands to say, “Hey, what is my response?” Or, “You know, you said you would call me, and you never called me. I am waiting for the response.”

The lack of follow up not only frustrated members like Elena, it seemed other *mamás* were becoming accustomed to the district’s non-response to questions. For instance, during a small group discussion activity in April, Ana had a question about the data that was being reviewed. LCAP Asst. Director Lopez was not able to answer her question (why the report read “N/A” for EL students), but suggested she write down her question. Ana responded, in a sarcastic way, that at the next meeting the question would be answered. LCAP Asst. Director Lopez picked up on her comment and reiterated the pledge he had made earlier in the meeting, to provide follow up to DELAC members. At the next meeting, new data reports were presented to DELAC members, but these were also incomplete and did not address Ana’s questions from the previous month.

The steps LCAP Asst. Director Lopez, with his pledge to provide follow up to parents made at the beginning of the April meeting, and Superintendent Waldman’s synthesis of DELAC

member recommendations during the May meeting seemed to suggest the district was trying to be more responsive to parents. The actions gave the impression that DELAC members were being listened to, yet when the end of the year came, there was no follow up about whether or how any of the DELAC recommendations had influenced decisions written into the district's final LCAP.

The limited discussion also impacted the exchange of information that was supposed to take place at these meetings. After all, one of the primary functions of DELAC was to provide advice, input, and feedback. The questions, concerns, and ideas captured in the feedback forms could inform the feedback provided by DELAC members. Moreover, it was a loss of information exchange that could lead to strengthening networks, gaining new perspectives, motivation, and learning about indispensable resources.

Contradictory Messages from District Officials about Parent Power

Ustedes son las voces de los niños. (You are the voices of the children.) — Silvia, district DELAC Coordinator

The impassioned remarks made by Silvia, the Coordinator for DELAC, came in the middle of a talk about the importance of EL parent involvement in both district-wide and school-level committees. The approximately 70 mostly Latina immigrant mothers in the large meeting hall fell quiet as Silvia continued. She insisted that only through their engagement would they fulfill their roles as advocates for emergent bilinguals in the district. Moreover, she insisted that they be active stakeholders, which she described as posing critical questions about programs, student outcomes, and funding decisions at meetings with the Superintendent and school principals.

The level of parent engagement described by Silvia seemed aligned with the level of involvement promoted by many nonprofit organizations urging for high levels of stakeholder involvement (e.g., the California Endowment (2019), Families in Schools (n.d.), and Public

Advocates (2018)). The three times when the district Superintendent attended the DELAC meetings, he communicated a similar message to parents, urging them to press their principals for greater transparency about school budgets and program evaluation. At one DELAC meeting he said, “You guys have control over school budgets through site councils” and told them they had a right to know how well a program worked. He also explained the rules he had set for approving funding requests from site councils and specified he would only approve those that were data-driven and explicitly tied to student learning.

Unfortunately, in all his urging and prodding to have DELAC members hold principals and site councils accountable by asking for data and results, he never once acknowledged the power differential between Latina immigrant mothers and school administrators and teachers. Nor did he ever offer specific strategies that parents could use when broaching potentially sensitive, political conversations. Moreover, he never led DELAC members in a *critical* dialogue; his actions contradicted his own message of power to parents.

“Eso es mentira (That is a lie),” responded Alma when I asked her about the power parents have according to DELAC Coordinator Silvia and Superintendent Waldman. She explained, “Ella [Silvia] te puede decir eso, pero cuando tú vas a tu escuela y tú le dices...recomendaciones...al final de cuentas, la directora hacía otra cosa. (She [Silvia] can tell you that, but when you go to your school and you tell them...recommendations...in the end the principal does something else.)” Alma said in her experience, when recommendations were made at a meeting, the principal would agree to fund the request, but the program would never get funded and, when asked, the principal would never provide an explanation. Carolina offered a similar example,

A mí me ha tocado dar recomendaciones y estar en el concilio. Entonces [yo] sí decía, “O pues es que las recomendaciones son estos.” Entonces ya la directora...dice, “Pero necesitamos esto y esto y esto y esto.” Entonces digo, “Y las recomendaciones de los padres, ¿dónde quedan?” Porque se supone que para eso están las reuniones, de que los

padres van a hacer las recomendaciones porque supone que queremos algo...Pero ella [la directora] ya tiene su plan...Al fin y al cabo ellos hacen lo que ellos quieren.
(I have had to give the recommendations and be at the [school site] council. So I would say, "Well it is that the recommendations are these." Then the principal...says, "But we need this and this and this and this." So then I ask, "And the parent recommendations, where are they?" Because that's what the meetings are supposed to be for, where the parents go to make their recommendations because it is presumed that we parents want something...But [the principal] already has her plan...In the end they do what they want.)

While parents were doing their part, following the process and method suggested by Silvia and other district officials, and making ELAC recommendations at school site council meetings, it seemed in some cases the principal would make their own decisions anyway. If parents chose to press on, they also feared retaliation, a topic discussed next.

Retaliation

Rarely addressed were the worries parents had about retaliation. When I asked about this in interviews with district representatives, they insisted nothing of the sort would happen and that these worries were all "made up in the heads" of parents. LCAP Asst. Director Lopez went on to explain principals were too busy to spend time retaliating against parents. Yet, many of my participants recounted being ostracized and the unfair disciplinary actions taken against their children after asking probing questions during school level meetings. As one of *las mamás* put it, "Cuando empiezas a cuestionar ya, ya no eres una persona agradable. (When you start to ask questions, you are no longer a nice person.)" The Superintendent and other district officials were asking parents to hold school administrators accountable, ask Silvia said in one DELAC meeting, "you have to become your site's accountant." They urged DELAC parents to ask questions, ask for budgets, ask for reports on student outcomes as they related to particular programs they had funded the previous year. But district officials did this without first equipping DELAC parents with effective strategies on how to approach a potentially explosive topic, nor did they advise them on what to do if principals and other site staff refused to share the data they asked for. Still,

retaliation was a real fear among *las mamás*, and many of them thought being outspoken during meetings had led to unfair disciplinary actions being taken against their children.

Training

As LCAP Director Centeno explained, DELAC meetings were where parents were trained on various topics including how to advocate for EL students. One of the primary functions of DELAC was to advise the board, through recommendations they formulated at meetings. District officials wanted DELAC members to provide the board with data-informed recommendations after analyzing data about student outcomes and programs and services offered in the district. What was unclear was what constituted “training.” The “training” provided at the meetings were more informational and any skill or behavior being taught to DELAC members was implicit. For instance, the district informed DELAC members about various programs that were available for EL students (Structured English Immersion, English Language Mainstream, and Dual Immersion). Implicit were the asides Silvia would provide when DELAC members would ask questions and she would offer ideas on how to advocate to get these programs at their school sites — mainly organize, strategize, be persistent, and get on site council.

There were a few instances when the district presented DELAC members with statistical reports (e.g., the CORE survey data, Dashboard data), and at times DELAC members had been trained on how to interpret the reports. During the November DELAC meeting, LCAP Asst. Director Lopez did explain how to read the Index Report that compared schools to equivalently situated schools in other districts (mostly based on student demographics). Still, the data set itself was problematic as it made it seem as if low performing schools were doing better than they really were. Also, cases when data was shared with DELAC members, like the November meeting, clear connections were not made to the LCAP. For instance, at that April meeting, when LCAP Director Centeno presented dashboard data to DELAC members and asked

that they identify strengths, weaknesses, and questions/comments in the LCAP Data Feedback Form, no context was provided. District officials did not remind DELAC members what was the purpose and goals of LCAP, nor did they explain how the Dashboard report could help inform the district's LCAP. Overall, the lack of clear and specific explanations about LCAP crushed deliberative discussions from taking place.

Deep Discussions Absent From DELAC Meetings

Ironically, while Silvia and the Superintendent and other district officials claimed parents had the power to change student outcomes through their engagement at the school level, at DELAC meetings parents were shut out of meaningful discussions about district-level budgets, student outcomes, and policy priorities. While it was true that a significant amount of LCAP funds had been directly allocated to school sites (\$13.3 million), that only constituted 10 percent of the LCAP funds distributed to the district. Another \$115 million was left in control at the district level, and based on the meeting observations, DELAC members did not appear to be involved in deciding how those funds would be spent nor engaged in evaluating outcomes related to those investments, even though they were according to the state's official policy (Cal. Educ Code § 52062). Moreover, the lack of opportunities for deep, meaningful engagement about LCAP in DELAC meetings, suggested the district officials were not really interested in carrying out the kind of process where data about student experiences and outcomes could be discussed and deliberated. Moreover, the one-way direction of information implied the district's disinterest, unwillingness, or inability to facilitate discussions to elicit the unique knowledge DELAC members had about emergent bilingual students in the district.

For example, one of four instances when LCAP was explicitly discussed during a DELAC meeting, the Superintendent gave a 4-minute update on LCFF purchases that had been made. It was June, the last meeting of the year, when he announced Chromebooks had been

purchased so that all meetings, include DELAC meetings, could go paperless. His announcement was a surprise as Chromebooks were not an ask or recommendation ever made at DELAC meetings.

Another time, during the very first meeting of the year in October, Silvia, the district's DELAC Coordinator, shared the recommendations that had been made by the DELAC president during an August school board meeting. Silvia read off the seven recommendations, which included a comprehensive English Language Development program specifically for EL students, bilingual front office staff at schools, research into effective interventions to improve English language arts and math test scores, expansion of the bilingual pathway program in the district, effective instructional interventions of ELs and long term ELs, before and after school and intersession programs, and workshops for parents on LCFF, LCAP, and site councils. Unfortunately, Silvia did not share the response from the school board, nor did she say whether any of the recommendations would be funded in the LCAP. While watching a recorded broadcast of school board meeting, I learned that after the DELAC president read her recommendations to the school board, the only response she received was from one board member who said the DELAC recommendations were not specific enough for the board to take action.

At another DELAC meeting where LCAP was discussed, DELAC members were provided with copies of the state's recently released Dashboard data, which illuminated various aspects of academic achievement disaggregated by student group. In small table groups, DELAC members were asked to write what they saw as strengthens, weaknesses, questions, reflections, or suggestions they had about the report. They were to write their insights on a sheet of paper they had been provided. While this may appear as a moment of idea sharing and dialogue, the district did not explicitly link the Dashboard data to the programs and services detailed in the

LCAP. The 10-minute activity became an exercise where members were trying to decipher the meaning of the red, yellow, green, and blue pie charts they were looking at, and the rows that simply read “N/A” due to the fact when the report was printed the EL-specific information had not yet been made available. Moreover, there was no discussion about EL programs and services or about any of the feedback provided on the sheets of paper.

At the next meeting, LCAP Director Centeno returned to read aloud a distilled list of the feedback collected from the prior month’s meeting. There were 4 strengths, 6 weaknesses, and 13 questions, reflections, or suggestions that had formed from the feedback gathered. After the information was presented, the LCAP Director did not open up the meeting for a whole group discussion about the points gathered. Nor was there any explicit conversation about EL performance, programs for ELs, or teacher training, topics contained within the feedback captured from DELAC members. Moreover, when DELAC members would raise questions related to these areas, the Superintendent, LCAP Director, and DELAC Coordinator all had similar responses, which was to redirect DELAC members and have their site councils and principals respond to their questions.

It seemed the district missed an opportunity to use DELAC as a forum for idea sharing. If the space had been opened up so that participants could hear what other schools were doing and have a meaningful dialogue about root causes of student outcomes, perhaps then the insights *mamás* had about these issues could have come up to the surface. Instead, when DELAC participants attempted to raise questions about funding and student outcomes, they would get redirected to their school sites, as described above. District officials would also shut down conversations by responding that a particular concern or question raised was specific to one particular school and would instruct the person to speak to them after the meeting, one-on-one.

This was an effective strategy to contain and control dialogue. One such example happened during the May DELAC meeting.

With the Superintendent and LCAP Director co-facilitating, the presentation was centered on a one-page handout that contained a spreadsheet with four columns and many rows. The title of the handout was called “Budget Summary: Local Control and Accountability Plan (LCAP)” with “Actions and Services,” “2016-17 Revised Plan,” “2017-18 Revised Plan,” and “2018-19 Revised Plan” as the headers in the columns. Below “Actions and Services” were 36 line-items containing broad and vague descriptions along with dollar figures. The last item on the table read, “Total – LCFF Supplemental and Concentration Grants.” Of the 36 line-items in the spreadsheet, only one made specific mention about EL students. This one item read, “Provide support to English Learners and their families” with budget figures of “\$1,280,000” under 2016-17 Revised Plan, “\$1,306,000” under 2017-18 Revised Plan, and “\$1,332,120” under 2018-19 Revised Plan.

To get the discussion started, the Superintendent said he wanted to provide some context. He began explaining that enrollment in the district was dropping and that had led to a decline in funding in the school district. The LCAP Director added that, “about 20% of budget items has something to do with ELs.” As parents began to take a closer look at the spreadsheet, questions began to emerge. Some asked about mental health services in schools. Others asked about the new reclassification exam and whether parents would be informed about the changes. When a question was raised specifically about support for ELs and whether schools were going to be required to publish monthly budget reports, the Superintendent replied that ELs who did not reclassify would always perform below grade level because they were taking tests in a language other than their home language. He added that was why he had given parents “a lot of authority. You have to be the new sheriff in town.” Then he shared that one of the large high schools in the

district had recently implemented Saturday School and something similar could be done at middle and elementary schools. He concluded by saying, “Remember, you guys have control over school budgets through site councils.” But again, he did not offer any specific strategy parents could use at the school sites nor did he say what he and others at the district level would be doing to support parents who attempted to exercise the power he said they had. After taking a few more questions, the Superintendent and LCAP Director departed, leaving Silvia to quickly wrap up the meeting by hurrying through the remaining agenda items.

