

6-2019

# Latino Parent School Involvement: Do Parents Read and Respond to Teacher Invitations?

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LATINO PARENT SCHOOL INVOLVEMENT: DO PARENTS  
READ AND RESPOND TO TEACHER INVITATIONS?

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A Project  
Presented to the  
Faculty of  
California State University,  
San Bernardino

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In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Social Work  
in the  
School of Social Work

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by  
Celia Araceli Marquez

June 2019

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## ABSTRACT

Latinos are the second largest ethnic group after Whites in the education system, yet there is still a large gap between Whites' and Latino's graduation rates. Research indicates that parental involvement in children's education plays a significant role in children's academic success. For this reason, this study aims to understand Latino parents' perspectives on their participation in their child's school. More specifically, how often Latino parents receive invitations from the school and whether or not they respond to these invitations. The research design for this study is exploratory and qualitative and uses one-on-one interviews with Latino parents. The central themes that emerged from this study were effective communication from the school to parents, a lack of structure for reciprocal communication, parents' welcoming attitudes of school invitations and "being present/involved" as the major responsibility parents identified for themselves for ensuring a successful school experience for their children. The results of this study have major implications for social work practice in that it allows schools to better understand how to involve Latino parents in the school setting. This study also proposes that school social workers educate school staff and Latino parents about the importance of Latino parental school involvement.

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## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

#### Problem Formulation

Latinos are the second largest ethnic group after Whites in the education system and their enrollment rate in public schools is growing exponentially (McGlynn, 2014). The National Center for Educational Statistics (2017) indicates that in 2014 Latino enrollment increased 6%, while Blacks' enrollment decreased 1% and Whites' enrollment decreased 8%. Unfortunately, the gap between Latinos' and Whites' high school graduations is still significant. In the academic year 2014-2015, Latinos' high school graduation rate was 10% less than those of Whites' (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2018). Therefore, an emphasis on helping this growing population improve their academic success should be a priority in the United States.

Research has indicated that parental involvement plays a key role in students' academic success (Wang & Sheikh-Khalil, 2014). Students whose parents are involved in their academic life have a greater chance of succeeding in school. Therefore, the degree of Latino parental involvement is an important component to assess in order to better understand Latino's poor academic performance. Research has shown that Latino parents' involvement is accomplished primarily through home-based activities (e.g. parents helping their children with their homework, asking children about their grades, etc.) and

academic socialization (e.g. dialogue between parents and their children about parents' academic expectations for their child) (Altschul, 2011; Walker et al. 2011; Whitaker & Hoover-Dempsey, 2013). In other words, Latino parents are mainly involved in their children's education at home but show little involvement in the school setting. This is important to note because it is possible that helping parents become involved at school may increase graduation rates in the Latino community.

Walker et al. (2011) assessed Latino parents' motivations for involvement in their children's education and found that the biggest motivation for Latino parents to be involved in the school setting was if they perceived that their child and teachers valued their participation. As a result, when Latino parents do not get invited or feel that their presence at the school is not valued, some Latino parents may not attend school events or volunteer for school activities.

Latino parents' lack of involvement in the school is a problem because it may be related to Latino students not graduating at the same rate as their White counterparts. Aside from the long-term effects of students not graduating, parents' lack of involvement in the school setting creates problems at the micro and macro levels. At the micro level, it is imperative to notice and take action when a student begins to do poorly in school as soon as possible. If parents are not involved in their struggling students' classroom, it could be more difficult for the student's underperformance to get noticed by the teacher when he/she has a high number of students in the classroom. At the macro level, when a large

number of students are performing poorly, this creates a problem for school districts. They need to spend more time and money on resources to help these children improve academically.

School-based parental involvement (e.g. parents attending school events, volunteering, etc.) varies in the effects of determining student's academic success. In students performing above average, school-based parental involvement shows little to no effect on student's academic success. Academic socialization is the most significant factor in promoting academic success in these students (Altschul, 2011; Wang & Sheikh-Khalil, 2014). For students from a low socioeconomic status or with poor prior academic achievement, school-based involvement plays an important role in their success at school (Benner, Boyle, & Sadler, 2016). With Latinos' low graduation rates, it is possible that for some Latino students, poor academic achievement began years before high school. With that in mind, school-based parental involvement could be the support that can diminish, or perhaps eliminate, the gap between Latinos' and Whites' graduation rates.

### Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to assess how frequently Latino parents are contacted by their child's teacher to participate in school events. This study also looks at whether or not parents believe that their participation in their child's school has any effect on their child's academic performance. Zarate (2007)

showed that Latino parents are not as involved in the school setting as parents from other cultures. Latino parents also need to feel invited and feel that their presence matters on school events in order for them to be motivated to participate in such events (Walker et al., 2011). Therefore, assessing how often Latino parents actively receive notices from teachers and whether they read them thoroughly or not, will be assessed in this study.

The overall research method used in this research study is a qualitative design. The study conducted semi structured, in person interviews with Latino parents of children currently in grades 1-8. The reason behind conducting in person interviews is to better understand the reasons why Latino parents are not attending school activities/events through open ended questions. Collecting more genuine responses from the participants was made more probable by allowing parents to verbalize their responses versus selecting an option on a survey or writing their answers on a page.

