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The Educational Impact of Involvement of Immigrant Latino Parents on Their High-Achieving  
5th Grade Children

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

by

Roberto Baeza

2012

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## ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

The Educational Impact of Involvement of Immigrant Latino Parents on Their High-Achieving  
5th Grade Children

by

Roberto Baeza

Doctor of Education

University of California, Los Angeles, 2012

Ernest Morrell, Chair

The questions associated with the potential influence of parental involvement on students' achievement at school have long been a focus of educational research. In particular, the involvement of immigrant Latino parents on the success of their children at school has been a matter of debate. This question is especially important with regard to students from Latino backgrounds who have the highest dropout rate across California and the United States. While the popular views are that Latino parents' involvement brings little benefit and that Latino parents are unwilling to be involved in the educational matters of their children, this study sought to determine whether these views could be validated empirically with regard to 5th graders. Specifically, the purpose of the study was to examine the level and nature of the involvement of immigrant Latino parents in their high-achieving children's school activities with the aim of

establishing ways and means through which all parents can be empowered to help their children achieve academic success.

The objectives of the research were to explore immigrant Latino parents' participation in their high-achieving children's schooling; to determine how limited English-speaking Latino parents supported their children in becoming high achievers; to describe what Latino parents do in and out of school to support their children's academic performance; and to examine the home and school environment to which Latino high-achieving students are exposed for maximum opportunities for academic skills. To achieve the objectives, the author employed a qualitative research design. Specifically, qualitative data was collected from individual interviews with a random sample of ten immigrant Latino parents and their 5th grade students who have shown a pattern of high academic achievement as defined by the California Standards Tests (CSTs) over the course of three years data.

Interview data revealed that Latino parents are interested and are involved in their children's education. The involvement of these particular immigrant parents in their high-achieving children's education occurs primarily at home and secondarily at school. The study found that low educational background and specific cultural practices did not prevent these parents from being highly involved in their children's education both at home and at school. Parents mentioned their role in enhancing children's motivation, developing love for schooling, providing outside help by, for example, hiring experts to help. At the same time, the teacher-parent connection was found to be quite limited with the major obstacle being the language barrier. Students were found to positively assess their parents' involvement in their education. The findings illustrate the experience of immigrant Latino parents in promoting the education of their high achieving children. Specifically, the findings validate the importance of parental

involvement in education of their primary school children and provide the background for recommendations as to making this involvement more effective.

*Keywords:* Latino parenting, educational impacts, high-achieving Latino students, achievement gap

The dissertation of Roberto Baeza is approved.

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Robert Chao Romero

Ernest Morrell, Committee Chair

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2012

## DEDICATION

Dedico este trabajo a la memoria de mi madre, Celia  
y a mi padre, Tomás  
quienes me enseñaron con consejos y ejemplos  
que una buena educación y el trabajar duro eran la receta a una mejor vida

I dedicate this work to the memory of my mother, Celia  
and my father, Tomás  
who taught me through words of wisdom and by example  
that a good education and hard work were the recipe to a better life



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## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

#### **Statement of the Problem**

Okagaki (1995) pointed out that most Latinos value education in general and see the importance of a high school diploma. Okagaki (1995) also observed that parents who become upset with low grades from their high achieving sons or daughters are the ones who reach out more to their children in order to help them to do better in school.

Research already shows the strong link between parent involvement and academic achievement (Tinkler, 2002). According to Gandara and Contreras (2009):

Many parents of high achievers who have low levels of formal education themselves nonetheless have very high levels of informal education and are able to assist their children's literacy and general education in relatively sophisticated way. (p. 206)

Despite the fact that most Latino immigrant parents are more than enthusiastic to provide and support their children's education, many have limited confidence and knowledge to help them achieve academically (Md-Yunus, 2008). For the purpose of this study, the use of the term immigrant will always imply Latino immigrant. Additional clarification of terms utilized in this dissertation can be found in Appendix A.

There are elementary school-aged Latino students who are successful in school despite the odds that the achievement gap imposes on their ethnic group (Gandara, 2005b). A research gap exists as to what the parents may be doing differently in order to facilitate this achievement despite barriers and statistics that are stacked up against the Latino students' success. This gap also exists as to how immigrant parents with limited English speaking skills have successfully been involved in their high achieving children's education. Research has already reflected the

numerous barriers that are stacked against such parents, especially due to language challenges (Md-Yusnus, 2008; Tinkler, 2002). However, there is limited research that expounds on the attributes and activities of Latino immigrant parents who are successful in helping their child achieve his or her full potential.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The intent of this qualitative study is to describe the attributes of parental involvement of limited English speaking parents and the impact these parents have on the success of their high achieving 5th grade Latino children. This happens despite the barriers to success that exist for students from a minority group that has the highest dropout rate in the U.S. (Gorinski & Fraser, 2006; Koss-Chioino & Vargas, 1999). The knowledge gained from this study can help to form a basic model of how limited English speaking Latino parents can improve their involvement in their children's education. The purpose of this study is to examine the level and nature of the involvement of parents in their high-achieving children's school activities with the aim of establishing ways and means through which all parents can be empowered to enable their children to reach their full potential.

### **Aims and Objectives**

Following are the objectives of this qualitative study; which aims to describe the attributes of limited English speaking Latino parents who are able to help their children become high achievers:

1. To understand the home and school environment by which Latino high achiever students are exposed to maximum opportunities for academic skills.
2. To describe the attributes of limited English-speaking Latino parents in relation to the high achievement of their children.

3. To determine how limited English-speaking Latino parents supported their children in becoming high achievers.

4. To describe what Latino parents do in and out of school to support their children's academic performance.

### **Research Questions**

The following research questions will serve as a guide in the completion of this qualitative study:

- How do immigrant Latino parents of high achieving 5th grade Latino students participate in their children's schooling?
- With respect to participating parents,
  - How are they involved with their children's education at school?
  - What do they do outside of school to support their children's education?
  - How does the school support their involvement?
- With respect to participating students,
  - In what ways do they see their parents supporting their education at school?

### **Focus on Latino Immigrant Parents**

The study will focus on Latino immigrant parents and their involvement in the educational attainment of their children. More immigrants presently live in the United States than ever before (Olivos & Mendoza, 2010). The largest percentage of these foreign-born people is of Latino heritage, primarily Mexican. This large demographic change means that schools are forced to look at existing practices in their attempts to address the increased number of Latino children attending schools in the United States (Olivos & Mendoza, 2010). The Associated Press-Univision Poll (University of Chicago, National Opinion Research Center, 2010) suggests that Latino immigrant parents aspire for their children to go to college.

The Pew Hispanic Center (2009) notes that fifty-two percent of Hispanic<sup>1</sup> children are the U.S. –born offspring of at least one foreign-born parent. It notes that the number of Hispanic American-born children born to at least one immigrant parent may not peak until at least 2050. Most of these Latino immigrant parents came to the United States from Mexico, Central America, and South America during the 1980s. The Center (2009) also reports that Latino children will continue to be one of the fastest growing student populations in the United States. Olivos and Mendoza’s (2010) research thus supports the notion that the immigrant parents of these children tend to be supportive of their children’s educational attainment.

### **Background of the Study**

#### **The Latino and the American Dream**

In the last 30 years, the total number of foreign-born residents in U.S. has tripled. Latinos, who constitute 47 percent of the minority groups in the country, are among the fastest growing minority groups (Tinkler, 2002). According to Tinkler (2002), most of the Latinos have been recruited into the country as low-skilled and low-wage employees; they mostly have come to seek a better life. In the next 20 years, the number of Latino children is predicted to double, and by 2030 Latino students are viewed to possibly comprise one-fourth of the total K-12 school population in the United States (Tinkler, 2002). It is these students that need attention and support from stakeholders in education.

One of the major reasons immigrants hope to come to the United States is their dream to provide their children with better educational and career opportunities. Regardless of their financial status, their home country, or what they have attained educationally, immigrants voice the same sentiments regarding their move to the U.S. Furthermore, the children of immigrants

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<sup>1</sup> The terms *Hispanic* and *Latino* are often used interchangeably in the United States for people with origins in Spanish-speaking countries, such as Mexico, Puerto Rico, Cuba, Dominican Republic, and Central and South American countries.

also start with a stronger desire to study, in comparison to non-immigrant children (Gandara & Contreras, 2009; Md-Yunus, 2008).

According to Md-Yunus (2008), 86.9 percent of children of immigrant parents view a college education to be necessary for what they want to do in the future or that they need good grades to have a good job. They equate education as a prerequisite to have a chance to be successful in life. However, immigrant Latino children often experience more cultural and linguistic barriers that hinder them from achieving an American education with ease. They also face psychological difficulties because they are oftentimes perceived as outsiders. Since they are faced with such struggles, this heightens the level of support they need from their parents and their teachers. However, home environments are viewed to have a substantial role in the academic performance of the children (Darnell & Alvarez-Jimenez, 2008; Garcia, 1997, April 15; Md-Yunus, 2008).

There is considerable evidence that points to the relationship between parent involvement and student achievement, as well as better school attendance and reduced dropout rates (Tinkler, 2002). Researchers discovered that parents who became more involved in monitoring homework were able to help improve the grades of children. Parental involvement was a key factor in the success of students.

However, the harsh reality is that despite the fact that parents want to be supportive of their children's formal education, a number of circumstances prevent them from doing so. Although Latinos earn more in the U.S. than they did in their home countries, they still make up two-thirds of the country's poor (Tinkler, 2002). This general state of poverty hinders effective involvement in school activities as parents of lower socioeconomic status shy away from interacting freely with teachers who are considered to belong to a higher social class. However,

strong parental encouragement is perceived from immigrant parents. In Mexico, compulsory education goes only up to *secundaria*, the U.S. equivalent of the middle school (Gandara & Contreras, 2009). However, many of these *secundaria* students are forced to leave earlier in their educational careers because of the economic pressures they encounter.

Nevertheless, it is these same immigrant parents that as a whole want more education for their children. This is rooted in the fact that they have left school out of necessity rather than a personal choice. Immigrants carry a unique hopefulness within their beliefs that exemplifies the value that if they work hard enough, they can attain the American Dream. This is well known among immigrants and they emphasize this with their children as they try to give education the significance it deserves (Gandara & Contreras, 2009).

However, one of the major concerns for Latinos is found in the academic achievement gap. Latino youth are typically viewed as the most under-educated of the U.S. population; they also have the highest drop rate in the U.S (Tinkler, 2002). According to U.S. Department of Education (USDE) statistics, Latino students are four times more susceptible to dropping out from school, and in the year 2000, for example, only 64.1 percent of Latino immigrant students were able to complete high school as compared to 91.8 percent whites, 90.6 percent Asians and 83.7 percent Blacks (U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics [USDE/NCES], 2001). Large achievement gaps between Latino and White students exist even when both must face high poverty. This is observed to be common in elementary students. While 41 percent of the White students in the fourth grade level reached above the proficient level expected at that grade, only a little over a third of the Latinos reached this level (Gandara, 2005b).



Furthermore, Latino children also encounter low expectations from teachers, poverty, racism and isolation, as well as the lack of cooperation that may exist between the school and the Latino parent community. According to a report by Tinkler (2002), over the last two decades, White parents have improved relations with their children's schools in terms of parental participation. On the other hand, Latino parents have decreased contact with their children's schools for several reasons that will be discussed later.

### **Elusive Potential for Latino Children**

According to recent studies, children that had close relationships with their parents excelled in school (Darnell & Alvarez-Jimenez, 2008 Tinkler, 2002). A transmission of cultural values is viewed as a manner by which Latino parents encourage their children to do well in school. There are high achievers in every group. Latinos also have a fair share of student high achievers. However, the average Latino student achieves lower than his or her White or Asian American peers (Gandara, 2005a). It is noted that Latinos tend to score a little higher than African Americans in some indicators of academic achievement. However, they remain the group that is most at risk for failing to complete school and going into college (Gandara, 2005a).

According to Brown (1989), Latino parental involvement as in any other group would greatly enhance the student confidence in schoolwork and mold positive attitudes towards issues relating to academics. This involvement is also believed to inculcate an improved relationship between the parents and their children, a fact that builds an environment conducive to learning. Students who have the right attitude towards academic work would definitely help in raising the confidence of the teachers who have always maintained very low expectations from the Latino students. Though teachers have in many instances interpreted the lack of involvement of Latino parents as lack of caring for their children, researchers have disapproved this notion. Considering

the caring attitude that the Latino parents have been found to possess for their children, it is therefore clear that once they learn of the importance of active participation in school issues then the full potential of their children in academic performance can be realized.

Traditionally, Latino parents have assumed the role of nurturing good virtues and discipline in their children and largely felt that the actual learning process belonged to the teachers. The teachers, however, expect the parents to actively participate in the actual learning process through guiding, supervising and creating a good environment for homework and other forms of studying at home (Tinkler, 2002). The secret of fully exploiting the potential of the Latino student has actually been in bridging this gap where the parents understand that the actual learning process of their children is not necessarily a domain of teachers only. Tapping the full potential of immigrant Latino students calls for total parental involvement in formal school activities, including volunteer services in the schools. However, the schools should also focus on appreciating the traditional methods of parental involvement that Latino immigrant parents are used to. This way the initiation towards the formal involvement shall be easy and smooth because the interaction of teachers and parents in the traditional approach will enhance a healthy and productive relationship that would support long-term involvement. Tapping the students' full potential through parent-school participation in "traditional" involvement can be realized by ensuring that the barriers that exist between the parents and the school are eliminated (or minimized). For example, schools can offer translation services for parents with language difficulties, they can offer transport services for parents willing to visit schools, and they can schedule flexible school events to accommodate parents with tight job programs (Tinkler, 2002).

## **Barriers for Latino Parents**

Numerous research studies present the reasons why parental involvement is difficult for Latino parents (Bempechat, 1999, May/June; Gandara, 2005a; Illinois State Board of Education, Illinois State Department of Human Services [ISBE/ISDHS], 2004; Md-Yunus, 2008; Tinkler, 2002;). It is difficult to place the blame on the parents when they either neglect or place too much pressure on their children to excel in school. They are faced with numerous challenges in becoming involved in their children's education in different ways from their peers of other ethnic groups. One of the major barriers is obviously the struggle with language. Many Latino parents speak little or no English. This serves as an evident barrier to communication between the school and the home. Many schools do not have the linguistically proficient staff that can assist new families in the school or translate written material efficiently.

Too often, written material is the primary manner by which schools communicate with the parents. If the materials are written in English only, a number of language minority parents will not be able to read and understand them well (ISBE/ISDHS, 2004). Furthermore, there are parents with limited abilities to read and write due to limited educational attainment. Much of the time, children serve as translators between the parents and the school. The young students are not viewed as reliable translators and sometimes they feel ashamed of their parents, thus discouraging them from attending school functions (Tinkler, 2002).

There is also a common misconception among school personnel that Latino parents are not interested in their children's education (ISBE/ISDHS, 2004). This may be due to cultural misunderstandings. There are different school systems across the globe and oftentimes immigrant parents simply trust the school and don't question the authority of the school.

Isolation is also a barrier to parental involvement (Tinkler, 2002; ISBE/ISDHS, 2004). Limited English language skills often lead parents to isolate themselves from the school community. Sometimes, they are reluctant to step out of their comfort zones because of what may be undocumented status in the country. On the other hand, others fear violence because of the neighborhoods they belong to. There were also those that cannot afford childcare for their younger children and this makes it difficult for them to be more involved in school activities (ISBE/ISDHS, 2004).

Aside from the variables already noted, there are also a lot of Latino parents that work double to triple shifts in a day. Due to their socioeconomic standing, they are forced to hold down more than one low-paying job in order to survive. Some work long hours in a day that prevents them from attending school functions or overseeing their children's school assignments. They also choose to work overtime rather than go home to attend school functions because of the much-needed extra money for the family (Tinkler, 2002).

Cases also exist wherein Latino parents do not find the welcoming atmosphere that would make them feel comfortable enough to attend school functions, such as parent-teacher conferences. Due to the fact that teachers are oftentimes overworked, lack the cultural sensitivity they require to deliver the intended curriculum or do not understand the Spanish spoken by many of the families, they would appear less than pleasant to the parents. As well, the overwhelming majority of teachers are White, and Latino teachers are underrepresented, even in California (ISBE/ISDHS, 2004).

Many times, teachers fail to undergo proper training in working with Latino parents, thus resulting in overlooking opportunities wherein they could get involved (Tinkler, 2002). This reality creates conflicts that involve parents and teachers due to their misperceptions of each

other. While teachers sense a lack of participation on the part of low-income and minority parents, teachers are viewed to be unwilling to accept parents that challenge the status quo (Bempechat, 1999, May/June; Caplan, 1998; Tinkler, 2002). In fact, Latino parents are described to be very much concerned with their children's education. They must be very passionate about ensuring educational opportunities for their children because of the barriers they face in order to provide for their children a quality education in the U.S. Furthermore, they work numerous shifts in a day, as well as having to face the hardships of moving to a different country, inspired by the dreams that they have for their children. These dreams are based on providing a good education for their children with subsequent opportunities.

There is a need for parents to be more involved at home, more than anywhere else, when it comes to the learning activities of grade schoolers. There are different methods by which parents can become involved in their child's schoolwork at home (Trumbull, Rothstein-Fisch, Greenfield, Quiroz, 2001). While there is an issue that parents with limited English speaking skills cannot help in a more effective manner, it is parents that dream aloud and encourage their children about the fruits of education that enable them to become successful in school (Gandara & Contreras, 2009).

Koss-Chioino and Vargas (1999) identified four types of Latino parents: authoritarian parents, authoritative parents, indulgent parents and neglectful parents. The first set mentioned includes those that are extremely strict and were highly controlling. They are also less endearing and were less involved in their children's activities. They make unilateral decisions on behalf of their children. The second type of parenting is authoritative, which is firm but warm. They maintain consistent household rules and routines. Indulgent parents are very warm, but exert little control over their children. These parents allow considerable levels of autonomy for their

children to decide on their own. Neglectful parents are neither warm nor involved in their children. Observations of hybrids are also noted, wherein parents are high in control and demand obedience, yet are affectionate and will shower their children with gifts. This study by Koss-Chioino and Vargas (1999) further reveals that the level of involvement in school can be attributed to the category in which the parents belong. According to the study, authoritarian parents were identified as the most likely to get involved in school while neglectful parents were ranked last. The importance of parental involvement in their children's education cannot be understated; this is discussed in the next paragraph and throughout the study.

