

LATINO STUDENT SUCCESS: THE POWER OF PARENT ENGAGEMENT

by

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A Scholarly Delivery Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

Educational Leadership

West Texas A&M University

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*Qualified Signature	✓	Yes		No		Literature Review		Case Study	✓	Empirical Study
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*The qualified signature of the methodologist indicates agreement only with the scholarly deliverable(s) checked. The lack of one or more checked scholarly deliverables is not indicative of disagreement, but instead reflects a lack or absence of the methodologist's involvement with the unchecked scholarly deliverable(s).

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Scholarly Delivery Framework

This final composite considers executive leadership and social networking through three submissions. The first scholarly deliverable is a case study appraising staff perceptions of parent engagement for immigrant families and can be used for teaching candidates of any level in the field of educational leadership. The title of this article is “The Power of Parent Engagement for Latino Student Success: A Case Study.” This case reviews the various attitudes and perceptions of administrators and staff looking to increase student success in their new Latino population, specifically through improved parent engagement. Teaching activities and discussion guides are included to help further demonstrate how biases and lack of cultural relevancy can negatively affect student success. The second scholarly deliverable is an empirical article titled “Leadership Practices to Engage Latino Parents in Rural Oklahoma.” This empirical article explores the perceptions of administrators, teachers, and parents to better focus on strategies that work as well as to find areas of improvement in engaging Latino parents through the use of cultural wealth. The final scholarly work is an annotated literature review of educational leadership practices through culturally relevant teaching and social networking with Latino families, particularly new immigrant families in rural areas.



INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD FOR HUMAN SUBJECTS

Letter of Approval

May 3, 2021

Dr. Hooper:

The West Texas A & M University Institutional Review Board is pleased to inform you that upon review, proposal #**2021.04.016** for your study titled, “**Leadership Practices to Engage Latino Parents,**” meets the requirements of the WTAMU Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) No. 15.99.05.W1.01AR Institutional Review Board (Human Subject Research). Approval is granted for one calendar year. This approval expires on **May 2, 2022**.

Principal investigators assume the following responsibilities:

1. **Continuing Review:** The protocol must be renewed on or before the expiration date if the research project requires more than one year for completion. A [Continuing Review form](#) along with required documents must be submitted on or before the stated deadline. Failure to do so will result in study termination and/or loss of funding.
2. **Completion Report:** At the conclusion of the research project (including data analysis and final written papers), a [Close out form](#) must be submitted to AR-EHS.
3. **Unanticipated Problems and Adverse Events:** Pursuant to [SOP No. 15.99.05.W1.13AR](#), unanticipated problems and serious adverse events must be reported to AR-EHS.
4. **Reports of Potential Non-Compliance:** Pursuant to [SOP No. 15.99.05.W1.05AR](#), potential non-compliance, including deviations from the protocol and violations, must be reported to the IRB office immediately.
5. **Amendments:** Changes to the protocol must be requested by submitting an [Amendment form](#) to AR-EHS for review by the IRB. The Amendment must be approved by the IRB before being implemented. Amendments do not extend time granted on the initial approval
6. **Consent Forms:** When using a consent form, only the IRB approved form is allowed.
7. **Audit:** Any proposal may be subject to audit by the IRB Administrator during the life of the study. Investigators are responsible for maintaining complete and

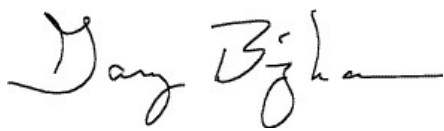
accurate records for five years and making them available for inspection upon request.

8. **Recruitment:** All recruitment materials must be approved by the IRB. Recruitment materials distributed to potential participants must use the approved text and include the study's IRB number, approval date, and expiration dates in the following format:
WTAMU IRB##-##-## Approved: ###/###/#### Expiration Date: ###/###/####.
9. **FERPA and PPRA:** Investigators conducting research with students must have appropriate approvals from the Family Education Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) administrator at the institution where the research will be conducted in accordance with the Family Education Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) if applicable to the research being proposed. The Protection of Pupil Rights Amendment (PPRA) protects the rights of parents in students ensuring that written parental consent is required for participation in surveys, analysis, or evaluation that ask questions falling into categories of protected information.

Sixty days prior to the expiration of this proposal, you will receive a notification of the approaching expiration date at which time you will need to submit an Amendment/Continuation/Close out form.

Thank you for your cooperation with the IRB and we wish you well with your research project.

Sincerely,



Dr. Gary Bigham
Chair, WTAMU IRB



Dr. Angela Spaulding
Vice President of Research and Compliance

Acknowledgements

Upon the completion of the months of research and writing required to obtain a doctoral degree in educational leadership, I gratefully acknowledge those who helped to facilitate this endeavor. First, I recognize a power higher than myself that instilled me with the courage, strength, and passion to see this to completion, a career goal that I have long held on to.

I am so thankful for my husband, Ricardo, who agreed to travel this path with me, although we did not realize then the incredible time commitment that would be involved. Thank you for understanding when I needed to sequester, for the early mornings, late nights, and long weekends over the past three years. Most of all, thank you for believing in me and pushing me to not give up, for convincing me that I was more than capable. Te amo y te agradezco por quedarte a mi lado. To my children, thank you for believing in me and supporting my dreams and goals. Thank you for reaching for yours so that I too could go for mine; it has been a long road, and I thank you for your patience with me for always wanting more.

I must acknowledge my many students over the years, who challenged me to follow my own advice and to lead by example by never giving up on goals and by persevering to the end. Your faith in me as a leader pushed me to want more for educational leadership and I hope this degree allows me to facilitate even more change and to continue to inspire you in your lives.

Thank you to the members of my committee, Dr. Buddy Hooper as my chair, Dr. JoAnn Klinker, and Dr. Mark Garrison as committee members, who helped me to see the full picture in a meaningful way so that others could see it as well. A special thanks to Dr.

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To Cohort 1 of WTAMU's first Ed.D. in Educational Leadership, we did it! And we did it together. I truly value the friendships and camaraderie that we have developed along the way. Let's go be great!

Table of Contents

Signature Page	ii
Scholarly Delivery Framework.....	iii
IRB Approval.....	iv
Acknowledgements.....	vi
Table of Contents.....	viii
Case Study Article	1
Abstract.....	2
Family Dynamics and Contributions	3
Practices to Engage Parents through Cultural Wealth	4
Social Network Theory	5
Implications for Administrators in Leadership	6
Case Narrative.....	7
Teaching Notes	15
Guided Discussion	17
References.....	19
Empirical Article.....	23
Abstract.....	24
Method	36
Findings.....	40
Discussion	50
References.....	57
Literature Review.....	65
Introduction.....	66

Theoretical Framework	67
Sources and Search Procedures	69
Presentation of Findings	72
Summary of Findings.....	96
Implications of the Review	98
References	101

The Power of Parent Engagement for Latino Student Success: A Case Study

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Abstract

This case will help prepare teachers and administrators in rural areas with increasing numbers of Latino immigrants to better lead their schools through a transition of cultural competency, particularly with parent engagement. School leaders should be able to facilitate tough conversations to help staff understand how their own prejudices and biases surrounding minorities and language diversity affects students and the larger community. Through guided discussions, all school personnel can benefit from exploring these issues in looking for improved parent and community engagement and how it affects Latino student achievement.

Keywords: leadership, cultural competency, cultural wealth, parental engagement, Latino student success

The Power of Parent Engagement for Latino Student Success: A Case Study

Latinos are the fastest growing minority ethnic group in the United States, and although high school graduation rates have improved, the post-secondary completion rate of bachelor's degrees for Latinos show that only 14% have a four-year degree, compared to 33% of Whites, 19% of Blacks, and 51% of Asian-Americans (Pew Research Center, 2014). Contributing to these low completion rates is the fact that immigrant families are quickly finding new destinations, with many of them in rural areas where schools are not equipped with the necessary resources and experience to serve the immigrant communities. While many studies have looked at the established urban areas where Latino immigrants have settled, few studies have included the rural areas of these newer immigrants (Altschul, 2011; Lowenhaupt, 2014).

Family Dynamics and Contributions

Often school personnel believe Latino parents do not care about education, a mindset resulting from negative attitudes of school administration and the lack of personnel efforts to relate to Spanish-speaking parents. By using parent engagement models based on the experiences of white, middle-class parents, they do not consider other culturally relevant approaches that may be more conducive to engaging Latino parents other than the traditional expected roles of parent-teacher conferences, field trips, or volunteering in a classroom. In general, these formal activities are those where parents are physically present or because they contact the school directly (Auerbach, 2007, 2009; LeFevre & Shaw, 2012; Pérez Carreón et al., 2005), something which Latino parents are less likely to do. Latino parents view their role quite differently, one in which it is their job to pass on *consejos* (advice) of hard work and other values such as *familisimo* (strong

family ties), *respeto* (respect for self and others), and *educación* (academics, but more importantly morals and upbringing), all of which are seen to be just as important as academic areas and places parents in the center of their child's informal education (De Gaetano, 2007; Woolley et al., 2009). School personnel often do not consider these social or cultural norms, nor do they distinguish between parental involvement and parental engagement; with involvement often seen as simply assigning parents a passive role, while engagement encourages parents to become change agents for the school and community (Ishimaru, 2019; Reynolds et al., 2015).

Practices to Engage Parents through Cultural Wealth

Lowenhaupt (2014) referred to a New Latino Diaspora, with a large growth of Latinos in new geographical areas, particularly rural areas. Schools in these areas lack the expertise of working with immigrant populations and therefore should find culturally appropriate means for engagement by understanding cultural wealth, thus allowing parents to be more involved in their students' education. Because these schools have little experience with immigrant students, they often lack the resources to address ethnic and linguistic diversity, and more importantly, often face resistance to do so within their own administration and staff. Because of this, schools' efforts to engage parents are superficial or culturally denigrating; a deficit-based belief system that often contributes to misunderstandings of both expectations and behaviors of parents, further contributing to a lack of parental engagement (García-Reid et al., 2005; Ishimaru et al., 2016).

More importantly, nurturing a community's cultural wealth further serves as leadership development for the Latino community as they are then able to address issues that are important to them and to teach others to negotiate with school administrators and

staff (Curry & Holter, 2019; Fernández & Paredes Scribner, 2018; Ishimaru, 2019).

Parents gain an appreciation for their own cultural capital, which leads to more confidence and strength as parents (Auerbach, 2007, 2009; De Gaetano, 2007; Larrotta & Yamamura, 2011). Furthermore, this type of leadership development is important as Latino parents become less passive and begin to advocate for themselves and their children as partners in the educational system, leading to capacity building and relationship building among both educators and parents (Ishimaru, 2019).

Social Network Theory

Parents tend to be more engaged when they feel invited and especially when they feel connected to other parents, often by way of volunteering or working together on committees. In the case of Latino parents, those relationships can lead to greater self-efficacy and involvement as they learn from other parents, particularly with a shared culture and language, making them more comfortable in the schools. Parents also become more aware of social issues that affect them and their students and bond with other parents to advocate for needed change (Curry & Holter, 2019; Fernández & Paredes Scribner, 2018; Ishimaru, 2019). Activities that encourage social networks and community engagement should become an integral part of school culture for family engagement to be a collaborative effort (Auerbach, 2009). In addition, positive relationships of students with their teachers are seen to have a direct effect on student behavior at school, and while important for student success, it is even more important to have positive connections between Latino parents and teachers. These connections help reduce misunderstandings of cultural differences and contribute to students having higher levels of respect for teachers, based on the respect shown to their parents (Woolley et al.,

2009).

Implications for Administrators in Leadership

For Latino students and parents to feel empowered, school personnel need to be proactive in understanding and including cultural sensitivity in all areas. Teacher preparation programs should include diversity training for all and acknowledgement of the importance of cultural wealth in parent and student engagement. Parental leadership programs benefit not only students and parents, but also teachers and administrators as they break down barriers of communication and cultural misunderstandings (De Gaetano, 2007; Fernández & Paredes Scribner, 2018; Ishimaru, 2019; Lowenhaupt, 2014).