#### Significance of the Project for Social Work Practice

This study is needed to better understand the factors impeding Latino parents from becoming involved in the school setting and to help increase Latino high school graduates in the future. Furthermore, this study will potentially have major implications for social work practice in that the findings will allow schools to better understand how to involve Latino parents in the school setting.

The results may indicate a need for school social workers to play a more vital role in linking Latino parents to their children's school(s). As a result, Latino parents could be more involved in their children's schools and observe academic improvement in their children. At the macro and long-term levels, having Latinos with a higher education will diminish problems associated with low levels of education such as poor health, drug use, incarceration and unemployment (Benner, Boyle, & Sydney, 2016).

This study will inform the assessment phase of the generalist intervention model. This study will continue the research from the literature regarding what prevents Latino parents from participating in school events and activities. It is still unknown why Latino students fall behind academically from their White counterparts, but research has proposed that lack of school-parental involvement could be a reason (Zarate, 2007). Altschul (2011), Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (2011) and Zarate (2007) have also identified different types of parental involvement in education that promote academic success. More specifically, Zarate (2007) has assessed what types of involvement Latino parents engage in. For that reason, research currently is working on assessing factors that impede Latino parents from becoming involved in the school because this type of involvement shows an increase in academic achievement in struggling and/or low-income students. Therefore, the two research questions for this project are: How frequently do Latino parents receive, read and respond to teacher

communications/invitations? And, if so, how do parents believe that their response or non-response affects their child's academic performance?

## CHAPTER TWO

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### Introduction

This chapter focuses on the different types of parental involvement that parents participate in relating to their child's education. It also discusses the type of involvement that Latino parents primarily engage in. A subsection is then followed discussing the importance of school-based involvement for Latino students by presenting statistics on why Latino students benefit from school based parental involvement. The final subsection relates to the two theories that guide this study: Family-Schools Relationship Model and The Integrated Theory of Parent Involvement.

#### Latino Parents' Involvement

Latino parents' involvement in their child's life has proven to be beneficial in many areas including academic success and mental health (Wang & Sheikh-Khalil, 2014). In the past decade, Latino parent involvement in their child's education has been a topic of research due to the low high school graduation rates in proportion to Latino student enrollment. Research has focused on parent involvement as a possible reason for Latino students not graduating at similar rates as their White counterparts (McGlynn, 2014).

### Home-Based Involvement

For a long time, it was believed that Latino parents did not support their child's education, but many studies (Altschul, 2011; Walker, Ice, Hoover-Dempsey, & Sandler, 2011; Wang & Sheikh-Khalil, 2014; Zarate, 2007) found that parents are highly involved in their child's education. The form in which Latino parents are involved in their child's education is through helping their children with their homework, setting a designated space for them to do work, and asking about their children's grades. Latino parents are also highly involved through academic socialization; meaning parents have informal conversations about the importance of school with their children.

Zarate (2007) found that Latino parents believe that their involvement in the home is a good predictor of their child doing well in the classroom which then leads to better academic learning opportunities. As seen with high school students, academic socialization seems to be a strong indicator of school achievement (Wang & Sheikh-Khalil, 2014). This is good news because Latino parents show their support in their child's education primarily through academic socialization (Walker et al., 2011).

### School-Based Involvement

There is clear evidence that Latino parents are not as involved in the school setting as they are in the home. This is a problem because when Latino parents are absent at school events, teachers and schools interpret the lack of involvement in the school as Latino parents being uninterested and uninvolved in

their child's education (Zarate, 2007). After findings suggested that Latino parents actually participated in their child's education through home-based involvement and highly value academics, research geared towards understanding what was keeping Latino parents away from the school setting (Walker et al., 2011).

Walker et al. (2011) focused on understanding Latino parents' motivations for participating in school events. Findings from this study indicated that the strongest indicator for Latino parents to be motivated to be involved in the school setting was their perception that their child and/or child's teacher wanted and valued their participation. In other words, parents were more likely to attend school events if there were specific invitations for the parent from the child and/or teacher. Following their perception of being valued, was Latino parents' time and energy. It is not uncommon for Latino parents' to be unable to attend school events due to their stringent work schedules (Walker et al., 2011).

Whitaker & Hoover-Dempsey (2013) sought to identify predictors about parents' own beliefs about what their role is when it comes to being involved in their child's education. Findings illustrated that parents' perceptions of school expectations of involvement, the school's climate, and the student invitations to involvement were strong predictors of parents' belief regarding their role at their child's school. These authors note that these predictors are part of a recurring cycle and if schools change one of these aspects it may influence parents to notice other forms of involvement that they can also be a part of.

## Importance of School Involvement

Research has tried to identify the importance of having parents involved in the school setting. Unfortunately, results are mixed in regard to how much of a predictor school-based involvement is for academic success. Altschul (2011) found no significant impact on school-based involvement and children's academic success. Altschul (2011) noted that the most significant predictor of children's success in school was academic socialization. This was a longitudinal study that used data from Spring 1988. This 20-year-old data is a limitation because it makes it difficult to apply its results to students currently in school. The school system has had many changes in the past twenty years and there has also been an increase in Latino students in schools nationwide in the past decade (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2017). Therefore, the results of this study should be taken in carefully and school involvement should not be completely discarded as an option to aid children in their academics.