Although DELAC participants were given the opportunity at this one meeting to ask their own questions, the materials they were provided did not include sufficient detail to have a meaningful discussion about programs and services for emergent bilingual students funded through LCFF supplemental and concentration grant monies. From the one-page spreadsheet that was handed out, DELAC members could not tell what was included as part of the line items such as the \$1.3 million entry that simply read “Provide support to English Learners and their families.” No additional information was provided letting parents know what exactly was included as “support” nor were any reports related to “support” provided at the meeting.

After an entire academic year of listening to Superintendent Waldman, LCAP Asst. Director Lopez, and others emphasize the need to make data-driven recommendations the district seemed to be breaking its own rule in this important instance. Moreover, the Superintendent seemed to suggest he and others had already decided on the contents of the LCAP. At one point during the meeting he said ‘we are...’ describing programs that would be included in the LCAP, implying LCAP decisions had already been made. Thinking about the good relationship he seemed to have with the school board (as noted earlier, the board unanimously accepted every policy he prosed during school board meetings), and his statements during the interview about final approval power lying with the school board, these called into question the sincerity of his

desire of wanting to engage DELAC members in LCAP decision-making processes. Again, this took place during the May DELAC meeting, well *before* the LCAP was presented to the school board for its final approval, which took place near the end of June.

Combined with the absence useful data and actual deliberations, Superintendent Waldman's assertions of parent power and insistence of *critical* parent participation seemed to be more rhetoric than reality. What seemed to be happening, at least at the May DELAC meeting, was an example of the Anderson's (1998) *inauthentic* participatory process, where ultimate power and control remained contained by high-ranking officials. It was actions such as these that illuminated the contradictory nature of district officials and eroded the trust DELAC members had in them. Still, the vague language in the law made it possible for the district to still claim they reviewed LCAP priorities with DELAC parents and collected feedback, thus meeting policy requirements.

Husbands

An unexpected barrier that was raised by *mamás* in my study was the role of husbands and their misperceptions about the purpose of committee involvement.

Y hay muchas injusticias que pasan pero porque la misma gente lo permite porque no se involucra. Y también porque me ha tocado ver que los hombres les pegan a las mujeres porque se involucran, porque ellos piensan que van al mitote, porque muchas nomás la manejan así, si no se fija que dicen, "O, se va al chisme. Haber que chisme agarramos." Y yo les digo que no es un chisme, que tienen que enseñarse a hablar con lo que es, vamos a abogar por nuestros hijos. Traten de cambiarle yo le digo, las palabras, para que no le digan chisme, mitote, nada de eso; es información para que puedan ayudar sus hijos en la educación. Así le tienen que decir, pero es algo tan difícil hacer y es cosas que a mí me ha tocado, que me insulten los hombres de las mujeres que quieren involucrar, las parejas me han dicho cosas feas. Pero le digo...uno tiene que ser fuerte.

(And there are many injustices that happen, but it is because the people allow them because they do not get involved. And also, because I have seen that men beat women because they are involved, because they think they are going to a party, because many people handle it like that, have you seen that they say, "Oh, she is going to the gossip. Let's see what gossip we hear." And I tell them it is not gossip, a wild party, nothing like that; it's information so that they can help their children in their education. That's how they have to say it, but it's very hard to do and these are things that have happened to me,

that I am insulted by the men of the women who are trying to get involved, couples have told me awful things. But I tell you...one has to be strong.) -- Alma, mamá-participant

As explained by Alma, spouses could have significant influence over a *mamás* involvement in school and district committees. Many of the *mamás* in my project talked about their husband's (or ex-husband, in the case of one participant) characterization of committee meetings as a waste of time and a place where people gather primarily to gossip. The mothers shared that they would have to explain to their husbands the benefit of their involvement (e.g., learning how to navigate the U.S. educational system, how to advocate for the children, becoming informed of programs and services available to them and their children in the district) multiple times. Even after hearing of the benefits and the purpose of their involvement, some husbands still preferred that their wives be at home, caring for their children, which equated to keeping a neat, clean home and preparing meals for the family. Husbands' attitudes led some participants to limit their involvement in committees or get into disputes with their partners over the amount of time they spent outside the home. Others created their own work around by getting up extra early to take care of household chores before heading out to committees. They explain that by take care of their chores early their husbands could not accuse them of neglecting the home. They also said it gave them a sense of satisfaction knowing they were able to meet what they saw and accepted as their responsibilities of the home and could continue to be involved in committees.

The experiences of *las mamás* were complex and filled with contradictions. On the one hand district officials would tell DELAC members that their voices mattered, that they were powerful, and that their engagement at their school sites was critical to ensure the needs of emergent bilingual students were being attended to. At the same time, the opportunities for their meaningful engagement at the district level were hindered by poorly structured activities, faulty translation equipment, questionable data, and constricted interaction — all the characteristics of an inauthentic process that retained privilege and power among the highest-ranking district

officials (Anderson, 1998). Yet, *mamás* would continue attending, which seemed perplexing and contrary to literature. But actually, in all the messiness of the LCAP process, these were still a group of mothers who were dedicated and committed to their roles as parent representatives. Moreover, DELAC was providing members with important information about funds, policies, and programs for EL students.

The Consequence of the Participation of *Las Mamás*

Sabiduría es el conocimiento y la experiencia que ellos han acumulado a través de los años porque yo digo que el conocimiento de cualquier persona lo puede aprender pero la sabiduría es la vivencia a través de los años, la experiencia que te da la vida. Entonces, cuando tú los escuchas y aprendes de sus errores y de lo que ellos han vivido, entonces, eso es sabiduría.

(Wisdom is the knowledge and experience that they have accumulated over the years because I say you can learn what others have learned but wisdom is experience over the years, the experience that life gives you. Therefore, when you listen and learn from their mistakes and from what they have lived, then, that is wisdom.) – Alma, mamá-participant

Sabiduría (wisdom) seemed like the most prominent consequence of the participation of *las mamás*. Moreover, what they learned as DELAC representatives in the LCAP process traversed from the personal to the interpersonal and even into the programmatic. While not every one of their insights and ideas were included in the district's LCAP, some of their recommendations did make it up to the school board. In this next section, I address the consequence of their participation as it related to the personal, the interpersonal, and the programmatic.

The Personal

The involvement of *las mamás* in the LCAP process and in DELAC more generally had significant consequences on them personally and to their children.

A source of knowledge and growth.

Me dio como esa cosa de saber más. (It gave me the thing [feeling] of wanting to know more.) – Alma, mamá-participant

One of the most prominent comments I heard among my participants when I asked them the benefit of being involved in groups like DELAC was the knowledge they gained. Every one of them talked about “muy buena información” (good information) they amassed from the meetings. It was in DELAC where they were learning not only about programs, policies, rules, and regulations, but it was also a place where they were learning *how* to advocate. Through role-playing, Silvia would share with them strategies on how to ask for data and budget information from their principals. Of course, the meetings were also problematic in that topics were often rushed through, substantial discussions about student outcomes and potential solutions were missing, and opportunities for authentic input seemed to be lacking. Still, at least to *las mamás* in my study, the information that was provided at DELAC meetings was important to their learning and understanding of the U.S. education system and their role in it. As Antonia explains below, being part of DELAC was a way that she could contribute to the school community:

He aprendido, he ayudado a mis papás de mi escuela en lo que más he podido dándoles informaciones...para las ayudas de las escuelas, todo eso lo he aprendido y me gusta porque es una manera de saber cómo puedes ayudar a tu comunidad.
(I have learned, I have helped parents from my school the best way I could giving them information...for the help in the schools, all of that I have learned and I like it because it is a way to know how you can help your community.)

Like the other mamá-participants in my study, Antonia often talked about wanting to help the children and the school community. It was their interest and passion that led them to remain involved in committees like DELAC, and despite all the problems that existed in it, DELAC provided them with a way to advocate for their communities.

Nuestros hijos – our children. Many of *las mamás* in my study also cited the how their children benefited as a consequence of their participation. In some cases, as discussed earlier, children were the source of retaliation. These *mamás* felt their children were disciplined unfairly for being outspoken mothers. But for other *mamás*, their involvement became something positive for their children. As Elena explained,

Yo estoy porque yo he aprendido de que estando involucrado mis hijas tienen voz. Mis hijas dejaron de ser un número más en la escuela. Mis hijas dejaron de ser un número más en estadísticas de la escuela. Mis hijas aprendieron que tienen una cara, tienen un nombre y tienen a su mamá.” Le dije, “Ya no son esas niñas que van ahí.
(I am here because I have learned by being involved my daughters have a voice. My daughters stopped being another number in their school. My daughters stopped being another school statistic. My daughters learned they have a face, they have a name, and they have their mother.)

As Elena articulated, her involvement had led to her daughters recognizing their own value.

Also, too, as implied in Elena’s quote, teachers took notice of children whose parents were involved in schools. Alma explained,

Porque esa es otra cosa que yo también noté, que cuando nos los papás no se involucran los maestros no se dirigen tanto a esos niños ni les ponen tanta atención.
(Because that is another thing that I noticed, that when the parents are not involved the teachers do not look at those children as much nor do they pay much attention to them.)

Their involvement had positive consequence to their children, and some *mamás* even described additional services their children received such as tutoring, when other parents had been told the classes were full.

Depression. An unexpected finding was the depression and emotional weariness experienced by some *mamás*.

Blanca: Y, ¿sabes? A veces, también involucrarte tanto puede llegarte a enfermar –

Carla: Mhm.

Blanca: Porque el año pasado – el año pasado, eso me provocó. El año pasado hubo tantos problemas, tantos, tantos, tantos que empecé a sufrir de depresiones. Entonces...

Elena: – desgasto emocional.

Blanca: Sí.

(Blanca: And, you know? Sometimes getting too involved can make you sick —

Carla: Mhm.

Blanca: Because last year - last year that happened to me. Last year there were so many problems, many, many, many that I started to suffer from depression. So...

Elena: – emotional weariness.

Blanca: Yes.)

As the exchange above Blanca disclosed the depression she had experienced, explaining that sometimes getting involved can lead to getting sick. Carla appeared to agree with Blanca,

articulating an affirming “mhm.” Elena, too, appeared to understand Blanca, describing the feeling as a sense of “emotional weariness.” The problems Blanca cited were related to her involvement at her school site and the many troubles she and other parents had encountered trying to work with their principal on the school’s budget. Later, Elena would describe the sense of hopelessness she has experienced when nothing comes about after all the work she has put in, concluding, “al final de cuentas, estamos viendo que el director quiere implementarlo para lo que ellos quieran (in the end, we are seeing that the principal wants to implement what they want).” *Mamás* said the emotional distress would lead to a period of inactivity; they would retreat from meetings, recover, and return again. While Silvia, the DELAC Coordinator, Superintendent Waldman, and other district officials never told parents their work would be easy, they also never acknowledged the emotional toll advocacy work could lead to.

Disillusionment. Two years into her official membership in ELAC, Ana had become disillusioned with the messages of parent power communicated at DELAC and other district level meetings. She said, “en las juntas de DELAC...nos animan y nos dicen a lo que tenemos derecho, pues dice...poco a poquito se puede lograr las cosas...No es cierto.” (“At the DELAC...meetings they encourage us and they tell us we have rights, well they say...little by little things can be achieved. It’s not true.”) Ana had been trying to get additional services for EL students at the schools she represented, but so far all of her requests had been denied. As she said in her quote above, she found the messages of parents’ rights were not true. She had been unsuccessful in advocating for items such as additional teachers trained to teach EL students and tutoring for EL students. While she was committed to completing out the year as a parent representative, she mentioned to me she was considering not returning the following year because her efforts to get additional services to EL students were leading nowhere.

The Interpersonal

Capacity building among parents was the most significant interpersonal consequence that occurred related to *las mamás* involvement in LCAP.

Emerging understanding of LCAP. The Superintendent knew the challenges of asking parents to be involved in a task as complex as LCAP saying during the interview, “the big surprise for everybody on the LCAP is how complex school funding is.” In response to this challenge, he said the district had “done training with folks on a regular basis.” He asserted it was important to “break things down to understandable chunks.” In fact, training was something that *las mamás* often talked about in our *pláticas* as well as in meetings. They wanted training to decipher the data they were asked to interpret and base recommendations on. They also wanted better understandings about LCAP, LCFF, and SSC. For some *mamás* they still struggled with keeping straight all of the different acronyms, codes, and funding sources at play in the district, but for others they had a well-developed understanding of the various policies and programs.

Capacity building of Latin@ parent involvement.

Nos dan mucha información en el distrito...A mí se me quedó hace varios años este ejemplo que nos daban de la manzana...Y dice que es como una manzana pelada y tiene sus semillas...si tú tiras esas semillas se pierde la esencia de la manzana, pero si tú siembras esa semilla...vas a tener un día un árbol que te dé muchas manzanas, vas a ver los frutos de esa semilla. Dicen, “Es lo mismo con la información. Si ustedes aquí dejan esta manzana se acabó la información, ustedes se guardan esa información, no la comparten con los demás papás, no van a ver los frutos. Pero si comparten —”
(They give us a lot of information in the district...It stayed with me, an example they gave us a few years ago, about the apple...It says, it’s like a peeled apple and its seeds,...if you throw away the seeds you lose the essence of the apple, but if you plant the seeds...one day you will have a tree that will give you many apples, you will see the fruits of that seed. They said, “It’s the same with the information. If you leave the apple here the information ends [here], you keep the information and do not share it with other parents you won’t see the fruits. But if you share it —”) — Yaneli, mamá-participant

As Yaneli explained, the information that *mamás* learned and distributed back at their school sites and among their friends would lead to a new group of parents who would then become

aware of programs and services available in the district, and ways to navigate the school system.

They were building capacity among Latin@ parents in the district.