Principal preparation programs should include training to make sure that leaders infuse family engagement throughout the curriculum as assets-based and not as deficit-based strategies meant to fix or repair parents (Ishimaru, 2019). Principal preparation programs should also include practicum experiences aligned with this view. Practices among principal candidates and current administrators should focus on nurturing community cultural wealth with the ability to lead both within their school building and outside in the larger school community (Auerbach, 2009; Fernández & Paredes Scribner, 2018; Khalifa, 2012). This is especially true for schools in a majority-minority community where resistance to the new immigrant communities still exists (Lowenhaupt, 2014).

Wang (2018) discussed social capital as a dominant concept in educational leadership; when integrated with trust, it becomes relational. Including cultural relevance when engaging Latino parents is important for building on trust and establishing relationships with them. Additionally, studies on the science of learning for educational leadership maintain that accountability increases when all school learners, including

parents, are supported and that educational programs and best practices are best viewed from a learning lens, allowing for the idea of cultural relevance as a new best practice to be learned (Myran & Sutherland, 2019). As principals consider their role as school leaders, they should decide to become community leaders, advocating for the causes of the community, regardless of race or ethnicity, thereby building trust and rapport in the schools among minority or immigrant communities. As parents feel more accepted and welcomed, student academic outcomes will also increase (Auerbach, 2009; Khalifa, 2012).

Researchers advocate for culturally relevant approaches to parental engagement practices, both formal and informal, particularly with Latino parents who often see their role of involvement through lessons taught at home rather than participation at school. School leaders may need to reframe definitions of engagement and leadership to better connect with and include parents of the non-dominant culture and to understand that current methods used for parent engagement are based on experiences of White, middle-class parents and students. Latino parents need to have a place of cultural acceptance and appreciation to better engage with the school personnel and systems in place (Young et al., 2013). The decisions of educators in leadership roles should be based on these concepts to understand how they are linked to gaining the trust of parents and, therefore, engaging them in the schools to influence student success (Sanders, 2001).

Case Narrative

Sunnyvale Independent School District in the southwestern part of the United States serves 3,135 students PreK-12. Over the past two decades, the region has undergone an extreme shift in demographics, most notably with the Latino population,

primarily made up of new immigrants. The school district is in an isolated, rural agricultural area, and 20 years ago, a new meat processing facility was established there, which has accounted for the majority of the district's demographic shift. At that time, the Latino population in the district was roughly 17%, by 2015, it was over 70%, although many in the district have yet to acknowledge that. The district has a 47% English language learner population and 82% of the students are on free or reduced lunch. There is a clear gap in achievement between Anglo and Latino students. More notably, there is a great lack of parent involvement within the Latino population due in part to poor communication between the school district and the parents. In a district that has a majority-minority population, there are no Latino school administrators, and only 7% of the professional staff is Latino; however, Latino employees do account for 90% of the maintenance and cafeteria staff.

A high school teacher, Michelle, who moved to the school district when the meat processing facility opened, has had great success working with Latino students in her classroom and in motivating them to attend college. She realizes that the best way to make a transformational change within the educational community is to actively engage the parents and begins to reach out to them through the students. As she realizes that parents are very eager to learn more, Michelle brings up the possibility of working with parents during a committee meeting addressing the needs of the English language learners. She suggests offering an institute for parents to better understand the school system of the United States and to learn ways in which they might actively engage in their children's education and to better advocate for them. She is surprised to hear the response from an assistant superintendent when he tells her, "The less parents know

about what we do here, the more we like it,” and even going as far as to say, “The plant will close up, those people will move away and we don’t have to worry about educating them!”

“Those people?” Michelle thought as she struggled to make sense of a public-school system believing that parents were not part of the educational process and, even more importantly, that certain parents were excluded from participating. She continued to consider ways to better engage non-English speaking parents and the following week again addressed it in a faculty meeting regarding the achievement scores of her district building. “I believe one of the ways we can make a difference with the Latino students’ achievement is by actively engaging the parents,” she said. Randy, a science teacher, scoffed and said, “Those parents don’t care about education. That’s what’s gotten us into this mess in the first place.” Mary Ann, an English teacher, added, “How would we communicate with them? They don’t even want to learn English!”

“Right,” Brad, a history teacher, added, “and we have enough to do just trying to educate our own students without having to worry about all of these newcomers. It’s just too much to expect from any of us!” Astounded, Michelle replied, “These are our own students, all of the students in this school are our students and they all deserve our time and effort.” John, the math department chair, interjected,

“I understand what you are trying to say, Michelle, but the truth of the matter is, that before these immigrant families moved to our town, our achievement scores were high and our sports teams were successful. Now all they have done is make

our test scores look bad by their lack of achievement and their laziness. Besides that, the increased student population has put us into another class with bigger schools so that we can't possibly compete with them in sports and these kids don't even want to participate! It's really just not fair to our kids whose families have been here for generations to have everything taken away from them by a culture that doesn't value education!"

Patricia, an art teacher, came to Michelle's defense by saying,

"Listen, everyone, Sunnyvale is better than this and you know that in our PLC's we have been discussing ways to better serve all of our students and to narrow the achievement gap. We've looked at the ways in which understanding students' backgrounds and experiences helps us to reach them and provide support for them. Maybe Michelle is not so far off in suggesting that another step in that process is to engage parents."

Finally, James, the building principal who was hired just last year from outside of the district, responded in hopes of bringing the faculty together.

"I've spent the past year getting to know you as a faculty and getting to know our students. As a district, we are beginning to engage in strategic planning in hopes of improving our school district for all students, staff, and the community. We cannot keep using our immigrant students and their families as the scapegoat for our low-test scores, or for our lack of competition in district sports. Until we begin to consider all of our students and their families as our community, we will always have these problems. I understand that there is a certain mourning for what you feel you have lost in community identity, especially those of you who are

native to this area, whose families have lived here for generations. There is a definite pride in the pioneer spirit here and I honor that, but we cannot continue to only work for those who look like us, or who speak the same language as us. Our community has changed greatly. Over 70% of our students are Latino. We cannot keep thinking about them as *those students*. They are our students and their parents are our parents. I want to thank Michelle for her suggestion of better engaging them. I agree with her that doing so will have an impact on our student outcomes and will help them feel more welcome as part of our community, giving them some ownership in what we do and how we do it in reaching the students. We are missing their voices and we are missing the opportunity to be more culturally engaged with them. We need to continue this dialogue and look for ways to improve our outreach.”

James noticed many of the faculty nodding their heads in agreement and felt good about the direction of the conversation, hoping that it would give the faculty the opening they needed to address the situation of social inequity in practices to engage parents. But he also noticed a few of the veteran teachers shaking their heads in disbelief and one of them murmured under his breath, “You have got to be kidding.” Slowly, Scott, the technology instructor, stood up and said,

“James, Michelle, I want to respect your opinion on this, but I just don’t believe it is our responsibility to educate those parents on what they should be doing in terms of their kids. Heck, half of those parents don’t even talk to their kids! They work long hours and the last thing they want to do is come up here for a meeting or a training of some sort just so we can say we tried. We didn’t ask to be put in

this position; our town was fine just the way it was before they all came here. If they can't learn English and participate like our parents always have in the past, then I don't see that there is anything we can do about it. We are not babysitters for these kids, and we shouldn't have to learn how to communicate with these parents who are just here to make money and then go back where they came from! That's just my opinion on the matter."

James now noticed that the faculty seemed to be split, those who understood that the success of all students was their responsibility and those who felt the expectation was too high. He appreciated Michelle bringing it to the forefront, but he also acknowledged that this was an emotional topic and that more work was needed to help the staff understand the importance of economic and racial privilege, social structure, and most importantly, the dynamic of parent engagement. With the upcoming work on the district strategic plan, he realized that this was the right time to approach it and hopefully find faculty willing to have the difficult conversations.

The next week James invited a smaller group of the faculty to meet with him; he included Michelle, of course, and a dozen of the more vocal ones from the previous meeting, along with Susana, a Latino paraprofessional who worked in the building. He knew that tensions were still high from last week, but he was determined to find some middle ground. It was important to him to begin parent engagement, but he also knew that some of the other issues needed to be addressed for that parent engagement to be productive. He began the meeting by saying,

"Thank you for agreeing to meet with me today. In our conversation last week about looking for ways to engage our Latino parents, several concerns were

brought forth that I believe we need to address before moving forward. This is our school, and although the demographics have changed considerably over the past several years, these are still our students and our parents. We must find ways to reach them in order for them to feel a part of our community here. I'd like to invite Michelle to speak first and present her ideas on parent engagement."

Michelle had spent the past week researching models of parent engagement, especially with ethnic minorities and was excited to share what she had learned.

"The research that I have looked at shows clearly that minority parents often feel unvalued in schools, but language and cultural barriers often prevent them from speaking up or from participating in school events. Most Latino parents believe that it is their job to educate the children at home, in terms of teaching them about respect, hard work, and strong family ties. They don't always understand our school systems and are not sure of their place in the process. As educators, it is up to us to reach out to them and offer our support for them to feel accepted and valued. I believe that teaching them about specific ways they can contribute to their child's education, and even helping them learn ways to communicate better with their children will go a long way toward improving student outcomes at school. I know that we can help make a difference for these parents and our students."

Scott, the technology instructor, inquired,

"Well, what does your research say about parents who just don't care or who don't have time for their kids? What about parents that we can't even communicate with? What does your research say about these people who have

come here and want everything given to them, but don't even want to learn the language?"

It seemed Scott was again becoming confrontational as he couldn't see any way for them to agree on this matter. A couple of other teachers nodded in agreement, but even before any of the others had a chance to voice their agreement with Michelle, Susana spoke up,

"I'm sorry to hear that you feel that way about us and about our culture. I have always been very proud to work at this school, and although I always believed we could do more for our Latino students and their families, I never expected to feel shame about the reasons for why we did not. If you want to know about our parents and their desires and concerns, you need to ask them. You need to include them in the conversations. Whether you do that in Spanish or in English with an interpreter does not matter. What matters is inviting them to the table. And now, thank you, James, for inviting me to the table today, but I am disappointed with some of you right now and I believe it will be best if I leave before I say something inappropriate."

With that, Susana left the room. Scott, embarrassed, shrugged and said, "Well, I was just voicing what a lot of us think. Right?" He looked around the room for confirmation, but was met only with a few shaking heads and others with their eyes downcast on the table. Realizing he was suddenly out-numbered, Scott also left the room. The remaining faculty looked around at each other, at Michelle, and at James, and realized they had some work to do, beginning with learning to understand a culture different from their own.

Teaching Notes

As observed in the faculty discussion dialogues, change is often difficult to navigate, perhaps especially in rural areas where a particular style of life has been followed for generations. New immigrant communities have continued to spring up in these rural areas and are often seen as a threat to the previously established norms and way of life. The schools in these rural areas often find themselves unequipped with the necessary resources and experience to serve the immigrant communities (Altschul, 2011; Lowenhaupt, 2014), resulting in misunderstandings and lack of empathy for both students and their families. As the faculty discussions demonstrate, even when change is proposed, it is often met with great resistance from administration, faculty, and staff and the school's efforts to engage parents thus become superficial or even culturally denigrating, causing further disengagement from parents (Garcia et al., 2005; Ishimaru et al., 2016; Lowenhaupt, 2014). School personnel often believe that this disengagement means that Latino parents do not care about education, a mindset resulting from negative attitudes of school administration and the lack of personnel able to relate to Spanish-speaking parents without considering more culturally relevant approaches which may better engage Latino parents (Auerbach, 2007, 2009; LeFevre & Shaw, 2012; Pérez Carreón et al., 2005).