### **The Risk of Uninvolvement**

Failure to actively participate and perform in an education system is a risky scenario whose effects and consequences are felt in the later developmental stages of the children. As noted earlier, Latinos had the highest dropout rate among all ethnic groups. According to an article by Moore (2009, February 18), Latino adults constitute 40 percent of the total convicts in the federal courts (Moore, 2009, February 18). According to 2007 statistics, the Latino population accounted for only 13 percent of the U.S. adult population however the immigrant group constituted 33.3% of the total inmates in U.S. federal prisons (Kohler & Lazarín, 2007).

### **Scope and Limitations**

The study focused on the parents of the 5th grade high-achieving students as determined by the results of the California Standards Test assessments and whose children are of Latino origin. Since many of the Latino parents had limited English-speaking skills, the questions were rephrased into Spanish. A qualitative approach was taken to establish the level of involvement of the parents in the school through interview questions. Open-ended interview questions are preferable for this study as they helped to direct particular research questions to participants

depending on their responses. The interview questions sought to establish the background of the parents, their experiences as students, their experiences with their children's school work as well as the impact they felt their efforts could have contributed in their children's academic work. For privacy reasons, the interviews were carried out one parent at a time at their homes (or in such a place where the parent might choose). Group interviews were considered if it might help extract better responses from those chosen to participate in the study. Each interview took 45 – 60 minutes. Limitations did not emerge from faulty translations and misunderstandings as a result of language barriers because the transcriptions were completed by someone who is bilingual. There was also a perceived limited time and sample size by which this study was conducted. Furthermore, there were also expected limitations that involve researcher bias because of the nature of data collection, which was gathered through interviews.

### **Significance of the Study**

According to Gandara (2005b), there are many structural and socio-cultural barriers that widen the achievement gap between ethnic groups (Gandara, 2005b). Poverty, poor schooling conditions, language differences, low income, low levels of educational attainment from the parents, and low social capital are but a few things that hinder the Latino student from excelling in school. There is a need for research that can provide academic and social interventions by which parents of Latino students could be assisted and empowered to be more involved in their children's education (Cleaver, 2008). In turn, this would mean that Latino students would be able to receive the support and encouragement they need in order to excel in school. Since Latinos continue to be one of the fastest growing ethnic groups in the country, it is in the nation's best interest to invest in the potential of Latino high-achievers.

It is important to develop different ways and means by which Latino children can be supported. If it is through the encouragement of parental involvement, which is already viewed to be widely effective (Gandara & Contreras, 2009), there is a need to understand the specific ways by which it can be effective. It is significant to develop a model through which parents with limited English speaking skills can duplicate and address in their own skill levels certain practices and expectations. Since parents' involvement in their children's lives is viewed as a vital part of their success, all means should be taken in order to adapt the attributes that make those young Latino high achievers break the odds. According to Sheppard (2007), parents represent a resource for professional educators and yet are vastly underutilized as a potentially powerful source for helping students learn. It would be beneficial to develop methods for parents to follow or adapt into their own lives in order for them to effectively empower their children to be the best students they can be (Burris, 2004).

### **Summary**

The effect of parents' involvement in their children's school activities has elicited increased attention in the recent past. Of particular concern is the fate of the immigrant Latino children whose parents have demonstrated low levels of involvement in school activities for varied reasons. In particular, past studies have identified immigrant students of the Latino origin as the most affected by the lack of involvement of their parents in school matters. Ironically, the Latino students have also been identified as the neediest since their academic performance has been generally low and their dropout rate has been relatively high. There has been a lack of focused studies that would identify the attributes and qualities of parents that have limited English-speaking proficiency, but at the same time managed to support and empower their children to become high achievers; this paper focuses on bridging this gap.



The next chapter will tackle the significant literature as it relates to Latino parental involvement. It will also focus on the educational problems regarding the achievement gap that existed across different people groups in the country. In particular the causes of Latino students' underachievement shall be discussed in details as well as the barriers that Latino parents encounter in their effort to make their children high-achievers. Moreover the issue of high achieving Latino student shall be presented as an opening to the evaluation of the relationship between parental involvement and education achievement. Finally, the chapter will explore on the Latino parent empowerment as the theoretical framework of the study before giving recommendations and conclusion remarks.

## CHAPTER TWO

### REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

In the last three decades, the United States has experienced significant changes in its population structure, and it is foreseen that the next two decades will usher in more dramatic changes (Roach, 2006; Tinkler, 2002) as the country continues to witness a considerable influx of immigrants. The steady growth of the Latino population, both native and foreign-born, makes up a fair share of this demographic change. Latino immigrants are regarded as the fastest growing ethnic group, taking up an estimated 47 percent of this population (Buysse, Castro, West, & Skinner, 2004). The growth rate of this group is even faster in children under the age of 18 and as such, they also represent the largest minority child population in the country (Buysse et al., 2004; Morse, 2003).

Immigrant aspirations to raise their children in the U.S. have been growing steadily as these individuals struggle to tap the opportunities offered by better educational systems and career opportunities (Gandara & Contreras, 2009; Md-Yunus, 2008). For instance, Santiago and Brown (2004) estimated that by 2025, twenty-five percent of school-age children and 22 percent of the college-age population will be Latinos, while Gibson (2002) predicted that in the next twenty years, the number of Latino children aged 5 to 13 will double by 2030. While this changing demographic pattern holds serious implications for every section of the society, its impact on education appears to be the most pressing. Indeed, the disparity in academic achievement of Latino children as compared to their White counterparts lends credence to this argument. It has been argued in several spheres that minority groups, especially Latinos, are the

most under-educated segment of the U.S. population (Inger, 1992). For example, Chavkin (1993) observed that Latinos are twice as likely to be under-educated as other ethnic groups combined, while Carger (1997), Scribner (1999) and Gibson (2002) agreed that of all minority ethnic groups, Latinos have the highest dropout rate in the country.

In a more recent study, Buysse et al. (2004) pointed out that Latinos are less likely than children from any other ethnic group to be enrolled in early childhood educational programs. They also observed that compared with seventy-three percent of white and seventy-six percent of black first graders, only about fifty-seven percent of Latino first graders had participated in any "center-based early childhood program" prior to kindergarten. Also, among three to five-year olds, White and African American children were more likely to be able to "recognize letters of the alphabet, participate in story boom activities, count up to at least 20 and write or draw rather than scribble" (Buysse et al., 2004, p. 3). From these observations, the author concluded that Latinos perform at lower academic levels, relative to other groups who may have participated in early childhood programs. The achievement gap tends to widen as they grow older, resulting in fewer educational opportunities and higher dropout rates. The National Center for Education Statistics [NCES] puts the dropout rate for Latinos at 20 percent, compared to 7 percent for Whites and 13 percent for African Americans (NCES, 2002). Gonzalez (2002) fittingly described the educational predicament of Latinos when he suggested that the Latino community values the education of its children.

In the bid to bridge this gap in educational achievement, the country has witnessed numerous educational reforms. Gonzalez (2002) observed that earlier educational reforms, especially the Title I program under the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), were primarily concerned with providing additional funding and resources to schools serving

disadvantaged groups. What is clear is that the low academic achievement and high dropout rates among Latinos is shaped by a myriad of factors. Some of the factors that have been highlighted include: language barriers, low expectations of teachers, poverty, racism, isolation, and the lack of effective parent and community involvement in education (Scribner, 1999; Tinkler, 2002).

Of these factors, the involvement of Latino parents in their children's education has been shown to greatly determine the academic achievements of these children. Research has shown the positive relationship between effective parent involvement and higher Latino student academic achievement. It has also been documented that in cases where Latino parents play active roles in their children's schools, these children perform at comparable levels to other ethnic groups (Aspiazu, Bauer, & Spillett, 1998). Henderson and Berla (1997) concluded that "the evidence is now beyond dispute. When schools work together with families to support learning, children tend to succeed, not just in school, but also throughout their lives (Colorado Department of Education, 2006). However, there are several barriers and issues that both limit Latino parents' involvement in their children's education and influence the relationship between this involvement and their academic achievement. These issues range from socioeconomic status to the literacy level of the parents. Whereas the status of poverty is a contributing factor to most of the challenges facing Latinos, other factors such as race, skin color and the low expectation of teachers have nothing to do with the parents of the children. In spite of this, past research reveals that parental involvement in school activities motivates the children, leading to better performance (Tinkler, 2002).

More than 85 percent of immigrant parents believe that a college education is needed in order to achieve economic stability in the future (Md-Yunus, 2008). Immigrant parents view

education to be a requirement in order to be successful in life. However, immigrant children may be prevented by several cultural and linguistic factors that make it difficult for them to make their parents' dreams reality.

This review intends to examine the various issues that Latino parents confront when their children are in American elementary schools and how their involvement can better improve their children's academic performance and achievement. It will deal with the significant disadvantages Latino students experience in the educational system. It will reveal the significance of profiling Latino high achievers. A theoretical and empirical discussion of parental involvement is also included. The underlying theories for the success of Latino students are also analyzed as well as the varied reasons against their success.

### **Disadvantaged Latino Students**

There has been significant research conducted that reveals the critical disadvantage that Latino students face when it comes to their academic performance and student achievement. There is a significant achievement gap between White and Latino students despite similar contexts of high poverty. According to a study Gandara (2005a) conducted, forty-one percent of poor White students in the fourth grade level reached above the proficient level on standardized tests, while only a third of Latinos were able to reach this level (Gandara, 2005b).

Another study highlighted the under-representation of Latinos in gifted programs due to the observed lower academic performance Latinos exhibited in comparison to other ethnic groups (Forbach & Pierce, 1999). This further creates stereotyping against them in the way teachers hold their perceptions about their students' abilities. Despite the fact that Latino students had significant potential in terms of achieving their aspirations and dreams in the

context of academic achievement and career opportunities, this goal becomes elusive for a number of Latinos because of the different challenges they have to overcome.

Solorzano and Ornelas (2002) used the critical race theory as a framework for a study that examined the access and availability of Advanced Placement courses and their impact on Latino students. The researchers analyzed the enrollment patterns for these classes, the impact of school structure and process on the maintenance of discrimination for accessing Honors classes, the response of Latinos to such structures, and reforms that could be implemented to eliminate discrimination in Latino access to Advanced Placement classes. Findings of this study revealed a disproportionately low representation of Latino students in Advanced Placement enrollment in California district-based samples (Solorzano & Ornelas, 2002). Schools that serve the urban and low-income zones also have low student enrollment for such classes.

Forbach and Pierce (1999) observed that training teachers on how to identify gifted minority students increased the nominations of African and Asian American students, but failed to do so with Latino students (Forsbach & Pierce, 1999). The language barrier between the students and the teachers was perceived to be a major factor as to why Latino students were still left back despite this intervention strategy. Cleaver (2008) further observed that classrooms in the country were usually not equipped to be culturally sensitive to the abilities of Latino students.

Latino students also face psychosocial barriers as well because of how they are perceived as outsiders within the school campuses, a fact which also contributes to the high dropout rate (20%) mentioned earlier. Considering the demographic projections raised by Santiago and Brown (2004), Latinos are likely to cover a significant number of the school-going children (25%). These facts call for an immediate need for higher levels of support from the school and their parents. This support should be offered both at school and at home. More often, home

environments were viewed to play a significant role in the academic performance of the students (Darnell & Alvarez-Jimenez, 2008; Garcia, 1997, April 15; Md-Yunus, 2008).

By the year 2030, the number of Latino children in the country could double and comprise a quarter of the total K-12 school population in the country (Tinkler, 2002). This was widely attributed to the influx of Latino immigrants in the United States. However, despite the fact that Latino parents earn more in the U.S. than they did in they home country, they still make up a third of the country’s families that are in or below the poverty level (Tinkler, 2002).

### **Latino Student Underachievement**

Gandara (2005b) presented the proportion of gifted children from different ethnic groups. Statistics showed that Latinos were critically underrepresented in comparison to the overrepresentation of White and Asian students in advanced programs. Table 1 depicts the percentage of these and other ethnic groups who participated in K-12 gifted and talented programs in the 1997 school year.

Table 1

*Percent of Participation in Gifted and Talented Classes by Ethnic Groups and Percent of K-12 Population*

<b>Ethnic Group</b>	<b>Percent Gifted</b>	<b>Percent K-12 Population</b>
White	76.61	64.0
Black	6.63	16.0
Hispanic	8.56	14.3
Asian	6.63	3.1
Native American	.9	1.1

Note\* Statistics from Gandara (2005b).

There were different factors that impeded high achievement among Latino students. For as long as data have been collected about student achievement, Latino students have fared poorly and have scored at the lower end of the student achievement gap. However, studies by Garcia (1997, April 15) and Tinkler (2002), leave no doubt that Latino parents and the community in general are greatly concerned about the education of their children and attribute the future success of their children (and society) to great academic achievements. The link and hope placed by the community on the academic achievement is already a significant cultural value that can be harnessed to exploit the full potential of the Latino students.

### **Cultural Differences**

One of the explanations that were offered to explain the dire state of Latino student achievement was based on the cultural difference model, wherein students were viewed to have a different set of cultural experiences that were inconsistent with the demands of American education (Gandara, 2007). The speech styles of lower income and middle class students of all ethnicities had been observed as one of the major reflections of cultural differences (Trumbull et al., 2001). The focus on language differences was observed with salience for Latino students because of the difference between the academic language required in the school setting and the language used in their homes, which created discontinuity in the communication experiences in these different settings. Nevertheless, this was not the only or the most critical problem for Latino academic underachievement.

### **Parent Income and Educational Background**

Gandara (2007) pointed out that differences in parental income and educational background by ethnicity were dramatic. There have been differences among the ethnic group with regards to their socioeconomic backgrounds. Latinos were more likely to have parents with



no high school diplomas and less likely to have parents with any college experience (Gandara, 2007). Latino parents were also more likely to have very low income, in comparison to White parents. The risk of being children of parents with low educational background and low income was pointed out as one of the challenges that prevented Latino students from achieving excellent academic performance.

According to Gandara (2007), parental socioeconomic status was a consistent variable for explaining academic achievement differences among students. Since low socioeconomic status was often associated with poor background characteristics and low opportunities, such as the decreased likelihood of early education classes, this indicated why most Latino students performed worse than most other students.

Low-income children experience limited opportunities to attend pre-school. Among all of the other groups, Latino children have the lowest probability of attending pre-school, and thus are more likely to attend kindergarten without the benefit of attending preschool (Gandara, 2007). The lack of early enrollment in kindergarten led to a higher risk of educational failure.

### **Residential Mobility**

In relation to low family income, family residential mobility was also observed in Latino students. This played a major role in the educational achievement of students. Families that moved their children within the first five grades could influence behavioral problems, grade retention, and poor attendance. Latino children were viewed to have been affected by these problems because of the need to move back and forth from the border as parents follow work opportunities and family commitments (Gandara, 2007). This resulted in difficulties in school adjustments and heightened the tendency to drop out of school all together.

### **Low Expectations from Teachers**

Even if parents could encourage their children to aim for high educational attainment, teachers often have a different view, and at times stereotypical expectations for Latino students (Gandara, 2007). It is important to note that a negative attitude by teachers towards their students, even communicated through non-verbal messages, affects the performance of the students. Latino youth experience the impact of teacher discrimination which in turn influences student underachievement (Koss-Chioino & Vargas, 1999). This can be highly revealed in assessments that influence the underrepresentation for gifted student programs and the overrepresentation for remedial and special education classes.

### **Non-inclusion in Advanced Programs**

Kohler and Lazarín (2007) confirmed that Latino and African-American students represented but a small portion of the student population that were enrolled in the gifted and talented programs. These students were less likely than White students to participate in such programs. Latino students were less likely to be enrolled in advanced mathematics and science classes. It is estimated that 47.4 percent of White high school graduates completed advanced mathematics courses, in comparison to only 31.1 percent of Latino students (Kohler & Lazarín, 2007). Schools that served Latino students offered less rigorous academic courses. Kohler and Lazarín (2007) pointed out that even though 74 percent of minority girls wanted to enroll in advanced courses, only 45 percent of their schools offered these. This scenario can be traced back to the Latino Educational opportunity reports; for example, Table 2 shows the variation in representation of students as represented in the California Educational opportunity report 2007.

Table 2

*Variation in Representation of Students in Different Educational Opportunities*

<b>Types of Schools or Programs</b>	<b>Latino Students</b>	<b>White Students</b>	<b>Asian students</b>
“Program Improvement Schools” (offering less vigorous courses)	30%	7%	11%
Not expected to meet NCLB’s threshold in mathematics proficiency in 2010	82%	44%	46%
Congested schools	35%	17%	29%
Significant lack of trained teachers	10%	4%	3%

Source: University California Los Angeles/Institute for Democracy, Education, and Access (IDEA) and University of California/All Campus Consortium on Research for Diversity (ACCORD, 2007).

**High Achieving Latino Students**

According to Gandara (2005b), the average high-achieving Latino student performs at a lower level than the average high-achieving White student. According to the 2002 SAT scores, the top fifth of the Latino test takers achieved a mean of 598 on the SAT verbal section and a mean of 646 on the SAT math section. On the other hand, White students had a mean of 663 and 720, respectively (Gandara, 2005b).

Nevertheless, it is important to understand and know what made these students perform better than their lower performing peers. Most of the time, high-performing students came from higher income and higher-educated families (Gandara, 2005b). Thus, students from such backgrounds have a greater range of financial and educational resources to provide for them the tools they needed in order to succeed.

Unlike high achievers from different ethnic groups, Latinos are not as likely to come from economically educationally advantaged families (Gandara, 2005b). However, the schools

that cater to low-income students are less likely to offer rigorous curricula and advanced placement classes. They also provide a lower percentage of qualified teachers and fewer resources overall to ensure a quality education that gifted children and high achievers need. Thus, even if the aspirations of these students were initially high, they tend to lessen because neither their peers nor teachers expect them to achieve high academic goals.

Given the strong association between socioeconomic status and academic achievement, it was even more tempting to conclude that Latino high achievers would come from the upper-economic background. More than 25 percent of high-achieving Latino students are more likely to have parents with low levels of education as compared to the less than five percent of the White sample that had at least one parent without a high school diploma (Gandara, 2005b). A high family income and education are less likely to keep Latino students in the upper achievement quintile than White students. The advantage that White children have with high income and high education parents did not appear to carry over as significantly to Latinos. Education is more likely to interrupt the strong negative correlation between socioeconomic status and achievement for Latino students.

Student achievement can also be influenced by the role of the mothers in the prediction for high achievement (Gandara, 2005b). Latino students who are high-achieving tend to live with both parents yet with low levels of education. Gandara (2005b) also revealed that the research suggests that schooling makes a difference in interrupting the relationship between socioeconomic status and achievement. This particular report discusses that schools may serve to compensate for what low-income households and communities are not able to provide.