More recently, Benner, Boyle, and Sadler (2016) conducted a study to assess the associations between home and school-based involvement, educational expectations, and academic socialization on grades and academic achievement. They also examined whether the type of involvement most beneficial to each student varied due to the family's socioeconomic status and/or the youth's prior academic success. In this study, school-based involvement and academic socialization were associated with higher academic achievement.

Specifically, they found that school-based involvement proved to be most beneficial to students from lower-SES households and/or students who struggled academically in past years. On the other hand, the vast majority of students who demonstrated a significant benefit from academic socialization were those with higher SES households.

According to the “Income and Poverty in the United States: 2015” population report from the United States Census Bureau (2016), Hispanics are living in lower income households than Whites and Asians. In 2015, the median household income for Hispanics was \$45,148, while for Whites it was \$62,950 and for Asians is was \$77,166. More specifically, according to the American Psychological Association (2018), thirty-three percent of Latino children and adolescents were living in poverty in 2014. This is important information because it shows that many Latino students are living in low income homes and thirty-three percent of those students may still be living in poverty today. Therefore, the results of Benner et al. (2016) can be applied to today’s Latino students by stating that many Latino students would benefit primarily from parental school-based involvement due to their lower SES households.

### Theories Guiding Conceptualization

Two theories used to guide the ideas in this research are the Family-Schools Relationship Model and the Integrated Theory of Parents Involvement.

The Family-Schools Relationship Model is a framework that has been used to address the importance of family and school partnerships. Adams and Ryan (2005) structure the model in a proximal distal function where different facets surrounding a child are associated with a child's academic success and social behaviors. Ryan and Adams (2005) created six levels for this "Family-Schools Relationship Model": Level 0) "Child outcome", level 1) "Child's Personal Characteristics", level 2) "School-Focused Parent-Child Interactions", level 3) "General Parent-Child Interactions", level 4) "General Family Relations", level 5) "Personal Characteristics of Parents", and level 6) "Exogenous Social/Cultural and Biological Variables." Levels one through six are the facets associated with level 0, which are a child's academic success and social behaviors. The lower the level, the stronger the association is with the child's outcome.

This study will specifically focus on level 2. Level 2 refers to the behaviors parents display relating to their child's education. In other words, what parents do to ensure that their child is successful at school has a strong influence on a child's academic attainment and social behaviors based on that it is level 2 and close to level 0. Some examples of influencing a child's academic success could be parents being involved in the school setting through various actions such as volunteering, attending PTA meetings, and/or having a direct relationship with their child's teacher.

The Integrated Theory of Parent Involvement was proposed by McCurdy and Daro (2001). They proposed this theory specifically to address parents'

involvement in family support programs. McCurdy and Daro (2001) created four dimensions that effect parent involvement: a) individual characteristics, b) provider attributes, c) program characteristics, and d) neighborhood context. Although this theory is made for participating in family support programs, different parts of this theory can be applied to parents' involvement at school as both types of involvement share similarities; being involved in family support programs and/or at the school setting are both voluntary and there are similar steps to be involved in family support programs as it is to be involved in the school. McCurdy and Daro (2001) defined three steps to attending family support programs. First, the intent to enroll, next enrollment, and last retention. These same steps can be applied to parents volunteering in the school setting. Parents' think about volunteering, communicate with the school/teacher about their willingness to participate in their child's school, and continue to participate in the school.

Based on this model, individual factors are a primary influence on the intent to enroll and retention (McCurdy & Daro, 2001). Some characteristics that represent individual factors are "attitude toward service, cost-benefit perceptions, readiness to change, subjective norms, and past program experience." These characteristics can be translated to participating in the school setting. In order for a parent to think about participating in school events, they must have positive views about the event they'll be attending, believe that their child will benefit from their participation in the school setting, be ready for an adjustment in their

schedule, feel some sort of social pressure to attend school events, and/or have positive past experiences at the school.

As research (Altschul, 2011; Walker et al., 2011; Zarate, 2007) suggests that Latino parents are not as involved in the school setting as they are in the home, it could be beneficial to begin by observing at what elements influence individual factors to help encourage parents become more involved in their child's school setting.

### Summary

This study explores the factors impeding Latino parents from engaging in school-based parental involvement. As Zarate (2007) found, Latino parents are highly involved in the home through academic socializing, but this is not enough to close the gap between Latino student enrollment and Latino student high school graduations. Therefore, it is important to fully understand the barriers keeping Latino parents from entering their child's school more regularly. Family-Schools Relationship Model and The Integrated Theory of Parent Involvement can also help school personnel and program facilitators to increase Latino Parent involvement in the school setting. This study aims to better understand parents' perception of their school-based involvement and how it affects their child's academic success. This study will contribute to the literature to help improve Latino students' academic achievement and increase their graduation rates.