While the faculty discussion began with a suggestion for better parent engagement, other deep-seated issues were revealed, which should also be addressed through transformational leadership. For Latino students and parents to feel empowered, school personnel need to be proactive in understanding and including cultural sensitivity in all areas (Fernández & Paredes Scribner, 2018). It will be necessary to provide staff

with lessons on cultural awareness and cultural competency to achieve the goals of cultivating community in this diverse setting. It will be most important to allow faculty and staff to engage in dialogue that allows opportunities to listen with empathy while showing respect for others' perceptions on culture and ethnicity, along with allowing them room to voice their feelings about immigrant communities and the perceived threat from changes brought about by new populations. Rather than trying to impose on them a certain belief system, leaders should allow time for self-reflection with the goal of cultural self-awareness (Guerra & Nelson, 2013). Group facilitators can create opportunities within the dialogues to then process action planning with the question of "Where do we go from here?" with meaningful solutions. Existing education models for family engagement have traditionally been school-driven and prescriptive. It may be necessary to begin to recognize institutional biases that schools maintain in communicating with families and seek to understand rather than being understood (Herrera et al., 2020).

Real change with parent engagement can then begin to take place in rural schools with minority immigrant populations once leaders learn to nurture the community's cultural wealth. Teaching educators to incorporate students' cultures into their lessons so that students are able to see themselves is an important asset to a school. Torre and Murphy (2016) suggested models that include "care, respect, trust, and authentic membership, shared vision, and collective work" (p. 204), which lead to approachability, empowerment, and development of capacity for both parents and teachers.

Building trust and rapport will allow for leadership development within the Latino

community as parents learn to engage and negotiate with school administrators and staff (Curry & Holter, 2019; Fernández & Paredes Scribner, 2018; Ishimaru, 2019). Activities that encourage social networks and community engagement should become an integral part of school culture for family engagement to be a collaborative effort (Auerbach, 2009). As suggested in the faculty meetings, engaging parents will help to improve overall student success as parents feel more accepted and welcomed and students develop of sense of belonging with more respect toward their culture (Auerbach, 2009; Khalifa, 2012).

Guided Staff Discussion

Too many times educators give answers instead of listening. To see and understand the community that is served, faculty should refocus and dialogue to better recognize systematic barriers and ask tough questions. This case study could be used with faculty or department members using the following questions to guide discussion.

Discussion Questions

1. What are some of the stereotypes or underlying assumptions that staff in this scenario hold about the immigrant population?
2. How might this conversation have been handled better? Do you think Michelle was prepared when she presented her ideas? Did James, the new principal, seem surprised at the hostility evident in conversation? As a school leader, how do you navigate those difficult conversations?
3. How do current policies in education, specifically in your own district, marginalize families and inhibit their engagement? What strategies could be implemented to help better engage immigrant parents?
4. What are some benefits derived from better parent engagement in schools?
5. What steps are necessary to help change the culture of the school? How important is buy-in from the community?

6. If you were a member of the staff at this school, how would you identify your personal beliefs about immigrant families?
7. How have your lived experiences shaped your opinions and actions? How might the lived experiences of immigrant students and their families be different from your own?
8. Some of the staff members were frustrated with the idea that “parents just won’t show up.” Do you agree with this statement regarding immigrant parents and why or why not?
9. Thinking about your school district, what linguistic resources does your school have in place?
10. Who carries the most responsibility in communicating with students and parents? Faculty and staff? Building administration? Central administration?
11. What activities and reflections can the district use to encourage cultural competencies for all students and staff? Does your school climate reflect the diversity of your students? Do they feel more welcome because they believe their culture is valued?
12. In small groups, consider what makes a community? How actively engaged are you in the community and in assessing the needs of said community?
13. Brainstorm ways that the staff could reframe specific activities or events to be more inclusive.
14. Many times, schools “do everything they can” to encourage parents to show up, and they still do not. What are the biggest barriers keeping parents from the schools?
15. In discussing working with parents, do you believe it is more important to have parent involvement or parent engagement? What do each of those look like? How important is it to have parent input on what it should look like?

Working through these questions will help school personnel identify some of the underlying issues surrounding the bigger issue of parent engagement and student success. Unless schools are able to provide equity not just for the students, but also for the families, success for immigrant students will be much more difficult to achieve.

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Leadership Practices to Engage Latino Parents in Rural Oklahoma

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Abstract

Purpose: Relatively little is known about how rural schools with high Latino populations effectively engage parents in their children's education. This article uses mixed methods to examine the attitudes, beliefs, and expectations of administrators, teachers, and parents, looking for commonalities as well as dissimilarities in their perceptions.

Research Methods: Data were gathered using a mixed method approach, including both a Likert type scale and open-ended questions on a survey with a representative sample of seven principals, 54 teachers, and 169 parents in a rural school district of Oklahoma. Data analysis techniques included qualitative analysis by coding, looking for patterns and themes and quantitative analysis using Observation Oriented Modeling and descriptive statistics to examine variations between the elementary and secondary levels as well as between teacher and parent responses. **Findings:** Results indicate that this rural school district can improve on successful strategies to engage Latino parents, particularly by utilizing culturally relevant techniques and social network theory as Latino parents, in particular, look for ways to engage on a more personal level. **Implications:** The findings of this study validate the importance of increasing Latino parent engagement in schools to better address student achievement levels. As the Latino population continues to grow and as more rural schools undergo these demographic shifts, this research will give current and future administrators and teachers better information to help shape parental engagement practices to ensure success for all students.

Keywords: instructional leadership, cultural relevance, cultural wealth, parental engagement, Latino student success, empirical paper

Leadership Practices to Engage Latino Parents in Rural Oklahoma

Parental involvement in students' learning is an important aspect of children's education and is directly related to students' academic performance and engagement (Oswald et al., 2017). This involvement is critical for all demographics; however, limited research has been conducted on the Latino population. Jeynes (2017) discovered an association between parental involvement and the academic achievement of Latinos is quite consistent and reasonably strong and demonstrates that when parents show up, they have the potential to positively impact the intellectual, emotional, and physical development of their children, school, and community.

Research has indicated that higher levels of family engagement are associated with social and academic skill development and that parents who engage in educational activities at home communicate clear expectations for achievement and help to integrate the school curriculum in the home (Bracke & Corts, 2012; Fernández & Paredes, 2018). However, while family engagement has been shown to provide positive outcomes for language, literacy, math, and social skills, it is noted that Latino parents are found to engage in fewer home enrichment activities (McWayne et al., 2016). It is further indicated that Latino families prefer home-based engagement over school contact, a practice that suggests the importance to this ethnic group in maintaining heritage cultural values and practices (McWayne et al., 2016; Park & Holloway, 2013).

Achievement gaps for Latinos can be seen as early as kindergarten, where twice as many Latino children as White children fall into the lowest quartile for reading and math at the beginning of the academic year, putting them already at a disadvantage for educational achievement (Gándara, 2015). These gaps may also be attributed to

immigrant families quickly finding new destinations, many of them in rural areas where schools are not equipped with the necessary resources and experience to serve the immigrant communities (Altschul, 2011; Lowenhaupt, 2014; Potochnick, 2014). Students may also lack access to highly qualified teachers, appropriate curriculum and instruction, and in addition, may have to tolerate negative teacher and administrator perceptions of Latino students and their families (Madrid, 2011).

Purpose of the Study

While many studies have looked at the established urban areas where Latino immigrants have settled, very few studies have included the rural areas. The intent of this research was to look at Latino parental engagement and to a) understand the barriers for effective parental engagement, and b) explore the strategies that educational leaders and teachers could implement to increase parental engagement. This research focused on practices of administrators and teachers to better engage Latino parents while addressing the view that Latino parents have of their role in the education of their children and how social network theory and culturally responsive leadership can work together to encourage parent and community engagement. The purpose of the study was to identify the strategies of administrators and teachers to effectively engage with Latino parents, while also exploring engagement from the parents' perspective with the goal of considering the attitudes, beliefs, and expectations of all groups to better close the gaps and include all parties in decision-making.

Delimitations of the Study

According to best practices outlined by the Oklahoma School Performance Review, school districts are often associated with the identity of the community,

especially in rural areas. It is necessary for schools to have effective community involvement, which highlights the unique characteristics of the school district and the surrounding community (OEQA, 2019). For that reason, this study was centered on a school in rural Oklahoma, a state that has experienced a recent population shift in demographics, particularly in the panhandle region, where Latinos are now considered a majority-minority. This demographic shift has created significant challenges in public schools unequipped to handle the rapid growth, particularly with non-English speaking parents and students. During a community forum for the district Continuous Strategic Improvement (CSI) Plan, it was found that 48.5% disagreed that the schools have high expectations for all students and 49% disagreed that the schools meet the academic needs of all students. A core belief of the district is the importance of family support, but 37.8% of the community disagreed that the schools communicate regularly and effectively, and 34.4% disagreed that the schools value their input (Oklahoma Independent School District CSI Plan, Section 3, 2019). For context, in 2019 the district served 3,073 students, with Latinos making up 70.4% of the student total. In addition, 44.7% of the students qualify for ELL (English Language Learners) services and 74.1% of the students are considered economically disadvantaged (OEQA, 2019). In terms of parent involvement in the school, the district reports 0.3 hours per student compared to an Oklahoma state average of 2.7 (OEQA, 2019).

Research Questions

Rural school districts with new Latino immigrant populations do not always have the resources necessary to work with these new students and their parents, often resulting in lower academic achievement for students and little to no engagement for parents

(Altschul, 2011; Lowenhaupt, 2014; Potochnick, 2014). The overarching question for the study involving this school district was “What relationship is there between the practices of administrators and school leaders to better engage Latino parents and the perception parents have of those practices?” The following research questions focused the study:

1. How do administrators, teachers, and Latino parents define parental engagement?
2. According to the perspective of administrators, teachers, and Latino parents, what are strategies for successful parental engagement?
3. According to the perspective of administrators, teachers, and Latino parents, what are barriers for successful parental engagement?
4. According to the perspective of administrators, teachers, and Latino parents, what role does cultural wealth/relevancy have in parental engagement?

Review of Literature

The theoretical framework of this literature review is informed by work done by Epstein (2010), whose framework of parent engagement has become a model for educators, defining six areas for effective parent engagement. These areas are constructive parenting, communicating with the school, volunteering at the school, facilitating children’s learning at home, participating in decision making at the school, and collaborating within the community to improve the education system. A second framework used in the study is Yosso’s (2005) work on community cultural wealth, which indicates that as parents gain an appreciation for their own cultural capital, both parents and students will have increased confidence and strength in terms of leadership. The research has shown that minority groups do not achieve as well when their learning styles, language, and culture are marginalized or disregarded.

The study of acculturation, the process of adopting and adjusting to a new cultural environment, is an area that is relevant to academic achievement as these cultural transitions influence family dynamics, which in turn may influence students' academic achievement goals (Miranda et al., 2007). While acculturation is not exclusive to Latino students, *familismo*, a deeply held value of placing priority on family, does play a larger role for them in determining future academic endeavors as students may feel pressure to help the family economically rather than pursue their own individual goals (Stacciarini et al., 2015; Turcios-Cotto & Milan, 2013). Santiago et al. (2014) found that trying to assimilate Latinos by encouraging them to adopt mainstream values could actually be harmful in terms of academic success; therefore, intervention measures should use acculturation to foster academics (Santiago et al., 2014). Latino students are much more likely to depend on social support from family than other ethnic groups and are more likely to emphasize the importance of following parental advice, further demonstrating the importance of working with the family as a unit when working with Latino students (Halfond et al., 2012).

Family Dynamics and Contributions

School personnel often believe that Latino parents do not care about education, a mindset resulting from negative attitudes of school administration and the lack of personnel efforts to relate to Spanish-speaking parents (Madrid, 2011). By using parent engagement models based on the experiences of White, middle-class parents, they do not consider culturally relevant approaches that may be more conducive to engaging Latino parents other than the traditional expected roles of parent-teacher conferences, field trips, or volunteering in a classroom. In general, these formal activities are those where parents

are physically present or because they contact the school directly, something which Latino parents are less likely to do (Auerbach, 2007, 2009; LeFevre & Shaw, 2012; Pérez Carreón et al., 2005). Studies involving high school students show that parent involvement continues to be important, demonstrating that students are more academically engaged when their parents are involved, particularly through encouragement and expressing the importance of education (Kao, 2004; Wang & Sheikh-Khalil, 2014). It was further found that parents of lower socioeconomic status may not be able to effectively engage with their children based on limited resources and information on how to engage. These parents may also suffer stress from working long hours or have financial struggles or a sense of incompetence, which may affect their ability to engage with their children at school (Wang & Sheikh-Khalil, 2014).