Yo estoy trabajando con otros papás y ellos están trabajando conmigo y los estoy preparando, dándoles el conocimiento, diciéndoles qué es el LCAP, que es DELAC, que es DCAC. Y esos papás están en la elementaría ahorita y ellos dicen que sí están seguros que sus hijos van a ir a [ABC Middle School]. ¿Entonces qué estamos haciendo? Trabajando con ellos, tomando talleres de liderazgo para cuando yo me vaya ellos van a quedar ahí. Y esos papás se van a encargar de preparar a otros papás. (I am working with other parents and they are working with me and I am training them, giving them knowledge, telling them what is LCAP, what is DELAC, what is DCAC [the Title I district level meetings]. And those parents are at the elementary school right now and they children will go to [ABC Middle School]. So what are we doing? Working with them, giving them workshops in leadership so that when I leave they will be there. And those parents are going to be in charge of training other parents.) — Alma, mamá-participant

Other *mamás*, such as Alma (quoted above), Tanya, and Carolina, were using their knowledge to train other parents. They were providing their own workshops, separate for those offered through the district, in essence creating a pipeline of knowledgeable parents involved in district committees and in LCAP. Interestingly, constructing a pipeline was a goal of LCAP Director Centeno:

You need to have a pipeline of parents that are prepared to step into these leadership roles. That's hard. That part is hard. In some cases, for some schools, they'll tell me, "we're struggling" just to get the members that they currently have right now to show up. So now you're talking about a cadre of people who are ready to take on the extra role is a completely different question. It's hard.

While LCAP Director Centeno was struggling to figure out how to create a pipeline, Alma, Tanya, and Carolina were busy already doing so. If the district had recognized the efforts these *mamás* were making, training an incoming set of parents. District officials such as LCAP Director Centeno could have learned partnered with these *mamás* to perhaps strengthen and expanded the pipeline.

The Programmatic

In meetings, *pláticas*, and interviews, *las mamás* conveyed their recommendations to support emergent bilinguals and their families in the district. Top among their recommendations were training for parents, quality teachers, and supplemental instructional services for emergent bilingual students. As discussed below, DELAC members and *mamás* in my study based their recommendations on conversations they had with other parents and their knowledge about the experiences of their children in the EL program at their school site, and the experiences of their children's friends. Unfortunately, not all of the recommendations made by DELAC members were included in the LCAP.

Training for parents. A common recommendation made at DELAC meetings and during interviews and *pláticas* was for training to be provided to parents. DELAC members, including *mamás* in my study, wanted the district to provide workshops that would delve deeper into topics such as LCAP, LCFF, and SSC. As Antonia and Tanya mentioned during a *plática*, DELAC meetings were often rushed and sufficient time was not allotted for parents to really understand or discuss topics on the agendas. In fact, training was a required task that district had to provide to parents per state code (CDE, 2018a). Still, what parents such as *las mamás* were recommending were in-depth trainings beyond the ones already provided by Silvia in DELAC meetings, which were much more informational presentations rather than trainings. Interestingly, a one-day Saturday workshop was something new the district had implemented during the observation year. While it was only one day, at the beginning of the year, the Superintendent, LCAP Director, and LCAP Asst. Director all remarked how well received the training had been among parent-participants.

Other *mamás* recommended training for all parents of emergent bilinguals. A source of frustration among many of my participants was the lack of knowledge about the reclassification

process, ELAC, and DELAC at their school sites. Tanya and other *mamás* noted the importance for the district “que capaciten” (build the capacity/knowledge) parents of emergent bilinguals,

Si ellos [padres] entendieran esas gráficas y hubiera talleres de eso sería diferente porque en las juntas yo sé que no es posible que toda la gente capte todo eso. Pero habiendo talleres para los papás que están sus hijos aprendiendo inglés, deberían de estar haciendo estos talleres y no los hay.

(If parents understood those graphs and if there were trainings on it things would be different because in the meetings I know that it is not possible for people to capture all that. But with workshops for parents whose children are learning English, they should be doing those workshops but they are not.) — Tanya, mamá-participant

Also, *mamás* such as Monica and Elena knew from their own experiences doing outreach that some parents and caregivers of emergent bilingual students did not know their children were classified as ELs in the district. The parents thought it impossible that their children were EL since they spoke English at home. Monica suspected that parents did not realize when they filled out enrollment paperwork and listed Spanish as the primary language spoken in the home, that their children were automatically classified as EL. It was this unique knowledge that *mamás* in my study had because of their contact with other parents. The district could develop systems to better understand the extent of this problem in the district and create corrective measures, instead this knowledge that was being left untapped by the district. Unfortunately training for parents was not included in the district’s LCAP.

Quality teachers.

Los niños tienen la capacidad de aprender, ellos van a aprender lo que les van enseñar y cómo les se van a enseñar. Porque una cosa es de que hay un maestro que tenga conocimiento de lo que es la clase y otra cosa es un maestro que tenga la habilidad para enseñar esa clase. Entonces yo lo que quiero que tengan un maestro que tengan la habilidad para enseñar esta clase y que tengan unos maestros que les den un taller especial en qué área estamos y conozca nuestra comunidad las necesidades nuestra comunidad, que tengan corazón para enseñar no cabeza, y las dos cosas. Eso es lo que necesitan las escuelas para salir adelante.

(The children have the capacity to learn, they will learn what they are taught and how they are taught. Because one thing is to have a teacher who is familiar with a classroom and another is a teacher who has the ability to teach a class. Then what I want are teachers who have the ability to teach this class and that there be special workshops for teachers [to show them] the area where we are and to be familiar with our community the

needs of our community, to have a heart to teach not a head, both things. That's what schools need to get ahead.) -- Alma, mamá-participant

One of the most common concerns among the *mamás* in my case study was the quality of teachers in schools. Alma spoke of wanting to have teachers who were familiar with the community where they taught, and that they have a heart and mind for teaching. Quality teachers for emergent bilingual students was not only a prevalent point raised by *mamás* in my study, but also raised by others at DELAC members in meetings. Questions about who was qualified to teach EL students were a point raised at more than one meeting. Silvia would always make it clear that ELD teachers had to be certified and credentialed to teach EL students. One of the official recommendations DELAC sent to school board was: Create additional continuous trainings for all teachers to better serve English Learners, Long Term English Learners and RFEPS in math, English and English Language Development (ELD). While this precise recommendation was not included in the LCAP, a version of it was. The LCAP contained plans to hire more specialists, allocate funds for teacher training, and provide additional instructional services for EL students. Still, the entries were vague and broad, and they did not include details such as where specialist would be working, or which teachers would be eligible for training, or what kind of instructional support would be provided.

Supplemental instructional services for emergent bilinguals. In addition to qualified teachers, *mamás* also recommended supplemental instructional services to be provided to emergent bilingual students in the district. Actually, many *mamás* involved with the Migrant Education Program credited the program's instruction on Saturday school as helping their children advance academically. "Es otro día de instrucción" (It's another day of instruction), commented Dolores. Saturday school was also promoted among the district staff, including the Superintendent and Silvia, both who suggested parents recommend it as a program to have their school site council fund. In fact, one of the recommendations made by DELAC to the school

was, “Continue to provide and implement research-based intervention programs either before, after school and/or during summer months to ensure that all EL students’ academic needs are being targeted and met through supplementary instructional programs.” This recommendation was also included in the district’s final LCAP of the year, although details about which schools will have these services and for how long was not disclosed.

Two Significant Events During the Course of the Observation Year

Two significant events took place during the course of the observation year that added another layer to the story of the *Rancho los Nietos* case study: a) the public response the Superintendent and school board took pledging their support for immigrant, undocumented students and families after the election of Trump as president and b) the Uniform Complaint Procedure filed against the district alleging it misused LCFF monies intended for English learners and other subgroups of students. These were significant events, the first illustrating the district’s proactive and public posture, declaring its support and protection of immigrants, which presumably included many emergent bilinguals and/or their families. The second was a formal complaint filed against the district, accusing it of having misspent LCFF monies intended for high-need students including those classified as English learners.

Public Statements and Resolutions Supporting Undocumented Students and Families

After a campaign that denigrated Latin@ immigrants, in November 2016, Donald Trump was elected as U.S. president. His words and the uptick in reported increases ICE raids stressed many of the families of the *mamás* in my study. Out of respect I never asked any of my participants about their legal status (having lived in a mixed status family for a period of my life, I knew that information was only to be shared when absolutely necessary.) Still, through our numerous conversations I did learn that some of them were from mixed status families and would be directly affected by the increase threat of deportation. Gándara and Ee (2018) found the

threat of deportation had led to an increase in behavioral and emotional problems, heightened levels of stress, and growing rates of absenteeism among immigrant student populations. They also found decreased levels in parent involvement related to fears of increased immigration enforcement (Gándara & Ee, 2018). EdSource (2017) estimated that 1 in 8 children in California schools has at least one undocumented parent. A recent report published by the New American Economy (2018) estimated 24 percent of the immigrant population living in *Rancho los Nietos* was undocumented. Also, using U.S. Census data as a proxy, approximately one-third of people living in the *Rancho los Nietos* area were foreign-born and 44 percent of the population spoke a language other than English, Spanish being the most common language spoken (U.S. Census Bureau, 2014). Looking at the EL population in the district, nearly 7,000 students classified as EL had been enrolled in U.S. schools for under 3 years (DataQuest, 2013), suggesting among these students there might be some undocumented students or children of undocumented parents, a population directly impacted by the increased threat created with enhanced raids.

Two weeks after the national election, the Superintendent published a letter in both English and Spanish, first proclaiming his thanks to families for a successful start of the school year, then stating the district would not be denying services to children or families based on immigration status. The letter read in part,

Algunos de nuestros estudiantes han expresado preocupación respecto a la manera en que una situación migratoria podría afectarlos a ellos, a su familia y amigos. Me gustaría asegurarles a estos estudiantes y a sus familias que nosotros no le negaremos nuestros servicios a nadie ni participaremos en ningún tipo de acción que exija el cumplimiento de alguna ley basada en una situación migratoria. Esa no es nuestra función. De hecho, nuestros consejeros escolares y el resto del personal de nuestras escuelas están listos para brindarle ayuda a cualquier estudiante que esté preocupado acerca de cualquier aspecto relacionado con su futuro. Nosotros estamos aquí para brindarles nuestro apoyo, y no los abandonaremos.

(Some of our students have expressed concern about how immigration status might affect them, their families and their friends. I would like to reassure these students and their families that we will not deny services, and we will not participate in enforcement actions, based upon immigration status. That is not our role. In fact, our counselors and

other staff at our schools stand ready to assist any child who is worried about any aspect of their future. We are here to support you, and we will not abandon you.)

In the letter, Superintendent Waldman acknowledged the anxiety and stress experienced by students and families in the district, and declared the district's unwavering support to those students and families ("we will not abandon you"). It was (and still is) a stressful time especially for undocumented or mixed status families, which included many of my participants.

Interestingly the Superintendent's letter was never discussed or brought up at any DELAC meeting.

When I asked my participants about the Superintendent's letter, they did not have much to say about it. They had more to say about how the threat of ICE raids was terrorizing their families and communities. In the early months of the Trump presidency ICE raids increased in communities throughout the U.S., including in *Rancho los Nietos* (Schmidt, 2017; U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, 2017). Participants in my study told me of the fear they felt. One reported hearing about an ICE stops at intersections near her children's schools and the mental distress experienced by her elementary-age son.

In February 2017, the school board responded to the growing concerns in the community by adopting a resolution proclaiming its support for immigrant and undocumented families in the district and declaring itself a Safe Zone. The letter published by the board stated in part,

As your elected school board, we will continue to welcome and protect all students. We will do everything in our power to prevent unwarranted intrusions or distractions that might interfere with the high-quality teaching and learning that happens every day in our schools.

The board took a formal, public position, affirming its support for undocumented students, and went on to resolve to require all after-school providers and other contractors doing business with the district also abide by the resolution.

At the March DELAC meeting, which took place after the adoption of the resolution, Silvia provided a copy of the resolution to all attendees. She told attendees that she had been receiving a lot of phone calls from parents asking if they should take their children to school. In DELAC, Silvia encouraged parents to continue to take their children to school, and asked members if any had questions about the resolution. The room was silent, and no comments were made. While my participants openly shared with me the terror they were experiencing, it seemed like a deeply personal topic that perhaps DELAC members felt uncomfortable talking about in a large, public, district forum.

Uniform Complaint Procedure filed against district

In early April 2017, a Uniform Complaint Procedure (UCP) was filed against the district alleging it had misspent \$41 million in LCFF supplemental and concentration funds (Fensterwald, 2017), the very funds generated by EL, low-income, and foster youth. Ironically, it was filed the month immediately following UCP training conducted at the DELAC meeting. In the UCP the complainants, which included two mothers of emergent bilingual students (not participants of this study) and three non-profit organizations, accused the district of having violated the requirement to spend those monies on high-need students. Instead, according to the complaint, the district planned to use those monies on salaries and pensions (\$21.4 million), instructional materials (\$17 million), and to make technology improvements (\$2.5 million) across the district (Fensterwald, 2017) and not specifically on low-income, foster, or English learner students. The complainants wanted the district to amend the LCAP it had adopted in June 2016, and either reallocate funds or justify how those spending plans complied with state law and were benefiting the high-need students that had generated the supplemental and concentration funds (California Endowment, 2017).

At no meeting that I attended did district officials ever mention the UCP, nor did any attendees ever ask about it. Some of the *mamás* in my study were aware of the UCP, they had learned about it through the nonprofit organization they were involved with. Here is a snippet from a *plática*. We had been discussing the absence of LCAP Director Centeno at this year's meetings when the UCP came up:

Tanya: Y también hay algo, bueno, yo estoy en muchos grupos comunitarios, en uno de ellos hay una, no es demanda, pero es una – que será, no sé cómo se le puede llamar, no es una demanda. Porque dicen que ha habido fondos, ellos tienen por ejemplo cuánto les da el estado de dinero y eso es público. Y hay cosas en que se ha gastado ese dinero que también es público y tienen que ponerlo. Entonces ellos encuentran que hay cierta cantidad de 3 años hacia aquí, 40,000, no sé si sean 40,000 o 40 millones, no me recuerdo, por 3 años consecutivos que nadie sabe qué pasó con ese dinero. Entonces ellos están, el grupo –

Esperanza: Tratando de investigar.

Tanya: Están, hicieron – no tengo la palabra, no es una demanda.

Me: Un complaint.