## CHAPTER THREE

### METHODS

#### Introduction

This study assessed the factors impeding Latino parents from becoming involved in their child's school such as attending parent-teacher meetings, volunteering in the classroom, and attending other school events. This chapter describes how the study was accomplished. The sections discussed in the chapter are study design, sampling, data collection and instruments, procedures, protection of human subjects, and data analysis.

#### Study Design

This study aims to better understand the barriers keeping Latino parents from their child's school and aims to inquire whether or not Latino parents believe that their communication with their child's teacher has any effect on their child's academic achievement. As a result, these questions were best addressed by performing a qualitative study design. It was important to understand, in their own words, how Latino parents believe that their response or non-response to teacher invitations affects their child's academic performance. This study is exploratory due to the qualitative study design. Another reason for this study being exploratory is because although there is extensive research on education and the importance of parental involvement, there is limited data on what's keeping

Latino parents from participating in school events. This study explored those barriers with Latino parents through one-on-one interviews. This study also helped provide insight into how often parents are invited to participate in the school and how often they responded and created a two-way communication system with their child's teacher.

A strength to using a qualitative design with one-on-one interviews is that it allowed participants to be as detailed as they wished to be. Facilitating interviews allowed the researcher to make clarifying questions or follow-up questions based on the participants' responses; creating more in-depth data. Also, with one-on-one interviews it was easier for the researcher to observe body language and facial expressions that would otherwise be missed in focus groups and completely missed through surveys.

A limitation of conducting one-on-one interviews is the likelihood of receiving socially desirable responses from the participants. Participants may have chosen not to be completely honest with the interviewer and decided to give answers that they believed were more socially acceptable. Conducting one-on-one interviews is also a limitation because of its invasive nature which may have led participants to be hesitant to provide in-depth responses. Additionally, due to the structure of one-on-one interviews, this was time consuming and accessing an adequate number of participants was difficult to achieve.

Another limitation of this study could be that the participants who agreed to partake in this study may share similar traits to parents who are involved in

their child's school. Therefore, most of the parents that were interviewed were involved in their child's school and provided the study with limited barriers for not attending their child's school. These parents also shared perspectives on the effect that their presence in their child's school has on their child's academic achievement. This prevents the study from generalizing its results to all or most Latino parents.

### Sampling

This study used a non-probability sample of Latino parents with children between first and eighth grade from the Riverside County area. The goal was to conduct interviews with ten participants or until saturation was reached. This specific criterion was chosen for this study because the focus of this study is to assess Latino parents' school involvement and their perceptions about the communication between the school and its parents.

### Data Collection and Instruments

Qualitative data was conducted through in person one-on-one interviews while being audio-recorded starting on February 2019. Each interview began with an introduction of the researcher and a brief description of the purpose of the study followed by an informed consent form. Demographic information was the first data collected during these interviews using a survey. This information consists of age, gender, ethnicity, if the participant has children in school and

how many, the grades or grade point average their child received in their latest report card and what grade their child(ren) is/are in.

The researcher conducted each interview using an interview guide created by the researcher. Some of the questions included but are not limited to are: 1. How often do you receive invitations from the school to participate in school events or attend meetings? 2. Do you feel that your response or non-response to these invitations has any effect on your child's academic success? 3. Do you feel that your participation in the school, has an influence on your child's academics? If so, how? If not, why not? 4. What do you think parents' most important responsibilities are for ensuring that their child/children have a successful school experience? The interview guide was previously pilot tested with Spanish and English-speaking volunteers to ensure that the questions were clear and understandable to participants.

### Procedures

The researcher first contacted a known parent who had a child in an elementary school in Riverside County and also received contacts through the Chaplain of another elementary school in the Inland Empire to acquire participants for the study. The researcher did not use these two individuals in the study but began the snowball sampling process with them. The researcher then used the snowball effect to acquire more participants into the study while ensuring that the participants didn't know the researcher prior to their encounter.

The researcher then contacted each participant through email and/or text messages by providing a brief description of the study and why their contribution was essential to the study. The participants were informed of the length of the interview (about 15 minutes) and the types of questions that would be asked during the interview.

After participants agreed to be part of the study, the researcher worked with them to establish a date and a place where they could meet. Eight participants chose to have the interview conducted in their home and two interviews were done in an empty classroom at a local elementary school. All participants were given the option to have the interview done at a nearby coffeeshop or anywhere else that they preferred.

Upon arriving to the interview, the researcher greeted each participant. The researcher then began the interview by providing them the consent form for them to sign. The researcher then provided them the demographic survey to gather their demographic information. After completing the survey, the researcher informed the participants that she would begin recording and moved onto the interview guide. After each interview, the researcher gave the participants a \$5 Target gift card in appreciation of their contribution to the study. The gift card was not given until the end of the interview to reduce the likelihood of participants demonstrating a social desirability bias as a result of receiving the gift card.

## Protection of Human Subjects

Confidentiality and anonymity were protected by not collecting names and other identifying information like birthdates. The initial survey and the interview guide only included basic demographic information and key words from the participant's responses written out by the researcher. Each participant was given an informed consent form to sign. Participants also provided their consent to being audio recorded prior to the beginning of the interview. Each audio recording was given a number for transcription to secure privacy. All audio recordings were stored in a password encrypted USB drive and kept safe.