Parent responses to a survey by Schneider and Arnot (2018) indicated that employment is the main barrier to being more engaged at school, particularly for those who work in agricultural jobs in rural areas. A second barrier identified was a lack of communication skills in English. According to these findings, schools should work to understand the perceived barriers and create strategies to better enable parents to be engaged. However, the study further found that school personnel often do not consider these social or cultural norms and may assume that immigrant parents understand the school system and simply choose not to be involved. Toren (2013) found that parent involvement often includes the interactions that parents have with their children and the schools to help encourage academic achievement. These can include a wide range of practices and may encompass expectations for achievement as well as educational beliefs. Several studies found that low-income and/or ethnic minority parents are less likely to

participate and may benefit from outreach efforts to encourage their involvement. This is especially true of Latino parents who may be more involved in the home but appear less likely to have high educational expectations for their students or to engage in postsecondary plans for education (Park & Holloway, 2013). Parent participation may be difficult to organize and continue as schools become more diverse, and teachers do not always have the appropriate information or training needed to work with parents, a problem intensified by a mismatch of teacher and parent demographics which can create misunderstandings in situations of cultural differences (Garcia-Reid et al., 2005; LaRocque et al., 2011).

A study by García-Reid et al. (2005) maintained that it is the responsibility of schools to remove barriers that may inhibit parental involvement and to establish a welcoming environment for parents. Jeynes (2003) indicated that involving parents has a positive effect on academic outcomes, with African American and Latino students benefiting the most with the additional benefit of stronger student-teacher relationships. When teachers create equitable learning environments for diverse students, they are better able to serve as change agents for those students (García-Reid et al., 2005). All levels of academic achievement, including GPA, standardized tests, and college enrollment, appear to be affected by parental involvement, thereby indicating a positive impact on children across race and academic outcomes (Jeynes, 2003). According to Gil (2019), traditional concepts of parental involvement have centered on academic issues for students and formal types of involvement for parents, such as parent organizations and parent and teacher conferences. With this emphasis on hierarchy, it is less likely that these interactions will become meaningful. Torre and Murphy (2016) suggested models

that include “care, respect, trust, and authentic membership, shared vision, and collective work” (p. 204), which lead to approachability, empowerment, and development of capacity for both parents and teachers.

Considerations for Rural Immigrant Latino Parents

The difficulty in communicating with the non-English speaking immigrant population of Latinos, particularly in rural areas, presents additional challenges. Lowenhaupt (2014) referred to a New Latino Diaspora, where Latinos are settling in areas that have not traditionally been populated by them, particularly in rural areas. Because the schools in these areas have little experience with immigrant students, they often lack the resources to address ethnic and linguistic diversity and, notably, often face resistance to do so within their own administration and staff. Cultural values and differences cause other barriers as well. Grace and Gerdes (2019) found that often parents perceive negative stereotypes and racial tension from non-Latino teachers and therefore view those teachers in a negative manner. Their study further found that parental involvement is higher when both parents and teachers are Latino; however, rural schools do not have the same opportunities to staff Latino teachers due to the scarcity of qualified applicants in these rural areas.

Obstacles to effective communication between teachers and parents include the lack of support and training for teachers working with diverse communities and the lack of time and resources for parents to take time off work (Shim, 2018). These working-class parents often work long hours and may not be available during regular school hours. In addition, they may need childcare for younger children or have issues with limited transportation (Coady et al., 2015). Rural schools’ efforts to engage Latino parents are

often seen as superficial or culturally denigrating, a deficit-based belief system that often contributes to misunderstandings of both expectations and behaviors of parents. These schools are seen as subtractive spaces that do not value the social and cultural resources of immigrant families, further contributing to a lack of parental engagement (Ishimaru et al., 2016). Miscommunication between parents and teachers is common, especially when their expectations for parent involvement are not the same. Often negative or infrequent communications can lead to limited possibilities for parents to be involved, an issue often found in rural schools (Grace & Gerdes, 2018).

Parental involvement in rural areas, particularly with students who are English language learners, relates positively to second language learning, motivation, academic achievement, and decisions to attend college (Shim, 2018). Conversely, factors that inhibit parental involvement of Latinos in rural areas are often based on teachers' judgments toward English Language Learners (ELL) and their parents, with parents frustrated with the lack of communication in Spanish, often causing them to become fearful of speaking up due to the perceived hierarchy (Ishimaru, 2019; Shim, 2018). Teachers in rural areas, mostly White with little exposure to diversity, should be reminded that lack of English proficiency does not equate to lack of intelligence (Shim, 2018). Latino parents are becoming somewhat less passive and have begun to advocate for themselves and their children as partners in the educational system, leading to capacity building and relationship building among both educators and parents (Ishimaru, 2019).

Nurturing a community's cultural wealth serves as leadership development for the Latino community as they are then able to address issues that are important to them and

to teach others to negotiate with school administrators and staff (Curry & Holter, 2019; Fernández & Paredes Scribner, 2018; Ishimaru, 2019). As parents gain an appreciation for their own cultural capital, it leads to more confidence and strength for both parents and students. In a study led by Guzmán (2018), most parents reported having aspirational capital, wanting their children to have a better future with better jobs than they had, and linguistic capital, recognizing the value of bilingual skills for their children in future jobs.

Principals as School and Community Leaders

Parental leadership programs benefit not only students and parents but also teachers and administrators as they break down barriers of communication and cultural misunderstandings (De Gaetano, 2007; Fernández & Paredes Scribner, 2018; Ishimaru, 2019; Lowenhaupt, 2014). It is important to value the assets these immigrant families in rural areas have, such as their diversity, linguistic skills, social networks, survival skills, and their contributions to the economy of the community (Coady et al., 2015). Practices among principal candidates and current administrators should focus on nurturing community cultural wealth with the ability to lead both within their school building and outside in the larger school community, especially in new majority-minority communities where resistance to new immigrants still exists (Auerbach, 2009; Fernández & Paredes Scribner, 2018; Khalifa, 2012). Studies on the science of learning for educational leadership maintains that accountability increases when all school learners, including parents, are supported and that educational programs and best practices are best viewed from a lens of learning, allowing for the idea of cultural relevance as a new best practice to be learned (Myran & Sutherland, 2019). As parents feel more accepted and welcomed, student academic outcomes will also increase (Auerbach, 2009; Khalifa, 2012).

The final barrier to successful community engagement stems from the teachers' and administrators' attitudes and perceptions of their community. When school leaders believe that their community does not care or does not have the necessary resources, they may not attempt to engage the community, regardless of the contributions that can be made to student success (Sanders, 2001). Often parent engagement is seen as an extra component or used when issues with students arise, rather than making it a central element in school practice (Torre & Murphy, 2016). School leaders should spend time getting to know the families with whom they hope to engage and lead in ways that produce new solutions (Reed & Swaminathan, 2016).

Parents should also be encouraged to become leaders as these non-dominant parents should be recognized as stakeholders whose leadership and power cannot be ignored (Rodela & Bertrand, 2018). This process of meeting parents where they are, both in cultural awareness and knowledge, and helping them feel included in decision-making also helps to build relationships between parents and teachers as they work to promote change in the schools and the larger community (Guerra & Nelson, 2013). One way to empower parents and give them an active role and ownership of their child's achievement is to give them the necessary tools to better understand the educational process and to encourage them to become more involved in the shared responsibility between home and school (Pstross et al., 2016). In schools where there is shared leadership and where stakeholders, including parents, have more leadership influence, there is also a higher student achievement. By educating the parents about school expectations, processes, and available resources, schools can help them achieve their dreams of success not only for their students but often for themselves as well (Ni et al., 2018).

Method

Research Design

I utilized a convergent parallel mixed-methods study design to collect, analyze and interpret both quantitative and qualitative data. This design converges the quantitative and qualitative data in order to provide a comprehensive analysis of a research problem (Creswell, 2014). The frameworks of Epstein (2010) for parent engagement strategies and Yosso (2005) for the importance of community cultural wealth helped guide the questions and surveys used for administrators, teachers, and parents. These two frameworks together were appropriate for this study to demonstrate the positive effect that culturally relevant leadership practices have on parent engagement in schools. According to Epstein's (2010) model, parents' active engagement in their students' lives and education makes a significant difference in their development and academic success. School leaders who choose to use approaches of embracing cultural wealth will have better outcomes for both parent engagement and student achievement using an asset-based perspective based on six types of capital identified by Yosso (2005).

Participants

The population for this study included 10 administrators, 226 teachers and 845 parents at a rural school district in the panhandle of Oklahoma, a school which has experienced over 400% growth in Latino students in the last 25 years, from 17.39% in 1994 to 74.76% in 2020 (ISD Minority Report, 2021). Of the participants, none of the administrators and only 8% of the total number of teachers in the district are Latino (OEQA, 2018). According to the 2018 School Profile provided by the Office of Educational Quality and Accountability (OEQA), the district consists of one high school

(grades 9-12), one junior high (grades 7-8), one middle school (grades 5-6), and five elementary schools (with varying grades according to building). Sixty-one percent of students in grades K-3 received reading remediation compared to a state average of 37.7%.

Recruitment of the participants for the study was through an all-district email inviting administrators and teachers to participate. Parents were also invited to participate in the study through the school-wide parent communication system of email and text. An introduction of the researcher and the purpose of the research were included with an invitation to participate in the survey and the survey link specific to each participant group. The parent introduction was also presented in both Spanish and English to better communicate the information and to provide for easier access for non-English speaking parents. A reminder email was sent to each group after one week and again after two weeks, allowing up to three weeks to complete the surveys as needed.

Data Collection

Both quantitative and qualitative data were collected simultaneously through survey instruments. These surveys were developed following three meetings with a focus group of administrators, teachers, and Latino parents in the fall of 2019 and early 2020 to discuss how to better engage parents. Based on information gained from those meetings, and from my years of practice in the field, along with the review of literature, I modified an existing parent/family engagement survey instrument from the state of Oklahoma. These modifications were to focus the questions to help identify patterns of practice currently utilized by administrators and teachers in this school district for specifically engaging Latino parents as well as to establish the parents' perceptions of such practices. A pilot

study of the parent survey was conducted with two non-participant volunteers to check for comprehension. The survey instruments were administered using Qualtrics software.

The quantitative portion of the survey was based on a Likert type scale.

Administrator surveys included seven questions on a Likert type scale regarding parent access to information and the strategies currently employed for communication with parents. The surveys for teachers included eight questions on a Likert type scale to address the strategies that they currently use to encourage participation among Latino parents and specific ways that they seek to include them. Parents were asked to complete surveys using a Likert type scale using eight of the same questions as the teachers regarding their level of participation in the schools and their levels of inclusion, providing quantitative data from both teachers and parents. Parents were asked an additional three questions regarding attitudes and beliefs toward the school system, how welcomed they felt in the schools, and levels of trust of the schools and school personnel. All surveys for the quantitative portion were answered on a scale of 1-5 with 1 being never and 5 being always.

The second part of the surveys, the qualitative portion, included three open-ended questions, which went to interpretation of the biggest barrier to engaging Latino parents, the importance of cultural wealth, and definitions of parent engagement. The qualitative survey questions specifically asked were: a) I believe the biggest barrier to engaging Latino parents is...; b) What role, if any, do you believe culture should play in engaging Latino parents; and c) What is your definition of parent engagement? All three groups were asked the same three open-ended questions and parents were given the option of answering in either Spanish or English, increasing the probability of more complete

answers. All surveys were anonymous and confidential with the only indicator of identity requested used to distinguish between elementary and secondary levels. When the results of the three surveys were completed using the Qualtrics software, the sample size included responses from seven of the ten administrators, 54 of the 226 teachers, and 169 of the approximately 845 Latino parents.