Bempechat (2008) conducted a study that determined what high achieving students viewed to be factors of success. They believed that high ability was a main factor for success but

the lack of ability was not the cause of failure (Bempechat, 2008). Low achieving respondents of the survey said that success was due to external factors and that the lack of ability contributed to failure. Bempechat (2008) revealed that it was healthy for children to believe that they had some measure of innate ability. Self-perception of ability was essential for a child's academic self-esteem.

The Latino culture places a teacher very highly and accords him or her high respect especially among the poor communities. This is because a teacher is considered as the "most learned" member of a society and the key to prosperity. Efforts to bridge the gap between the work of a teacher and complementary involvement in school activities by the parents towards improving the performance of the students is bound to bear fruits among the low income Latino community. These efforts are apparent, considering the work being done by researchers and government agents to promote more interaction between teachers and parents. Teachers are also increasingly considering the importance of parent involvement, which is a departure from the past notion that a teacher could work it out "all alone" in the student academic process. It is important to note that even the parents in the very low income brackets have begun to realize the need to participate in events organized by schools to improve the parents' involvement, despite the discriminatory environment that they have to contend with (Christenson & Sheridan, 2001). This trend, if sustained, is likely to greatly impact positively on the performance of the Latino students and turn around the attitude of teachers towards them.

## **Parental Involvement and Educational Achievement**

### **Brief Theoretical History**

In the last fifty years, the theory and understanding of family involvement in education has undergone dramatic changes. Less than fifty years ago, theorists like Parsons and Weber

suggested that schools and families will perform their roles most effectively if they both pursue their goals of educating the child independently and neither encroaches into the responsibilities of the other. Later, this “separate influence” theory, as it was known, gave way to the “sequenced influence” theory. Unlike the separate influence, the sequenced influence theory holds that there are critical stages in the child's development during which parents and teachers must alternate their contributions to the child's effective development. This theory, which was based on the early works of Piaget, Inhelder and others, assumes that the parents play their roles during the early years of the child, prepare the child for school, and hand over the baton to the teacher (Epstein, 1987, 1992).

As mounting evidence pointed to the positive role of parents in children's education, the sequenced influence theory evolved into the embedded influence theory (Walberg, 1984). This model, focusing on the psychology of individual development, posited that the society, family and other environmental factors influence personal development. In the mid and late 1980s, Joyce Epstein's studies expanded the understanding of parental and societal involvement in children's academic and social development. Apparently, in theory as in practice, the role of parents in their children's educational achievement level has evolved through several layers and periods of misunderstanding. Even with the present state of knowledge, parental involvement in education is still mired in several controversies. Re-stating the difficulties in understanding parental involvement, Baker and Laura (1998) observed that even among authors and researchers there are difference of opinions, as reflected in the various and sometimes conflicting research methods adopted in measuring the effect and role of parental involvement on children's academic achievement.

## **Perceptions of Parental Involvement**

Currently, there is agreement among researchers that when parents get positively and effectively involved with their children's education, the children perform better and achieve more. Unfortunately, the definitions and perceptions of what constitute parental involvement vary significantly (Baker & Laura, 1998; Tinkler, 2002). For example, Baker and Laura (1998) noted that among researchers and in the various studies on parental involvement, the conceptualization of parental involvement was inconsistent. The authors explain that some researchers focused on attitudinal components of the concept, and thus defined parental involvements as parental aspirations or expectations of their child's educational success (Goldenberg, Gallimore, Reese, & Garnier, 2001; Prins and Toso, 2008) while other researchers have focused on the behavioral component (e.g., assistance with homework or attendance at parent-teachers' meetings and conferences). In yet another group of studies, parental involvement was defined and measured in terms of parental style or family interaction patterns.

Rationalizing these differences, Tinkler (2002) suggested that parental involvement can mean different things to different people. And as such, differences in the understanding of parental involvement are expected. In fact, the difference in perception and understanding of parental involvement is more pronounced between teachers and Latino parents, due largely to cultural differences. Evaluating the difference in the understanding of parental involvements between Latino parents and teachers, Zarate (2007) reported that Latino parents' understanding of parental involvement falls into two categories: academic involvement and life participation. The author explained that academic involvement includes activities like assistance with homework, educational enrichment and academic performance, while life participation, on the other hand, encompasses different ways through which parents provide life education to their

children. The latter involvements include practices that are holistically integrated into children's lives in school, as well as away from it. However, when asked to define parental involvements, Latino parents, reportedly, mentioned life participation more frequently than academic involvements.

However, in this and another study by Scribner, Young, and Pedroza (1999), teachers and instructors' perceptions of parental involvement were shown to contrast greatly with Latino parents' perceptions. For example, in the Zarate (2007) study, teachers, principals and administrators described parent teacher organizations as an important form of parental involvement, but no single Latino parent in the study cited these organizations in their understanding of parental involvements (Zarate, 2007). Scribner et al. (1999) also reported that teachers defined parental involvement as participation in formal activities, such as school events and meetings, or working as a teacher assistant or tutor, for example.

While the difference in perception of what constitutes parental involvement is one of the major factors responsible for the low rate of Latino parents' involvement in their children's education, the difference in the perceived roles of teachers and parents by both parties also play a significant role. In several studies, for example, researchers have shown that Latino parents tend to create a distinction between the roles of the school and teachers and that of parents (Carger, 1997; Chavkin & Gonzalez, 1995; Trumbull, Rothstein-Fisch, & Greenfield, 2001). Latino parents see parents' responsibilities as nurturing, teaching morals and good behavior, and instilling life knowledge. They believe that every other responsibility, pertaining to education and academics, falls in the realm of the school and teachers. It is therefore obvious that Latino parents might be confused and unsure of what is expected of them, if required to partake in responsibilities considered outside their realm. Chavkin and Gonzalez (1995) further observed



that the Latino culture holds teachers in high esteem, and, as a result, considers interference in the teacher’s responsibilities as rude and disrespectful.

Figure 1 Latino Parents Understanding of Parental Involvement

<b>PARENTS’ DEFINITIONS OF PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT</b>	
<b>Academic Involvement</b>	<b>Life Participation</b>
Attend parent-teacher conferences.	Be aware of child’s life.
Sign homework as required by the teacher.	Be aware of and monitor child.
Know when to expect report cards.	Be aware of child’s peer group and interacting with peers’ parents.
Ask about homework daily.	Teach good morals and respect of others.
Listen to the child read.	Communicate with child.
Visit classroom during open houses.	Be aware of and encourage child’s abilities and career aspirations.
Ask questions about homework.	Provide general encouragement.
Ask friends, siblings, and other family members for homework help for child.	Discuss future planning.
Have high standards for academic performance.	Monitor school attendance.
Purchase materials required for class.	Exercise discipline and provide behavioral cuing.
Drive them to tutoring and school activities.	Establish trust with child.
Go to the library with them.	Provide advice on life issues.
Be present when required to pick up report cards at school.	Warn of dangers outside the home, such as illegal drugs.
	Get to know teachers to assess child’s safety.
	Volunteer to observe school environment.
	Encourage siblings to look out for each other.

Figure 1. Table taken from Zarate (2007).

### **Impacts of Parental Involvement**

There are significant pieces of evidence that revealed the relationship between parental involvement and better student performance, which can be reflected by increased school attendance and reduced dropout rates (Tinkler, 2002). For instance, parents who were better

involved in monitoring homework were able to improve their children's grades. Parental involvement was viewed as an essential factor in high achieving students' performance in school. Research showed that children that had strong bonds with their parents were the ones who were more likely to achieve in school or perform better in their classes (Darnell & Alvarez-Jimenez, 2008; Tinkler, 2002).

Oftentimes, a transmission of cultural values occurs in such a way that Latino parents are able to impart with their children the desire to perform better in school. High achievers can be found in every ethnic group. Latinos also have a share of high achievers due to the aspirations of their immigrant parents who want a high quality of education for their children. However, most of these Latino parents have left school out of a necessity to work for their families due to poverty. These are the parents that want a better future for their children and are more passionate about their children's educational achievements. Latino parents carried with them a unique sense of hopefulness that exemplified the value they have for hard work with the vision of living the American dream (Gandara & Contreras, 2009). This is emphasized with their children as they try to give education the significance it deserves.

In conceptualizing the *group work theory*, it is noted that the more people are familiar with each other, the more they interact, the more they get to know one another the more they know each other, and the more they will interact (Homans, 1997). With the growing evidence pointing to the positive effect of parental involvements on their children's education, the relevance of this theory is further reinstated with regards to the importance of bringing schools and families together for the good of the child. Over the last two and half decades, several studies have reported the positive link between effective parental involvement and improved academic outcomes of children. Although, it is important to state, as mentioned previously, that

these studies were based on different interpretations of parental involvement. However, the important thing is, that regardless of the interpretation adopted, these studies mostly return positive results (Kelty, 1997; Tinkler, 2002).

For example, Muller (1998) reported that parental involvement improves students' achievement in mathematics, while Jeynes (2003) reported improved reading achievement and in other subjects. In related studies, authors have shown that parental involvement not only improves students' academic performance, but other aspects of social and mental development. Brown (1989) reported a relationship between parental involvement and enhanced student self esteem, improved child-parent relationship. Parental involvement was also shown to help improve parents' positive attitudes towards schools and schooling. Studies also indicate that improved parental involvement also benefits teachers; teachers have been shown to gain confidence in their ability to teach children, to tailor the curriculum to meet the special needs of their students and also to strengthen community relations (Gonzalez-DeHass et al., 2005). The most important part of these findings is that the effect of parental involvement in enhanced and improved student achievements occurs irrespective of the economic, social or cultural backgrounds of the family.

Despite the generally positive impacts of parental involvement on students' academic performance, few studies have focused primarily on investigating Latino parents' involvements, and even in these few studies have observed that parental participation in education is particularly low for Latinos compared to other ethnic groups. Part of this low Latino parental involvement in their children's education derives from the difference in perception about the roles of parents and teachers. For example, as mentioned previously, Latinos believe that their responsibilities as parents are restricted to nurturing and caring for the child, instilling morals

and good behavior and ensuring that the child is prepared, willing and ready for school. Every other academic and school related function is considered the exclusive reserve of teachers and school administrators. However, a large part of the factors limiting Latino parents' involvement in their children's education has to do with socioeconomic and cultural and language related factors.

### **Issues with Latino Parental Involvement**

With the current emphasis on high standards, the role of Latino parents in helping their children bridge the wide academic achievement gap in school becomes even more important. Sadly, even if parents want to improve their participation and involvement in their children's education, they must first surmount several hurdles. Several studies have highlighted the social, economic, cultural and political issues that define and limit Latino parents' involvements in their children's schooling. Hyslop (2000) noted the low level of literacy and socioeconomic status of several Latino parents. The author pointed out that in some cases, Latino parents feel intimidated by teachers, especially if the teachers adopt a condescending attitude and especially when elements of racism comes into play (Hyslop, 2000).

While this problem is partly due to the low self esteem that goes with low literacy, socioeconomic status (especially in an academic arena) and power (mostly associated to teachers), most teachers have had little training in dealing with parents. It has been observed that very few teacher-training institutions offer effective courses and training on teacher-parent relationships. Indeed, Williams (1992) reported in a study to measure teacher-parent relationships that seventy-three to eighty-three percent of the teachers and school administrators surveyed agree that there should be effective courses that train education students in effective teacher-parent relations.

Another issue that Latino parents confront in trying to participate in their children's education is language difficulty. Many schoolteachers and administrators speak and understand only English, while many Latino parents only understand Spanish. This language barrier considerably limits communication between the two parties. For example, teachers often communicate students' grades, behavior, and even homework in English, making these difficult for the Spanish-speaking parent to understand. Again, parents are not motivated to participate in school events such as parent-teacher conferences and meetings because the primary language spoken in these activities is English, and in most cases without interpreters. Obviously, there is no reason for Latino parents to attend these events if they will not understand what is being said (Gibson, 2002; Inger, 1992; Tinkler, 2002).

Stressing this argument, Zarate (2007) reported that Latino parents are unable to provide homework assistance to their children for two primary reasons. One, many Latino parents in this study have had a limited education in their native countries, and two, there is a language barrier. Parents in the study reported that language was an overwhelming barrier that interfered with their participation in their children's academic program and also, as their children progressed through school, the content and course material becomes increasingly difficult to understand. There is no denying the fact that homework assistance is an important form of parental involvement in education. Parents can improve their children's academic chances by helping them with their homework. Zarate (2007) reported that some of the parents in the study argued that if the parent is obligated to check if the homework was done completely then the teacher is obligated to correct the homework.

Cultural difference is another issue that Latino parents have to contend with. Authors have reported that there is disconnect between the culture children are exposed to at home, and

the culture they are exposed to in school. Reconciling this cultural difference is difficult for both the parent and the student, in most cases (Gibson, 2002).

Latino families value what Trumbull et al. (2001) referred to as collectivism. Collectivism focuses on "interdependent relations, social responsibility, and the well-being of the group" (p. 4), versus individualism which focuses on "individual fulfillment and choice" (p. 4). For example, a parent in Zarate's (2007) study pointed out that, "teachers push students to be more independent ... like adults," which rendered the parent less relevant to the child's education (p. 10).

Another issue that confronts Latino parents is communication problems. In the Zarate (2007) study, parents reported that communication with their children's schools was "impersonal, infrequent, and without adequate notice" (p. 10). The result is that parents feel they do not receive substantial information from their children's schools and as a result, are not encouraged to communicate or participate in school activities. Some parents even feel that there is no need for them to contact their children's schools or teachers provided there is no problem. This kind of attitude, definitely, discourages parental participation in school activities.

As mentioned, there is also a common misconception among school personnel that Latino parents are not interested in their children's education (ISBE/ISDHS, 2004). This could be explained by the presence of cultural misunderstandings. Isolation is also a barrier to parental involvement (Tinkler, 2002; ISBE/ISDHS, 2004). Due to the limited English-speaking skills of the parents, they often isolate themselves from the school community. They are reluctant to participate in school events because of their immigration status in the United States (ISBE/ISDHS, 2004).

Work demands also limit Latino parents' involvement in their children's education. In fact, lack of time, due to inflexible work schedules is one of the major reasons Latino parents offer for their low levels of involvement. This is understandable since many of the Latino parents in these studies are low-waged, low-skill workers (Gandara, 2005; Zarate, 2007). The income from these jobs is often inadequate to run the house, especially in single parent situations. In order to visit schools or participate in other academic activities, parents might have to forego wages for the period spent, and in most cases, parents believe that their jobs might be at risk if they were absent from work frequently. In essence, Latino parents feel they often have to attend school activities at the expense of their work and earnings.

Many of the Latino parents surveyed have to work double to triple shifts in a day. Their socioeconomic standing forced them to hold numerous odd jobs in order for their family to survive. The long hours of work prevented them from being visible in school functions or in helping their children with their school assignments. They would also choose to work rather than go home or attend school functions because of the income needed to sustain their families.

The aforementioned factor was not the single variable impeding school involvement; Latino parents may also experience an unwelcoming atmosphere that makes them feel less than comfortable to attend school events. Teachers who are oftentimes overworked failed to communicate with parents who do not speak the English language well. Thus, they may appear unfriendly and harsh towards parents who are experiencing difficulty in the way they communicate (ISBE/ISDHS, 2004).

Despite the fact that most immigrant parents are very supportive and enthusiastic about their children's performance in school, a number of them have limited to no knowledge about how they can help them achieve more or perform better (Md-Yunus, 2008). These parents

usually speak limited English and have with them differential issues that were associated with cultural differences. Thus, this creates barriers in supporting their children. Even if the parents understand the language of the teachers, most are insecure to voice concerns and questions due to their language differences. While some try to get their sentiments across, despite limited English language skills, most stay quiet because of their fear of embarrassment. This often forms the misconception that these parents are uninvolved or disinterested in their children's education.

Md-Yunus (2008) pointed out that parents view their personal attempts to be active in their children's schools as ineffective or extremely difficult. Thus, they do not do so unless there is a problem. Despite the fact that the study represents the parents who are passionate about their children's education, cultural and language barriers emerge due to different school practices and expectations that were developed in the parents' native countries (Md-Yunus, 2008).

There are instances wherein teachers fail to undergo necessary training that could have taught them cultural sensitivity, particularly towards Latino parents. This tends to create conflicts that would lessen parental involvement in school functions. As noted, while teachers view this as aloofness or a lack of participation on the part of low-income and minority parents, teachers could also be misconceived as being unwilling to accept parents that challenge the status quo (Bempechat, 1999, May/June; Caplan, 1998; Tinkler, 2002).

Furthermore, some Latino parents have limited formal literacy skills or had little experience with schools. Thus, teachers cannot assume that children's parents would be able to help them out even if they wanted to (Trumbull et al., 2001). This study concludes that parents should not necessarily be expected to take on the role of having to improve the child's academics because this falls into the domain of a professional teacher (Trumbull et al., 2001).



Latino parents and their children still have several hurdles to cross before this dream can be realized. Nevertheless, studies cannot deny the fact that there have been important cases wherein Latino students were able to overcome the odds stacked against them and experience high levels of student achievement.

### **Theoretical Framework: Latino Parent Empowerment**

There have been various reasons for Latino underachievement. However, it is undeniable that there have been Latino students who were able to do well in school despite the factors identified for academic failure. Gandara (2007) pointed out that there was less attention given to students who were able to defy the predictions yet failed to identify the factors that made it possible for them to overcome these critical barriers. There were significant perspectives that could explain Latino high achievement in the face of adversity.

Figure 2 shows how different disciplines (psychological, sociological, anthropological and educational) can explain how Latino students, who are raised in poverty and disadvantage, manage to rise to high levels of achievement.

According to the psychological perspective, all ethnic groups have a normal distribution of abilities, thus Latinos have their fair share of achieving students. According to entity theorists, most assessment instruments are insensitive to cultural differences thus preventing the adequate assessment of ability for culturally different groups (Gandara, 2007). On the other hand, some Latinos are able to survive these assessments, and thus their abilities are discovered.

The resilience theory described the human's natural tendency to "self-right," and that despite the disadvantages that this ethnic group experiences, protective factors still exist such as a caring adult or a personality that is attractive to others (Gandara, 2007). Parenting practices and other environmental factors shape the behavior of individual students and their self-

evaluation. Thus, they are molded to overcome the academic odds, which are in place against them (Gandara, 2007). Therefore, the presence of appropriate child rearing practices and supportive home conditions enable low-income Latino parents to yield high achieving students.