## Data Analysis

The questions in the interview guide focused on Latino parents' participation in the school and their thoughts about their participation. Questions focused on Latino parents' beliefs of whether their physical involvement in their child's school has any influence in their child's academic performance.

First, audio recordings were transcribed into written form. Each participant was assigned a unique code to separate each participant's responses. Descriptive analysis was used to provide a demographic profile of the study sample. Then, content analysis was used to identify themes among the various responses. The themes were given specific codes to allow for easier data analysis.

## Summary

This study assesses the barriers that Latino parents experience that keep them from being active in their child's school. This study also assesses Latino parents' perceptions on whether or not they believe that their involvement in the school setting plays an important role in their child's academic success. These interviews allowed Latino parents to express themselves openly and allowed the researcher to collect data focused on answering the research questions elicited in this study.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### RESULTS

#### Introduction

The participants in this study provided important information regarding their perceptions of their participation at their child's school and the communication between the school and the parents. The four central themes that emerged from these interviews were effective communication from the school to parents, a lack of structure for reciprocal communication, parents' welcoming attitudes of school invitations and "being present/involved" as the major responsibility parents identified for themselves for ensuring a successful school experience for their children. A subtheme to school's effective communication to parents was that technology has made it easier for parents to receive and read invitations from the school. Another subtheme emerged from the lack of structure for reciprocal communication theme. The subtheme focused the responses of eight parents who acknowledged an influence from their responses to school invitations to their child's academic education. This subtheme along with the four central themes are described below.

#### Sample Description

Table 1 presents the demographic characteristics of the study sample. The average age for the sample was 36. All participants in the study were

women. All participants had children between 1<sup>st</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> grade. The majority of the participants' children were in elementary school (66%) and the rest were in middle school (33%). A requirement to participate in this study was to be Latino/Hispanic.

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of Study Sample.

	Age	N (%)
Mean	36	
Participants' Children		
Elementary School		8 (66%)
Middle School		4 (33%)

### Qualitative Analysis

The following section includes the four themes that emerged from the thematic analysis. The themes are not presented in any particular order as all themes contribute to the overall outcome of this study. Based on the interviews, the chosen themes relate to the communication between the school and parents, whether parents respond to school invitations, parents' attitudes about receiving school invitations and notices, and what these parents believe is the most important responsibility for ensuring that their child is successful academically.

## Effective Communication from School to Parents

Most participants verbalized that they receive invitations from the school on average about twice a month. Some parents explained that they may receive more notices or invitations from the school if an event is happening at school. Parents verbalized that the frequency the school communicated with them was enough for them to be involved in their children's education. A parent explained the following:

“For meetings it's once a month. We do get invitations maybe like twice like reminders. [For] other school events we'll get emails or text messages.”

A subtheme that emerged around effective communication was that technology has made it easier for parents to receive and read invitations from the school. All parents explained that they receive such invitations primarily through email and some parents said that their school used text messages as well as phone applications to communicate with the parents. Parents stated that receiving notices from the school through emails or text messages made it easier for them to read the information rather than waiting for their child to hand them a paper invitation. Below, a parent of a fourth grader shared that technology has made it easier for her to read invitations from the school that fits with her busy schedule.

“Everybody is so busy but an email, I can read it anytime. They used to use paper but switched to emails to be more ecofriendly. Which having paper was nice because you'd get it when you would pick up your kid.”

### Lack of Structure for Reciprocal Communication

Although the school communicates with parents several times out of the month to invite parents to attend school events, the school does not require parents to respond to their invitations. Most invitations or notices from the school are open invitations in which parents may attend the event if they want to, but don't have to let the school know in advance. Two parents explain why they don't respond to the invitations:

“Well I don't respond to the emails or text messages because they're just for everyone. It's an open invitation.”

“When needed, yes. When they're just announcing that something is gonna happen then no.”

A subtheme emerged from the communication theme on whether parents think that responding to school's invitations have an effect on their child's academic performance. Eight parents acknowledged an influence in their child's education resulting from their responses to school invitations. They emphasized that responding to such notices from the school was important for their children and their teachers. The following are responses from two parents:

“I feel that the parents that are more involved, I feel like the teacher, or whoever is in charge of taking care of them, [will] pay more attention to them because [the teachers] know they will see their parent's face [at school] more than the parents that aren't really there.”

“Si porque ellos miran que uno pone interes en ellos. Y los [maestros] tambien lo notan. Que uno esta mas interesado en el progreso de los niños. Y se toman mas encuenta.” (Yes, because they notice that we are interested in them. And the teachers also notice that we are interested in our children’s progress. And they pay better attention.)

#### Parents’ Welcoming Attitudes of School Invitations

All participants when asked their thoughts about receiving invitations and notices from the school said that they liked them. They shared that it was important for them to feel involved in their child’s academic life and reading invitations from the school made them feel part of the school. One parent in particular shared that her children’s school had a high volume of Hispanic parents and she felt that receiving multiple invitations encouraged these parents to attend school functions. Her response to school invitations is the following:

“I think they’re great. I think it’s great that they get parents involved. And the school that [my child] goes to is like all Hispanic and they do a lot of like translations. And I think it’s good to invite the Hispanic community cuz I feel that a lot of Hispanic families don’t attend. Maybe because they don’t feel comfortable you know. So, if they feel comfortable [and] if they’re constantly being invited, they’ll eventually respond to at least one of them you know.”