Data Analysis

I first analyzed the quantitative forced choice responses of administrators, teachers, and parents. The Qualtrics software calculated the mean and standard deviations of all responses. The administrator responses were separate and used only to determine the level of agreement among administrators. The parent responses were compared with teacher responses to identify patterns and look for degree of alignment. Results were further analyzed using Observation Oriented Modeling (OOM). The build-test model function in the OOM software was used to identify individual patterns in the data. Discovery of patterns is aided by the production of multi-grams, or multi-unit frequency histograms (Grice, 2014). With this analysis, the responses were compared to see how practices vary between elementary and secondary levels as well as between teachers and parents.

The qualitative data were downloaded from the survey responses in Qualtrics into a separate Excel spreadsheet for each participant group and then organized by elementary or secondary level. Responses were reviewed line by line and color-coded by pattern using a matrix in Excel to track participant responses for each question and to organize the categories and themes. After all responses were coded and themes were identified, I then met with a focus group of teachers, to further investigate the differences between

teacher and parent responses, regarding communication and cultural relevancy.

Findings

The quantitative data reveal dissimilarities in the responses of secondary and elementary levels, and in the comparisons of teachers and parents. In addition, three themes were identified after coding of the qualitative portion (See Figure 1). A common theme that emerged was one of inclusion and respect, providing a welcoming environment, and in respecting the parent contributions not just at school, but also at home.

Figure 1:

Identified Themes and Categories

THEMES and categories		
Communication	Inclusiveness and Respect	Cultural Relevancy
Language	feeling understood	cultural awareness
Connection	feeling valued	appreciation
Interpreters	feeling welcomed	cultural roots
understanding the school system	acceptance	customs
	trust	diversity
	inclusion	majority community
	opinions matter	

Research Question 1 focused on how each subgroup defines parent engagement as reported by administrators, teachers, and parents. Principals agreed that parent

engagement means that parents take a proactive role in their child’s education, even to the extent of accepting leadership roles with parent groups and serving on committees as volunteers. Teachers recognized their own responsibility in engaging parents as their definitions included making parents feel welcome and comfortable and providing opportunities for parents to become more involved. Parents wanted to better understand the school system, to know what happens during the day with their child, to be able to trust teachers, and to feel respected as well as wanting to be better informed about school events and the opportunities to be involved. A graphic summary of parent engagement definitions according to the findings of each subgroup is presented in Table 1 below.

Table 1:

Definitions of Parent Engagement

Administrators

- Parent engagement at home
- In leadership roles at school events

Teachers

- Making parents comfortable
- Meeting them at their level and at their convenience

Parents

- Keeping an eye on the environment where my child is developing
 - Being confident that I can trust the teachers
 - Feeling respected and that my opinions count
-

An elementary principal commented on the importance that parent engagement at home has on student success, saying that a parent who is interested and asks their child about school helps the child understand the importance of education. Another elementary level principal believed that having the participation of parents in leadership roles is part

of the definition of parent engagement. Two of the principals commented that two-way communication between home and school is important.

Teacher survey responses revealed other distinct definitions. A secondary teacher defined parent engagement as “connecting with parents in a way that causes them to feel comfortable with being involved in their children’s education” while another emphasized the importance of meeting parents on their level and making time when it is convenient for them. An elementary teacher stressed the importance of having children see how educators and parents interact with each other and said, “When a child knows that their parents care and want them to do well, it will help each child strive to do their best in the classroom.”

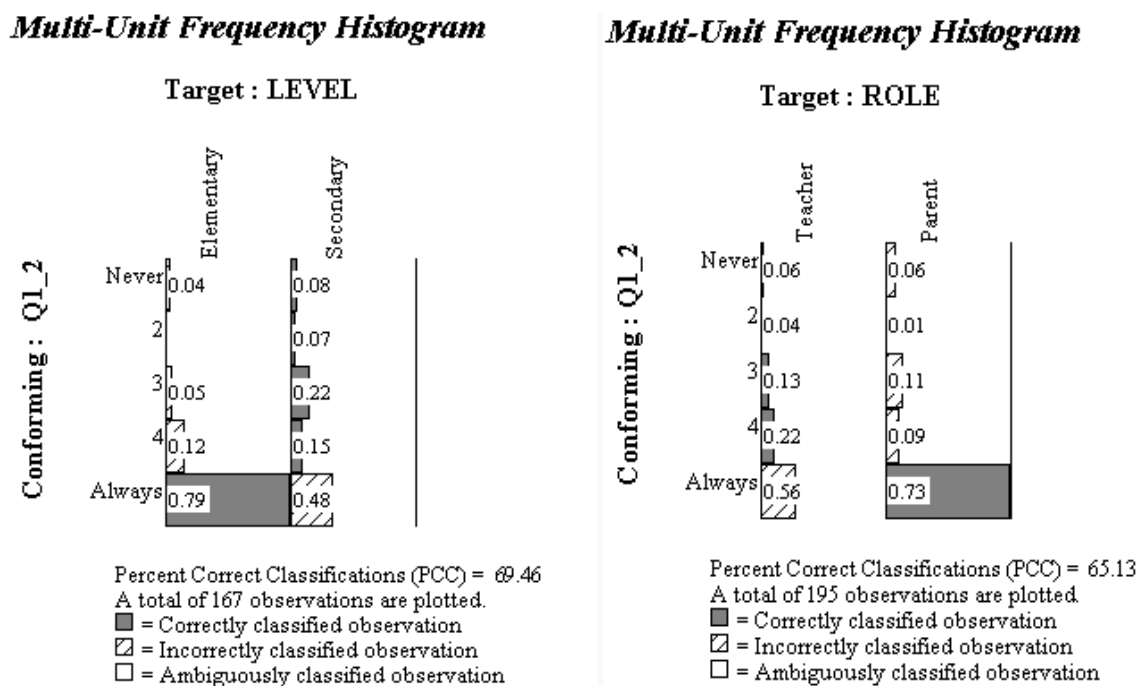
When parents were asked about the definition of parent engagement, a parent of an elementary student said engagement for them means, “estar al pendiente del medio ambiente en el que mi hijo se desenvuelve” meaning “to keep an eye on the environment in which my child is developing.” A secondary parent added “tener seguridad de que puede uno como padre confiar en los maestros,” translated as “to have confidence that as a parent I can trust the teachers.” Two parents mentioned that being engaged in the schools depended on feeling respected and included and “that if [parents] have an opinion or idea, it should also count.”

The second research question focused on strategies currently used by the school district to successfully engage parents and examined the differing perspectives of administrators, teachers, and Latino parents. This question had components of both quantitative, through the Likert type scale, and qualitative, through the open-ended questions. An area of concern noted among administrators was the lack of translation of

report cards, with 57% of principals responding that report cards are never translated to Spanish. Upon further review, it was noted that 100% of the negative responses were from the secondary level where report cards are a computer printout which only lists classes and the grade received with no additional information requiring translation. At the elementary level 67% of the principals responded that grade reports are always translated to Spanish. As to sending written information home in Spanish, again there was a difference between the elementary and secondary levels with 79% of elementary teachers responding that they “always” send it and only 48% of the secondary teachers doing the same. When comparing responses between all teachers and parents, 56% of the teachers responded with “always” and 73% of the parents selected that they “always” receive the information in Spanish. (See Figure 2.)

Figure 2:

Reported Frequency of Sending Information in Spanish by Grade Level and by Role



In Figure 2 above, the Percent Correct Classification (PCC) identifies how many responses match the detected pattern. When comparing elementary and secondary teachers, the PCC value is 70% matching the pattern and for the teacher and parent comparison it is 65%. In addition, the OOM model also identifies a c-value determining the percent of times the pattern may occur by chance. With a c-value of .40, this does not indicate a significant result.

Administrators are also very cognizant of the fact that the demographics of the staff do not match the demographics of their community. Administrator responses for the question regarding the demographics received the lowest rating of all questions on the Likert type scale, with 43% of all responses selecting “never” and an additional 29% responding with “almost never.” A teacher at the secondary level also commented, “Even though the majority of the students are Hispanic and a majority of our city’s population is Hispanic, most of our teachers are Caucasian and do not speak Spanish.” Descriptive statistics for the principal surveys are presented in Table 2.

Table 2:

Descriptive Statistics for Principal Surveys

N = 7 Principals		
	M	SD
Registration forms are available in Spanish	4.57	0.73
Letters sent home are translated into Spanish	4.43	0.73
Spanish interpreters are available to make and take phone calls	4.86	0.35
Grade reports are translated into Spanish	2.29	1.75
The demographics of our Spanish speaking teachers match our students	2.14	1.36
Spanish interpreters are present at parent-teacher conferences	5.00	0.00

Spanish interpreters are present at school wide or community meetings	4.14	1.12
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The findings revealed that at this time the most successful strategy implemented in the school system is the use of interpreters, specifically for parent-teacher conferences, although there are discrepancies among the three groups as to how often that is the case. According to the responses, 100% of the administrators selected “always” while only 74% of teachers and 76% of parents agree that interpreters are always available. The responses from the teachers show that within the elementary teacher group 84% selected “always” while only 56% of the secondary teachers did. Teachers also realized that interpreters do not provide the same level of personal communication with parents as one teacher responded, “The biggest barrier is not being able to speak with them on my own. Sometimes if a parent just has a quick question when they pick up their student it is difficult to find a translator to help.” This difficulty in finding experienced and available interpreters has caused them to sometimes resort to using a child as the interpreter, a practice that is not ideal according to one elementary teacher, “Sometimes the translation process is hindered if they have to have a younger child or student translate for them.”

Furthermore, 22% of the teachers referred to the new communication system the school has implemented, School Status, as a useful tool for bridging the communication gap. This system sends text or email messages to parents in their preferred language and teachers believe that it has not only eliminated many communication issues, but has also helped solve the problem of engagement. A secondary teacher stated, “We provide a positive attitude through School Status – with an interpreter – so engagement is not a problem with parents,” and an elementary teacher commented, “We now have School Status and it translates text messages for us. It is AMAZING!” However, no one in the

parent participant group commented on the surveys about using this system as a strategy for communication. In following up with the focus group, which provided more depth to the study, teachers suggested that reasons for the lack of School Status could include: a) parents may not have a wireless plan that supports the service, b) parents can opt out of receiving the messages, or c) parents do not know about the service.

Research Question 3, using qualitative data, addresses potential barriers for successful parental engagement by asking participants to describe what they see as the biggest barrier. Administrators, teachers, and parents agreed that it is communication, specifically that of a language barrier, although one administrator recognized language is not the only barrier, “While there are language barriers, it is also a lack of understanding and not always having a warm and friendly environment.” Three of the administrators listed trying to reach parents due to different shift schedules at work as a barrier and two others listed a lack of parent understanding of their role in their child’s education, particularly for first-generation parents.