Figure 2 Theoretical Perspective for Latino High Achievement

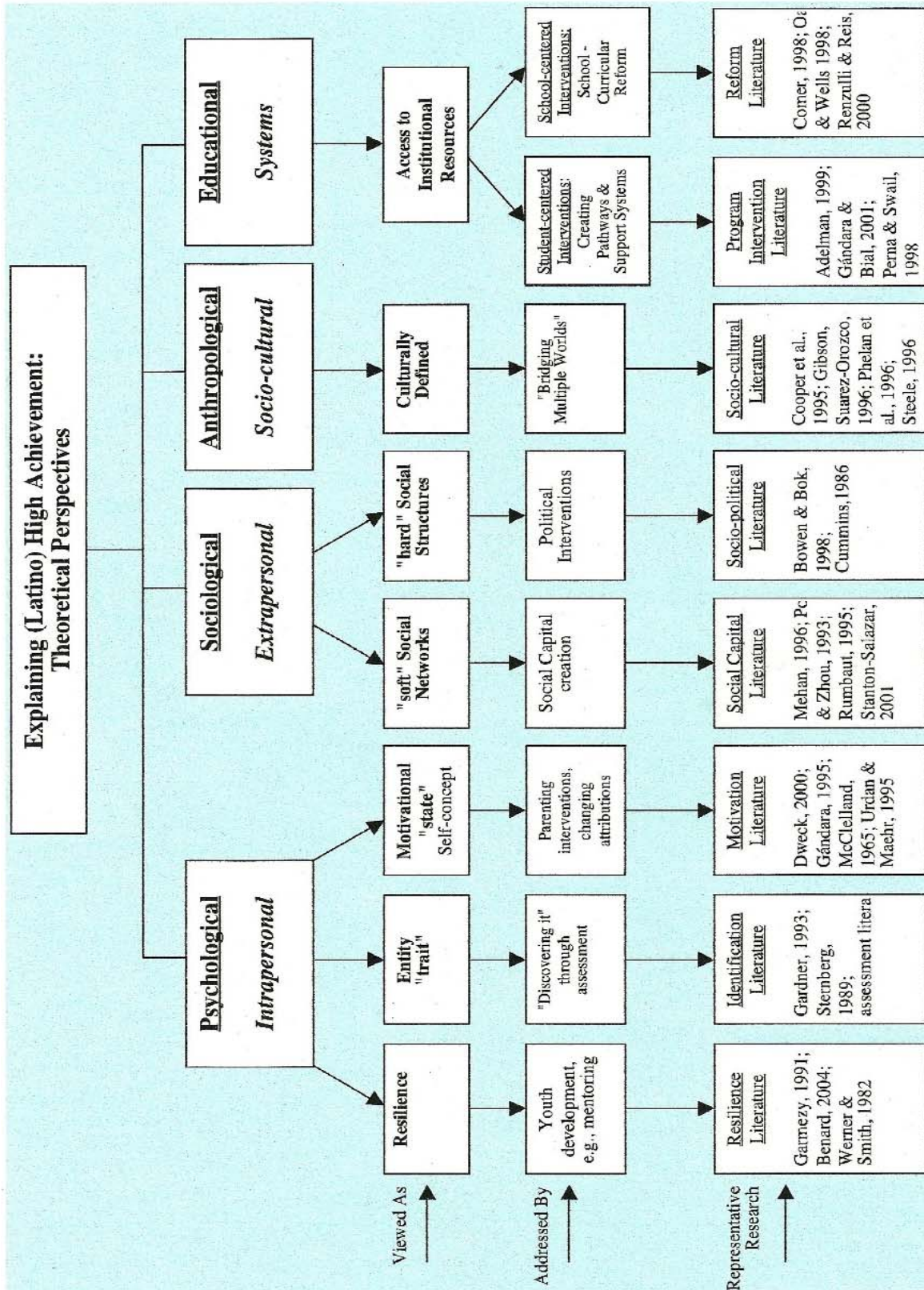


Figure 2. Taken from Gandara, 2005b, p. 84.

## **Research-based Recommendations for Action**

Miller (2004) offered a few recommendations that address the underrepresentation of minority groups in gifted and advanced program classes. One of which included the establishment of a high achievement trend-monitoring unit. This would play out in different roles, such as reviewing standardized test data sets that would allow the monitoring of high achievement trends for ethnically different groups across the K-12 years. The unit could determine whether several databases could be improved and in order to enhance monitoring accuracy.

Another recommendation involved the development of a high achievement education strategy evaluation unit which would review existing evaluations and other strategies in search for high achievement impacts. This unit would look for evidence as to what approaches produced high achievement impacts for disadvantaged students (Miller, 2004). In relation to this, an academic development research synthesis unit could also be created to look at the reading and mathematics research bases and identifying leads for the promotion of high achievement even in the earlier years.

The concept of parent empowerment was an essential approach to addressing the needs of Latino students. The concept of empowerment often evoked images such as being able to overcome social inequity, racism and exploitation (Trumbull et al., 2001). Thus, parent empowerment programs should avoid misconceptions; for example, if they change their behavior all will be well in school and in their homes.

An example of a successful program is the *Comite de Padres Latinos* (COPLA) which was organized with Spanish-speaking immigrant parents of pre-school children in order to share strategies as to how they can adjust to their new communities. This program emphasizes

maintaining the Spanish-language and cultural values along with being able to experience cooperative dialogue with schools. One of the goals of this program is to provide bilingual programs for their children. As a result, the parents learned to expand their range in terms of language patterns. COPLA is considered one of the models of empowerment that integrates collectivistic values and behaviors with the school's individualistic orientation (Trumbull et al., 2001). Research reflects the need to further explore intervention strategies that can assist Latino parents to have a greater impact in the academic achievement of their children (Md-Yunus, 2008; Trumbull et al., 2001).

### **Summary**

This section discussed the dire state of the achievement gap between Latino students and other ethnic groups. There is a significant disproportion in the achievement levels between White and Latino students. Furthermore, there is also a critical underrepresentation of Latino students in gifted student programs. This chapter provides an analytical review of the studies that were conducted about the reasons for Latino underachievement. It discusses the significant problems that were observed as to why students from a particular cohort found it difficult to be included in the gifted and advanced program classes. Furthermore, it shared the few research studies that were conducted to profile the existing Latino high achievers.

The influence of parental involvement is widely discussed in terms of theoretical foundations and its impact in the academic performance of the children. Latino parental involvement is also analyzed in terms of its impact and the difficulties that exist against it. Furthermore, theoretical perspectives and recommendation strategies are also included as to the promotion of Latino student achievement.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

The research design is one of the key factors contributing to a successful research study. If the research method is not appropriate and does not address the needs of the research, the whole effort and resources spent on the study are wasted. The selection of an appropriate research methodology is based on an improved understanding of the research objectives and research questions that define the scope of study (Malhotra & Birks, 2006). The research outcomes must encompass a wide-angled perspective on the defined area of study and focus on providing a well-supported exploration of the identified problems. Hence, this chapter discusses the details of the research methodology adopted to conduct the study and analysis. The chapter not only highlights the methodology adopted during the research process but also provides a complete understanding and justification of the qualitative research approach, its characteristics, advantages, and explanation of specific research tools used in the course of this study.

Qualitative methods are also effective in identifying or clarifying those factors such as social norms, gender roles, religious and ethnic characteristics as well as other variables that may not be obvious (Maxwell, 2005). The use of qualitative research methods in educational studies plays a vital role in highlighting the role of each variable and its interplay with other variables within the focus of study. This research approach was chosen for its role in understanding the meaning of the events, situations, experiences and actions. In a qualitative study, the researcher is not just interested in “physical events and behaviors that are taking place, but also in how the participants in the study make sense of these, and how their understanding influences their

behavior” (Maxwell, 2005, p. 22). The approach also helps in understanding the context of the study and the impact of the situations on individual behavior and actions. Moreover, this approach allows the researcher increased flexibility to modify the research to analyze the study through a new lens and different perspectives. The findings of the study will be more informative through a qualitative approach because the respondents will have room to open up and give facts that would not necessarily be covered in the “open ended interview questions.” This ensures that the research questions’ responses capture different perceptions of the participating population sample.

### **Research Questions**

- How do (limited English proficient) parents of high achieving 5th grade Latino students participate in their children’s schooling?
- With respect to participating parents,
  - How are they involved with their children’s education at school?
  - What do they do outside of school to support their children’s education?
  - How does the school support their involvement?
- With respect to participating students, in what ways do their parents support their education at school?

### **Explanation of the Project**

The purpose of the study was to analyze the significance and contribution of parental involvement in the achievement level of Latino students at the elementary school level. The aim of the research study was to seek a greater understanding of the following:

- The extent of parental involvement in elementary schools
- Impact of parental involvement on the achievement levels of students
- The achievement level of students from the Latino community

The research was undertaken to determine the effectiveness of the parental involvement based on background information gathered on the performance of the Latino students at the elementary school level.

### **Research Design**

Desforges and Abouchaar (2003) in their work on the impact of parental involvement claimed that the extent of parent involvement is strongly influenced by family social class, maternal level of education, material deprivation, maternal psycho-social health and single parent status and, to a lesser degree family ethnicity. Hence there are numerous variables that have an impact on the achievement levels of students in schools. Based on the need to investigate the inter-relationships between these variables, the research design focuses on obtaining information through both primary and secondary data. The primary data included the interviews conducted with parents and students while the secondary data consisted of the children's test results.

This research project sought to find ways in which Latino parents of elementary school-aged children affect the achievement levels of these 5th grade students. Qualitative data was collected from one-on-one interviews with Latino parents and students who were in the 5th grade in the spring of 2011. Ten students and families were randomly selected to conduct the one-on-one interviews. The participants chosen were selected from a randomized selection by district personnel from a database of students who met the qualifying criteria (i.e., 5th grade, Latino, immigrant parents, and scored proficient or advanced on California Standards Test in 2nd, 3rd, and 4th grade). At least thirty possible candidates were identified in a random search with the authorized district personnel assisting by sending out recruitment letters. Personnel with authorized access to the potential subjects within the school district were provided a recruitment



letter to potential participants (i.e., parents) on the researcher's behalf. The recruitment letter described the eligibility criteria and indicated that the parents should contact me if they thought that they were eligible and they were interested in participating in this project. This prevented a potential invasion of the participants' privacy by allowing parents to initiate contact with the researcher regarding participation in the project.

This qualitative study was conducted to answer my research questions, which aimed to more clearly understand the influence that limited-English speaking Latino parents have on their children as they navigate the American school system. Individual interviews with these parents and students were integrated into my research study to extrapolate the necessary information in order to make a fair and in-depth analysis of the impact that parental support has had on these successful students.

Interviews form a vital part of qualitative research that helps in the data collection process. These mechanisms are used by researchers to gain insight into individual perceptions and analyze the subject matter from different perspectives. Interviews in the qualitative research approach follow a less structured format as compared to the quantitative interview process owing to its focus on gaining an insight into the opinion of respondents. More open-ended questions are used to elicit detailed responses. The researcher attempts to draw information on the individual beliefs, values, emotions, behavior, relationships, contradictions, locations and communities to frame the research arguments and guide the conclusive evidence (Kvale, 1996).

### **Site and Sample Selection**

Sampling involves identifying some individuals from different target groups to gain an overall impression and opinion about the intended product or service. Since it is practically impossible to research all consumers or even a section of the population, researchers identify a

group of individuals that represent different sections of the target audience and this sample group is exposed to the research techniques to obtain field data. Considering the heterogeneous nature of the Latino households, a stratified sampling technique was used where the Latino sample population was selected based on the parents' income level, academic level, English proficiency and the number of school-going children.

This study took place in the Los Niños School District (LNSD) because it has a high number of schools where Latino students are the majority and from which the respondents can be drawn. However, the district is similar to many others in the state of California. Within the particular county, it is representative of other high Latino student population school districts such as Santa Ana Unified. LNSD's twenty-four schools serve a student population of nearly 20,000 elementary (K-6) school students. Eighty-four percent of the student population is of Latino descent and thirty-five languages are spoken by the student population. The majority of families live at or below the poverty level with eighty-one percent of the students on the free-or-reduced lunch program (Anaheim City School District [ACSD], 2010). Approximately sixty-three percent of Los Niños' students are English learners (ACSD, 2010). Eleven percent of the students have an Individualized Education Plan (IEP). The district has a teacher/students ratio of 28 students for every teacher, and 57% of the students are English Language Learners. As required by the "No Child Left Behind Act" of 2001, HMSD has committed to set performance goals for the students that measure the levels of academic improvement and are reviewed at the end of each academic year (ACSD, 2010).

The target group for this study included students and parents of the Latino community in a number of elementary schools. The goal was to identify approximately thirty parents of high-achieving fifth grade students who would be considered for possible participation in this research

exercise, all of whom are served by Los Niños School District. For the purpose of this study, high-achieving students are those who scored Proficient or Advanced on the state-mandated exams over three consecutive years. The parents of these students were selected through stratified sampling to identify the first thirty and to ensure that all “strata” of the population were represented in the sample. The sampling unit of eight to ten participating families was selected on a random basis from this list of Latino students accessed from the school district database.

Ten parents were contacted over the phone and asked for a time preference to conduct the interview session in person. The convenience of the respondents is a special criterion since many of the participants to be interviewed are members of the Latino community and may have limited proficiency in English. Since many of the research participants were more comfortable with speaking Spanish, most of the interviews were conducted in this language to make it easier for the respondents to understand and provide accurate responses to the questions.

### **Data Collection Methods**

Qualitative data was collected from individual interviews with Latino parents and their 5th grade students who have shown a pattern of high academic achievement as defined by the California Standards Tests (CSTs) over the course of three years data. Individual interviews were restricted to students and parents who had met the criteria for participation and reside within the Los Niños School District. Research participants (both adults and children) participated in one-on-one interviews during which I asked several questions related to their experiences as either parents of elementary school children or as the students themselves. I conducted all of my interviews in the City of Los Niños and the locations of my interviews took place in settings where the participants felt most comfortable—in all cases except one which

occurred at the school site in a private office or classroom. The majority of the interviews took place in the early afternoon or during the evenings after my regular workday.

I was able to conclude my interviews within a month's time. The interviews varied between a minimum of 30 minutes and a maximum of 60 minutes. Much depended on how comfortable I was able to make the subjects feel in order for them to open up about their experiences in the school system. Valdes (1996) spoke of a system that did little to acknowledge the contributions of the Latino families because these familial groups were unlike the typical American family unit. There were plans for follow-up interviews with any of my research participants had I needed to clarify some information from their interviews. However, this was not necessary upon completing and coding the interviews.

Upon obtaining approval from my research participants, I recorded each of the interviews, most of which took place in Spanish, with a digital voice recorder. All of my interviews were transcribed within two or three days so as to ensure the integrity and precision of the recordings. I translated the interviews, as well. Spanish was the language I grew up speaking at home and that I later studied formally at the university level to complete a minor in Spanish. I am efficiently bilingual, bi-literate, and bicultural. Notes were taken during and after the interviews to capture whatever non-verbal communication was observed and pertinent to the study. Upon collecting data from my interviews, I attempted to capture some of the common themes that develop over the course of the interviews.

My research questions guided the general scope of my interview questions. The interview questions attempted to establish a link between the parents' backgrounds and the value they placed on their children's education. This questionnaire is included in Appendix B. As I approached other sites within LNSD, I presented myself as a graduate student interested in

finding ways to empower parents to participate more fully in the educational process of their children in order to impact student achievement.

In essence, this study purported to learn what impact or influence Latino parents have on the achievement levels of their American-educated children. I was able to uncover what support and challenges parents perceive that they face that help or hinder their involvement in the school system and/or with the education of their children. In addition, the study attempted to understand how students perceive their parents' involvement. These data were sorted, color-coded, and analyzed allowing me to draw conclusions, and hopefully contribute to the body of literature dealing with parental involvement.

The data collected were analyzed through excel and SPSS computer programs. These programs proved to be most useful in analyzing this kind of data because they offer a wide variety of options in the data of a qualitative nature as well as inbuilt features for presentation of results through diverse graphs and charts.

### **Credibility and Validity**

Data collected during the interview process was tested for reliability since the responses formed a vital part of the research analysis. All the respondents were provided similar questionnaires and the pattern of responses was traced for similarities in views and observations. Though there were significant differences in some of the responses, the inconsistencies were attributed to individual experiences and perception of situations.

All measures were taken to maintain the confidentiality of the sampling unit to avoid any misunderstandings and biased attitudes during the course of the research, including all data files being stripped of personal identifiers. Audio recordings were transcribed and then destroyed (erased) to eliminate the possibility that study participants could be identified. The individual

opinions were collected solely for the purpose of enhancing the research arguments and providing an analysis from different perspectives to the study. Written consent was taken from all respondents before enrolling their participation in the research study. All the respondents were informed ahead of time on the purpose of the research, about the expectations from the research participants, confidentiality of views expressed, and contact details of the researcher to avoid ambiguity or future inquiries on the issue.

### **Limitations**

The research process did not face any specific constraints as such but the interviews of the sampling unit were a time consuming process. Limitations could have emerged from faulty translations and misunderstandings due to language barriers, but the researcher was perfectly bilingual to handle any perceived barrier in this area. There was also a perceived limited time and sample size by which this study was conducted. The school year was coming to a close and access to the students and their families became more difficult to achieve. Furthermore, there were also expected limitations that involve researcher bias because of the nature of data collection, which was gathered through interviews. The ability to utilize either language proved to be of benefit in gathering the required data to complete this research. The interview tool was deemed effective in drawing detailed and relevant responses to the issues but it had its own limitations. During interviews, I was able to utilize my experiences and background knowledge as the son of immigrant Latino parents to draw out more information by relating my life experiences.

The interview tool made use of a small sampling unit that may not be representative of the whole community. The size of the sampling unit is limited in view of the research focus but it assisted in analyzing the issues and challenges faced by parents from different ethnic groups and

communities in increasing their involvement in their child's progress and school activities. There were parents who did not fully respond to certain questions and hence the analysis focused on the average response pattern. The responses to open-ended questions were analyzed in detail summarizing the views and opinions to form a deductive research argument.

The data interpretation and analysis process posed some challenges since the responses given were descriptive in some instances and the researcher had to avoid personal bias and attitudes during the interpretation of data collected. The researcher had to spend a lot of time in discerning the facts and views presented by the parents in the research context. Most of the data collected were in Spanish and the translations were completed by the researcher, as previously noted. The findings of the research process are outlined and presented in a well thought-out format in the results and analysis section of this report.