Tanya: Ajá, un complaint. Entonces preguntándoles qué pasó. Porque si ustedes se fijan, hace 1 mes nos dieron el budget del dinero para qué estaba signado. Entonces hay una cantidad que para las pensiones de los maestros, el aumento de las pensiones. Entonces en el primer año viene una cantidad, pero ya en los años consecutivos ya no la tiene. Y yo no sé si eso tenga que ver con esa – y yo digo que sí porque yo tengo entendido que hay grupos que no están de acuerdo en que del budget de la educación para los niños se use lo del retiro.

(Tanya: And something else too, well, I am in many community groups, and one of them—there is—it's not a lawsuit, an—what is it called, I don't know what it is called, but it's not a lawsuit. Because they say there have been funds—they have, for example how much they receive from the state and that is public information. And there are many things that those funds have been spent on and that is also public information and they have to disclose that. So they [the nonprofit organization] have found that there is a certain amount for three years now, 40,000—I don't know if it's 40,000 or 40 million—I don't remember, for three consecutive years that no one knows what happened to that money. So they, this nonprofit organization—

Esperanza: Are trying to investigate.

Tanya: They did — I don't know the word, it's not a lawsuit.

Me: A Complaint.

Tanya: Yes, a complaint. So we asked what happened. Because if you look, it was signed. So there is an amount of money for pensions. So during the first year there is an amount, but in the consecutive years it's no longer there. And I don't know if that has something to do with it [the Complaint] —

and I say yes because I understand that there are groups that disagree with the education budget that is for children be used for retirements.)

Although she struggled to remember it was called “UCP,” Tanya knew about the complaint filed against the district. She also understood the UCP was *not* a lawsuit, as she said repeatedly. Additionally, Tanya knew some details about the complaint, that it was related to the use of funds to pay for retirement costs, and it went back 3 years. While she did not know every detail about the complaint during this *plática*, which took place two months after the formal filing of the UCP, she was aware that a complaint had been filed. She learned about it through the nonprofit organization she was affiliated with. Of the six *mamás* who were at this June 6th *plática*, Tanya was the only one who talked about it.

At an earlier *plática*, one that took place on April 26th, just a few weeks after the complaint had been filed, Alma brought up the complaint. In this instance, Alma, Carolina, and I were talking about one of the small group activities we had participated in at the last DELAC meeting. In explaining why she had written her recommendation that schools with 50 percent EL students should receive more money for parent engagement, Alma added,

Pues espero que nos den más dinero porque con esa demanda que tienen encima, tienen que hacer — si quieren tapar eso tienen que hacerlo.
(Well I expect that they will give us more money because with that lawsuit that they have over them, they have to — if they want to put a lid on it, they have to do it.

During this *plática*, Alma referred to the complaint as a lawsuit, but still, like Tanya she was aware that the district was being accused of mispending funds that were supposed to go to EL and other specific student groups. I did not ask how it was she knew about the complaint, but Alma was well connected in the community which leads me to believe it was through her network that she learned about the UCP.

I asked LCAP Asst. Director Lopez and DELAC Coordinator Silvia for their thoughts about the complaint filing. More specifically, I asked the LCAP Asst. Director Lopez whether he was surprised that the complaint had been filed. He said,

Was I surprised at the filing of the complaint? I don't think so. I think there's always going to be concerns or complaints, depending upon perspectives of people...I think it's a good thing to be able to analyze if we're doing something wrong, or rationalize why we're doing it, and the rationale may or may not be something that's compatible with the complaint...hopefully you're making good rationale and good use of data to support what you're doing. You're making informed decisions...By the same token our English learners are not progressing the way we want them to. So it's one of those things, you say OK, there's some growth here, but we can do better...our ELs are not doing well. What are we going to do? That's the question. And I think the answer comes from these discussions. And maybe this complaint, or maybe other complaints, or even taking a look at other schools that have been successful, and what are they doing? – Michael Lopez, LCAP Asst. Director

Lopez thought the complaint might “be a good thing” and prompt the district to take a closer look at the programs and services for ELs and the outcomes of those allocations. He knew, as did Silvia and other district officials who would present data reports to DELAC and other parent groups, that EL students were not performing well in the district. In fact, the LCAP Director, said as much during my interview with him,

They [EL students] should still be doing better than they're doing right now. We have to do more in terms of building their academic vocabulary, in terms of helping them acquire the language, and master the language so that they can pass out of an exam but truly be set up to be in a position to excel academically.

Still, at least in the final DELAC meetings of the year, absent were the kinds of discussions Lopez envisioned, where DELAC members are asking about specific programs and services that existed in the district for EL students. There were no conversations that delved deeper into the data that could help identify areas of success and areas of concern by grade level, assessment, or other way of tackling outcomes of EL students. As mentioned by Tanya and Antonia, DELAC meetings were always rushing from one topic to the next with no real opportunity to unpack data and develop informed recommendations.

In May of 2018, the district settled with the complainants. This took place nearly one year after the end of my data collection, and the details that I gathered came primarily from press releases put out by the nonprofit organizations involved with the complaint. I am not sure whether the district made a formal announcement about the settlement at DELAC or any other official forum. Nor did I find any record of the settlement being announced at any school board meetings in May 2018.

In the settlement, the district agreed to provide mental health and social-emotional support services to targeted elementary, middle, and high schools, to offer English and Math tutoring to students attending targeted schools, and to be more transparent about how it develops its LCAP, including how feedback gathered at DELAC and other parent group meetings guided final LCAP decisions (Settlement and General Release Agreement, 2018). It also required the district to co-host with local non-profit organizations, two LCAP community forums (one in the fall and one in the spring) with the purpose to “include discussions on data and strategies in order to solicit community input on the LCAP” (Settlement and General Release Agreement, 2018, p. 4).

Because the settlement happened after I had stopped gathering data for this case study, it is unclear what impact the UCP had for EL students and their families. The settlement did not obligate the district to provide programs or services specifically for its EL students, rather the district agreed to provide specific services (e.g., mental health and social emotional services and tutoring) to students who attend specific schools. Also unclear is what, if any, impact the UCP had on parent engagement in the district. The settlement required the district to be more forthcoming about feedback it gathered from groups like DELAC, but it did not specify how, when, or where this would happen, nor did it require the district to change the manner in which it was collecting parent input for the LCAP other than co-hosting these bi-annual forums.

Conclusion

At the end of the observation year *las mamás* had gained important knowledge from DELAC meetings about how to more effectively navigate the school system. The DELAC Coordinator, Superintendent, and others constantly reminded them of the importance of their role at their school sites and the power of their voices. *Las mamás* also recognized the significance of their role and purpose – as parents representing and advocating for the academic achievement of emergent bilingual students in the district. They wanted to make informed recommendations at their school sites and at DELAC meetings, and their recommendations to the board were meaningful. Still, they were denied meaningful opportunities to discuss and unpack the very data the Superintendent and other district staff urged them to interrogate. The next chapter addresses the significance of the findings from this study.

Chapter 8: Significance and Conclusion

In this final chapter, I discuss the significance of my findings in light of the of the literature presented in chapter 2. More specifically, I draw upon role theory (Whitaker & Hoover-Dempsey, 2013) and cultural brokering (Henderson et al., 2007; Ishimaru et al., 2016) to describe the roles *las mamás* constructed and the ways they enacted their roles. I use Bryk and Schneider's (2002) theory of trust and collaborative relationships to understand and interpret the impact district officials' actions had on the involvement of DELAC members in LCAP and the relationships they shared with members. Finally, I draw upon participatory policymaking (Anderson, 1998; Fung, 2004) to discuss and describe how *las mamás* participated in LCAP, their experiences, and the consequence of their involvement. My study set out to answer four questions: 1) What prompted Latina immigrant *mamás* to become involved in school and district committees? 2) What were the understandings of Latina DELAC members about their purpose and role in LCAP? 3) What were district officials' understandings of the purpose and role of Latin@ parents of emergent bilinguals in LCAP? 4) How were *las mamás* participating in LCAP? What were their experiences in the process? What were the personal, interpersonal, and programmatic consequences of their participation? The findings revealed an LCAP process that was fraught with challenges, but that also revealed the persistent spirit of *las mamás*.

As captured in the portraits from chapter 4, for their entire lives the *mamá*-participants in my study have been struggling to, as Sofia said, "llegar a donde tenía que llegar" (reach where I was supposed to reach). It was during their young adulthood when many of them learned critical lessons they would carry with them into their roles as parent representatives, such as Dolores learning how to *hablar* (speak) for and with people and Monica learning to *luchar* (fight). They were interested in their children's education, which compelled them to become involved parents. They recounted the hardships they encountered trying to remain engaged, including the

spousal abuse Alma witnessed, the depression Blanca experienced, and the disillusionment Ana faced. They persisted even when they sensed being discriminated against due to not speaking fluent English (reported by Alma and other *mamás*) and when they worried about retaliation (reported by Carla and Monica). During the observation year, there was the added threat of deportation and living in an environment that was hostile toward Latin@ immigrant families. Still these particular *mamás* persevered. They embodied *sobrevivencia*, which Trinidad Galván (2006) explains is beyond surviving, it is having a vision for change and the strength to carry it out (p.176). They were dedicated to their roles as parent representatives and committed to their work. Discussed next are the summary of findings, followed by analysis of their significance to policy, practice, and research. Finally, the limitations of this study are discussed and the areas for future research.

Summary of Findings

Prompting Latina Immigrant *Mamás* to Become Involved in Committees

The 14 *mamás* who participated in this study each had a unique and powerful life story, but still they shared a common goal of wanting to provide their children with the best education possible. They had high aspirations for their children, what Ana described as “llegar a defenderse” (to be able to defend themselves) or Yaneli said, “ser preparados” (be well-educated). They valued education and wanted to support their children by understanding how the U.S. education system operated and learning how to navigate it. Still, what led to their initial involvement in schools varied among *las mamás*. For many of them, the path to parent involvement came with the enrollment of their children into Head Start. In fact, eight *mamás* talked about the impact their involvement in Head Start had on them. The path toward involvement was different for other *mamás*. For instance, Ana, wanted to understand why her children were not acquiring English more quickly; Antonia wanted to check-in on her children;

Lorena and Yaneli wanted to create open lines of communication with their children's teachers. Once *las mamás* found themselves in schools, opportunities to become involved in committees opened up.

The paths that led to their involvement in committees varied, however, common among all *las mamás* were the in-person invitations they received from family, friends, and/or staff to participate in these groups. The invitations communicated to each *mamá* the notion that an involved parent included being an active member in committees. The messages communicated through the invitations followed the theory of role construction advanced by Whitaker and Hoover-Dempsey (2013) and Henderson et al. (2007). These researchers have argued that parents base their ideas on what they should do to support their children partially on the messages communicated to them by their family, friends, and their children's schools. For some *mamás* like Elena, Sofía, and Blanca, invitations came from their friends who encouraged them to attend committee meetings. For other *mamás* like Carla, Alma, and Dolores, invitations came from school staff. For Monica, the invitation came from her own mother.

Several factors inspired them to continue their involvement in committees. For instance, common among *las mamás* was their interest and desire to learn more about how the district operated after their involvement commenced. There was also the camaraderie that was displayed in the multiple mini *pláticas* that took place before, during, and after DELAC meetings, when *mamás* would exchange concerns, knowledge, and ideas with each other. These factors seemed to outweigh the negative factors related to their involvement in committees (e.g., lack of follow up, disillusionment and depression related to their ability to affect change, potential problems with their husbands); negative factors that could have led to disengagement as noted in the literature (e.g., Anderson, 1998; Fung, 2004).

Interestingly, their status as Latin@ immigrants did not appear to inhibit their

participation in school committees, which conflicts with literature on Latin@ parent participation in schools. For example, Gándara & Contreras (2009), Gándara & Ee (2018), and others (Olivos, 2006; Petrone, 2016) have found cultural differences with school personnel, not being fluent in English, and fear of coming into contact with government agencies could dissuade Latin@ immigrant parents from becoming involved in schools. But those concerns did not prevent *las mamás* in this study from becoming and remaining involved in committees. While some *mamás* did share with me the anxiety and stress they and their children were experiencing related to the heightened hostile environment towards Latin@ immigrants and increased threat of deportation, they continued with their participation.

When I asked some of my participants why they continued committing their time to committees when it did not seem their voices were being taken into account, they responded by asking who else would participate if not them. It was a complicated relationship they had with the district, where on the one hand the district was providing them with information to help them advocate for emergent bilingual students at their sites, but on the other hand they were not being given the time or space to advocate for those same students at the district level. There was also the camaraderie and exchange of information I observed before, during, and after meetings among DELAC members that drew these *mamás* together and kept them involved in DELAC, as well as their commitment to fulfill the roles they had agreed to take on as parent representative.

Understandings about Role and Purpose

The *mamás* in my study understood their role in DELAC and ELAC was to be parent *representatives*. While they were initially concerned and focused on the needs of their own children, once they became members of DELAC, ELAC, and of other committees they came to understand they were the voices of parents of all EL students, including those parents who for many reasons were not there to exercise their own voices. It was a process that Carolina

described as “agarrando la onda” (getting it; understanding), learning over time that their role was to represent all EL students and parents. Also, as expressed by Dolores, Carla, and other *mamás*, they understood they were *la voz* (the voice) of those parents who could not or chose to not participate at either the school or district level.

From every day conversations they had with other parents, both inside and outside of schools, *las mamás* learned the concerns and questions of those parents whom they represented. These conversations informed the recommendations they advocated for at their school sites, and for some, it informed the questions they asked at DELAC meetings. That was one of the values of participating in DELAC, the opportunity to share concerns and ideas across school sites and build capacity among DELAC members. Interestingly, Silvia’s own handouts on ELAC and DELAC identify “parents can express and share their concerns and successes with other parents” as one of the benefits of ELAC, but this same benefit is not listed under DELAC. Still, concerns and ideas were being shared among DELAC members, in the mini *pláticas* I observed occurring before, during, and after meetings. They would also happen at times when DELAC members would raise questions during meeting presentations.