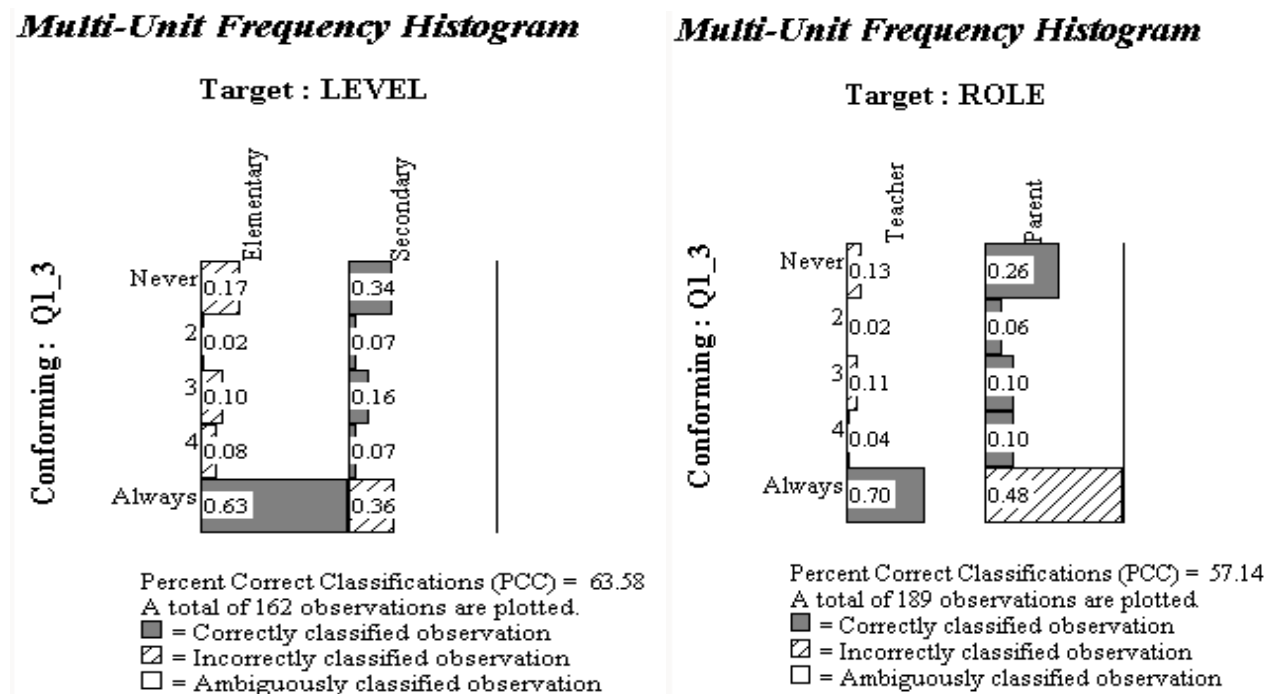
Teachers also agreed that they struggle more with newer immigrant parents who not only do not know the language, but “may not be accustomed to the American school system and their part in it.” Nine teachers (17%) discussed the cultural gap that exists as the biggest barrier which often leads to misunderstandings, not feeling welcomed, and a lack of trust from the parents because of those feelings. One teacher specifically pointed to the non-acceptance of another culture, “We have many that think they are accepting, but are truly not hence parents do not feel welcome.” Two of the teachers listed parent education levels, particularly with literacy, as a barrier with one of them stating that sending home everything translated does not always guarantee they know how to read it

so they still may not know how to be engaged. Three teachers referred to parent work schedules in a negative manner, as a detriment to education, believing Latino parents encourage work over school. Comments included “some believe hard work pays more than schooling” and “their culture puts more emphasis on work than education.”

Parents also recognized the difficulty in participating in events and activities due to their work schedules. One parent stated her biggest barrier was “having to juggle work and having two kids as a single mom,” while other parents simply said “trabajo mucho” (I work a lot). Parents also mentioned the feeling of not being welcome or feeling respected in the schools. This was evidenced by not always being made aware of events in a timely manner, “no me doy cuenta de los eventos porque no me informan” (I don’t realize there are events because they do not inform me), or feeling that the way in which they are informed is not motivating enough. “Un mensaje de texto no es suficiente para que uno se sienta motivado a participar” (a text message is not sufficient for one to feel motivated to participate). Regarding a question with the Likert like scale about inviting Latino parents to school night out events, 63% of the elementary teachers responded that they “always” do while only 36% of secondary teachers “always” do. Parent responses indicated that 48% of parents felt that they had “always” been invited. (See Figure 3).

Figure 3:

Reported Frequency of Inviting Parents to School Nights Out by Grade Level and by Role



One parent, in particular, commented that he/she did not understand why the barrier between teachers and parents exists, “Aún no entiendo si es por ser Latino o por no tener una posición social.” (I still do not understand if it is because I am Latino or because I do not have a social position.) Research Questions 2 and 3 together revealed a second common theme, that of communication, viewed both as a strategy and as a barrier.

The final research question addressed the role culture should have in engaging Latino parents. Through the survey responses a third theme emerged, the importance of valuing cultural wealth. In responding to the open-ended qualitative question on the survey, all administrators’ answers indicated that culture is a very important aspect, recognizing that they “may need to understand more about the Latino culture in order to better engage with the parents.” One administrator stated that staff needed to have more cultural awareness training to better understand the community they serve. One of the

secondary principals said, “I believe we can do a much better job at engaging parents when we are welcoming of their culture.”

The teacher responses were more varied. Several agreed that based on the demographics of the school, culture should have an important role and as an elementary teacher said, “parents would trust us more and become more invested if they felt we were trying to learn about and understand their culture.” Others believed that it was important to appreciate and accept all cultures with another elementary teacher explaining the need for cross-culture in this way, “We need to embrace and respect their culture, so that we can teach them why we love and respect ours.” A question regarding greeting parents in a culturally appropriate way was included on the quantitative Likert type scale with 61% of elementary teachers responding “always” while only 36% of the secondary teachers selected “always.” 61% of parent participants, however, do feel welcomed in a culturally appropriate way.

Parent responses for the role of cultural relevancy were heartfelt, with the majority believing that the Latino culture plays a very important role in engaging with the schools, especially given that they are now the majority. Parents wanted their culture to be “honored and respected,” and they worried that their children will forget, saying “para que ellos no olviden sus origenes” (so that they don’t forget their origins). “Son nuestras raices, de donde venimos y que a pesar de estar en un país extranjero con diferente idioma y diferente cultura es importante mantener parte de lo que somos, Latinos.” (These are our roots and where we are from and even though we are in a foreign country with a different language and different culture, it is important to keep part of what we are, Latinos.)

Discussion

Studies show that Latino parents view their role as an informal one of support and of modeling good behavior in the home (De Gaetano, 2007; Quiñones & Kiyama, 2014; Woolley et al., 2009) while also recognizing that by discussing school at home, future aspirations for students are improved (Kao, 2004). These studies support the first theme that emerged from the study, that of inclusion and respect for the efforts of parents to be engaged, whether at home or at school. That sense of inclusion and respect helps provide a more welcome environment and as Torre and Murphy (2016) suggested, using models of care, respect, and trust will increase approachability and empowerment of parents, concepts mentioned as a need by the parents in this study. Literature from previous studies demonstrate the importance of addressing parents on their terms, taking their cultural norms into account. According to Epstein (2010), using a social network theory helps develop strong community and school collaborations and helps parents have a more active role in recruiting other parents for engagement. When schools continue to use parent engagement models that only take into account parent-teacher conferences or attending activities or events, they are not connecting with Latino parents who are more relationship based (Auerbach, 2007, 2009; LeFevre & Shaw, 2012; Pérez Carreón et al., 2005). Research corroborates the findings of this study in stressing the importance of understanding how Latino parents choose to engage, accepting that the same model does not work for all cultural groups, as well as recognizing that educators should spend time getting to know the parents in the communities with whom they hope to engage (Reed & Swaminathan, 2016).

The second theme that emerged from this study was communication, including language barriers, and most participants identified it as the biggest barrier. Research by Schneider and Arnot (2018) supported this finding of the communication barrier, although their study found that often work schedules, particularly in rural areas, were considered to be more of a barrier than English communication skills. Other studies address the importance of building relationships and communicating with parents to avoid miscommunication. Grace and Gerdes (2018) found that negative or infrequent communication leads to limited participation opportunities, which supports another finding in this study as parents reported not receiving important information in a timely manner. Latino parent engagement in rural areas is often hindered by teacher judgements toward non-English speakers and parents' frustration with the lack of communication in Spanish. Some of the communication issues could be solved if the school district were to hire more Latino teachers and administrators as this mismatch of demographics often creates misunderstandings (Garcia-Reid et al., 2005; LaRocque et al., 2011).

The third theme regarded the importance of cultural relevancy when working with diverse parents and particularly in understanding cultural norms surrounding education and work. Administrators and teachers in this study referred to the culture of work in the Latino population as one of the barriers to engagement. According to research, rural schools' efforts to engage parents are often seen as superficial or culturally denigrating, a deficit-based belief system that contributes to misunderstandings of both expectations and behaviors of parents. These schools are seen as subtractive spaces that do not value the social and cultural resources of immigrant families, further contributing to a lack of parental engagement (Ishimaru et al., 2016). The school leaders in this study believe that

the Latino culture promotes work over education, particularly as parents often work long hours. Both Shim (2018) and Coady et al., (2015) agreed that the long work hours of the parents may also cause other issues for consideration, such as childcare or transportation, which may make it difficult for them to be more engaged.

Other studies regarding cultural wealth and its impact on parent engagement also support this study. Administrators who are fully aware of their shortcomings and realize that more training is needed will benefit from the approach of acknowledging and embracing the cultural wealth in their community as Yosso's (2005) framework has shown that approach to have a great effect on parent engagement. Survey responses concerning the perceptions, attitudes, and norms of parents relate to a study by Bracke and Corts (2012), showing the potential for interventions and initiatives once teachers and administrators are more aware of the Latino parent perceptions. Better understanding of the culture and communication with the parents will be vital moving forward toward better engagement. García-Reid (2005) encouraged teachers and administrators to move away from deficit models that place blame on parents and students and look for ways to create equitable learning environments for diverse students.

Limitations

The results and conclusions are limited by some weaknesses. Although a pilot study for the parent survey was conducted, a complete pilot study for the survey was not conducted, due to the three different surveys used. The timing of the study was not optimal as surveys were distributed during the last few weeks of the school year making participation more difficult for school staff. In addition, parents were contacted through the district communication portal, "School Status", which as demonstrated through the data collected, is not an effective communication tool for reaching the majority of

parents. These limitations may have eliminated some participants from the study who could have provided valuable information.

COVID-19 was also a limitation of this study, causing issues of availability as well as added stress levels for participants. The focus group including parents that began in the Fall of 2019 could no longer continue and the focus group for teachers conducted in the beginning of the 2021-2022 school year was limited in participation numbers due to social distancing. Another limitation of the study is that the focus group of teachers used for clarification purposes regarding some of the responses did not involve any parents. Future research and follow-up could convene a focus group representing all of the participant groups to be able to spend time observing and highlighting areas of strengths as well as opportunities to better understand different perspectives.

Implications for the District

A needs assessment showing the weaknesses in current practices and discussing the importance of cultural wealth to parents will be presented to the school district. Through continued dialogue with a focus group and with district leadership, this study serves as another tool for better parent engagement leading to a long-term collaborative relationship between the school and Latino parents and the larger community. The findings of this study validate the importance of increasing Latino parent engagement in this school district to better address student achievement levels. As the Latino population continues to grow and as more rural schools undergo these demographic shifts, this research will give administrators and teachers information to help shape parental engagement practices using cultural relevancy to ensure success for all students. This is especially true for our newer immigrant communities growing in rural areas where

schools may not be equipped with the necessary resources and experience to serve the immigrant communities.

Lessons for the school district are evident in the concerns of communication which must continue to be addressed. Based on the data presented, the secondary schools, in particular, of this district may increase their efforts in this area. Administrators and teachers have learned that simply sending an email or a text is not considered meaningful communication in the Latino culture and efforts should be made to establish more personal relationships and to use other communication styles rather than relying solely on School Status, the technology platform currently used.

Implications for Practice

Latino parents need to have a place of cultural acceptance and appreciation to better engage with the school personnel and systems in place. The decisions of educators in leadership roles should be based on these concepts to understand how they are linked to gaining the trust of parents and, therefore, engaging them in the schools to influence student success. It is important that parents be engaged in leadership roles as well to better voice their concerns and to further engage other parents by giving them the necessary tools to better understand the educational process. Using this study as a guide, school leaders can examine policies in place that contribute to the unwelcome atmosphere of their schools and look for strategies for authentic parent engagement. School leaders should look for asset-based and not deficit-based curriculum to better engage all students and parents using cultural relevancy. Parent leadership programs should be implemented to help parents better understand the school system and the expectations for both themselves and their children.

Finally, preparation programs for teachers and principals should include diversity training and cultural awareness in practicum experiences, helping to teach that immigrant families in rural areas have much to offer and should be valued for their diversity, linguistic skills, social networks, survival skills, and perhaps most importantly, for their contributions to the economy of the community (Coady et al., 2015). Teacher and principal preparation programs should continue to recruit Latinos to the education field, especially given that the demographics consistently show an increase in this population. School leaders should be prepared to lead their new communities in new ways to reflect this shift in demographics.