### “Being Present/Involved”

The last question asked to these parents was what they believed was parents’ most important responsibility in ensuring that their child had a successful school experience. Eight parents clearly stated that being present or involved in their child’s education was the most important responsibility for parents. They explained that being involved helps to know when their child is doing well, but also if their child is struggling with something before it’s too late. A parent explains this response in the following:

“I think being involved with the kids in all aspects. Being aware. Like now, we don’t have that excuse. Like I remember when I was a kid my mom, I don’t think she ever went to parent-teacher conferences or anything like that. And I don’t know if it was a language barrier because a lot of Hispanic older parents, you know are just like you’re fine I’ll just see your report card. But by that time, it can be too late. You might already be behind. Now we have a great system. It comes up on your phone to this date. What is turned in. What’s not turned in. What they’re missing. So, I think that helps a lot in keeping track of where your kids are. So just being aware. That’s just our responsibility. Like I said, I have one ready to graduate and he’s almost ready for college and it’s just been like a blink of an eye to be honest. It goes by so fast. That with this one, I’m just watching her. Like ok she’s at this point. She’s in fourth grade and another eight years and she’ll be gone. It seems like a

long time when you say it that way, but it's not. It goes by really fast. So, I think just being aware of what they have going on is really important.”

## CHAPTER FIVE

### DISCUSSION

#### Introduction

The goal of this study was to better understand the lack of Latino parental involvement in the school setting. Previous research has shown that some barriers for Latino parents to participate in school events include language, work demands, and child care. Although that was not the focus of this study, participants in this study also supported these claims. Primarily, parents explained that not having flexible work schedules and child care available to them were the reasons for not attending school events. Furthermore, schools have attempted to place an emphasis on welcoming Latino parents to the school through different programs and modes of communication. Unfortunately, the number of active Latino parents in the school setting is still low compared to the enrollment of Latino students (Behnke & Kelly, 2011). Consequently, this study focused on answering the following two questions: How frequently do Latino parents receive, read, and respond to teacher communications/invitations? And, if so, how do parents believe that their response or non-response affects their child's academic performance?

## Discussion

The results of this study answered the previous two questions as part of the four central themes and two subthemes that emerged from the data. On average, parents reported that they received invitations or notices from the school about twice a month. Participants also stated that most of the time they did not respond to the school's notices because most invitations are open invitations. Parents described open invitations as notices regarding school events directed to all parents without the need to respond. On the other hand, when the school required a response from the parents, all participants in this study stated that they did respond.

The theme of open invitations is an important concept that emerged from the data which may contribute to Latino parents' lack of school involvement. Parents do not feel that they are personally being invited to an event and may not see the value in attending these events. Walker (2011) found that parents were more likely to participate in the school if they felt that their child or teacher wanted them to participate. That study emphasized the importance of personalizing invitations to the Latino community. Results from Walker (2011) and this study suggest that schools should aim to personalize invitations and require parents to respond to notices sent home. It's possible that if parents are required to respond to most invitations sent home, they will be more motivated to confirm their attendance and increase their participation in the school setting.

Two unanticipated findings from this study were parents' attitudes towards receiving notices from the school and parents' perspectives of what their most important responsibility is for ensuring a successful school experience for their children. Although, generally, Latino parents are not highly involved in the school setting, all participants from this study verbalized that they enjoyed and/or appreciated receiving notices and invitations from the school. These parents explained that they appreciated being aware of events surrounding their children at school. This indicates that schools are doing a good job at keeping parents informed without bombarding parents with an excessive number of notices. Parents' positive thoughts about school notices may be due to the fact that they receive and read notices online. Most parents shared that they are informed about school events through their emails and/or cell phone applications where they can directly communicate with the teacher. This mode of communication makes it easier for parents to read communications from the school regardless of their busy schedules. Therefore, encouraging parents to respond in the same form should also be simple for parents to do.

Being involved and present in their child's education was the most popular response given by eight participants when asked what they thought was their most important responsibility as parents to ensure that their children have a successful school experience. Parents emphasized the importance of being aware of their child's academic progress regularly to help notice any difficulties their child has and make the necessary adjustments to prevent their child from

falling behind. The responses from these parents do not correlate with past research. Past research (Altschul, 2011; Walker, Ice, Hoover-Dempsey, & Sandler, 2011; Wang & Sheikh-Khalil, 2014; Zarate, 2007) has indicated that parents are involved in their child's education through home routines and academic socialization, but not by attending school events. The parents from this study discussed their school involvement through volunteering in the classroom, attending assemblies, and communicating with the teacher regularly.

One explanation for this discrepancy is the sample size of the study. The sample size of ten participants does not allow for these results to be generalized to the entirety of the Latino parent population. Also, using one-on-one interviews can elicit social desirability from the participants. In this case, all participants responded that they were active parents in their children's schools, but no questions were asked about the frequency of their participation or about what events they usually participate in. These two furthering questions would provide better insight about these participants' actual presence in the school setting. However, since the goal of this study was focused on the number of invitations and notices parents receive throughout the year and whether parents read and respond to these invitations, those previous questions were not necessary for this study.