Las mamás understood their role was to build the capacity of among other parents. Most did this by discussing DELAC information back at their school sites. However, capacity building also happened when *mamás* used their knowledge to help other parents navigate the system and learn about programs and services available for EL students. They enhanced their own capital and that of other DELAC members by exchanging concerns, insights, and ideas formally and informally at DELAC meetings, as well as through conversations with parents both inside and outside of schools.

Finally, *mamás* also understood the purpose of their engagement in DELAC was to have their opinions included in their school’s budgetary decisions and in the district’s LCAP. This was

the role that had been communicated to them by the district. At the same time, some *mamás* such as Esperanza, understood their purpose was to *vigilar* (keep watch) over the district and how it spent its funds. Other *mamás* such as Carolina, Tanya, and Blanca, who were connected to nonprofit organizations, knew that LCAP contained funds specifically generated by EL students, that those funds should be dedicated to supporting the EL students in the district. These *mamás* also knew they were supposed to have a say in how those funds were being spent. While their actions during DELAC meetings did not seem to be any different than other members, their comments during *pláticas* revealed the knowledge they had about LCAP and LCFF, specifically about the supplemental and concentration funds and the role parents had in developing the district's LCAP.

Las mamás understood DELAC was a place where they collected information to take back to their school sites, where they could ask questions and learn about what was happening at other school sites, and where they were *supuestamente* (supposed to) give input about the district's LCAP. *Las mamás* understood they were representatives and advocates for all EL students and families, and they sought to build their own navigational and social capital and the capacity of other parents. Some *mamás* had created roles that went beyond the minimum required of them, and they constructed opportunities where they were actively and intentionally building the capacity of parents within the district. What they sought from their participation, their ultimate purpose, was to transform the current educational experiences of ELs in the district. Still, as Ana, Alma, and other *mamás* shared during interviews and *pláticas*, the messages they were receiving from district officials about their power and importance was not what they were experiencing at their school sites, as their recommendations and input were getting denied or ignored by their site councils and principals. The contradiction led to feelings of depression and disillusionment, yet the *mamás* persisted.

District officials wanted DELAC members to be involved in decision-making processes, particularly at their school sites. They said they wanted parents to take on roles as critical data analysts who proposed data-informed recommendations to their site councils. To achieve this vision, the district provided DELAC members with information about rules, regulations, and funding sources. Officials from the Superintendent on down to the DELAC Coordinator continuously told parents they were powerful and that their voices mattered. Through their messaging, the district seemed to construct an idea of Latin@ parents who were already empowered to analyze data, scrutinize and ask critical questions about decisions made by school site councils and principals, and develop data-informed recommendations. While *mamás* may have wanted to achieve this level of involvement, specific conditions would need to be in place, such as principals and site councils recognizing the value of *mamás* and responding to them with respect (Henderson et al., 2007; Olivos, 2006); *mamás* would also have to be supported by district staff (Henderson et al., 2007). But based on the multiple discussions during DELAC meetings about the administrative issues happening at school levels, Silvia's urging to not allow site councils to ignore ELACs, and accounts shared by Blanca, Alma, and others who directly witnessed recalcitrant behavior by principals, the district's support was lacking. District officials were allowing these problems to continue, and their inaction was eroding the trust *mamás* had in them.

Still, there were some common understandings about the role of *las mamás* between *mamás* and district officials. For instance, *mamás* wanted to be make informed recommendations to their site councils and principals, just as district officials wanted them to. *Mamás* also wanted to have access to data about programs and services and EL student outcomes so that they evaluate decisions made by site councils and principals, and advocate for change when they saw progress was not being made. These were also the roles and purpose that had been

communicated to them during DELAC meetings. Yet, it was hard to decipher if *mamás* had constructed these roles on their own because they wanted to hold site councils and principals accountable, or if they constructed these roles as a result of the messages being communicated by district officials. Was it that district officials, or more specifically that the Superintendent had already decided the role parents were going to play and that was what would be communicated at DELAC meetings? There was some evidence from meeting observations that suggested DELAC members positioned as responding to policy and agendas that were formulated by the Superintendent. Still, *mamás* and district officials had a common understanding here, about being a critically involved parent at the school level.

District officials also contradicted their own descriptions of the role that DELAC members should play. For instance, the Superintendent, LCAP Asst. Director, and DELAC Coordinator would urge DELAC members to be *critical* parents (Terriquez, 2011), where they scrutinized and critiqued decisions made by site councils and principals. But this level of activity was noticeably absent at DELAC meetings. While the LCAP Director and LCAP Asst. Director did present data reports to DELAC members, they were not meaningful sets of data (Anderson, 1998; Henderson et al., 2007). Instead data presented was incomplete, lacked focus on EL students, was superficial (very high-level and general), was mostly focused on narrow measures of academic success (e.g., AP enrollment, SAT participation), and rarely included social-emotional measures. Moreover, discussions about data were limited and controlled by the LCAP Director and Superintendent, which impeded having meaningful discussions that could have led to the development of fresh perspectives and policy ideas (Nabatchi, 2010).

How *Mamás* Participated in LCAP

While *las mamás* knew that part of their purpose in DELAC was to provide input about LCAP, and district officials *said* they wanted parent input in LCAP, what actually transpired in

DELAC meetings seem to fall well short from being a meaningful participatory process.

DELAC met once per month for two hours, and every meeting had a packed agenda. There were specific topics that had to be discussed at DELAC meetings, including the eight legal tasks enumerated in the education code (which included reviewing and commenting on the LCAP). Additional presentations were also provided at meetings, such as leadership training, nutritional services offered through the district, information about the county's transportation services, and the district's middle school choice processes. Essentially, it was high-ranking officials in the district (DELAC Coordinator with LCAP Director approval) who set and controlled the agenda.

Also, *las mamás* participated mostly as one-way recipients of information. Presenters would talk *to* DELAC members, giving them information about programs or services, but did not create opportunities to have an open, two-way conversation where questions and ideas could be discussed. When input was collected from DELAC, that too was severely controlled by district officials — that is, officials would decide what data would be distributed at meetings and the process that would be used to collect input. That included moments such as when DELAC members were asked to review and comment on the LCAP budget summary from a one-page list of line items. No detailed information was provided about what programs and services were contained in each of the line items nor was an explanation provided about how the line item expenditures were connected to student outcomes or any of the other eight state priorities at the center of LCAP. Moreover, the data they were given to base their input on was not focused on EL students, the very subgroup DELAC was created to advocate for. Yet, even under these conditions, some DELAC members still pushed for their voices to be heard and asked critical questions of district officials.

Being critical. While district officials constructed opportunities that restricted discussions (by controlling agendas, discussion topics, time allotted for discussions, and data

used to frame input) about EL experiences and outcomes, some *mamás* attempted to create those opportunities through the questions and comments they made at meetings. For instance, in their written feedback to the LCAP Director (which came after viewing Dashboard print outs), DELAC members wrote comments such as, “We would like data reports presented to us to be more detailed and specific to ELL students” and “We would like more information regarding the type of programs and/or services that are being provided to ELL students at the district and school site level” and “I went into the Dashboard and saw that a majority of our schools are in red and orange. In the EL Progress Indicator it reports that we have 30 schools that are in red and 13 schools in orange out of [all] schools on the report. What is the district going to do about this problem?”

Las mamás and other DELAC members were seeking to arm themselves with meaningful information about student outcomes and about the programs and services available to EL students so that they could make informed recommendations. Still, as was the case with the written comments made by DELAC members, the district failed to provide responses to some questions (such as what was the district going to do about EL outcomes) and only provided partial information to others (such as giving the example of Saturday school offered at one high school as the types of services provided to ELs in the district).

Ultimately, *how* DELAC members were participating in LCAP resulted in a lack of substantial influence (Anderson, 1998) in the process. In the end, it was high-ranking officials who set meeting agendas, shared limited information with parent-participants, and restricted discussions to safe issues — features of an inauthentic participatory process (Anderson, 1998; Fung, 2004). *How* DELAC members participated in LCAP, the opportunities constructed and carried out by district officials, thwarted district officials’ own ideas and stated goals for parent participation.

Experiences in LCAP Process

Gap in translation and interpretation support. Another significant barrier to the meaningful engagement of DELAC members was the gap in translation and interpretation support available at meetings. While a skilled Spanish-English district translator was present at every DELAC meeting, the demands made on this sole person to interpret non-stop for the entire two hours naturally caused fatigue and led to imprecise translations. As the translator became exhausted, portions of questions and presentation information would get missed. At the same time, the headsets used to provide translation to DELAC members were unreliable. Numerous times loud static interrupted the interpretation that was being provided during the meetings. This led to additional pieces of information being lost and resulted in misinformed DELAC members.

Having effective, reliable translation is fundamental to a process that is highly dependent on stakeholder's understandings. Anderson (1998), Epstein (2011), Henderson et al. (2007), and Olivos (2006) have all noted that providing translation and interpretation are essential when it comes to involving parents whose primary language is something other than English. Effective, reliable translation and interpretation is also necessary to be able to achieve the kind of parent involvement stated in the LCAP template, where they were to be included in the development of the annual update to LCAP goals, actions, services, and expenditures (CDE, 2016d, p. 12).

Lacking accurate, reliable translation frustrated *las mamás*, made some of them feel misunderstood and misrepresented, and ultimately, eroded their trust in school district officials.

Lack of follow up. As described earlier, district officials managed all aspects of meetings including setting the agenda and controlling when and how DELAC member questions were handled. A common occurrence at DELAC meetings was that a limited number of questions would be taken from DELAC members (mostly due to time limits), and they would be one-directional. Instead of opening the gathering to listen and discuss questions and concerns that

DELAC members had, DELAC Coordinator Silvia would ask members to write their questions on feedback forms that were collected at the end of meetings with the expectation that follow up would be provided as indicated by a statement on the form. Yet, follow up was not happening at the meetings. This frustrated Elena, who described the process in my interview with her:

Cuando quieres preguntar, “Apúntenlo en su papel.” Y nunca ha habido un foro que diga, “Okey, la respuesta a su comentario es tal.” Nunca la hay.
(When you want to ask a question, “Write it down on your paper.” And there has never been a forum where they say, “OK, the response to your commentary is this.” There never is [any follow up.]) — Elena, mamá-participant

In the quote above Elena described her frustration with the lack of follow up, when Silvia would tell members, “apúntenlo en su papel” (write it down on your paper), and then there would be never be any response to questions. Ironically, Superintendent Waldman understood the importance of providing follow up to parents about the comments and input they had been asked to provide during meetings. During my interview with him, he said follow up was essential to maintain good partnerships with parents. Indeed, LCAP Asst. Director Lopez had made a pledge to provide follow up to parents. Yet, follow up, as Elena said, never happened. In fact, follow up was one of the requirements outlined in the UCP (Uniform Complaint Procedure) settled between the district and two mothers of EL students and three non-profit organizations. The UCP had been filed alleging the district had misspent \$41 million in LCFF supplemental and concentration funds – the funds that were partially generated by emergent bilingual children enrolled in the district. In the settlement, the district agreed to disclose how the feedback it gathered at DELAC and other committee meetings guided LCAP decisions (Settlement and General Release Agreement, 2018). The settlement was reached nearly one year after data collection for this study had ended, so additional research would have to be conducted to know how the district has fulfilled the requirement. Still, lack of follow up was an issue that was captured in the UCP settlement. From the data gathered it is hard to tell whether the district was

purposefully not following up with DELAC members, but, given that the LCAP Asst. Director made a public pledge to provide follow up, it did not seem that the district was intentionally attempting to deceive. Still, their lack of follow up was having an impact on the trust *mamás* had in them.

The lack of follow up called into question district officials' integrity, one of the four key elements to building and sustaining trust between parents and schools identified by Bryk and Schneider (2002). While Bryk and Schneider's (2002) concept of trust and its key elements (integrity, competence, respect, and personal regard) were used to describe relationships between school officials and parents, I adapt their theory and its key elements to this case study and the relationship between district officials and parents. Bryk and Schneider (2002) explained trust would be weakened in part when promises were broken. In the case of the *Rancho los Nietos*, district officials kept breaking their promise to follow up with DELAC members. I never asked district officials directly about the lack of follow up, so I am not sure what their motives were. However, *mamás* had become skeptical about the district's promises to provide follow up to their questions.

Eroding information sharing. Moreover, the limited and restricted discussions resulted in a loss of information exchanges that could have led to strengthening networks, gaining new perspectives, enhancing motivation, and learning about indispensable resources (Orozco, 2008). From the many conversations *mamás* were having with parents inside and outside of schools, they had access to insights and concerns that could have informed LCAP discussions. As Nabatchi (2010) noted, meaningful parent involvement could lead to fresh perspectives about policies and practices. McNeil and Coppola (2006) found that parents have valuable insights and unique knowledge about their children and communities that may not be known to policymakers. Even LCAP Director Centeno and LCAP Asst. Director Lopez understood and recognized the

unique perspectives that parents could bring to the table. Yet, their own involvement in LCAP processes at the district level obstructed the possibility of accessing and discussing those insights.

Mixed messages about parent power. Superintendent Waldman and other district officials insisted that DELAC members had power and urged them to exercise their power so that they could be included in the decision-making processes taking place at their school sites and to evaluate the quality of programs and services provided to EL students. In fact, district officials suggested the kinds of questions they should ask of their site councils and principals (e.g., Who is teaching ELD? When are they teaching ELD? How are they doing on SBAC? How are students doing on the CELDT?) The message from district officials was that parents should be analyzing data to understand the status of the EL program at their schools, student outcomes, and how to advocate for recommendations based on their analysis. Still, the LCAP activities carried out at DELAC meetings did not reflect this same level of inquiry. I am not sure why there was a difference, and I wonder if district officials themselves realized the conflicting messages they were communicated to DELAC members. From the data gathered during interviews and through meeting observations, officials did not indicate that something needed to change with their approach to LCAP activities. The only indication that something different needed to happen was in relation to providing follow up to parent input and questions, mentioned by both Superintendent Waldman and LCAP Asst. Director Lopez.