Implications for Policy

It is important to acknowledge that deficit-based assumptions that focus on the lack of parent involvement often divert attention away from actual policies and attitudes already in place, which cause this lack of involvement. School leaders should examine the policies that contribute to the unwelcome atmosphere of their schools. It is important in future policy to understand how parental aspirations may vary among races and ethnicities, particularly among first and second generations of immigrants. Policies should be developed with inclusivity in mind to continue to engage parents for increased educational outcomes in the schools. Policies requiring diversity training for all school personnel should be implemented to continue to serve our diverse populations and give all students equitable opportunities. The state-approved curriculum required for preservice teachers and for aspiring principals should be set to include culturally relevant teaching and leadership techniques, as well as the methodology for engaging parents in the decision-making of the educational program of their students.

As this study indicates, valuable lessons can be learned through continued dialogue, both through the use of focus groups and larger parent meetings. Engaging parents will help to improve overall student success as parents feel more accepted and welcomed and students develop a sense of belonging with more respect toward their culture. Building trust and rapport will allow for leadership development within the Latino community as parents learn to engage and negotiate with school administrators and staff. In the future school-provided activities that encourage social networking among parents and other community members should become an integral part of school culture for family engagement to be a collaborative effort. These lessons will be valuable to all schools with high Latino populations, particularly those in rural areas with new immigrant populations. As the Latino population continues to grow, it will become imperative for school leaders to reach out to the Latino communities and bridge the cultural gaps by acknowledging their cultural wealth and making them partners in the education of their children.

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Literature Review of Parent Engagement for Latino Student Success

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Latino Parent Engagement and Student Outcomes

Introduction

Parental involvement in students' learning is an important aspect of children's education and is directly related to students' academic performance and engagement (Oswald et al., 2017). Parent involvement affects many areas of student outcomes, including: a) academic achievement; b) school attendance; c) graduation rates; d) educational aspirations; e) positive classroom behavior; f) enrollment in more challenging curricula, and g) favorable attitudes towards school (Bracke & Corts, 2012). This involvement is critical for all demographics, however limited research has been conducted on the Latino population (Jeynes, 2017). A study conducted by Jeynes (2017) discovered an association between parental involvement and the academic achievement of Latinos is quite consistent and reasonably strong (p. 23). This literature review will investigate the use of culturally responsive practices to ensure better parent engagement and improved community relations. It will further investigate the concept of *familismo* when working with Latino families and how culturally responsive leadership, together with parent and community engagement, and improved teacher preparation practices can all make a difference for Latino student outcomes, particularly when working with new, rural immigrant communities.

Statement of Purpose

The research focus for this review is on leadership and the social network theory with educational leaders, particularly those in administrative roles, as the primary subjects in examining the practices they employ to better engage Latino parents and to encourage positive family dynamics and higher achievement for Latino students in

school. The purpose of this review is to address the issues of the Latino achievement gap that can be improved by utilizing culturally responsive practices to ensure better parent engagement and improved community relations. The intent of the research is to look at the Latino achievement gap through the lens of parent engagement and to a) understand the different needs and values within the Latino family dynamics; and b) to explore the practices that educational leaders must improve upon to better engage with parents and to build bridges with the communities that they serve. Based on the literature reviewed, the discussion will focus on various practices, those of understanding the concept of *familismo*, and the view that Latino parents have of their role in the education of their children, how social network theory and culturally responsive leadership can work together to encourage parent and community engagement, and the importance of teacher preparation, particularly when working with new, rural immigrant communities.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework of this literature review is informed by work done by Epstein (2010), whose framework of parent engagement has become a model for educators, defining six areas for effective parent engagement. These areas are constructive parenting, communicating with the school, volunteering at the school, facilitating children's learning at home, participating in decision making at the school, and collaborating within the community to improve the education system. A second framework used in the study is Yosso's (2005) work on community cultural wealth, which indicates that as parents gain an appreciation for their own cultural capital, both parents and students will have increased confidence and strength in terms of leadership. The research has shown that minority groups do not achieve as well when their learning

styles, language, and culture are marginalized or disregarded. These two frameworks together are appropriate for this study in showing how culturally relevant leadership practices can have a positive effect on the type of parent engagement that schools encourage, according to Epstein's (2010) model.

Epstein's (2010) framework demonstrates that parents' active engagement in their students' lives and education makes a significant difference in their development and academic success. The appropriateness of the framework for this literature review is based on learning proactive parenting skills with their children and modeling for them in terms of reaching higher goals and thereby narrowing the achievement gap for Latino students. As parents learn to engage in the various strategies as outlined by Epstein (2010), students will achieve at higher levels and will become more adept at decision-making, particularly at the school level. School leaders who choose to use approaches of embracing cultural wealth as outlined by Yosso (2005) will have better outcomes for both parent engagement and student achievement.

The final component of the framework is Epstein's (2010) sixth strategy for parent engagement, that of utilizing the social network theory to connect with other parents and thus have a more active role in community engagement practices. This helps to develop strong community and school collaborations, which work to eliminate barriers for both parents and students and provide opportunities for parents to become leaders in the school environment. Lastly, this literature review will discuss key considerations for future teacher and principal preparation programs and the effect those can have on the Latino achievement gap when combined with effective parent engagement, particularly with rural, immigrant communities.

Sources and Search Procedures

Scholarly peer-reviewed and empirical articles were searched online utilizing the Cornette Library on the West Texas A&M University website and Google Scholar as the principal sources. While these search engines served as primary sources, the reference section of several articles provided cross-referencing, leading to other articles that matched the parameters of the literature review. These articles were then verified with information in Cornette Library online to be certain that they were peer-reviewed.

Keywords in the searches included: *Latino/Hispanic students, Latino/Hispanic student success, parental engagement/involvement, high school graduation rates and Latino/Hispanic students, Latino/Hispanic achievement gap, immigrant students, academic achievement, minority schools, rural schools, leadership, principal leadership, principal decision-making, social network, and culturally responsive teaching/leadership.* Keywords were often searched using Boolean operators such as *and* and *or*.

As seen in the search term list, there was some overlap of how terms were listed. For example, both Latino and Hispanic were used, often interchangeably. Parental engagement and involvement were also found to be used interchangeably. School leaders were sometimes referred as principals or superintendents, and sometimes as teachers. Every effort was made to try to limit the scope of dates to the last twenty years, preferring those articles published in the last ten for the most accurate and timely information as the Latino population is quickly changing in numbers and more information is rapidly becoming available regarding student success.

The databases that provided the majority of the articles were: EBSCOhost Education Source, JSTOR Arts & Sciences IV, SAGE Premier, and Taylor and Francis

Online. Table 1 gives an overview of the academic journals that provided at least two separate articles for this review, including journals of behavioral sciences, education, leadership, and psychology.

Table 1

Review of majority of academic journals utilized in presentation of findings in literature review

Academic Journal Names	Number of Academic Journals
American Educational Research Journal	3
Bilingual Research Journal	2
Education and Urban Society	7
Educational Administration Quarterly	11
Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis	2
Educational Management Administration and Leadership	2
Hispanic Journal of Behavioral Sciences	2
International Journal of Leadership in Education	3
Journal of Business Ethics	2
Journal of Educational Research	4
Journal of Hispanic Higher Education	3
Journal of Latinos and Education	4
Journal of Management	2
Journal of Research on Leadership Education	2
Journal of School Leadership	4
Journal of Youth and Adolescence	3
Multicultural Education	2
Professional School Counseling	2
Psychology in the Schools	5
Research in Higher Education	3
Review of Educational Research	3
School Community Journal	3
School Leadership and Management	2
Urban Education	5

A framework of articles was established to best determine which articles to use according to the research focus of the study and the framework based on Epstein (2010)

and Yosso (2005). This framework was used to organize the articles to provide smooth transitions between subheadings and paragraphs, with some articles having crossover information and therefore used in multiple subheadings. The focus was also on articles that were identified as scholarly empirical, peer-reviewed articles. The organization of these articles is displayed in Table 2.

Table 2

Review of scholarly journals in presentation of findings or literature review

Type of Sources	Number of Sources
Empirical peer-reviewed sources collected	93
Empirical, not peer-reviewed sources collected	8
Non-empirical, not peer-reviewed sources collected	3
Empirical sources on Latino achievement gap	14
Empirical sources on family dynamics	12
Empirical sources on parent engagement	19
Empirical sources on rural immigrant communities	18
Empirical sources on social network theory	13
Empirical sources on leadership styles	16
Empirical sources on principal leadership	20
Empirical sources on parent leadership	7
Empirical sources on future teacher education	13

In the years spanning 1998 to 2020, 104 journal articles were collected and sorted by themes and relevance to the research focus, then organized and summarized in a table by year and author (Table 3 on p. 48). In addition, eight non-peer-reviewed articles and three non-empirical sources were included. The articles selected for the review were those best related to the research focus and encompassed areas leading to a better comprehension of the literature available concerning the topic of Latino parent engagement. These articles were ones that provide information regarding the leadership practices for engaging Latino parents that may lead to increased student success for Latino students as well as building family dynamics and community relations. The

literature articles selected also provided information on understanding cultural relevancy and the role it plays in engaging parents and in increasing leadership among parents.

Articles further addressed needed reform in principal and teacher preparation programs to better serve the changing demographics of the school districts.

Presentation of Findings

Latino Student Achievement Gap

The Latino population is the largest, youngest, and fastest-growing ethnic minority group in the United States, as indicated by the population records of July 2007, with children of Latino descent making up 24% of those younger than age 5 and 34% of those under 18 years of age (Hill & Torres, 2010). Although high school graduation rates for Latinos have improved, the post-secondary completion rate of bachelor's degrees for this ethnic group shows that only 14% have a four-year degree, compared to 33% of whites, 19% of blacks, and 51% of Asian-Americans (Pew Research Center, 2014). These achievement gaps can be seen as early as kindergarten, where twice as many Latino children as White children fall into the lowest quartile for reading and math at the beginning of the academic year (Gándara, 2015), putting them already at a disadvantage for educational achievement. Latino children have the lowest levels of access to preschool than any other racial or ethnic group, which, when combined with issues of poverty, lack of resources, and beginning school with lower levels of English proficiency, contribute to the educational outcomes for Latino students (Gándara, 2015).

The low high school completion rates may also be attributed to the fact that immigrant families are quickly finding new destinations, many of them in rural areas where schools are not equipped with the necessary resources and experience to serve the

immigrant communities (Altschul, 2011; Lowenhaupt, 2014). While many studies have looked at the established urban areas where Latino immigrants have settled, very few studies have included the rural areas of these newer immigrants. These schools and neighborhoods often lack specific resources for immigrants and ethnic support systems to meet the diverse needs of these students (Potochnick, 2014). Students may lack access to highly qualified teachers, appropriate curriculum and instruction, and in addition, may have to tolerate negative teacher and administrator perceptions of Latino students and their families (Madrid, 2011).

An issue that further impedes better understanding of the achievement gaps presented between Latino and White students is that many are unwilling to discuss gaps based on race or ethnicity, focusing instead only on socioeconomic factors. Too often, the achievement gap research considers only intrinsic factors of both students and school, without taking into consideration family or cultural background (Leavitt & Hess, 2017). The study of acculturation is an area that is relevant to academic achievement as these cultural transitions influence family dynamics, which in turn may influence students' academic achievement goals (Miranda et al., 2007). For Latino students, *familismo* plays a large role in determining future academic endeavors where students may feel pressure to help the family economically rather than pursue their own individual goals, creating undue stress and family conflict for these students leading them to simply give up on their academic goals (Turcios-Cotto & Milan, 2013). *Familismo* is a deeply held value of placing priority on family and involves the willingness to sacrifice for the greater good of the family (Stacciarini et al., 2015). For this reason, Latino students may face additional stress due to family responsibilities that often interfere with their academic endeavors.