### **Dissemination and Public Persuasion**

Many schools have unconsciously erected barriers to Latino parents, adopting a paternalistic or condescending attitude toward them (Nicolau & Ramos, 1990). In some cases, parent-teacher organizations meet during working hours, and material sent home is in English only. Few educators are offered guidance or training to help them understand and reach out to Latino parents, and school personnel rarely speak Spanish. Less than three percent of the nation's elementary school teachers, less than two percent of secondary teachers, and only two percent of other school personnel are Latino (Orum & Navarette, 1990). The hope is that we can learn from parents who may be having a real impact on their children's academic advancement so that school systems can re-produce the practices that parents may be utilizing to increase the achievement levels of their children. It is also hoped that a dissemination of these findings will help to change attitudes towards parents among school district personnel.

The knowledge gained from this study can help school officials or experts to form a basic model of how immigrant Latino parents can improve their involvement in their children's education. The purpose of this study is to examine the level and nature of involvement of parents in their high-achieving children's school activities with an aim of establishing ways and means through which all parents can be empowered to enable their children to reach their full potential.

The findings indicate that a parental coalition with educators is advantageous to students, families and schools. In addition, parents who take part with their children in schools allow for an involvement that has brought about enhanced academic performances among students and educators (Carger, 1997). It thus behooves us to begin to look at what it is that stands in the way of increasing immigrant Latino parental involvement in order to impact student achievement.



## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **FINDINGS AND DATA ANALYSIS**

This qualitative study aims to describe the attributes of the parental involvement of limited English speaking parents and the impact these parents have on the success of their high achieving 5th grade Latino children. This involvement happens despite the barriers that exist against the success of students from a minority group that has the highest dropout rate in the US (Gorinski & Fraser, 2006; Koss-Chioino & Vargas, 1999). The knowledge gained from this study can help to form a basic model of how limited English speaking Latino parents can improve their involvement in the education of their children. The purpose of this research study is to examine the level and nature of the involvement of parents in the school activities of their high-achieving children with an aim of establishing ways and means through which all parents can be empowered to enable their children to reach their full potential.

In this chapter, the study findings are analyzed in relation to the research questions initially presented in the first section of the study. Qualitative analyses of interviews with parents and their children who are fifth grade students are presented in this section and discussed in the next section of the study, chapter five. The qualitative analysis allows the researcher not only to gather information pertaining to the behaviors of the participants but the impact of the situations on individual behavior and actions. The adult/parent interview was used to shed light on parent's expectations and experiences, and on the impact of school. Qualitative research is primarily interpretative in that the researcher interprets the data collected. This includes developing a thick, rich and detailed description of the data analyzed, including identifying common themes and drawing conclusions about their meaning (Creswell, 2007). To further ensure that wide

collections of data are being used in this study, the final phase of the study was conducted by interviewing ten students. The voices of these students were critical in enabling the researcher to gain an in-depth understanding of how Latino parental involvement in children's education affected their children's performances in school. Their perspectives assisted in acquiring an insight into individual perceptions to better analyze the subject matter.

### **Findings from Adult/Parent Interview**

The adult/parent interview was designed to gather insight, perceptions, and knowledge from parents, who are Latino immigrants, about the achievements in school, particularly in the fifth grade, of their children. This interview provided a framework of knowledge that included the parent's experience in school as a student, parent's experiences with the school of their children, and the impact that parents have on their own children. The interview also allowed the researcher an opportunity to examine one-on-one specific views and assumptions of these high-achieving learners in the context of fifth grade. Data were collected for this interview using a semi-structured interview protocol (Appendix B). The interview was tape recorded and transcribed by the researcher. The transcription was reviewed by each participant to ensure accuracy of the transcribing.

Codes were developed by the researcher to analyze the interview data. This procedure allowed the researcher to examine each section of the data one at a time. Creswell (1998) indicated that open coding involves the researcher forming initial categories of information about the incident being studied through information segmentation. The language of the participant was used to develop codes and category labels. Next, the researcher provided a detailed description of the interview data collected. According to Hatch (2002), the best model for analysis of qualitative research for this design is the interpretative analysis. This method makes sense of the

phenomenon by generating explanations and rich descriptions. This technique supported the researcher's ability to represent the data as well as to weave aspects of it throughout the study. The color coding systems developed and implemented by the researcher not only helped to quickly and accurately identify key data but it provided a double check as to the information analyzed and presented in this section of the study.

### **Educational Background and Parent Experiences in School as a Student**

The first section of the adult/parent interview was tailored to provide the participating parent's country of origin, education background and their experiences in school as students, and contains information related to the introduction aspect of the interview. The participants were asked to provide their names, the number of children they had in school or who had attended school, the country in which the parents were born and their age. Participants not born in the United States were asked to identify the age in which they came to this country.

For confidentiality purposes the names of parents are not included in this study. The findings indicated that the adult participants had between one and three students who were either in this particular school or who had been in this school. The mean number of children attending or had attended school here was two, the median is two, and the mode is also two. Responses to where parents were born yielded the result that nearly every parent participating in the study was born in Mexico. There were not any participants born in the United States of America but most of the participants had been in the United States for a long time (more than 15 years).

The coding system developed for this interview transcript emerged as themes developed within the responses given by participants and analyzed by the researcher. The importance of this coding is to foster the identification of patterns and commonalities among participants' responses as the language barrier in some way resulted in skewed responses.

The participating parents were tasked to address the interview questions related to their experience in school as students in an effort to gain an in-depth understanding of the changes that might have been instituted in these schools. Their responses were of paramount importance in understanding the disparities addressed by the existing literature on non-English speaking students. The information gathered from the parents was also compared with the information from their children, those in 5th grade, in an effort to understand the level of parental support for Latino children and the potential effects of parental involvement in the education of their children. This is important in addressing the plight of their children in these schools. During the data collection, a closed-ended interview protocol was adopted to foster the accuracy of the information from the participants. This also ensured that the data were relevant to the research questions raised earlier.

The responses of 90% of the participating parents that, “I attended school in Mexico” and 10% that, “I attended school in Zacatecas,” is a clear indication that most of the participating parents hailed from Mexico and had attended schools outside the U.S. Moreover, 60% of these parents were either high school graduates while 40% completed between 3 and 11 years of compulsory education in their native country. The responses of parent 7 that, “I completed grade three,” which is the lowest level completed by the participating parents, and Parent 3 that, “I am a high school graduate,” which is the highest completed level of education by the participating parents, are clear indications that most Latino parents in the U.S. do not access tertiary education. This is attributed to poverty and other social factors in Mexico such as child labor, among Latino families in the U.S. which forced most of the participating parents/adults to nearly quit or drop out of school without graduating. Furthermore, the responses of most of the participating parents as to how their parents contributed to their academics was, “Through verbal

encouragement” which indicates that these parents received minimal parental support during their school days as a result of their parents having little formal education. This may also be attributed to the social and cultural practices among the Latino population in the U.S. in which parents presumed that learning experience was the duty of schools (Murillo, 2010; Smith, Stern, & Shatrova, 2008; Valencia, 2010). A general finding was that the parents of the student participants at least praised, encouraged and even demanded of them to do their homework or check the homework for them despite their low literacy levels. Through parental involvement in the schooling of these individuals, even though minimal, they were motivated to work harder and excel in their education. Consequently, most of the participating parents were challenged to give their children all the relevant support to enable them achieve the best education in spite of the social factors. Their determination is a reflection of the struggle that immigrants have to endure even after staying in the U.S. for a long period of time. This may be attributed to the low social class of many Latino immigrant families in the U.S. and the social injustices meted out on the first immigrants by the whites, which has transcended to haunt their young and old populations alike (Valencia, 2010). Responses to questions 1 and 2 are depicted in Table 3, below. For a full representation of all parent responses see Appendix C.

Table 3

*Parent Responses to Background and Childhood Experiences Questions*

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**Question 1: Where did you attend school?**

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- Parent 1: Jalisco, Mexico
  - Parent 2: Mexico
  - Parent 3: Mexico
  - Parent 4: California & Mexico
  - Parent 5: Mexico
  - Parent 6: Mexico
  - Parent 7: Mexico
  - Parent 8: Mexico
  - Parent 9: Zacatecas
  - Parent 10: Mexico
- 

**Question 2: What is your highest level of schooling completed?**

---

- Parent 1: secondary school
  - Parent 2: grade 6
  - Parent 3: high school graduate
  - Parent 4: grade 11 (or equal)
  - Parent 5: grade 9 (or equal)
  - Parent 6: secondary school
  - Parent 7: grade 3
  - Parent 8: some high school
  - Parent 9: some high school
  - Parent 10: junior high
- 

**Parent Involvement in Child's Education**

The interview questions here were structured to help in capturing information concerning the levels of parent participation in the school of their children, the aspect of parent involvement and how schools help in fostering parent involvement in student education. The questions also address the problems that parents encounter in the process of becoming involved in the education of their children, the parental involvement programs commonly used and the level of parent-teacher relationship in relation to parent involvement in the education of the Latino students.

The levels at which parents got involved in the education/school of their children varied and ranged from pre-school to 3rd grade. Parents, generally, indicated a low level of commitment or involvement in their children's schooling since they perceived it as the duty of school to give education to their children and felt that their involvement would contravene the function of the schools. The response of Parent 8 on how he gets involved in child's education, "just with homework (busy life), last year needed more help, I get involved when I know or asked" reflected how most of the Latino parents, especially those fully employed, were affected by both work and their cultural belief identifying school as the only right source to offer education for their children. The positive responses received from 8 out of 10 of the participating parents on their involvement in the schools of their children contradict previous research on Latino immigrants which cited low educational backgrounds and cultural practices to be the reasons behind low parental involvement in children's education (Bloodworth, 2008; Fan, 2001; Vidal De Haymes, Kilty, & Segal, 2009). Contrary to the research by Smith, Stern, and Shatrova (2008) on factors inhibiting the participation of Latino parents in the education of their children, the research findings indicate that most of the participating parents were involved in various school activities. These activities ranged from school meetings, volunteer programs, and talks with children's teachers aimed at addressing the problems facing children at school, to assisting children with homework. The responses of some of the participating parents that, "I participate in all meetings I know," "I participate in the STAR test program" and others that, "I participate in PTA and other meetings" meant that the meetings ranged from informational to Parent-Teacher Association (PTA) meetings. Another parent also stated, "I participate in parent-help-parent programs" thus illustrating the high levels of Latino parental commitment in the education of

their children. Other parents work for their children's teachers in classes as part of their volunteer programs at school, which is aimed at boosting the morale and performances of children.

The school, for its part, has played a critical role in improving the levels of parental involvement in the education of the children through the organization of meetings and other school sponsored events. Seventy percent of the participating parents felt that school programs such as PTA involved them more in the education of their children and thus helped them to understand the problems that affect their children. This is illustrated in the responses of Parent 7 who stated, "the school sends some home PTA invites, lots of information sent home" and Parent 10 stating, "they encourage and motivate, send home stuff to get me to come to school and I do that a lot when I can" when addressing the question on how schools involve them in children's education. As a result, parents are empowered to address the challenges facing their children at school and thus help in boosting their children's performances through motivation and finding solutions to the emerging challenges or problems. Most of the participating parents felt that schools involved them in school activities, especially on issues involving their children, through sending home notes and advising them on the relevant areas affecting their children. However, some parents were prevented by their employment or rather busy schedules from attending various school activities as illustrated by the responses of Parent 7 who, when answering the questions on the problems she encounters when helping her child, said, "trying to balance home and helping at school" and Parent 9, when answering the question on when he got involved in his child's education stated, "just with homework (busy life), last year needed more help, I get involved when I know or asked." The nature of work that some of these parents are engaged in requires more of their time and this often leaves them with limited time to attend to their



children’s academic work or school activities. This is illustrated in the responses to question 1 indicated in Table 4, below. For a complete list of all parent responses, see Appendix D.

Table 4

*Parents Responses to Questions Regarding Initial Involvement in Schools*

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**Question 1: How and when did you first get involved in the schools? Why?**

---

Parent 1: very little (busy life) – 3rd grade

Parent 2: invited to meetings, a great deal of time, from K

Parent 3: no response

Parent 4: invited to meetings, sometimes help, since – 3rd grade

Parent 5: since I was pregnant (buy and read books to her), very involved, since K

Parent 6: meetings, two years ago joined and helped in the PTA

Parent 7: school meetings, a great deal, in 3rd grade

Parent 8: when I know about stuff, off and on as needed, joined PTA

Parent 9: just with homework (busy life), last year needed more help, I get involved when I know or asked

Parent 10: as much as I can (busy), read and check homework, not needed child performs well

---

Language was a barrier cited by a small number of the participating parents as the limiting factor in their parent-teacher relationship. As the parents’ responses (Table 5) show, language was not a response submitted by parents as a deterrent to their involvement. Being limited proficiency in the English language has prevented some of the parents from attending school activities or communicating with their children’s teachers. However, this particular group of parents on the whole did not find that language was a barrier in their involvement or did it prevent them from providing their children with the support they were able to offer. This is echoed in one of the parents’ responses to the question of the problems encountered when helping their children that “language sometimes, teachers help with translation.” The children

have, however, been instrumental in improving parent-teacher communication by helping their parents in translations as indicated by one of the parents who stated that her daughter helped her in translation whenever she attends school activities. A general observation is that most parents preferred communicating with their children's teachers only when prompted by circumstances to do so. It was noted during the interviews that parents mostly communicated with teachers whenever their children were facing problems or when there were important issues to be addressed by the teachers or the school.

Table 5

*Parents' Responses to Questions about Barriers Encountered*

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<b>Question 4: What problems do you encounter in trying to help your children, if any?</b>
Parent 1: <b>none</b> noted (language not an obstacle)
Parent 2: <b>none noted</b>
Parent 3: <b>none</b>
Parent 4: homework is hard (math)
Parent 5: <b>none</b>
Parent 6: <b>no problems</b> – great teachers
Parent 7: trying to balance home and helping at school ... sometimes it is hard to talk to the teachers because we speak different languages
Parent 8: language sometimes (teachers help to translate)
Parent 9: <b>no problems</b>
Parent 10: <b>no problems</b>

---

**Impacts of Parent Involvement on their Children**

To capture the perceptions of the parents on the potential impacts of their involvement in the education of their children, questions were structured to highlight how parents helped their children with school and the subsequent effects of the approaches adopted. Open-ended

questions were utilized in this part of the interview so as to foster the understanding of how these immigrant parents perceived their contribution on the academic performances of their children.

A general observation was that parents were positive about their contribution towards the education of their children. They concluded that the constant encouragement and involvement in school activities have helped their children to love school and improve in their performances. Some also attribute the high achievement of their children to the constant encouragement on the use of the English language and the help they gave to their children in relation to doing their homework. This is supported by the response of Parent 2 when addressing the question on how her involvement in her child's education had impacted the child academically saying, "Very much, I always try to speak to him in English so he can learn it, prepare for college and more opportunities." The identification and subsequent assistance with subjects where students perform poorly through parent-teacher communication was also cited as one of the contributing factors to the high performances among these Latino students. This point is supported by the response of Parent 6 who said, "I think very much, they are happy when I am involved and it makes them like school even more. I want them to see how important a good education is to get a good job," as illustrated in Table 6.

Following the interviews with the adult/parent participants, the data collected pertained to different aspects of adult/parent experiences in school and how they contributed to the well-being of their children.

Table 6

*Parents Responses to Question Regarding How their Children Interpret their Involvement*

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**Question 2: How has your involvement in your children’s education impacted your child academically?**

---

Parent 1: I make sure she does her homework

Parent 2: very much I always try to speak to him in English so he can learn it, prepare for college and more opportunities

Parent 3: no response

Parent 4: it is good, he knows I care and that I am here to check and help him as best I can, I want him to always make 100%

Parent 5: I think it has helped, I encourage my children to be someone and be something, I try to correct them when they are wrong so they can learn from it. Strict with my children. I take my child to all school activities that they want to do. Help with finding stuff on the computer going to buy books.

Parent 6: I think very much, they are happy when I am involved and it makes them like school even more. I want them to see how important a good education is to get a good job.

Parent 7: I think very much

Parent 8: very much

Parent 9: They like it and see the importance of school, proud

Parent 10: it is a good thing, kids like to see it too

---

**Findings from Student Interviews**

This section of the interview was critical in understanding the student view on the importance of parental involvement in both their academic and other school activities. Through this part we shall be able to find the correlation between student performances and parental involvement in their academic work, at least from student point of view. The participating students for the interview were ten randomly selected 5th grade Latino students. Their high performance in school despite their low English proficiency was the reason for their selection.

These students have gone against all odds to become high achievers. Some researchers have attributed this to the changes in the Latino social structure, parental involvement in education and the Federal government's policies of equality in school (Bloodworth, 2008; Delgado-Gaitan, 2004; Soto, 2007; Valencia, 2010). The findings from the student interviews will be tested against that of the parents' interviews and some previous research on achievement gaps and high performance among Latino students.

### **Student Experiences at School and the Support they Get and/or Give to Their Parents**

The interview questions were carefully structured to enable an understanding of the students' perception of their parents' involvement in their education. These questions served as a good ice breaker that ensured that students spoke directly and in detail about their parents. Their answers were recorded in a condensed form. A color-coding system was also used to tract the student responses.

In summary, students provided short but clear answers to the questions regarding their perception of their parents' involvement. The researcher notes that all students interviewed were positive in the responses that they provided and seem to provide trustworthy answers to the questions asked of them. The students were appreciative of their parent's involvement in their academic work. They explained that their parents were sources of inspiration and encouragement necessary for their passing examinations, helping them with homework, and preparation for college. They cited encouragement, praise, good communication and assistance in doing homework as the main contributing factors towards their improved academic performances. Also noted is the assistance that students received from their parents in terms of meal preparation and communication with their teachers. This is an indication of parental eagerness in ensuring that

students perform well in their academic work. The positive responses of students are captured in full in Appendix F. A sampling of responses are also indicated in Table 7.