The kind of data that district officials were urging parents to ask of their sites were not being provided at DELAC meetings. The kinds of questions they wanted DELAC members to ask at their school sites were not being addressed at DELAC meetings. Plus, based on questions submitted during meetings and comments made during interviews and *pláticas*, some DELAC members wanted to engage in discussions about EL students at the district level. The mixed

messages about the role of DELAC members at schools versus district meetings created a sense of mistrust among some of *las mamás*, and skepticism about the district's message about parents' power.

Irregular constitution and administration of site committees. Another significant finding was the irregularities with ELACs. There were issues such as principals and site councils asking ELACs to simply rubber-stamp site plans and principals appointing members instead of holding legitimate elections — precisely the kinds of activities that lead to inauthentic parent involvement (Anderson, 1998; Malen, 1999). There were other issues too, such as site councils not allotting time for ELACs to speak at site council meetings. The irregularities impacted DELAC as well. Such as when it was unclear who was the official DELAC representative for a particular school site. For instance, Antonia was under the impression she was the DELAC representative for her school site. However, when it came time for DELAC representatives to vote for DELAC officers, she was told she could not participate in the election because she was not her school's official DELAC representative. There were also situations where no ELAC existed at sites that based on their student demographics were required by law to have them. Irregularities such as these were effectively disenfranchising EL students and parents whose schools were not represented at DELAC.

Bryk and Schneider (2002) argued in order to maintain trusting relationships with parents, administrators had to demonstrate their competence. Their actions would display the knowledge and know-how they had to fulfill their role as partners with parents (Bryk & Schneider, 2002). When incompetence and negligence were allowed to persist, trust between partners would be degraded (Bryk & Schneider, 2002). Marsh and Hall (2018) further argued that degradations in trust led to weak collaboration among participants involved in LCAP processes. The irregularities that were allowed to happen in *Rancho los Nietos* were eroding the

trust parents had in the district, specifically districts were not meeting the expectations *mamás* had that they would ensure that schools were operating ELACs in a manner consistent with the law and the rules and regulations presented to them at DELAC meetings.

Consequence: Personal

Involvement in the LCAP process resulted in positive and negative personal consequences for *las mamás*. While they enjoyed attending meetings because of the knowledge they gained, but for some *mamás* their advocacy work was also leading to depression. Blanca spoke openly about her need to step away from her involvement due to the emotional wear she was experiencing related to having to fight to get irregularities corrected at her school site. She had been expending tremendous amounts of energy and time trying to get principals to stop their questionable acts such as stacking committees with appointments instead of holding elections and having committee members rubber-stamp budgets and school program plans without first allowing parents to review and comment on such plans. Depression set in as her efforts were not leading to observable changes. Moreover, when she turned to district officials for help, they were slow in responding. Experiences similar to these were reported by other *mamás* who told me about the hopelessness, despair, and disillusionment they had experienced. As recounted in their portraits, these *mamás* were fighters who throughout their lives overcame hardships and struggles. Their advocacy work was yet another example of their *lucha* (fight), and it could be debilitating. Moreover, they were simply trying to enact the power DELAC Coordinator Silvia, Superintendent Waldman, and other district officials insisted they had. Surprisingly, after a break, *mamás* such as Blanca, Elena, and Carla resumed their involvement in committees. This seemed to contradict literature arguing disillusionment and inaction would lead to disengagement (Anderson, 1998; Henderson et al., 2007). Perhaps there were some DELAC members who did stop participating as the number of participants had decreased, still the *mamás* in my study

carried on, asking out loud who else would do the advocacy work if not them.

Two-way cultural brokers. Henderson et al. (2007) defined cultural brokers as individuals who work bilaterally, sharing information and strategies with schools and parents so that they can learn how to work with each other. In addition, cultural brokers can be found in many places and are not necessarily only school staff (Henderson et al., 2007, p. 123). Taking a closer look at the actions of *las mamás*, what emerged were the ways in which some of them operated as cultural brokers.

According to Ishimaru et al. (2016), *cultural brokering as authentic care* cultivated a welcoming and trustworthy school environment for families. The description of authentic care aligned with Yaneli's work where parents felt *cómodos* (comfortable) that they could ask her questions, that she could communicate with them in Spanish, and that as a mother of EL students, they could identify with her and she with them. They had confidence in her and recognized her as someone who was knowledgeable about programs and services to support EL students.

There was also the parent training work Tanya and Alma were engaged in. Independent of the school district, they were actively recruiting and training parents on LCFF, LCAP, DELAC and other areas. Analyzing their work of organizing of parents, growing and strengthening parents' social capital, and recognizing parents as leaders and change agents, Tanya and Alma embodied what Ishimaru et al. (2016) described as cultural brokering as catalyzing parent relationships and leadership. There was a sense of agency and leadership that was emerging within them from their collaborative work with parents inside and outside of schools.

In their own ways, other *mamás* were also engaged in cultural brokering practices. For instance, Elena and Dolores talked about learning and teaching other parents how to talk with

site councils and principals when making recommendations. They understood “the culture of schools” (Henderson et al., 2007, p. 123) and how to have constructive conversations within that culture.

The role of cultural brokering practices that were emerging were a consequence of the involvement of *las mamás* in DELAC and in LCAP processes. They were expanding their own knowledge as Latin@ parents in committees and decision-making processes, and sharing information with parents both inside and outside of schools. At the same time, *las mamás* were collecting concerns, insights, and ideas from these parents and (at least attempting) to share these at DELAC meetings to expand district officials’ and other DELAC members’ knowledge about what students and parents were experiences in schools across the district.

Consequence: Interpersonal

A major finding related to interpersonal interactions was the capacity building that was taking place within DELAC, in schools, and outside of schools. While the engagement of *las mamás* was leading to personal growth, it was also expanding the knowledge of those parents with whom they were sharing information. The ways in which they shared information (the extent and intent behind their actions) reflected the idea that Carolina talking about during my interview with her. During the interview, Carolina described being able to create a role that was as big or as small as one wanted to make. Parents could decide for themselves how involved they wanted to be, how much time and effort they wanted to commit to their role as parent representatives. The minimum that was required was that the information collected at DELAC be distributed at ELAC meetings, beyond that, it was up to individual parent representatives to decide.

Some *mamás* such as Alma and Tanya, were actively trying to build parent capacity by holding their own workshops that covered topics such as LCAP, Title I, and ELAC. Their work

was intentional and goal-oriented in that they each wanted to create a pipeline of trained parents who would be joining committees for the first time. Then there was the work of Lorena and Carla, who were actively organizing carpools, enabling more *mamás* to participate in DELAC meetings. There was also the work of Yaneli, Dolores, and Antonia, who shared information primarily at their school sites, in ELAC meetings where they could then devise recommendations to be presented to their site councils.

There were also the impromptu conversations many of *las mamá* described having with parents on school steps, in laundromats, and other informal spaces, where they would share their navigational knowledge. There were also the *pláticas* that would take place among smaller groups of DELAC members before, during, and after meetings. It was during these moments when *mamás* would share with each other their concerns, insights, and ideas. All of these formal and informal conversations helped to build capacity among a wide array of parents.

District officials. The involvement of DELAC members in LCAP processes also had an impact on district officials. During my interviews with district officials, all of them talked about the importance of listening to parents, showing parents they were being listened to, and providing updates to parents related to the comments and recommendations they gave at meetings. Still, their ideals were contradicted when compared to what was actually happening at meetings. The meeting observations captured the many ways district officials closed off open dialogue and discussion about LCAP decisions related to EL students.

End of the year actions by district officials, however, seemed to suggest the district was moving toward being more responsive to parents. They were modest steps, but as the year was coming to a close, LCAP Asst. Director Lopez and Superintendent Waldman both attempted to show parents they were listening. At the April DELAC meeting, Mr. Lopez made his public pledge to follow up with parents about the recommendations they gave to the district —

responding to the feedback he had heard directly from parents. At the May meeting, Superintendent Waldman provided DELAC members with a synthesis of the recommendations DELAC members had given to the LCAP Director the month before. While a modest first step, Superintendent Waldman's move to provide follow up seemed to indicate district officials were responding to the feedback they had been receiving from parents about wanting to know what had happened with their input. The Superintendent's actions gave the impression that DELAC members were being listened to, but in reality, the feedback that he provided did not disclose whether or how their recommendations influenced decisions written into the final LCAP. His approach seemed insufficient to be a truly participatory process (Marsh & Hall, 2018).

Silvia was a particularly important person in the LCAP process. Of all the district officials, she seemed to want to develop the leadership and sense of agency among DELAC members and some of her actions could be described as those of a cultural broker (Henderson et al., 2007; Ishimaru et al., 2016). Interspersed within her presentations were strategies, tools, and bits of knowledge that DELAC members could use to more effectively navigate their relationships with site councils and principals. For instance, she would role play how to ask principals for data reports on EL student outcomes. She also taught them how to pronounce key terms such as SPSA (sip-sah). She constantly encouraged them to become members of their site councils, and she suggested critical questions they could ask in relation to EL student achievement. Finally, Silvia shared information with them about state and federal laws, including about Prop. 58, informing them that Prop. 58 was one way to open the possibility of getting dual immersion programs at their schools. In addition, *mamás* in my study described the love they had for Silvia, pointing out the critical knowledge they gained in the Migrant Education Program, which Silvia was the administrator.

Still, Silvia's other actions seemed to hinder her own work, for instance, running the

DELAC meetings in English with Spanish translation when a large portion of DELAC members were bilingual or Spanish-dominant. I did not ask Silvia why she carried out DELAC meetings in English, so I am not sure why she ran them that way, but it seemed especially problematic given the trouble with headsets and translations. Also, she would run meetings that were dominated by one-way conversations rather than two-way discussions to elicit *mamás* insights and ideas. These actions seemed to contradict her desire to empower parents and to create a culturally responsive forum for DELAC members. Although it was unclear why she chose to run meetings in English and facilitated one-way conversations, there was some evidence (based on comments made during interviews and *pláticas*) that suggested these actions eroded the trust some *mamás* had in Silvia.

LCAP Director Centeno had the least amount of contact with DELAC members, yet he was responsible for carrying out the LCAP input sessions with them. He seemed to struggle to create a connection with DELAC members. Some of the *mamás* who participated in my study talked about his demeanor and described him as always seeming to be upset. Actually, of all the district officials, LCAP Director Centeno seemed to have the most in common with DELAC members as he had been an EL student and his parents were immigrants. He, like LCAP Asst. Director Lopez, also knew that parents were holders of unique knowledge about children that could help district officials better understand the impact of their policies and practices. Still, his manner of being and the ways in which he carried out LCAP activities impacted the quality of input he collected from DELAC members.

Consequence: Programmatic

The participation of *las mamás* also had some programmatic consequence; there were points of convergence where some of the recommendations DELAC members made were included in the district's final LCAP. In meetings, *pláticas*, and interviews, *las mamás* conveyed

their recommendations to support emergent bilinguals and their families in the district. Top among their recommendations was providing quality teachers specially trained to work with EL students. They also advocated for supplemental instructional services for emergent bilingual students. While these recommendations were broad, the final LCAP adopted by the school board did contain items such as teacher training and instructional services to be provided to EL students. For example, Saturday program and tutoring would be offered at some site to address the district's goal to fully implement Common Core State Standards. Also, to achieve its goal to increase SBAC English proficient rates among specific student subgroups including ELs, the district and sites would introduce literacy classroom teachers. To address its goal to increase the reclassification rate, sites would be hiring specialists and would be providing programs for students before and after school and on Saturdays.

Other recommendations did not make it into the district's final LCAP. DELAC members wanted training for themselves and parents across the district. They specifically asked for training on the LCAP, ELAC, and DELAC. In fact training in these three areas is required by state regulation so that DELAC members can "carry out their required advisory responsibilities" (CDE, 2018a, Trainings section). The regulation also specifies the training shall be planned in full consultation with committee members (CDE, 2018a, Trainings section). However, this level of training for parents was not included in the *Rancho los Nietos's* LCAP. Nor was the type of training Tanya suggested during a *plática*; general training for all parents of emergent bilingual students so that they could be fully informed about the EL program in the district. Monica, Ana, and Elena all shared accounts of talking with parents and grandparents who did not realize and refused to believe their children were classified as English learners. It is critical that parents, caregivers, and students know and understand what EL classification is, what services and programs are available to them, and how the reclassification process functions. While it is

unclear whether district officials were aware of the misperceptions parents and other caregivers had about EL classification, the district could be proactive and provide specific training for parents of emergent bilingual students to dispel the misconceptions about EL classification.

Interestingly, the *Rancho los Nietos* LCAP included a goal to increase the percent of parents who were satisfied with the decision-making opportunities available to them at their school sites (which would be measured with survey data), but no equivalent goal was created for parent satisfaction with district-level decision-making opportunities. There was also no mention of training for parents on LCAP.

The Importance of Context

As the findings of this case study suggest, the *Rancho los Nietos* LCAP process did not match the rhetoric of its district officials. Superintendent Waldman and others expressed their desire to have DELAC participation in the LCAP process. Moreover, LCAP Director Centeno and LCAP Asst. Director Lopez talked about the value of having parents participate in such a process, where the unique insights of DELAC members could inform decisions made about policies and practices in the district. Still, the actions of district officials revealed a closed process that was controlled and constrained by high-ranking officials. It also revealed a district that valued top-down control, where, as the Superintendent himself stated, he and the school board have the final say about LCAP decisions.

Moreover, it is important to remember *Rancho los Nietos* is a highly regarded urban school district, where the Superintendent has been the recipient of numerous awards for his leadership. Yet, in this case, it seemed Superintendent Waldman was not partnering with *mamás* rather he was positioning them to respond to his policy agendas. From his interactions with *mamás*, Superintendent Waldman was not looking for solutions or for fresh ideas from DELAC members; instead he was encouraging them to advocate for existing practices and programs. His

actions seemed to embody what Auerbach (2010) referred to as *leadership for nominal partnerships*, where “leaders make some effort to involve parents but keep them limited and controlled” (p.734). Looking more closely at his comments during DELAC meetings, Superintendent Waldman was focused on his priorities, including securing the state’s permission to substitute PSAT and SAT exams in place of the state's standardized exam. When sharing his initiative at the DELAC meeting, he did not come to gather members’ input, instead he came to garner their support and encouraged parents to reach out to their state representatives and voice their support for the Superintendent’s proposal.