Another explanation for this discrepancy was suggested by one of the participants in this study. It is possible that social media has had a positive effect in parental school involvement by creating awareness about the importance of

parents attending school events. One parent shared that she often notices other parents post on their social media accounts how active they are in their child's school. It would be interesting to see if social media has had any effect on this issue. Future research may want to assess how often parents use social media to show their school involvement to others and if this is a motivating factor for Latino parents to attend school events.

#### Recommendation for Social Work Practice, Policy and Research

The results of this study indicate a need for better communication between the school and the parents. Although the school is communicating enough with the parents, the school needs to work on creating a system that encourages reciprocal communication. A way social work practice can help this issue is by educating teachers and staff about the Latino population. Social workers can explain to school staff that personalizing notices and invitations and requiring a response from parents may increase the number of Latino parents present in the school setting.

School social workers can also help connect with Latino parents and educate them about the importance of attending school events, especially parents of struggling students. School social workers are better able to create stronger relationships with parents than teachers because they are able to stay in contact with parents for more than one year. With their busy schedules, teachers are only able to stay in contact with the parents of their current students.

Therefore, this is a good opportunity for school social workers to become more involved with Latino parents and help them feel more comfortable and prepared to attend different school events. These efforts may have lasting effects for society by increasing Latino student high school graduation rates and reducing negative behaviors associated with low education. Future studies looking to examine Latino parent participation should look into the effects social media plays on Latino parents' participation at school. Social media may be another avenue that schools can use to help increase Latino parents' presence in the school setting.

APPENDIX A  
LATINO PARENT QUESTIONNAIRE

## APPENDIX A

### LATINO PARENT QUESTIONNAIRE

1. **Que tan frecuente recibe invitaciones para participar en la escuela de su hijo/a.** How often do you receive invitations from the school to participate in school events or attend meetings?
2. **Cuando recibe estas invitaciones, responde?** When you do receive these notices, do you respond?
3. **Usted cree que el responder o no responder a estas invitaciones tiene algun efecto para el exito escolar de su hijo/a?** Do you feel that your response or non-response has any effect on your child's academic success?
4. **Que piensa usted de las invitaciones que manda la escuela a la casa?** What are your thoughts about these notices from the school?
5. **Cree usted que su participacion en la escuela de su hijo/a tiene alguna influencia en la vida academica de su hijo/a?** Do you feel that your participation in the school, has an influence on your child's academics? If so, how? If not, why not?
6. **Si usted estuviera a cargo de la escuela de su hijo/a, como trataria usted de contratar a mas padres de su comunidad?** If you were in

charge of the school, how would you try to engage more parents from your community?

7. **Cual cree usted que es la responsabilidad mas importante de los padres para asegurarse de que sus hijo/a(s) tengan una experiencia exitosa escolar?** What do you think parents' most important responsibilities are for ensuring that their child/children have a successful school experience?

This survey was exclusively created by Celia Araceli Marquez for the purpose of this project.

APPENDIX B  
LATINO PARENT DEMOGRAPHIC SURVEY (ENGLISH)

LATINO PARENT DEMOGRAPHIC SURVEY (ENGLISH)

Age: \_\_\_\_\_

Ethnicity:

- Asian/Pacific Islander
- Black/African American
- Latino
- White
- Native American
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

Gender:

- Male
- Female
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

Do you have kids in school between first and eighth grade?

Yes: \_\_\_\_\_

No: \_\_\_\_\_

How many? \_\_\_\_\_

What grades are they in?

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_
5. \_\_\_\_\_

What grades or grade point average (GPA) did your child(ren) receive in their latest report card?

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_
5. \_\_\_\_\_

APPENDIX C  
LATINO PARENT DEMOGRAPHIC SURVEY (SPANISH)

LATINO PARENT DEMOGRAPHIC SURVEY (SPANISH)

Edad: \_\_\_\_\_

Ethnicidad:

- Asiatico/Isla Pacifico
- Negro/Afroamericano
- Latino
- Blanco
- Nativo Americano
- Otra: \_\_\_\_\_

Género:

- Masculino
- Femenino
- Otro: \_\_\_\_\_

Tiene hijos en la escuela  
entre primero y octavo grado?

Si: \_\_\_\_\_

No: \_\_\_\_\_

Cuantos? \_\_\_\_\_

En que grado(s) esta(n)?

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_
5. \_\_\_\_\_

Que calificaciones o promedio de calificaciones (GPA) recibió/recibieron  
su(s) hijo/a(s) en su ultimo reporte escolar?

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_
5. \_\_\_\_\_

APPENDIX D  
INFORMED CONSENT (ENGLISH)

# INFORMED CONSENT (ENGLISH)



WE DEFINE THE *Future*

CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, SAN BERNARDINO  
5500 University Parkway, San Bernardino, CA 92407  
www.csusb.edu

## INFORMED CONSENT

The study in which you are being asked to participate is designed to investigate Latino parents' participation in their children's school. This study is being conducted by Araceli Marquez, a graduate student, under the supervision of Dr. Erica Lizano, Assistant Professor in the School of Social Work at California State University, San Bernardino (CSUSB). This study has been approved by the Institutional Review Board Social Work Subcommittee at CSUSB.