Table 7

*5th Graders Observations Regarding What They See as Helping them on State Tests*

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**Question 1: What has helped you to do well on the state test (CST)?**

---

Student 1: my mom encourages me, always telling me to do my best, teachers have been good

Student 2: my mom prepares my backpack, checks my homework

Student 3: motivation

Student 4: parents and teachers

Student 5: my parents and the teachers at this school

Student 6: teachers, and my parents have helped me to learn

Student 7: mom

Student 8: parents

Student 9: parents and teachers

Student 10: parents encourage and want me to do the best that I can at school

---

Career guidance from both teachers and parents is important in fostering the performance of students. Ninety percent of the students were of the opinion that encouraging parental and family support in career guidance through suggestions of colleges that offer relevant courses helped them. This is illustrated by the voices of the students, for instance, when answering the question on how their parents help them do well in school. Student 2 said, “talk about college and scholarships”, student 3 said, “motivates me and checks my homework,” and student 8 said, “homework, motivation, breakfast and lunch.” Moreover, when answering the question on what

they expect their parents to do more for them, students 6 & 7 both said, “College preparation,” while Student 4 said, “just help me get things done if I need help.” These answers are indications of how these students highly value the participation of their parents in their education. The findings indicated high student expectation of parental involvement in college selection in order to enable them to start planning and thinking about the type of colleges to attend and the career paths to pursue. The students also attributed the contribution of their teachers through the assistance they receive in relation to their choice of career paths. The students further cited the assistance they receive from both their teachers and parents in doing special projects as one way that boosted their self-esteem. These responses are illustrated in Table 8.

Table 8

*5th Graders’ Observations about How Their Parents’ Help Them*

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**Question 2: How do your parents help you to do well in school?**

---

Student 1: encouragement, good breakfast  
 Student 2: talk about college and scholarships  
 Student 3: motivates me and checks my homework  
 Student 4: encouragement  
 Student 5: prepare/food  
 Student 6: talk to teachers, homework  
 Student 7: look over my stuff, homework  
 Student 8: homework, motivation, breakfast and lunch  
 Student 9: talk to teachers  
 Student 10: prepare, check homework

---

Students also indicated that extended family members did have an impact on their education and they always felt like they were encouraged to do their best on the test. One child noted that her family always talks about the test and it is considered something very important to

her family. The fact that some of the students referred to one or two of their family members as role models meant that they derived their inspiration from them. This, for instance, was the case in two of the responses from the student participants who felt that their uncles were doing well with the English language and were helpful in addressing their plight in relation to academic work. One of the students answering a question on how their parents could also help them in school said, “Speak more English like my uncle who can help me,” while another student when responding to the question on how their parents/ relatives helped them said, “uncle helps with English and to write special homework.” We can draw a conclusion from this that their uncles have endured the challenges facing this population and are determined to help their nieces and nephews to improve their education.

Since the fifth grade students were more conversant with the use of the English language, they reciprocated their parental involvement in their education by helping them with house chores and in translations. One of the participating students said, “I help my parents in translating, help with brother and sister by giving them advice.” This effort may be attributed to the impact of parental involvement in the education of these students inculcating a sense of responsibility and appreciation of the importance of education which then leads to a college-going culture thus eliminating poverty within their society (Vidal De Haymes et al., 2009). The above student responses in relation to parental influences on their education are captured in Table 9.



Table 9

*5th Graders Observations about Other Ways in which Parents Help Them and Vice Versa*

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**Question 3: What else do you think your parents can help you with to do well in school?**

---

Student 1: nothing noted

Student 2: help me prepare for college

Student 3: healthy breakfast, helps me prepare for college

Student 4: just help me get things done if I need help

Student 5: nothing noted

Student 6: prepare for college

Student 7: college preparation

Student 8: get me up and ready each day

Student 9: hard projects or homework assignments

Student 10: Speak more English like my uncle who can help me

---

**Question 5: How do you help your parents at home?**

---

Student 1: translating, help with brother and sister, giving them advice

Student 2: correcting them because they only know about 40% English

Student 3: clean take out trash

Student 4: translation

Student 5: clean, English

Student 6: mostly stuff around the house is the biggest help to them

Student 7: take out the trash, dishes, cleaning stuff

Student 8: helping them say words right in English

Student 9: with their English

Student 10: cleaning, translation

---

Following the interview with the student participants, the researcher was able to collect data from student interviews pertaining to student perception of parental involvement in their school and/or education and the impact of the same from the students' point of view.

## Discussion

The research findings indicate that immigrant parents have limited their definition of parental involvement in children's education to parent involvement in Parent-Teacher Association, attendance of parent-teacher conferences, being a classroom resource, attendance at school functions and involvement in child's homework. This may be attributed to their culture which dictates this definition. According to Chavkin & Gonzalez (1995), Latino parents have great respect for teachers and they alienate themselves from academic work as they believe schools are the only institutions to instill knowledge (Chavkin & Gonzalez, 1995). Carger (1997) explains that the Latino parents have defined their roles in educating their children into the teaching of morale, behavior, respect, and nurturing their children. It is from this school of thought that most Latino parents, for instance, are reluctant to get involved in other school activities beyond those defined by their culture since they equate this to overstepping their own boundaries. Latino parents, on the other hand, consider questioning teachers on issues pertaining to children's assignments and grades as disrespectful. This explains why most of the Latino parents were only involved in assisting their children with their homework but not engaging the teachers in discussions about the performance of their children (Delgado-Gaitan, 2004).

Parental involvement, according to Davies (1991), should encompass the involvement of all individuals having responsibilities for the care and well-being of children. These individuals should help in ensuring that all children access the right tools needed for their success. Parental involvement should therefore be aimed at encouraging the social, emotional, physical and academic growth and development of a child. In order to achieve this, parents and other stakeholders should help in parenting by nurturing and guiding their children (Hernandez, 2007). This is also important in instilling discipline in these children as well as motivating them. As this

study highlights, parents are advised to engage themselves in school activities such as helping in classroom and school-wide activities. These are critical in motivating children and in understanding the nature of children/student problems which is important in developing relevant solutions. Epstein (1995) cited parent-teacher communication as aspects of parental involvement in child's education. The parents are expected to engage themselves in regular talks with the school staff on children's progress, school affairs and other programs. Helping children with their homework at home and the participation of parents in school decision making also constitutes parent involvement.

The communication aspect of parent involvement has been given little or insignificant attention by the Latino parents. This may be attributed to both cultural influences and economic challenges that these people are facing. Firstly, the Latino culture discourages questioning of student grades or assignments as it is viewed as disrespect to the teacher. This consigns educational duties to teachers resulting in the impediment of student performances (Valencia, 2010). Secondly, the ethnographic findings have indicated that most of the immigrant Latino families in the U.S. belong to low social classes (Vidal De Haymes et al., 2009). Because of their economic status quo most Latino parents are forced to engage themselves in more than one job in an effort to meet their family demands (Murillo, 2010). As a result, the parents find limited time to get involved in school activities. These factors have negatively impacted on the student performances thus explaining the general low performances among the Latino student population in the U.S. Onikama, Hammond, and Koki (2001) have stated that teachers or school administrators have different expectations for different parents based on their social classes. The low-income earning parents, especially the working class all want their children to excel in school but find limited time to participate in their school activities. This is unlike the middle-

class parents who perceive themselves as partners in the education of their children and are always involved in it.

Simon (2001) posited that teenagers whose parents partake in various school activities tend to attend school more consistently than those whose parents do not partake in school activities. He argued that this is experienced irrespective of the teenager's background. Parents who attend school functions have an advantage of interacting with other parents and teachers thus developing relationships. Through these relationships students or teenagers are held accountable to the community's adults and are thus prevented from skipping school as other parents help in keeping tabs on them. Moreover, parents interact with both teachers and other administrators attending these school events. This helps in reinforcing parent-teacher communication that is critical in helping students improve their performances through the identification of student's weak subjects or academic areas (Hernandez, 2007; Simon, 2001).

There is a close correlation between this research and the Simon's (2001) statement on children's performances in schools. From this research we can conclude that students whose parents are involved in their education or schools are bound to excel more than those who do not receive any parent involvement in school activities. This is indicated by the positive responses from the participating parents/adults and the students. Most parents stated that their children were happy whenever they saw them talking with their teachers or participating in school activities. This may be equated to motivational factors necessary for a student's success. The parents felt that they have challenged and empowered their children to perform better in their academic work by helping them select colleges and in accessing library materials. The finding further cited student pride in their participating parents as an important motivational factor culminating to student success or high performances.

Furthermore, some of the participating parents stated that their involvement in their children's education enabled them to interact with other parents. Through this interaction parents have been able to share views about their children and assist each other, outside school, in addressing student issues such as doing homework or encouragement. One of the participants indicated that he has been instrumental in his community in the encouragement of parent-teacher communication. He stated that he encourages parents to talk with their children's teachers since they were nice and hospitable. In doing this he engages more parents in the education of their children, thus fostering their academic performances (Fan, 2001).

The level of parent/adult involvement in their children's education varied and it ranged from helping them do their homework to participating in school activities such as PTA meetings. Through this involvement parents get an opportunity to understand the predicament of their children in school. As a result they are in a better position to address issues hindering the performance of their children in school. The challenge related to parent involvement in their child's education is the language barrier or low literacy levels that limit some parents from helping their children with homework. Most parents were found to communicate less with their children's teachers unless prompted by need or problems affecting their children. Consequently, most Latino parents fail to fully address school issues affecting their children as compared to white parents. Moreover, the difficulties related to balancing of work, school and family demands has downplayed parental involvement in children's education. A general observation from the finding was the high levels of parental involvement in their child's education which is attributed to the determination of parents to ensure that their children acquired the highest levels of education (Delgado-Gaitan, 2004).

## **Barriers to Parent Involvement in Children's Education/Schooling**

Language barriers form one of the limiting factors to Latino parent involvement in children's education. Many of the Latino parents interviewed for this study are conversant in the Spanish language but fewer seem to be proficient in the English language. The fact that most teachers in these schools speak and communicate in English limit teacher-parent and student-teacher communication. Spanish is the language used by these Latino parents and children at home. When communicating with the school staff, most parents are hindered by the language factor from raising issues that may be beneficial to their children. Children, have been instrumental in breaking this language barrier by helping their parents in translations. However, their efforts have not been fully utilized since some parents because of their cultures do not communicate much with their children's teachers (Murillo, 2010; Vidal De Haymes et al., 2009). Poor communication between the parents and teachers has been elicited by the research findings as another factor affecting parent involvement in education. According to Onikama et al. (2001), while parents feel more comfortable communicating in their native languages, school systems tend to utilize English to communicate. This poses a problem as parents often perceive an adversarial relationship.

Most of the participating parents indicated that they had very little communication with the school teachers or staff. Most of these communications are prompted by events or issues affecting the child. Poor communication between the parents and teachers may be blamed on both the Latino culture, which discourages the questioning of teachers, and the language barrier, English vs. Spanish. This communication aspect is echoed in one of the participating parent's responses in which she says, "I talk to them (school staff) when needed and my daughter help in translation." This is illustrated in the responses of the parents in Table 10.

Amid the high living standards in the U.S. and the low-income earnings among the Latino families, most parents have been forced to take more than one job in an effort to sustain their families. Work policies confine these parents to their work places, thus giving them limited time to attend to the needs of their children’s education, especially those related to parental involvement in school activities (Fan, 2001). Two parents, during the interview, stated that they were less involved in their children’s education or school activities as a result of their busy work schedules. A general observation was that these parents were willing to be part of their children’s school activities but were limited by their work. This illustrates part of the challenges faced by Latino parents that most researchers have highlighted and thus the need to address it in an attempt to ensure equality in education and improved lifestyles among these Latino families (Delgado-Gaitan, 2004; Valencia, 2010; Vidal De Haymes et al., 2009).

Table 10

*Parents’ Observations about Communicating with Teachers*

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**Question 6: How often do you communicate with your child’s teacher? In what ways do you communicate with him/her?**

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Parent 1: little communication is needed, notes

Parent 2: very little

Parent 3: n/a

Parent 4: each day briefly when I pick-up child

Parent 5: with notes and in the hall, not that often

Parent 6: a lot

Parent 7: as needed, not much

Parent 8: I talk to them when needed (my daughter help to translate)

Parent 9: I talk and send notes as needed, they are good about letting me know stuff from school

Parent 10: very often if needed – notes and letters

---

## **Conclusion**

Due to the parental involvement in their child's education most children are found to complete their preliminary education and most of them are bound to graduate contrary to the experience of their parents. Through encouragement and assistance with homework, children have been able to develop high self-esteem that is important in boosting their performances both in and outside of school. The language barriers to education have been addressed by parents through the encouragement of English language use both within the home and school. This is critical in improving the children's command of the English language which results in improvement in academic performance. The findings further indicated parental support through the purchase of needed books, visits to libraries and setting goals; children are encouraged to work hard in order to attain the highest levels of education and become better individuals. This, to some extent, contradicts the previous research on Latino parent involvement in children's education in which parents as a result of cultural and educational differences were reported to be less involved in their children's education. The previous findings have indicated that these parents considered education to be the function of schools and not homes (Bloodworth, 2008). The responses of the participating parents in this study indicate changes in the opinions of parents.

Some participating parents were unwilling to respond to some of the research questions which may be considered sensitive to them. Parent 3, for instance, did not respond to the question on how he gets involved in his child's education as he might have considered this an infringement on his family life. Non-responses in the research contributed to non-respondent errors which limit the accuracy of the research. It is, however, imperative to note that parental non-response is associated with the Latino culture which prohibits these people from discussing



some sensitive issues outside their homes or community (Murillo, 2010). Another contributing factor is language barrier in which the parent may not have fully understood the interview questions or may have misinterpreted the questions due to the fact that the individual conducting the interviews utilized terms that are not necessarily of a universal usage in the Spanish language.

It is important to note the decline in the number of dropouts in most schools following the continued parental involvement in children's education. This decline in high school dropout rates should not be confused with the high number of Latino population which is composed of immigrants who drop out of school before coming to the U.S. It should be understood that the immigrant population, many of whom drop out of school before coming to the U.S, constitutes a significant proportion of the labor and workforce. According to Fry (2003), the number of immigrant Mexicans between the ages of 16 and 19 who are high school dropouts in the U.S. amounts to 40%. However, the actual dropout rate of Mexican immigrants educated in U.S. schools is 20%. More Latino girls are found to drop out of school at an earlier age than their male counterparts as a result of Latina culture, which charges girls with family responsibilities. Lack of English language ability has also been cited as one of the reasons behind the high dropout rates among the Latino students in the U.S. This, when compared with the responses of the parents indicate a clear link or correlation between dropout rates and the command of English language among the children. The fact that the parents have committed themselves to assist their children in learning more English through their using the language highlights the extent to which the subject has contributed to lowering the Latino dropout rate.

In summary, the findings of this research, to a great extent, reflected the findings of various existing research on Latino parental involvement in the education of their children in the

U.S. Some of the research findings exhibited in this research and the existing research on immigrant Latino population in the U.S. are similar (Avaria-Verdadeiro, 2007; Bloodworth, 2008; Davies, 1991; Epstein, 1995, Hernandez, 2007; Murillo, 2010; Onikama et al. 2001). Similarities in the literature include: cultural factors, language and communication barriers limiting parental participation in children's education, comparatively low participation in children's education and job-related challenges. The participating parents of this study seemed to be more aligned to academic and emotional aspects of their children's development as evidenced by the responses given to during the interviews. Moreover, the research findings indicate a higher level of parental involvement in the education of children through various school activities contrary to the previous research reports on Latino population in relation to parental involvement in education (Onikama et al., 2001; Simon, 2001; Smith, Stern, & Shatrova, 2008; Soto, 2007; Valencia, 2010). It follows from this research that many Latino parents in the U.S. may be changing their perceptions on parental involvement in the education of their children as a result of understanding the impact that this has on the academic performances of their children.

The next chapter of this doctoral study will focus on the conclusion and recommendations for future research on immigrant parental involvement and its impact on the achievement levels of fifth grade students.

**CHAPTER FIVE**  
**SUMMARY OF FINDINGS, CONCLUSION**  
**AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

This study investigated involvement of Latino parents in their children's education, particularly those of high-achieving fifth grade students and outlines some of the challenges and barriers experienced in helping their children realize educational goals and aspirations. This chapter begins with an overview of the research problem, the research questions, the research design used, participants, and summary of the study's major findings. Afterwards, the significance of the study's findings is discussed followed by its implications for practice where recommendations for education practitioners and school administrators are highlighted. Implications for research are thereafter discussed in relation to how the study contributes to existing literature on Latino parental involvement. Next, the limitations of the study are discussed followed by directions for future research on the topic of Latino parental involvement and how schools can better support high achievement in students belonging to culturally diverse families. This chapter ends with the principal investigator's concluding remarks and reflections.

**Overview of the Study**

This qualitative study sought to describe the level and nature of parental involvement among immigrant Latino parents and how this influences the academic outcomes of their high-achieving fifth grade children. Immigrant families are in a constant struggle with social, economic, and language barriers that negatively impact their integration into the US public school system (Valdes, 1996). Notwithstanding the fact that Latino students have the highest

dropout rate in the US, there are Latino students who break barriers and are able to achieve academic success (Gorinski & Fraser, 2006). Parental involvement has been shown to be critical to the development of high achieving Latino students (Reese, 2002). It is hoped that this study can provide a preliminary illustration that shows how immigrant Latino parents can become more involved in the educational life of their children.

### **The Research Problem**

Under the “No Child Left Behind” Act of 2001, closing the achievement gap of students is considered to be crucial to the overall economic, social and moral stability of the nation (Evans, 2005). In this regard, efforts are being made in order to assist minority groups to cope with the demands of education beginning at the primary level. The Latino school-age population in the US alone is expected to climb to 28 million by 2050 (Fry & Gonzales, 2008) making the need for closing the achievement gap among Latino students even more imperative. Despite being considered as historically predestined to lose in the education race, there are high achieving elementary school-aged Latino students able to debunk this trend (Gandara, 2005b). Unfortunately, until now research interest has emphasized more on the deficits that make Latino students fall behind their peers while little interest has been focused on the process of developing academically successful Latino students. Furthermore, there has been scant research attention on how parental involvement can enable Latino children to break barriers and help them realize their true potential (Md-Yusnus, 2008; Tinkler, 2002).

### **Purpose Statement and Research Questions**

The purpose of this study is to examine the level and nature of involvement of immigrant parents in their high-achieving children’s school activities with an aim of establishing ways and

means through which all parents can be empowered to help their children achieve academic success. The research questions explored in this study follow:

1. How do (limited English proficient) parents of high achieving 5th grade Latino students participate in their children's schooling?
2. With respect to participating parents,
  - a. How are they involved with their children's education at school?
  - b. What do they do outside of school to support their children's education?
  - c. How does the school support their involvement?
3. With respect to participating students, in what ways do their parents support their education at school?