Superintendent Waldman wielded substantial authority and control in the district and likely influenced how input was collected from DELAC members, and what would be done with their input. Based on the information gathered during my interview with him, he also thought school funding and budgets were complex topics and it was important to “break things down to understandable chunks” for parents, that way they could provide input. However, the activities observed during DELAC meetings did not seem to help DELAC members better understand the LCAP or LCFF, nor did it result in the gathering of meaningful data from *mamás*. If anything, it left *mamás* feeling skeptical about the district, and eroded their trust in district officials.

His approach to involving DELAC members in the LCAP process highlights the trouble with the inherent assumptions embedded within the LCFF policy that district officials are ready to partner with parents on decision making processes, that is, that district officials have the training and more importantly the mindset, or as described in Henderson et al. (2007), the core beliefs, attitudes, and actions to build collaborative relationships with parents. Henderson et al. (2007) argued when officials fail to treat parents as equal partners and do not recognize the value of creating reciprocal relationships with them, a lopsided power dynamic emerges that marginalizes parents (p.28).

Study Implications

The findings from this study point to several implications for policy and practice. First, with respect to policy, this research indicates that policymakers at the state level have an opportunity to strengthen the language in the policy and define the role and *purpose* of stakeholders such as DELAC members, in the LCAP process. The current language in the policy simply requires districts to “consult with...parents” (Cal. Educ Code § 52060). LCAP guidelines published by the state also mention that “meaningful engagement of parents...is critical to the LCAP and budget process” (CDE, 2016d, p. 3). What seems to be missing is a clearly articulated rationale *why* parents and other community stakeholders should be involved in LCAP development, evaluation, and revision processes. The ambiguity has led to an array of disparate definitions constructed by school districts, parents, nonprofit advocacy organizations, and others. Having a clearly defined rationale for parents in LCAP would better guide the work of districts and parents, as there would be a common understanding of the purpose and expectation of input. An explanation would also guide parents, making clear the valuable knowledge they bring to decision making processes that involve the children they are advocates for.

At the same time, state policymakers should invest in ongoing capacity building for districts and parent committee members, including DELAC members. The LCFF policy and guidelines seemed to make the assumption that districts and parents were ready and able to undertake a participatory decision-making process and seemed to ignore the need to train those being asked to achieve the accountability goals set forth in the LCAP. Training and ongoing support were needed in *Rancho los Nietos*, yet they were noticeably absent. As noted in the literature review in chapter 2, researchers have found Latin@ immigrant parents have unique knowledge and insights that could contribute to the transformation of policies and practices in schools and districts (e.g., Elenes et al., 2001; Olivos, 2006; Terriquez, 2011; Velez, 2012). But

researchers (e.g., Affeldt, 2015; Marsh & Hall, 2018; Wolf & Sands, 2016) have also found that district officials have struggled to include Latin@ parents and other historically marginalized parents in policymaking processes like LCAP. Districts need support in learning how to create meaningful opportunities to include DELAC members in LCAP processes, approaches that would tap into their sources of knowledge. In fact, Marsh and Hall (2018) found when intermediary organizations were brought to help districts, broader and/or deeper engagement was noticed. They also found that in some of these districts institutional mindsets were changing (Marsh & Hall, 2018). Identifying intermediary organizations that both district officials and DELAC parents are willing and able to partner with could lead to outcomes similar to those found by Marsh and Hall (2018).

State and federal policymakers also need to enforce the creation and administration of ELACs and DELACs, as both levels of government have jurisdiction over the funding and legal requirements of the programs. ELACs and DELACs play a vital role in local districts, whose members advocate on behalf of emergent bilingual students, represent parents of EL students throughout districts, and advise superintendents, schools boards, and site councils about policies and practices for EL students. To fulfill their role and purpose, these committees must be created and administered following the legal requirements established by state and federal policies. Uncovered in this study were the significant administrative issues with the creation and operation of ELACs in the district, which have led to anger and mistrust among some *mamás*. There was also the disenfranchisement of EL students and parents at school sites where no ELAC or DELAC representation existed. Actually, oversight of these programs already exists through the California Department of Education's Technical Assistance and Monitoring Office (CDE, 2019b) and the Federal Program Monitoring Office (CDE, 2018c). These two offices have a duty to investigate and make known the extent of the administrative issues happening in districts

across the state, to understand the root causes of such problems, and to provide support to those who struggle to create and maintain proper functioning ELACs and DELACs.

Regarding local practices, the findings of this study suggest there are several areas where *Rancho los Nietos* administrators could improve the strategies and approaches they use to involve DELAC members in LCAP processes, top among these is a recommendation that *Rancho los Nietos* invest in more skilled translators and new translation equipment. As the findings of this study demonstrated, accurate and consistent translation was a significant barrier in the district. In DELAC meetings, where a large portion of the attendees were Spanish-dominant, having skilled translators and translation equipment was essential. While the Spanish-English translator at the DELAC meeting was highly skilled, fatigue would set in and erode his ability to maintain accuracy. At the same time, the headsets used at the DELAC meetings were faulty. Additionally, many materials (presentations and handouts) used by guest speakers (such as the talks about different funding categories and planning documents delivered by the LCAP Asst. Director) were not translated in time for DELAC meetings, making it difficult for DELAC members to follow discussions or to be able to later refer to materials. Also, ensuring there are skilled translators at school sites would enhance the engagement of ELAC members and other Spanish-dominant parents. Again and again, *mamás* in my study cited the importance of having skilled translators at their school sites. It created a more welcoming environment and improved the communication between the school and parents. As both Ana and Yaneli mentioned, having bilingual school staff can make parents feel comfortable and understood.

Providing accurate, up-to-date, disaggregated data about EL students in the district, and ample time to unpack the meaning of such data, could improve the quality of DELAC engagement in LCAP. Data reports that include academic and social and emotional measures disaggregated by school and grade level would help illuminate places where students are finding

more success and sites and grade levels that need greater support. While making data-informed decisions was a mantra frequently communicated by district officials, data to develop such decisions was not made available at DELAC meetings. Moreover, the data presented to DELAC members should be directly tied to the metrics, programs, and services listed in the LCAP that addressed the needs of EL students. After all, one of the primary functions of DELAC was to be “engaged and involved in developing, reviewing, and supporting implementation of the LCAP” (CDE, 2016c, p. 21).

In LCFF, district officials have been positioned as street-level bureaucrats with “substantial discretion in the execution of their work” (Weatherly & Lipsky, 1977, p. 172). As captured in the meeting observations, district officials had tight control over the agendas, data, and discussions that took place. The broad language in the policy allows district officials to decide how and to what extent DELAC members and other stakeholders will be involved in LCAP decision making. Yet, to develop an LCAP that is informed with meaningful input from parents, as stated in the LCAP template (CDE, 2016d, p. 3), districts need to *collaborate* and share power with parents. Henderson et al. (2007) argues that sharing power means families are engaged in dialogues about budgets, programs, and practices *before* final decisions are made (p. 187). The observations from this study revealed that the district officials came to DELAC when decisions had already been made. To enhance the quality of DELAC member involvement, local practices should include skilled facilitation, ongoing training, and access to a repository of resources that are frequently refreshed. Running effective meetings that elicit meaningful input from DELAC members is a skill, which at its core is carried out by an experienced facilitator. Training conducted by professional groups with expertise working with Latin@ immigrant parents and education administrators provided for both DELAC members and district officials could also help raise the level of knowledge and engagement taking place at meetings.

Developing and maintaining resources such as a glossary of terms, rules and regulations, and a central online location where input could be stored and made public, could enhance the quality of DELAC engagement in LCAP decision making processes. These recommendations would require an additional investment in staff dedicated to organizing and coordinating these efforts, but having staff exclusively committed to LCAP could improve how the processes are carried out, which in turn could result in the adoption of policies and practices that transform the experiences and outcomes of EL students.

Contribution to Scholarship

This research study adds to the literature on parent engagement and parent participation in decision-making processes. Specifically, it brings to the surface how Latina immigrant mothers active in school and district sanctioned parent committees, understand and enact their roles as parent representatives, and the consequence of their engagement. While an extensive body of work has been published on parent involvement in schools, few have examined the experiences of Latina immigrant mothers involved in district-sanctioned committees like DELAC. At the same time critical scholars have found a historic and ongoing narrative that frames low-income, racial, and language minority parents as inferior, culturally flawed, and as incapable of making a valuable contribution to schools without first receiving help from experts (Ishimaru, 2014; Lightfoot, 2004; López & Stoelting, 2010). The findings from this study speak back to those notions and offer a fresh perspective of Latina immigrant mothers as active, informed, and engaged parents who seek to improve the educational outcomes of EL students.

My study adds to the growing body of literature focused on Latin@ parents involved in education policymaking (e.g., Olivos, 2006; Terriquez, 2011; Velez, 2012; Yosso, 2006). What emerged from this study was a clearer understanding about the roles that Latina immigrant mothers play and want to play through their engagement in schools and districts. It sheds light on

their unique positions in the district, the ways they use their positions to navigate the educational system, and how they build capacity among other Latin@ parents.

This case study also extends the literature currently published about the LCAP. While research has been emerging on the LCAP, most reports have centered on the impact the policy has had on administrators (e.g., Fuller & Tobben, 2014; Wolf & Sands, 2016) and has looked at stakeholder engagement more broadly (e.g., Affeldt, 2015; Marsh & Hall, 2018). This study has taken a close look at the involvement of Latina immigrant mothers active in DELAC, members of the central district level committee dedicated to advocating for emergent bilingual students, one of the student subgroups at the center of the LCFF. My findings shed light on the members of this unique group and the ways in which their involvement in DELAC is working and not working to change the educational experiences and outcomes of EL students — a major goal of LCFF.

Limitations of the Study

Although this study yielded meaningful results in terms of understanding the role, purpose, experiences, and consequences of *las mamás* involved in district LCAP processes, limitations have remained in the study. First, the design of this study (a qualitative case study) was limited to the *Rancho los Nietos Unified School District*, a bounded system with its own unique context. While the demographics of the district may be similar to others across the country, the findings of this study may not apply to any other school district.

Second, this project was narrowly focused on DELAC meetings. This was only one forum where LCAP conversations took place in the district. Other district level meetings where LCAP was discussed were not included in this study. However, collecting these additional interactions would have broadened the scope of my project and would have shifted the focus away from the Latina mothers advocating through DELAC. While the experiences of parents in

these other spaces would be important to understand, the focus of this study was on *mamás* active in DELAC.

Third, this study collected data from roughly one academic year (2016-2017), but LCAP is a dynamic and ongoing process. While the findings from this study are significant, they captured what happened during one year of engagement. It is possible that the understandings, experiences, and consequence of the involvement of *las mamás* would change the following year, just as they probably were different the previous year. Still, the findings from this study offer important insights related to the involvement of DELAC Latina mothers in the LCAP process and could inform future LCAP iterations.

Finally, at the center of this study were active DELAC Latina mothers. Data from Latina mothers who were not active in DELAC were not collected for this study. In a district with the size and composition of *Rancho los Nietos*, that meant that thousands of *mamás* were not included. Still, this study centered on a unique and important parent group, active DELAC Latina mothers. Illuminating their understandings about their role and purpose in LCAP, the experiences they had in the process, and the consequences of their involvement in DELAC provided a unique contribution to our knowledge about this particular group.

Future Directions for Research

Exploring the relationship between *las mamás* and the parents they come into contact with would be one important direction for future research. As was uncovered in this study, an exchange of information seems to be taking place between *las mamás* and parents inside and outside of schools. Some of these parents might be considered disengaged or uninvolved parents as they never or rarely interact with school personnel. But these were also the parents who came into contact with *las mamás*, had questions or concerns about their child's education, and received guidance from a *mamá*. Better understanding these parents, their questions and

concerns, the relationships they have with *mamás* (i.e., active parent representatives), and the consequence of the interactions with *mamás* could inform policy and practice. For instance, what are the questions and concerns of these parents and could schools and districts address these in a more proactive manner? Also, how can the questions and concerns of these parents be captured in a more systematic way and used to inform decision making?

Examining the involvement of Latina mothers in other district level forums would be another important area for future research. As mentioned before, DELAC was not the only forum where LCAP discussions were taking place in the district. From my own involvement in the district, I know there are Latina mothers who are active in some of these other forums. Understanding their experiences and the ways in which they advocate for emergent bilingual students in the district would illuminate other paths and contexts where Latina mothers are involved in LCAP processes.

At the same time, collecting data from other meetings could provide a way to compare how parents in other advisory groups are engaged in LCAP. How do their experiences compare to those found in this study on DELAC? What input do parents in these other committees *want* to share with district officials, and what input *is* getting through? How are their insights and ideas handled in relation to the district's final LCAP decision making? Findings from research in this area could offer new knowledge on the ways in which diverse parent groups are being involved in LCAP, and how the needs of EL students are advocated in these spaces.

Carrying out case studies on DELAC involvement in additional districts would be another direction for future research. Some areas of inquiry could include: who are the parents participating in other DELACs, what are their experiences, and what is the consequence of their involvement? Investigating the insights and experiences of DELAC members in additional districts would add to the findings uncovered in this study. It would also help document the

various input approaches taken by districts and the impact of those approaches. Documenting effective and not so effective methods to involve DELAC members in LCAP processes could inform local practices.

There is also the importance of carrying out studies that examine the engagement of other immigrant and EL groups in participatory policymaking processes. While Spanish is the home language of 77 percent of all EL students enrolled in U.S. public schools (NCES, 2016), there are hundreds of thousands of other children classified as EL whose home language is something other than English or Spanish. For instance, over 100,000 children come from homes where Arabic is their home language, over 100,000 children come from homes where Chinese is their home language, and over 80,000 children come from homes where Vietnamese is their home language (NCES, 2016). According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2016), “the 30 most commonly reported home languages also include several whose prevalence has increased rapidly in recent years” (para. 6) including speakers of Napali and a Karen¹⁷ language, whose numbers have quadrupled since 2008. In the *Rancho los Nietos* district, Khmer, Tagalog, and many other languages comprised the EL student population. Knowing and understanding the engagement and involvement of these children’s parents and caregivers in participatory policymaking could help illuminate and inform policy, practice, and research.