**PURPOSE:** This purpose of this study is to understand the challenges Latino parents face in engaging with their child in the school setting. This study also aims to understand Latino parents' perspective on their own participation in their child's school.

**DESCRIPTION:** The researcher will ask you several open-ended questions regarding your participation in the school setting. Some questions will also ask about the school's attempt to invite you to participate in your child's school. At the end of the interview, you will receive a \$5 gift card for your participation and will not need to do anything further in relation to this study.

**PARTICIPATION:** Your participation in this study is completely voluntary, and you do not have to answer any questions you do not wish to answer. You can refuse to participate in the study or discontinue your participation at any time without any consequences.

**CONFIDENTIAL:** Your responses will remain confidential and data will be reported in group form only.

**DURATION:** The duration of this interview will be about 30 minutes.

**RISKS:** Although not anticipated, there may be some discomfort in answering some of these questions. If you begin to feel uncomfortable with a question you are not required to answer it and can skip the question or end your participation altogether.

**BENEFITS:** There will be no direct benefit to you as a participant.

**CONTACT:** If you have any questions about this study, please feel free to contact Dr. Lizano at (909) 537-5584.

**RESULTS:** The results of this study can be obtained from the Pfau Library ScholarWorks database (<http://scholarworks.lib.csusb.edu/>) at California State University, San Bernardino after July 2019.

.....  
I agree to be audio recorded: \_\_\_\_\_ YES \_\_\_\_\_ NO

This is to certify that I read the above and I am 18 years or older.

**SIGNATURE:**

\_\_\_\_\_   
Place an X mark here

\_\_\_\_\_   
Date

APPENDIX E  
INFORMED CONSENT (SPANISH)

# INFORMED CONSENT (SPANISH)



WE DEFINE THE *Future*

Academic Affairs  
College of Social and Behavioral Sciences  
School of Social Work

CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, SAN BERNARDINO  
5500 University Parkway, San Bernardino, CA 92407  
909.537.5501 | fax: 909.537.7029  
<https://csbs.csusb.edu/social-work>

## Consentimiento Para Participar en la Investigación

Se le está pidiendo que tome parte en un estudio de investigación siendo conducido por Araceli Marquez, una estudiante de Maestría que esta siendo supervisada por la Dra. Janet Chang, Profesora en la Escuela de Trabajo Social en California State University, San Bernardino (CSUSB). Esta investigación a sido aprobada por la Junta de Revisión Institucional del Subcomité de Trabajo Social en CSUSB.

**PROPÓSITO DEL ESTUDIO:** El propósito de este proyecto es entender los retos que padres Latinos enfrentan al participar en la escuela de sus hijos. Este proyecto también pretende entender la perspectiva que padres Latinos tienen sobre su propia participación en la escuela de sus hijos.

**PROCEDIMIENTO:** La investigadora le hará varias preguntas en relación con su participación en la escuela de sus hijo(a)s. Algunas preguntas también pedirán saber sobre los intentos que la escuela a tenido para invitarlo(a) a participar en la escuela. Al terminar la entrevista, usted recibirá una tarjeta de \$5 por su participación y no tendrá que hacer nada más en relación con esta investigación.

**PARTICIPACIÓN:** Su participación en esta investigación es completamente voluntaria, y no tiene que responder a preguntas que no desee. Usted puede negar su participación en esta investigación o suspender su participación a la hora que sea sin ninguna consecuencia.

**CONFIDENCIALIDAD:** Sus respuestas las mantendremos completamente privadas. No revelaremos información que pueda identificarlo para proteger la confidencialidad de la información que nos genere.

**DURACIÓN:** La duración de esta entrevista sera de aproximadamente 30 minutos.

**RIESGOS:** Aunque no se anticipa, puede experimentar algunas molestias al responder a algunas preguntas. Si no se siente agusto con alguna pregunta o preguntas, no tiene que responder y puede pedir que se brinquen a la siguiente pregunta o rehusarse a seguir con la entrevista por completo.

**BENEFICIOS:** No habrá ningún beneficio directo hacia usted como participante.

**CONTACTO:** Si tiene alguna pregunta sobre esta investigación, puede contactar a la Dra. Janet Chang al (909) 537-5184.

**RESULTADOS:** Los resultados de esta investigación pueden ser encontrados en la base de datos de la biblioteca Pfau (<http://scholarworks.lib.csusb.edu/>) en California State University, San Bernardino despues de Julio del 2019.

Estoy de acuerdo en ser grabado en audio: \_\_\_\_\_ SI \_\_\_\_\_ NO

Esto es para certificar que leí lo anterior y soy mayor de 18 años.

FIRMA:

Coloque una marca X aquí

Fecha

California State University, San Bernardino  
Social Work Institutional Review Board Sub-Committee  
APPROVED 1/23/2019 VOID AFTER 1/22/2020  
IRB# SW1925 CHAIR Janet Chang

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