### **Design of the Study**

This study used a qualitative research design. This is characterized by studying a phenomenon in a natural setting, an interpretive stance toward data gathered, and describing the phenomenon using the participants' perspectives (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). In writing the final report for this research, the investigator makes extensive use of participant voice, his or her own reflexivity, and utilizes "rich and thick" description and interpretation of phenomenon in order to extend the literature or call for action to the problem being examined (Creswell, 2007). The researcher utilized the grounded theory method for analysis with emphasis on theoretical sensitivity to generate theory on how parental involvement among limited English speaking parents contributes to their children's high scholastic achievement. Theoretical sensitivity enables the researcher to relate concepts emerging from data gathered together with normative theoretical models. Theory generated from this study was produced by systematically processing data from the study with general hypotheses already available (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

## **Participants**

Qualitative data was collected from individual interviews with a random sample of 10 Latino parents and their 5th grade students who have shown a pattern of high academic achievement as defined by the California Standards Tests (CSTs) over the course of three years data. The participants were randomly selected from an eligible pool.

## **Summary of Findings**

This section presents a summary of the major findings of the study and is organized according to the research questions.

### **Research Question 1**

Interviews conducted show that Latino parents are interested and are involved in their children's education. This is consistent with Reese's (2002) finding that despite developing low acculturation and integration with mainstream American society, Mexican families are shifting their perspectives when it comes to their children's education. While Mexican families still desire to infuse traditional values in raising their children, many of them are consciously disengaging with some cultural traditions when it comes to providing support for their children's education. Mexican parents reported being involved in motivating their children to perform well in school, helping them with homework in ways their own parents did not and declaring high educational aspirations for their children (Reese, 2002). In the present study, involvement of Latino parents in the education of their high achieving children occurs: at home, primarily, and at school, secondarily. Overall, the level of parental involvement among Latino parents interviewed and the length of time to which they perceived being actively involved varied. With respect to their participation at home, Latino parents help their children with their homework or

seek outside help when needed, offering motivational support, food preparation, preparing school materials, and finding translators when necessary.

Despite this positive finding, however, it is also noteworthy that there are Latino parents who still believe that education can be relinquished to the full responsibility of the school. But these perceptions do not necessarily indicate that Latino parents are predisposed to be unsupportive. Many of those who had this perception were usually parents who struggle with work and life balance issues and those in full employment. Valdes (1996) noted in *Con Respeto* that there are "profound" clashes between home and school values in the experience of Latino immigrant families. However, maintaining these prejudices against Latino families can only discourage parents further and can even hurt children's educational outcomes. Thus, care must be taken on the part of teachers when dealing with issues regarding parent involvement in order to avoid presumptions and prejudicial beliefs about culturally diverse families.

## **Research Question 2**

Regarding their participation at school, Latino parents reported being minimally to fully involved, depending on time availability. Most parents reported attending school or PTA meetings and talking to teachers about the status of their child's performance. However, many of these parents admitted that they were more involved in their children's education by providing them support at home and indicated a relatively low level of commitment to participation at school. Many considered the school as beyond the scope of their authority as parents and perceived that schooling in general should be left to the school system. This was particularly common among parents who were employed outside the home. This suggests retention of deeply held beliefs on the separation of home and school and alienating the school as the only rightful and effective institution to be charged with children's education. Nonetheless, most of

these Latino parents, 8 out of 10, no longer seemed to view this dichotomy and reported being actively involved in schools. This seems to challenge previous research on Latino immigrants which cited low educational backgrounds and cultural practices to be the reasons behind low parental involvement in children education (Bloodworth, 2008; Vidal De Haymes et al., 2009). In fact, many parents explained their participation in various school activities, such as informational school meetings, PTA meetings, dialogue with their children's teachers on academic concerns, and even on volunteer programs, especially those offered by the school. While this is not true for all Latino parents interviewed, this suggests a positive parental commitment that breaks the cultural stereotype that Latino parents have low academic aspirations for their children. Some of the relevant reflections of parents include the following:

- *I participate in all meetings I know...*
- *I support my child in the STAR test program any way I can...*
- *I participate in parent help parent programs...*
- *Too busy...I get involved when I know or asked*

When asked about their views on how they contribute to the academic achievement of their children, it was generally observed in the interviews with participating parents that they regard their efforts positively and believe that this contributes to their children being more motivated in school. Many parents believed that through their constant encouragement and involvement in school activities, their children would develop a love for schooling and consequently will be encouraged to get better grades. Some parents considered their constant encouragement of their children to use the English language as a determining factor in their



children's high performance in school. Many parents shared that they encourage their children to speak English because they view English proficiency as preparation for better and more productive employment opportunities. Some parents also shared that effective parent-teacher communication contributes to the higher performance of their children because the subjects where their children fall behind are identified and assistance can be provided. These are among the common reflections of parents on how they provide motivational support for their children:

- *Very much, I always try to speak to him in English so he can learn it, prepare for college and more opportunities.*
- *I think very much, they are happy when I am involved and it makes them like school even more. I want them to see how important a good education is to get a good job.*

Parents were also asked how teachers and administrators assist them in their involvement with their children's education in order to examine whether there is a reciprocal effort from the schools system to encourage parent participation. The parents perceived that the school was significant in improving the levels of parental involvement by organizing meetings and other events that allow parents not only to observe their children's activities but also to share experiences with other parents. Seventy percent of the parents interviewed believed that PTA meetings were a crucial part in their involvement and helped them understand the problems their children experience in class. Some parents remarked that teachers send home notes and apprise them on the progress of their children's grades and performance in school subjects. In this manner, parents reported feeling a sense of empowerment to know that their role in their children's school performance is highly valued. Some teachers would also communicate with them directly in order to talk about some relevant areas that their children need more work on. Not all parents share positive reviews with respect to their involvement with their children's

education, especially those who have full time employment. Some parents lamented that while they would like to be more involved with their children's education, work schedules keep them from fulfilling this obligation. Difficulty balancing work and home life concerns prevent most parents, especially mothers, from allotting time to inquire on their children's progress in school or to attend school activities. Some of the common views shared by the parents:

- *Teachers send some home, PTA invites, lots of information sent home...*
- *They encourage and motivate, send home stuff to get me to come to school and I do that a lot when I can...*
- *I wish... but trying to balance home and helping at school*

With respect to parent teacher interactions, language was considered as a major barrier by the parents interviewed. Their limitations in speaking English have a disempowering effect when it comes to actively engaging teachers in concerns that relate to their children's schooling. Most of the parents interviewed reported that they encountered difficulty in speaking to teachers and that teachers would often require translation in order to be able to communicate with them. This limitation is redressed when children themselves help their parents with translation in school events, home notes, or in meetings. Another salient observation is that parent-teacher communication only occurs when there is a perceived problem with their children's schooling. Often parents speak with teachers only when summoned or requested.

In the interviews conducted, it would seem that the three main barriers of Latino parent involvement are: language difficulty, low literacy, and time availability. Parents' lack of English skills hinder parents' possible active participation and input in their children's academic endeavors. Accordingly, the school's lack of bilingual personnel makes translation needs more difficult. While this does not necessarily prevent parents from attending meetings, it is

admittedly lessening their capacity to voice their concerns and to make their ideas known to teachers and school personnel. Moreover, parents' low literacy levels do not coincide with the school's natural expectation that parents have to be able to speak, write, and interpret information in English effectively. Some parents, however, report making an effort to speak English and to practice speaking with other more fluent relatives. With respect to time availability, parents who have economic issues are reportedly among the least involved. Among the parents interviewed a few worked hourly-wage jobs and could not afford to leave work in order to perform parental obligations in school during work hours. Some parents suggested that if meetings and consultations were conducted outside of work hours, they would not miss school activities and meetings. Mothers struggling to balance work and home life also expressed difficulty in focusing on the academic needs of their children in school but expressed that they feel their efforts in motivating their children at home are appreciated by their children.

Based on the interviews, it can be said that there is a perceived lack of teacher connections with Latino parents and this might affect parents' involvement in school. Due to the aforementioned barriers, primarily the language difficulties experienced by Latino parents, teachers may not connect effectively with parents in order to discuss their children's academic standing. Despite the language barriers, Latino parents interviewed demonstrated strong belief in the value of education and their high hopes for their children. They believed that this is why they always make sure to encourage children to go to school and work hard with homework and school requirements. Often their encouragements are laced with family histories in order to convince their children to do better in order to do justice to the sacrifices borne by their family in order to give them a good life in the US. Parents are more optimistic that they will be able to access opportunities commonly lacking among Latino students, such as college and a high

paying job. Parental involvement also becomes a family affair, as in the case of one parent, who expressed that she sends her child to one of her uncles in order to hone her English skills. While Latino parents were very enthusiastic about education, they also acknowledged that they lack a support system that could help their children sustain their achievements in later life. These are some of the common themes in parents' perceptions of the role of schools on their involvement:

- Most perceived that they only communicate with schools in the event of problems or an observed drop in grades.
- Most appreciate teachers' efforts in communicating with them but are prevented from interacting with them actively due to language difficulty and the lack of translators to mediate communication.

### **Research Question 3**

Aside from considering parents' voices, this study also sought to highlight the perceptions of participating students on how they view parental support and involvement in their education. Results from the interviews suggest that students generally view their parents' involvement as satisfactory and helpful in motivating them to become high achievers. Children interviewed expressed that they appreciate the efforts made by their parents and are mindful that being successful in school will not only help them but their families in the long-term. This value represents the cultural concept of *familismo* among Latino families, which emphasizes reciprocity and commitment to their families (Valdes, 1996). Since the Latino family system is built on *familismo*, determining how parent-child dyads interact and influence academic outcomes is important. Students reported that their parents' main involvement in school is through verbal encouragement and motivational support. Most of the students cited their mothers as the most involved in their schooling. The participating students considered their

parents as their inspiration for doing better in class. They also reported being appreciative of the efforts of their mothers to help with homework, prepare food, prepare their backpack, and encourage college preparation. When asked which forms of parental involvement they thought contributed to excellent performance in school, they cited encouragement, praise, good communication with teachers and assistance in doing homework as the four main factors. Students also believed that they need more career guidance from teachers and parents in order to sustain their performance in school. At an early age, Latino high achieving children recognize the need to plan for the future and 90% opined that they would want their parents to be more involved in career planning. Some reflections on how parents help them enhance academic performance:

- *Talk about college and scholarships...*
- *Motivates me and checks my homework...*
- *Homework, motivation, breakfast and lunch...*

### **Significance of the Findings**

The findings illustrated the experience of immigrant Latino parents in promoting the education of their high achieving children. Due to the recognized limitations of this study, the researcher is not in a position to generalize the findings and create a universal model to describe parental involvement of Latino parents and families in general. However, based on the data this study has gathered, it can be argued that Latino parent's voices can serve to validate and challenge some of the established beliefs and perceptions about the participation of Latino parents on the academic welfare of their children. The voices considered from the parents and their children also provide valid indications of what the school system can focus on in order to close the achievement gap that is characteristic among the Latino student population.

First of all, the findings enable us to provide a challenge to the assumption of Latino parent “non-participation” because from the interviews conducted, most did not indicate passivity to their roles and obligations as parents toward their children’s education (Reese, 2002). However, this could also indicate the difference in the effect that non-participating and participating parents have over the academic outcomes of their children. The findings thus support the case for strong parental involvement in order to produce positive educational outcomes for Latino children. While involvement was widely perceived by participating parents to be of great importance, it is equally noteworthy to point out that parents considered themselves less involved in their children’s educational experience due to several barriers: language, low literacy, and economic issues.

Unlike some of the findings in earlier studies which heavily emphasize cultural beliefs as a determinant in passivity, this study indicates that external factors account for less than active involvement of Latino parents. There was an acknowledged lack of parent-teacher interaction not because of cultural resistance but because of perceived disempowerment due to inability to speak fluent English and the need for translation in order to interpret school information. The passivity reported by participating parents was from those who were fully employed or in temporary employment. Most of the Latino parents who are unable to oversee their children’s academic progress attribute it to lack of time availability and the demands of balancing work and home life. These variables need to be considered if schools are to promote stronger parental involvement in order to achieve educational targets under the No Child Left Behind policy. Since reported lack of involvement did not spring from deep-seated cultural resistance to education and parental involvement but external variables, schools can implement programs and

policies that can provide an enabling environment for greater parental involvement among Latino parents.

Second, because this study focuses on primary education, it is thus important to make changes to the way in which parents and teachers communicate in order to establish positive patterns of behavior with regards to parental involvement. That Latino parents only meet or interact with teachers in the event a problem arises or if their child is having difficulty coping with some subjects is not indicative of a healthy parent-teacher communication pattern.

Whatever long-term improvements the school may envision in order to promote improved educational outcomes among Latino children should be established at an early stage and primary level of education, which is a crucial period. Instead of just calling or informing parents of any meetings or school activities which require their attendance, structures may also be needed to foster collaboration between parents and teachers and among parents themselves. Volunteer programs set up by the school as a way of engaging parents seems to be a step in the right direction.

Third, the findings validate how families, especially mothers, play a critical role in children's lives and formation of belief systems in the value of education. The students themselves acknowledge that the main contribution of their parents is motivational support and encouragement to improve performance by explaining the benefits of a good education and good grades. Most of the support that children appreciated from their parents was home-based. Mothers of participating students spent time on homework despite language difficulty, sought help for homework when needed, prepared meals and backpack and offered words of support in times of personal crisis. Therefore, contrary to the deficit theories which highlight the systemic lack of literacy, English skills, and resources as determinant of Latino underachievement, it is

better for teachers to appreciate the strength that Latino *familismo* contributes to Latino high achievement (Valdes, 1996).

Fourth, the importance of culturally sensitive schools should be emphasized when trying to achieve educational targets for minority students. Several studies have noted disappointment from parents when teachers lump all Latino families as people whose country of origin is Mexico, and do not appreciate the complex cultures of various Latino families. While this study only focused on Latino families of Mexican origin, it is important for teachers to have cultural competence when dealing with culturally diverse families. When they do not respect ethnic and cultural differences, there will be severe difficulties in communication and interaction with parents of Latino children. Teachers are in a position to initiate and facilitate innovative arrangements which can allow parents to be more responsive. The study points out that parents can become active and conscious participants if particular arrangements are made, such as a translator, more bilingual staff, changes in scheduling (to accommodate working mothers/parents) or transportation services.

Lastly, the study's findings support a collaborative model of parental involvement in order to enhance educational outcomes for minority students. The lack of interaction between teachers and parents comes from the existing model of interaction where teachers schedule meetings and activities characterized by one-way planning and one-way targeting. For Latino parents with limited English speaking skills, this standard model becomes disempowering and may contribute to the thinking that their involvement is sufficient if they meet with parents when their children are having scholastic concerns. Adequate mechanisms can be provided in order to make the process more democratic and two-way for limited English speaking parents. Teachers and parents also need to reach out to one another and establish human relationships that can be



more supportive of Latino children. More importantly, support of the implementation of such mechanisms requires the active involvement of school administrators and policy makers in order to be effective.

### **Implications for Practice**

This research advances the ideal that schools need to invest in Latino students and their families in order to improve educational outcomes. Schools need to emphasize the role of parental involvement and influence as key educational strategies. With respect to Latino families which are characterized by strong family attachment, the family serves as site for motivation, empowerment, and the formation of educational aspiration. The findings of this study strongly support that Latino parents are not characterized by passivity towards their children's education but have great hopes and aspirations for them. However, this aspiration does not necessarily translate to the desired level of involvement with their children's education due to the presence of barriers such as limited English skills, low literacy level, and economic issues/time availability. Aside from this, schools and education practitioners can also focus on building or enhancing cultural competence. Building on the significance of the study's findings, the following are its implications and recommendations for practice (See also Appendix G).

Schools could promote mechanisms that can establish a collaborative partnership with parents to encourage their feedback, such as provide translators or hire more bilingual staff, set up parent liaisons in order to enhance the flow of communication, and consider providing English classes for parents. These recommendations attempt to increase the fluidity of communication taking place between school employees, namely teachers, and parents.

Schools could promote cultural competency in their personnel by conducting cultural sensitivity training or basic courses on Latino culture, by offering basic Spanish language

courses for school personnel, and organizing trainings and parent outreach programs. These opportunities will provide school staff with tools for gaining a better understanding of the culture of the students they serve.

Schools could develop partnerships with communities or organizations that can provide career support and guidance for high-achieving Latino students. By doing this, Latino students are given the correct tools they need to be successful college graduates and may be provided with access to careers that may have otherwise proved out of their reach or unrealistic possibilities.

Schools could also clearly define parental involvement to extend not only to scheduled meetings but to involve parent-teacher relationships and parent-parent relations as well; scheduling could be programmed to respect parents' time availability and resources. Meetings would include translators so that parents feel an integral part of the meeting. And we can't forget about the parents who work outside the home and remain unable to attend school site meetings. Their interactions with their children are equally valuable and ways must be found to support them.

### **Implications for Research**

To a great degree, the findings of this study validate existing research regarding immigrant and Latino parental involvement but also challenge some of the assumptions made in some studies as well. Language and communication barriers were cited as the most fundamental hindrance towards parent-teacher involvement followed by economic issues or job-related obstacles (Avaria-Verdadeiro, 2007; Bloodworth, 2008; Davies, 1991; Onikama et al., 2001). Nevertheless, participating parents revealed that they were heavily aligned towards the academic aspirations of their students and provide emotional and motivational support in order to encourage them to improve their performance. Aside from emotional support, parental

involvement also came in the form of physical support such as food preparation, backpack preparation, and finding tutors or outside help to help with homework. With 90% of the parents perceiving themselves as actively involved, this study finds a higher degree of perceived parental participation compared to other studies such as Smith et al. (2008) or Soto (2007). This could indicate that there is a shift in the perceptions of Latino parents on the importance of their involvement as well as their desired level of participation in their children's education. This could be seen as contradicting some of the earlier research which relied heavily on the passivity of Latino parents as a result of their socioeconomic status and their cultural resistance. The research also challenges the finding that most Latino parents would rather opt out of school-based involvement because of the perceived dichotomy between family and school, with the latter the only capable institution to handle educational issues of their children (Bloodworth, 2008).

### **Limitations of the Study**

This study has several limitations which need to be mentioned in conjunction with stated findings. First, the applicability of the study's findings is limited only to the particularly sample investigated, that is, Latino parents of Mexican origins. The study did not include a diverse pool of Latino families from other countries. As a limitation of qualitative studies, the results of this study cannot be generalized to the Latino parent population in general. It is not representative of Latino populations residing in the United States or elsewhere. A second limitation is that the instrument used has not been extensively tested for validity with Latino parents since the design was of a more exploratory nature. In relation to this limitation, misunderstandings or faulty appreciation of questions may have arisen that restricted the ability of the participants to fully

explain their perceptions. These are expected limitations coming from the qualitative nature of data collection.