Concluding Statement

Commonly used top-down decision-making approaches create distance between powerful policymakers and the communities impacted by policy decisions. The presumed local control approach of the LCAP intends to disrupt this practice by engaging DELAC members and other community stakeholders in the process in meaningful ways. The LCAP presents an opportunity

¹⁷ Karen includes several languages spoken by the Karen ethnic group from Burma (NCES, 2018).

to have the voices of historically marginalized parents included in the decision making that will directly affect the educational experiences of emergent bilingual students.

The findings from this case study shed light on the ways in which Latina immigrant mothers active in district governance committees understood their roles and purpose in LCAP, engaged in the process, and the consequence of their participation. Adding to the literature on parent engagement and participatory policymaking, the findings uncovered the lived experiences of the *mamás* in this space, what precipitated their involvement in committees, and the important contributions they made to their school communities and their district. This study also captured the personal and district constructed barriers that impeded their meaningful engagement, and the ideas that were left behind as a result. Ultimately, this research highlights the adversity, tension, and suppression faced by the 14 *mamás* who participated in this study, and reveals their dedication and perseverance to carry on.

Appendix A

Parent Interview Protocol¹⁸

1. Completely review the *Informed Consent* form with the participant. Ask if they have any questions or concerns about the form or the participation procedures. Have them sign the form if they are willing to participate in the study. Provide them with a copy for their records.
2. Demographics:

Birthplace: <i>Do you identify as Latina and/or Mexicana?</i>	
Educational Attainment:	
Length of time in the States:	
Length of time in district:	
Number of children & school each attends: <i>Which of your children are classified as English learners?</i>	
<u>Name of Child</u>	<u>Grade Level</u>

First Interview: Present lived experience

- What is your official role as a committee member?
- What are your responsibilities as a member of the advisory committee?
- How long have you been an advisory committee member?
- How do you prepare for the district advisory committee meetings?

¹⁸ Adapted from I.E. Seidman (2013), *Interviewing as Qualitative Research* (4th ed.). New York: Teachers College Press.

- As you know, the state recently changed how money is distributed to school districts, and now requires districts to include parents in making funding decisions about EL student engagement and learning.
 - Can you describe how you have been engaged in this new process?
- What are some strategies you use to push your ideas or concerns at district-wide meetings? Can you provide a recent example?
- Do you gather input or concerns from parents who do not attend the advisory meetings? How?
- How do you remain aware of EL student concerns at your school site?
- How often do parents contact you with concerns they have about their children's educational experiences?
 - Can you describe the nature of their communication? What methods do they use to contact you? What do you do with that information?
- Can you describe the approach you take to resolve an ongoing or widespread concern? Do you raise the concern at the district-wide meeting? If so, do you feel district officials provide you with effective guidance or resolution?
 - Can you provide a recent example?
- What do you do with the information you learn from the district-wide meetings?
 - Do you share the information with parents who do not attend meetings? If so, how? When?

Second Interview: Focused Life History

- What motivated you to become an official ELAC committee member?
- What keeps you motivated to continue to be involved in advisory committees?
- Do you remember the first time you become involved in your children's school?
- Do you remember when you first attended a DELAC meeting? Did someone invite you to attend?
- How is your involvement in your child's education different from your parents' involvement in your education?
 - When you were younger, were your parents involved in school groups like ELAC? Do such groups exist? How do parents exercise their voices in school policy decisions? How do parents advocate for their children?
- What were some unexpected differences you encountered between your educational experience and that of your children attending school in the U.S.?
 - How did you become aware of these differences?
 - How have you worked through with these differences?

Third Interview: Reflection and Goals

- Why have you become involved in an advisory committee centered on the engagement of English Learners?
- What do you hope to accomplish as an advisory committee member? Why are these goals important to you?
- What do you consider to be your greatest success thus far as a committee member?
- What does being a member of the advisory committee mean to you?
- What do you see as some of the greatest challenges impacting the engagement of DELAC members in the district?
- How has your work on the committee impacted or influenced district meetings or decisions?
- In what ways has your work impacted your children's education? Your circle of friends?
- What would you want others to know about being a member of the advisory committee?
- How much influence do you think you have over school and district budget and policy decisions? Why?
- Can you describe some of what you have learned by attending the district meetings?
- Do you plan to run for office again in the coming year? Why or why not?

Appendix B

District Interview Protocols¹⁹

Completely review the *Informed Consent* form with the participant. Ask if they have any questions or concerns about the form or the participation procedures. Have them sign the form if they are willing to participate in the study. Provide them with a copy for their records.

1. Background:
 - a. Can you describe your role/areas of responsibility in the district?
 - b. Can you describe your experience working with parents of emergent bilingual families?
 - c. How are you involved in the LCAP and/or budget development process?
 - d. What was the budget process like prior to LCFF?
 - e. Please describe the budget and LCAP development process in the district?
 - f. How did the LCAP change your budget development process?
2. Present Experience, Parent Engagement:
 - a. How have parents of emergent bilinguals been involved in the LCAP development process?
 - b. What challenges have you faced in engaging these parents? How are the challenges different from past challenges engaging parents?
 - c. What skills or knowledge do you believe parents need to engage in the LCAP process? Why?
 - d. What training has been provided to DELAC parents to get them started in the LCAP process?
 - e. How do you analyze parent input and decide what to incorporate into the LCAP?
 - f. What strategies have you/the district tried to engage parents? What have been the results?
3. Reflection, Parent Involvement:
 - a. Has the information you have gathered as a result of parent engagement caused you to make decisions you might not have otherwise made? Please explain.
 - b. As you head into a new academic year, what are your goals for DELAC member engagement in the LCAP? What steps will you take to reach those goals?

¹⁹ Questions adapted from Wolf and Sands (2016).

Appendix C

Meeting Observation Checklist²⁰

1. The physical setting:
 - What is the physical environment like?
 - What is the context?
 - What kinds of behavior is the setting designed for?
 - How is the space allocated?
2. The participants:
 - Describe who is in the scene, how many people, and their roles.
 - What brings these people together?
 - Who is allowed here?
 - Who is not here who would be expected to be here?
 - What are the relevant characteristics of the participants?
 - What are the ways in which the people in this setting organize themselves?
3. Activities and interactions:
 - What is going on?
 - Is there a definable sequence of activities?
 - How do the people interact with the activity and with one another?
 - How are people and activities connected?
 - What norms or rules structure the activities and interactions?
 - When did the activity begin?
 - How long does it last?
4. Conversation:
 - What is the content of conversations in this setting?
 - Who speaks to whom?
 - Who listens?
 - What do parents say? How do district officials respond?
 - What do district officials say? How do parents respond?
5. Subtle factors:
 - Informal and unplanned activities
 - Symbolic and connotative meanings of words
 - Nonverbal communication such as dress and physical space
 - Unobtrusive measures such as physical clues
 - What does not happen (especially if ought to have happened)?
6. My behavior (for meetings physically attended):
 - How is my role affecting the scene I am observing?

²⁰ This observation checklist is an adaptation of one developed by Merriam (2009, p.120-121).

- What do I say and do?
- What thoughts do I have about what is going on?

Appendix D

Background Information About Each Mamá

The following contains background information about each *mamá* including her hometown, number of years she has been living in the U.S., her level of formal education completed, work status at the time of the study, and a description of children.

<u>Name</u>	<u>Hometown</u>	<u>Yrs. in U.S.</u>	<u>Level of Edu.^a</u>	<u>Work Status</u>	<u>Official Roles in District^b</u>	<u>Children, Grade/Age, EL Classification^c</u>
Alma	Colima, Mex.	22	Completed high school in Mex. Earned technical degree in Mexico.	Homemaker	Former school's DELAC rep. Former Title I co-chair Former site council member Former ELAC member	1. Daughter, 12 th grade, reclassified 2. Son, 6 th grade, reclassified
Ana	Guadalajara, Mex.	6	Completed first year of high school in Mex.	Homemaker	ELAC president at high school and middle school	1. Daughter, 11 th grade, reclassified 2. Son ^d , 9 th grade, EL 3. Daughter ^d , 9 th grade, EL 4. Son, 7 th grade, EL
Antonia	Guadalajara, Mex.	30	Completed high school in Mex. Trained nurse in Mex.	School Recreation Supervisor	ELAC president Former school's DELAC rep.	1. Son, 26 years old, high school graduate, complete technical college degree, reclassified 2. Son, 25 years old, high school graduate, reclassified 3. Daughter, 24 years old, high school graduate, technical college degree, reclassified 4. Son, 12 th grade, unsure if reclassified 5. Daughter, 5 th grade, EL

<u>Name</u>	<u>Hometown</u>	<u>Yrs. in U.S.</u>	<u>Level of Edu.^a</u>	<u>Work Status</u>	<u>Official Roles in District^b</u>	<u>Children, Grade/Age, EL Classification^c</u>
Blanca	Ciudad de Mex., Mex.	20	Graduated from U.S. high school	Homemaker	ELAC secretary at high school and elementary school Site council member	1. Daughter, 12 th grade, reclassified 2. Daughter, 10 th grade, reclassified 3. Son, 4 th grade, reclassified
Carla	City in Michoacán, Mex.	23	Completed three years of high school in Mex.	Freelance Caterer	School's alt. DELAC rep. ELAC secretary Former site council member	1. Son, 23 years old, no longer in school 2. Daughter, 8 th grade, reclassified 3. Son, 7 th grade, reclassified 4. Son, 1 st grade, EL
Carolina	Rural town in Guanajuato, Mex.	15	Completed high school in Mex. Earned technical degree in Mex. Earned GED in U.S.	Freelance Beauty and Health Sales Person	School's DELAC rep. Former site council member	1. Daughter, 9 th grade, reclassified 2. Daughter, 6 th grade, reclassified 3. Son, 2 nd grade, EL
Dolores	City in Michoacán, Mex.	20	Completed middle school in Mex.	Homemaker	DELAC secretary School's ELAC president	1. Son ^d , 10 th grade, EL 2. Son ^d , 10 th grade, EL 3. Son, 7 th grade, unsure of classification status

<u>Name</u>	<u>Hometown</u>	<u>Yrs. in U.S.</u>	<u>Level of Edu.^a</u>	<u>Work Status</u>	<u>Official Roles in District^b</u>	<u>Children, Grade/Age, EL Classification^c</u>
Elena	Ciudad de Mex., Mex.	19	Completed high school in Mex. Completed 2 years of university study in Mex. Earned GED in U.S.	Homemaker	DELAC president ELAC president School's site council vice president	1. Daughter, 3 rd grade, EL 2. Daughter, Head Start, EL
Esperanza	Mexico	34	Completed middle school in Mex.	Homemaker	Former DELAC rep. Former ELAC member Former site council member	1. Daughter, 32 years old, high school graduate, classification unknown 2. Daughter, 30 years old, earned GED, classification unknown 3. Daughter, 27 years old, high school graduate, classification unknown 4. Son, 24 years old, high school graduate, classification unknown 5. Son, 9 th grade, reclassified
Lorena	Guadalajara, Mex.	17	Completed high school in Mex. Took some college courses in Mex.	Housekeeper	Site council president ELAC member	1. Son ^d , 6 th grade, reclassified 2. Daughter ^d , 6 th grade, reclassified

<u>Name</u>	<u>Hometown</u>	<u>Yrs. in U.S.</u>	<u>Level of Edu.^a</u>	<u>Work Status</u>	<u>Official Roles in District^b</u>	<u>Children, Grade/Age, EL Classification^c</u>
Monica	Guadalajara, Mex.	17	Completed first year of high school in Mex.	Homemaker	School's Title I rep. School's Spec. Ed. rep. Former site council president	1. Son, 23 years old, high school graduate 2. Daughter, 9 th grade, reclassified 3. Daughter, 6 th grade, EL
Sofia	Ciudad Juárez, Mex.	25	Completed part of middle school in Mex.	Homemaker	School's alt. DELAC rep.	1. Daughter, 24 years old, high school graduate, currently attending university, unclear if ever classified as EL (1 st language was Spanish) 2. Son, 20 years old, high school graduate, currently attending university, never classified as EL 3. Daughter, 8 th grade, never classified as EL
Tanya	Rural town in Guerrero, Mex.	28	Completed high school in Mex. Earned associate degree in social work in Mex.	Homemaker	School's DELAC rep. ELAC president	1. Daughter, 30 years old, classification unknown 2. Daughter, 27 years old, classification unknown 3. Daughter, 26 years old, classification unknown 4. Son, 25 years old, classification unknown 5. Son, 20 years old, classification unknown 6. Daughter ^d , kinder., EL 7. Son ^d , kinder., EL

<u>Name</u>	<u>Hometown</u>	<u>Yrs. in U.S.</u>	<u>Level of Edu.^a</u>	<u>Work Status</u>	<u>Official Roles in District^b</u>	<u>Children, Grade/Age, EL Classification^c</u>
Yaneli	Guadalajara, Mex.	16	Attended high school in U.S., left in 11 th grade	Homemaker	School's DELAC rep. Former site council president	1. Son, 9 th grade, reclassified 2. Daughter, 1 st grade, EL 3. Son, under 5 years old, not yet enrolled in school

^a The Mexican schooling system is organized similar to the U.S. in that there is *primaria* (grades 1-6), *secundaria* (grades 7-9), and *preparatoria* (grades 10-12). For simplicity, I used the terms “middle school” and “high school” to describe the level of education completed by each *mamá* even if was in Mexico.

^b Former positions are also listed to demonstrate the various elected positions and perhaps institutional knowledge held by each *mamás*.

^c Classification as English learners was not gathered or not known for all children, especially children who were no longer attending K-12 schools.

^d Twins. There were four sets of twins among the children discussed in this study.

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