Nevertheless, the findings of this study provide encouraging insight. Several significant findings emerged from the interviews that were able to describe the particular nature of parental involvement of limited English speaking Latino parents on the education of their high achieving children. More specifically, the study found that while levels of parental involvement vary among the parents, all of them had some form of involvement whether in home-based or school-based activities. In short, excellent academic performance among Latino children may be associated with parental participation. Given the unique characteristic of the sample as well as the sample size limitation, the investigator does not recommend making broad generalizations arising out of this research. What is hoped is that the preliminary findings can provide the context for a more comprehensive model of parental involvement of Latino parents and their high-achieving children. Considering the projected growth of the Latino student population, further research will be necessary in order to come up with a full understanding of how parenting can impact scholastic functioning among Latino children.

### **Directions for Future Research**

While this research establishes a starting point for understanding parental involvement practices among limited English speaking parents of high achieving Latino children, there are potential research questions that remain. First, the concept of parent involvement can be more explicitly differentiated from parent engagement. For instance, further studies could explore how parents can have an ongoing presence and engagement with the school rather than just routine attendance at school meetings. It can also construct the concept of parental involvement as one that involves a continuum from involvement to engagement. Levels of parental

participation may vary across different schools especially in areas with a low-income minority population where parents may show support rather than becoming fully engaged. How a school defines its goals and missions towards achieving positive educational outcomes of Latino children through parent involvement can also be studied.

The data included in this study considered the empowering nature of using parents' and students' voices in constructive Latino parent involvement. Subsequent research can also utilize interviews with school leaders and teachers in order to determine how the school responds to challenges of parental involvement and what mechanisms are in place to enable it. It would be beneficial to consider the different perspectives and interpretation of what constitutes satisfactory parent involvement.

Future investigations could also be a comparative study on Latino parent involvement in high achieving and low achieving children in order to determine the difference in the forms and degree of participation that parents invest to ensure educational outcomes of their children. This could help assess whether parental involvement can be empirically established to be related to high academic achievement if socioeconomic status and English speaking ability of parents are controlled. Another interesting future research project would be to study the effects of involvement not only of parents but other kin such as uncles or aunts and how they provide support to the education of Latino children.

### **Concluding Statement**

Parental involvement is one of the most significant factors that can determine whether a child succeeds academically or not. The study of how parental involvement translates to educational outcomes has therefore been an imperative one, especially among culturally diverse families and their children. As the minority group that registers the highest dropout rate in the

country, assistance should be provided by schools to Latino students in order to close the gap that exists between them and their peers. In order to do this, promoting parent involvement of Latino parents at an early stage can enhance the outcomes of Latino children towards better employment opportunities and better chances in the future.

While there have been studies pointing to cultural resistance towards education in general among Latino parents, this study does not seem to validate that claim. Latino parents are more than willing to be involved with the education of their children but are, however, barred from the desired level of involvement because of language barriers, low literacy levels, and job-related restrictions. Overall, however, their own aspirations are aligned with that of their children's and this commitment can be fostered by teachers and the school system by implementing adequate mechanisms that would enable strengthened parent involvement among Latino parents. If educators are committed to making big changes in the educational outcomes of Latino students, they need to consider the factors that strengthen and weaken parent involvement. They must also understand that they need to be rid of presumptions of passivity among Latino parents and consider that parents are genuinely interested in seeing the academic success of their children. Schools must make an effort to collaborate and accommodate the challenges that immigrant Latino parents face in California's educational system.

## APPENDIX A

### DEFINITION OF TERMS

#### *Limited English Speaking Parents*

Immigrant parents that come from a country in which they did not speak English as a native language. They were usually coming from a country that had a less than average educational system than in the United States and achieved lower formal educational attainment (Gandara & Contereas, 2009).

#### *Parental Involvement*

Parent involvement activities in which parents were involved in their children's education and were significant in the overall development of their children. Sheppard (2007) pointed out six types of involvement, which included parental learning opportunities, communicating with school, volunteering, home support, governance and decision-making, and association with the community.

#### *Latino Students*

Latino students who originate from Hispanic countries. In 20 years, they will comprise of one-fourth of all the students in the U.S. (Gandara, 2005a). They were also viewed to have high rates of dropouts and juvenile delinquency (Koss-Chioino & Vargas, 1999).

#### *Latino High Achieving Students*

The average high-achieving Latino student performs a little lower than the level of the average high-achieving White student (Gandara, 2005b). They are students that despite the odds faced the challenges and become high achievers due to numerous factors, including the support and encouragement of their parents (Gandara & Contreras, 2009).

## APPENDIX B

### INTERVIEW PROTOCOLS

#### Parent Involvement Parent Interview Protocol (30 to 60-minute Interview)

#### INTRODUCTION

1. Please tell me your name and the name of the school where your children attend.
2. How many of your children attend the particular school or have attended?
3. Please tell me where you were born and your age.
4. If not born in the United States, at what age did you come to this country?

#### PARENT'S EXPERIENCES IN SCHOOL AS A STUDENT

1. Where did you attend school?
2. What is your highest level of schooling completed?
3. What type of student do you think you were?
4. Please tell me what impact your parents had on your academic education.
  - a. What was the extent of your parents' involvement with your homework assignments?
  - b. Please describe how your parents were involved in your education?

#### PARENT'S EXPERIENCES WITH THEIR CHILDREN'S SCHOOL(S)

1. How and when did you first get involved in the schools? Why?
2. Please describe how you are involved in your child's education.
3. How did your child's school help you to become involved in your child's schooling?  
How do they help you to stay involved?
4. What problems do you encounter in trying to help your children, if any?
5. Please describe the parental involvement programs you are involved with.
6. How often do you communicate with your child's teacher? In what ways do you communicate with him/her?

#### IMPACT ON THEIR OWN CHILDREN

1. How do you help your children with school?
2. How has your involvement in your children's education impacted your child academically?
3. What other activities are your children involved with outside of school? How do you support their involvement?
4. What are the "consejos" (advice) you give your child?
5. What do your children say about your involvement?
6. How has your involvement in your child's education affected other parents? How do you know?



Parent Involvement  
Student Interview Protocol  
(30 to 60-minute Interview)

INTRODUCTION

1. Tell me your name.
2. What grade are you in?
3. What do you like best about school?

STUDENT PERSPECTIVE ON THEIR PARENTS' INVOLVEMENT

1. What has helped you to do well on the state tests (CSTs)?
2. How do your parents help you to do well in school?
3. What else do you think your parents can help you with to do well in school?
4. How have others around you helped you to do well on the tests?
5. How do you help your parents at home?

## APPENDIX C

### ADULT/PARENT BACKGROUND INFORMATION AND HOW IT AFFECTED THE PARTICIPANTS EDUCATION

---

**Question 1: Where did you attend school?**

---

Parent 1: Jalisco, Mexico  
Parent 2: Mexico  
Parent 3: Mexico  
Parent 4: California & Mexico  
Parent 5: Mexico  
Parent 6: Mexico  
Parent 7: Mexico  
Parent 8: Mexico  
Parent 9: Zacatecas  
Parent 10: Mexico

---

**Question 2: What is your highest level of schooling completed?**

---

Parent 1: secondary school  
Parent 2: grade 6  
Parent 3: high school graduate  
Parent 4: grade 11 (or equal)  
Parent 5: grade 9 (or equal)  
Parent 6: secondary school  
Parent 7: grade 3  
Parent 8: high school  
Parent 9: high school  
Parent 10: junior high

---

**Question 3: What type of student do you think you were?**

---

Parent 1: normal  
Parent 2: good  
Parent 3: good  
Parent 4: good  
Parent 5: very good  
Parent 6: good  
Parent 7: learned quickly (good)  
Parent 8: good  
Parent 9: good  
Parent 10: good

---

---

**Question 4: What impact did your parents have on your academic education?**

---

Parent 1: verbal encouragement only

Parent 2: went on time, completed homework

Parent 3: verbal encouragement mostly

Parent 4: helped greatly with reading/writing

Parent 5: verbal encouragement, threats to stay in school

Parent 6: very much supported (advice)

Parent 7: verbal encouragement only

Parent 8: very little

Parent 9: prepare clothes, food, etc. (no academic preparation)

Parent 10: Verbal mostly, did help with homework

---

## APPENDIX D

### ADULT/PARENT INVOLVEMENT IN CHILD'S WELFARE

---

**Question 1: How and when did you first get involved in the schools? Why?**

---

Parent 1: very little (busy life) – 3<sup>rd</sup> grade

Parent 2: invited to meetings, a great deal of time, from K

Parent 3: no response

Parent 4: invited to meetings, sometimes help, since – 3<sup>rd</sup> grade

Parent 5: since I was pregnant (buy and read books to her), very involved, since K

Parent 6: meetings, 2 years ago joined and helped in the PTA

Parent 7: school meetings, a great deal, in 3<sup>rd</sup> grade

Parent 8: we I know about stuff, off and on as needed, joined PTA

Parent 9: just with homework (busy life), last year needed more help, I get involved when I know or asked

Parent 10: as much as I can (busy), read and check homework, not needed child performs well

---

**Question 2: Please describe how you are involved in your child's education?**

---

Parent 1: go to all school meetings, read all teacher notes, family Fridays (fun programs), and volunteering

Parent 2: go to the school

Parent 3: check homework, talk to teachers, do what they ask me to do, attend PTA meetings

Parent 4: attend meetings read what comes home, check on child's homework

Parent 5: buy books and materials, attend meetings for parents, check homework

Parent 6: go to school and visit, attend meetings and the PTA

Parent 7: programs in which parents learn how to support their child's education, check papers that come home,

Parent 8: in the PTA, volunteering, Family fun nights at school

Parent 9: attend all school meetings and talk with teachers if needed

Parent 10: read what comes home, make sure she does everything that is expected

---

---

**Question 3: How did your child's school help you to become involved in your child's schooling? How do they help you stay involved?**

---

Parent 1: contacted me with learning concerns of an older child of mine at the school, they always welcome my questions

Parent 2: nice to me and kids, fun things like raffles and prizes,

Parent 3: n/a

Parent 4: encourage to attend meetings

Parent 5: homework they give children, notes sent home from teacher

Parent 6: asked to do the PTA, send some home to read and do

Parent 7: send some home, PTA invites, lots of information sent home

Parent 8: meetings they give advice, motivation

Parent 9: send letters home, they are nice, they are helpful when I am there so easy to come back

Parent 10: they encourage and motivate, send home stuff to get me to come to school and I do that a lot when I can

---

**Question 4: What problems do you encounter in trying to help your children, if any?**

---

Parent 1: none noted (language not an obstacle)

Parent 2: none noted

Parent 3: none

Parent 4: homework is hard (math)

Parent 5: none

Parent 6: no problems – great teachers

Parent 7: trying to balance home and helping at school

Parent 8: language sometimes (teachers help to translate)

Parent 9: no problems

Parent 10: no problems

---

**Question 5: Describe the parental involvement programs you are involved with.**

---

Parent 1: homework and college motivation programs

Parent 2: star program, work with Ms. Yamile

Parent 3: n/a

Parent 4: just with the library programs

Parent 5: whatever they need me to do

Parent 6: PTA and meetings

Parent 7: Pique program

Parent 8: parents helping parents

Parent 9: I attend all of them that I know about, they are good

Parent 10: all different meetings they have after school

---

---

**Question 6: How often do you communicate with your child's teacher? In what ways do you communicate with him/her?**

---

Parent 1: little communication is needed, notes

Parent 2: very little

Parent 3: n/a

Parent 4: each day briefly when I pick-up child

Parent 5: with notes and in the hall, not that often

Parent 6: a lot

Parent 7: as needed, not much

Parent 8: I talk to them when needed (my daughter help to translate)

Parent 9: I talk and send notes as needed, they are good about letting me know stuff from school

Parent 10: very often if needed – notes and letters

---

## APPENDIX E

### PARENT IMPACT ON THEIR CHILDREN

---

**Question 1: How do you help your children with school?**

---

Parent 1: encouragement every single day, go on school trips with child

Parent 2: Reading in English to my son, help with homework,

Parent 3: no response

Parent 4: check over homework, provide encouragement and praise, check in with the teacher

Parent 5: I encourage them and see that they do all they are supposed to including homework, they have everything they need

Parent 6: I give him ideas for homework and project, I check in with the teacher to make sure everything is okay

Parent 7: I help with homework and special projects

Parent 8: I am always there to answer questions or to try to find the answers to stuff they are doing in school

Parent 9: homework, reading activities, talking to them every day about school

Parent 10: check with teacher make sure I am doing what I can, homework

---

**Question 2: How has your involvement in your children's education impacted your child academically?**

---

Parent 1: I make sure she does her homework,

Parent 2: very much I always try to speak to him in English so he can learn it, prepare for college and more opportunities

Parent 3: no response

Parent 4: it is good, he knows I care and that I am here to check and help him as best I can, I want him to always make 100%

Parent 5: I think it has helped, I encourage my children to be someone and be something, I try to correct them when they are wrong so they can learn from it. Strict with my children. I take my child to all school activities that they want to do. Help with finding stuff on the computer going to buy books.

Parent 6: I think very much, they are happy when I am involved and it makes them like school even more. I want them to see how important a good education is to get a good job.

Parent 7: I think very much

Parent 8: very much

Parent 9: They like it and see the importance of school, proud

Parent 10: it is a good thing, kids like to see it too

---

---

**Question 3: What other activities are your children involved with outside of school?**

---

- Parent 1: none noted  
Parent 2: none noted  
Parent 3: no response  
Parent 4: sports activities  
Parent 5: girl scouts  
Parent 6: none noted  
Parent 7: none noted  
Parent 8: none noted  
Parent 9: sports  
Parent 10: none noted
- 

**Question 4: What are the “consejos” (advice) you give your child?**

---

- Parent 1: to do their best, work, achieve at a high level  
Parent 2: to go to college  
Parent 3: no response  
Parent 4: to go to university, to have a good career with a good salary, not to kill himself working too hard  
Parent 5: to do the best in school, make good choices and to hang with the right kids  
Parent 6: to be good and do good in school  
Parent 7: taking school serious, being well behaved  
Parent 8: be a good student, help the teacher and make your family proud  
Parent 9: be serious about their work, try hard go for college  
Parent 10: university/college, positive praise
- 

**Question 5: What do your children say about your involvement?**

---

- Parent 1: she likes the way it is  
Parent 2: they are happy when I come to school, I tell him not to look for trouble as some other kids do, to be good, not to fight  
Parent 3: no response  
Parent 4: they are good with what I do, he likes to see me at school  
Parent 5: my children love it when I am at school or talking with the teachers.  
Parent 6: they are proud when I am doing stuff with them about school  
Parent 7: they like it  
Parent 8: no response  
Parent 9: nothing really said  
Parent 10: they like it and are proud of me when I can do things at the school.
-



---

**Question 6: How has your involvement in your child's education affected other parents? How do you know?**

---

Parent 1: I talk to other parents and encourage them to love their child

Parent 2: have never done that.

Parent 3: no response

Parent 4: I see other parents I tell them to talk to the teachers they are nice and helpful

Parent 5: Other parents ask me for advice or call and ask about the homework and I help them or I will tell them to call the teacher.

Parent 6: They see it and they also know it's important. I like to talk to them and tell them all the good things about this school.

Parent 7: They see it as a good things and they trust the school when they see me there

Parent 8: no response

Parent 9: To love children and do what is the best thing to do (always)

Parent 10: no response

---

## APPENDIX F

### STUDENT PERSPECTIVES ON THEIR PARENTS' INVOLVEMENT

---

#### **Question 1: What has helped you to do well on the state test (CSTs)?**

---

Student 1: my mom encourages me, always telling me to do my best, teachers have been good

Student 2: my mom prepares my backpack, checks my homework

Student 3: motivation

Student 4: parents and teachers

Student 5: my parents and the teachers at this school

Student 6: teachers, and my parents have helped me to learn

Student 7: mom

Student 8: parents

Student 9: parents and teachers

Student 10: parents encourage and want me to do the best that I can at school

---

#### **Question 2: How do your parents help you to do well in school?**

---

Student 1: encouragement, good breakfast

Student 2: talk about college and scholarships

Student 3: motivates me and checks my homework

Student 4: encouragement

Student 5: prepare/food

Student 6: talk to teachers, homework

Student 7: look over my stuff, homework

Student 8: homework, motivation, breakfast and lunch

Student 9: talk to teachers

Student 10: prepare, check homework

---

#### **Question 3: What else do you think your parents can help you with to do well in school?**

---

Student 1: nothing noted

Student 2: help me prepare for college

Student 3: healthy breakfast, helps me prepare for college

Student 4: just help me get things done if I need help

Student 5: nothing noted

Student 6: prepare for college

Student 7: college preparation

Student 8: get me up and ready each day

Student 9: hard projects or homework assignments

Student 10: Speak more English like my uncle who can help me

---

---

**Question 4: How have others around you helped you to do well on the tests?**

---

Student 1: my cousins have helped

Student 2: teachers help because they are strict and want us to do our very best in school and learn as much as we can

Student 3: they give me advice

Student 4: they talk about the good things about college

Student 5: parents and teachers both have helped me on the test with encouragement

Student 6: teachers

Student 7: teachers

Student 8: my entire family gives me encouragement

Student 9: my family talks about school and they ask lots of questions about it

Student 10: uncle helps with English and to write special homework

---

**Question 5: How do you help your parents at home?**

---

Student 1: translating, help with brother and sister, giving them advice

Student 2: correcting them because they only know about 40% English

Student 3: clean take out trash

Student 4: translation

Student 5: clean, English

Student 6: mostly stuff around the house is the biggest help to them

Student 7: take out the trash, dishes, cleaning stuff

Student 8: helping them say words right in English

Student 9: with their English

Student 10: cleaning, translation

---

## APPENDIX G

### IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PRACTICE

Building on the significance of the study's findings, the following are its implications and recommendations for practice:

- Promote mechanisms that can establish a collaborative partnership with parents to encourage their feedback;
- Schools can conduct basic Spanish language courses for school personnel;
- Promote cultural competency by conducting cultural sensitivity training or basic courses on Latino culture;
- Develop partnerships with communities or organizations that can provide career support and guidance for high achieving Latino students;
- Schools can also clearly define parental involvement to extend not only to scheduled meetings but to involve parent-teacher relationships and parent-parent relations as well;
- Scheduling can be programmed to respect parent's time availability and resources;
- Provide translators or hire more bilingual staff;
- Set up parent liaisons in order to enhance the flow of communication;
- Schools can consider providing ESL classes for parents; and
- Conduct trainings and parent outreach programs.

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