Trying to assimilate Latinos by encouraging them to adopt mainstream values could actually be harmful in terms of academic success; therefore, intervention measures should use acculturation to foster academics. (Santiago et al., 2014).

Research indicates that 20% of Latinos live below the poverty line, which limits resources available to students and causes them to feel responsible for choosing employment over college, with only 22% of Latinos enrolled in post-secondary education in 2000, compared to 39% of White students (Desmond & Turley, 2009). Figures for 2018 show progress in this area for Latinos, but they are still behind, with 36% of Latinos enrolled compared to 42% of White students (NCES, 2018). These figures are important because in the United States, economic success is often tied to the completion of high school and the attainment of a four-year college degree (Spees et al., 2017). While various studies have indicated that Latino students and parents both have high expectations and hopes for students' future goals, family dynamics often impact the attainment of those achievement goals. Furthermore, Latino students are much more likely to depend on social support from family than other ethnic groups and are more likely to emphasize the importance of following parental advice (Halfond et al., 2012), further demonstrating the importance of working with the family as a unit when working with Latino students.

Family Dynamics and Contributions

Due to the achievement gap, school personnel often believe that Latino parents do not care about education, a mindset resulting from negative attitudes of school administration and the lack of personnel efforts to relate to Spanish-speaking parents. By using parent engagement models based on the experiences of White, middle-class

parents, they do not consider culturally relevant approaches that may be more conducive to engaging Latino parents other than the traditional expected roles of parent-teacher conferences, field trips, or volunteering in a classroom. In general, these formal activities are those where parents are physically present or because they contact the school directly (Auerbach, 2007, 2009; LeFevre & Shaw, 2012; Pérez Carreón et al., 2005), something which Latino parents are less likely to do. Latino parents view their role quite differently, one in which it is their job to pass on *consejos* (advice) of hard work and other values such as *familismo* (strong family ties), *respeto* (respect for self and others), and *educación* (academics, but more importantly morals and upbringing), all of which are seen to be just as important as academic areas, placing parents in the center of their child's informal education (De Gaetano, 2007; Quiñones & Kiyama, 2014; Woolley et al., 2009).

Latino parents view their involvement in school different from the dominant culture. They often see their role as modeling good behavior and respect for their children, while it is the responsibility of the school to impart knowledge (Vega et al., 2017). In this way, immigrant parents often promote student success by a form of interdependence and thus communicate expectations of high achievement. Previous research suggests the importance of communication within the family and has found that positive relationships with family relate directly to academic expectations and performance (Spees et al., 2017). Kao (2004) further stated that immigrant parents must convey their ambitions to children by talking about school and social activities at home as Latino youth generally respond favorably to discussions about school and future aspirations. While the sense of *familismo* has positive outcomes, the close family network

does have a drawback in that often students' academic success can be weighed down by family obligations and daily demands on their time, thereby reducing their capacity to fully engage in academic endeavors (Spees et al., 2017).

Studies involving high school students show that parent involvement continues to be important, demonstrating that students are more academically engaged when their parents are involved, particularly through encouragement and expressing the importance of education (Wang & Sheikh-Khalil, 2014). It was further found that parents of lower socioeconomic status may not be able to effectively engage with their children based on limited resources and information on how to do so. These parents may also suffer stress from working long hours or have financial struggles or a sense of incompetence, which may affect their ability to engage with their children at school, even while they may continue to do so at home (Wang & Sheikh-Khalil, 2014).

Parent responses to a survey by Schneider and Arnot (2018) indicated that employment is the main barrier to being more engaged at school, particularly for those who work in agricultural jobs in rural areas. A second barrier was identified as a lack of communication skills in English. According to these findings, schools must work to understand the perceived barriers and create strategies to better enable parents to be engaged. However, school personnel often do not consider these social or cultural norms and often assume that immigrant parents understand the school system and simply choose not to be involved.

Parental Involvement and Engagement

Many schools do not distinguish between parental involvement and parental engagement: parent involvement is a passive role, while engagement encourages parents

to become change agents for the school and community (Ishimaru, 2019; Reynolds et al., 2015). Parent involvement includes the interactions that parents have with their children and the schools to help encourage academic achievement. It can include a wide range of practices and may encompass expectations for achievement as well as educational beliefs (Toren, 2013). Epstein's (2010) framework of parent involvement has become a model for educators and includes six areas: constructive parenting, communicating with the school, volunteering at the school, facilitating children's learning at home, participating in decision making at the school, and collaborating within the community to improve the education system (Park & Holloway, 2013, p. 106). While this is the goal, for working with parents, it is also clear that not all parents are able or willing to be involved in all areas. Several studies found that low-income and/or ethnic minority parents are less likely to participate and may benefit from outreach efforts to encourage their involvement. This is especially true of Latino parents who may be more involved in the home but appear less likely to have high educational expectations for their students or to engage in postsecondary plans for education (Park & Holloway, 2013). Parent participation may be difficult to organize and continue as schools become more diverse, and teachers do not always have appropriate information or training needed to work with parents, a problem intensified by a mismatch of teacher and parent demographics which can create misunderstandings in situations of cultural differences (Garcia-Reid et al., 2005; LaRocque et al., 2011).

Further research has indicated that higher levels of family engagement are associated with social and academic skill development and that parents who engage in educational activities at home communicate clear expectations for achievement and help

to integrate the school curriculum in the home. However, while family engagement has been shown to provide positive outcomes for language, literacy, math, and social skills, it is noted that Latino parents are found to engage in fewer home enrichment activities (McWayne et al., 2016). It is further indicated that Latino families prefer home-based engagement over school contact, a practice that suggests the importance of this ethnic group in maintaining heritage cultural values and practices. The low engagement of Spanish-speaking families also appears to differentiate in the level of support of male versus female child, seeming to show that male students are left on their own more frequently as part of the cultural norms, which may be linked to Latino males having the highest rates of school dropout among all demographic groups (McWayne et al., 2016). These Latino males also face complications with familial capital as their fathers may encourage them to enroll in postsecondary education but expect them to work full time as well, which impacts their persistence in school (Saenz et al., 2017).

A study by García-Reid et al. (2005) maintained that it is the responsibility of schools to remove barriers that may inhibit parental involvement and to establish a welcoming environment for parents. This can be done by creating equitable learning environments for diverse students and moving away from deficit models that place the blame on students and families, looking instead to the issues of poverty and low societal expectations for Latino youth. Jeynes (2003) indicated that involving parents has a positive effect on academic outcomes, with African American and Latino students benefiting the most with the additional benefit of stronger student-teacher relationships. When teachers create more equitable learning environments for diverse students, they are better able to serve as change agents for those students (García-Reid et al., 2005).

All levels of academic achievement, including GPA, standardized tests, and college enrollment, appear to be affected by parental involvement, thereby indicating a positive impact on children across race and academic outcomes. This has led many researchers to learn more about the specifics of parental involvement and to try to clearly define what is meant by that to determine which aspects benefit children the most (Jeynes, 2003). According to Gil (2019), traditional concepts of parental involvement have centered on academic issues for students and formal types of involvement for parents, such as parent organizations and parent and teacher conferences. With this emphasis on hierarchy, it is less likely that these interactions will become meaningful. Torre and Murphy (2016) suggested models that include “care, respect, trust, and authentic membership, shared vision, and collective work” (p. 204), which led to approachability, empowerment, and development of capacity for both parents and teachers.

The difference between parental involvement and parental engagement and whether they are interchangeable is still unclear. Previous studies have provided mixed evidence, depending on the type of engagement, and also taking into consideration parenting styles and family background. Some researchers believe that parental engagement goes well beyond parental involvement and others say that involvement and engagement represent a continuum. Parental engagement seems to have a variety of indicators, including “parent-school involvement, parental extracurricular participation, and parent-child communication” (Liu & White, 2017 p. 33). Family engagement can also represent the aspirations and sacrifices made by Latino families to achieve upward mobility and show a deep value for education (Hill & Torres, 2010; Quiñones & Kiyama,

2014). Still, others believe that involvement is more important than engagement because efforts to engage parents without involving them first have proven to be unsuccessful (Jeynes, 2018). Pérez Carreón et al. (2005) defined parent engagement as “practices embedded in cultural spaces” (p. 469). A framework designed by Ferlazzo (2011) identified parent involvement as leading with the mouth by identifying areas of needs and goals where parents can contribute. Parent engagement is identified as leading with the ears by listening to parents’ ideas and thereby gaining partners in the process.

Considerations for Rural Immigrant Latino Parents

It is perhaps the idea of listening to parents that causes issues with the non-English speaking immigrant population of Latinos, particularly in rural areas. Lowenhaupt (2014) referred to a New Latino Diaspora, with a large growth of Latinos in new geographical areas, particularly rural areas. Immigrants move to these areas in larger numbers due to agriculture-based work opportunities (Díaz et al., 2017). Schools in these areas lack the expertise of working with immigrant populations and therefore, must find culturally appropriate means for engagement by understanding cultural wealth, thereby allowing parents to be more involved in their students’ education. Because these schools have little experience with immigrant students, they often lack the resources to address ethnic and linguistic diversity (Lowenhaupt, 2014) and, notably, often face resistance to do so within their own administration and staff. Cultural values and differences cause other barriers, as well. Often parents perceive negative stereotypes and racial tension from non-Latino teachers and therefore view those teachers in a negative manner. Parental involvement is higher when both parents and teachers are Latino; however, rural schools do not have the capacity to staff Latino teachers (Grace & Gerdes, 2019).

Obstacles to effective communication between teachers and parents include the lack of support and training for teachers and the lack of time and resources for parents to take time off work (Shim, 2018). These working-class parents often work long hours and may not be available during regular school hours. In addition, they may need childcare for younger children or have issues with limited transportation (Coady et al., 2015). Rural schools' efforts to engage parents are often seen as superficial or culturally denigrating, a deficit-based belief system that often contributes to misunderstandings of both expectations and behaviors of parents. These schools are seen as subtractive spaces that do not value the social and cultural resources of immigrant families, further contributing to a lack of parental engagement (Ishimaru et al., 2016). Miscommunication between parents and teachers is common, especially when their expectations for parent involvement are different. Often negative or infrequent communications can lead to limited possibilities for parents to be involved (Grace & Gerdes, 2018).

Parental involvement in rural areas, particularly with students who are English language learners, relates positively to second language learning, motivation, academic achievement, and decisions to attend college (Shim, 2018). Conversely, factors that inhibit parental involvement of Latinos in rural areas are often based on teachers' judgments toward English Language Learners (ELL) and their parents, with parents frustrated with the lack of communication in Spanish, often causing them to become fearful of speaking up due to the perceived hierarchy. Teachers in rural areas, mostly White with little exposure to diversity, must be reminded that lack of English proficiency does not equate to lack of intelligence (Shim, 2018). Latino parents are becoming somewhat less passive and have begun to advocate for themselves and their children as

partners in the educational system, leading to capacity building and relationship building among both educators and parents (Ishimaru, 2019). A recent study by Stone et al. (2020) looked specifically at parents encouraging Latinas from small, rural towns to pursue higher education degrees, where they perform especially well in school, often as a reflection of the sacrifices that family members have made for them. Latinas are particularly influenced by the matriarchs of the family and many choose to remain close to home because of those cultural ties, while others look at going outside of their communities to attend college as a way to seek a better future than their mothers may have had. This matriarchal influence is seen more predominantly as Latino fathers are less involved in their children's education (Grace & Gerdes, 2018).

Nurturing a community's cultural wealth serves as leadership development for the Latino community as they are then able to address issues that are important to them and to teach others to negotiate with school administrators and staff (Curry & Holter, 2019; Fernández & Paredes Scribner, 2018; Ishimaru, 2019). Yosso (2005) recognized that many believed Latino parents and other marginalized groups might not have financial wealth, but that they could pass on other types of social or cultural wealth to their children. As parents gain an appreciation for their own cultural capital, it leads to more confidence and strength for both parents and students as research has shown that minority groups do not achieve as well when learning styles, language and culture are marginalized or disregarded (Auerbach, 2007, 2009; De Gaetano, 2007; Larrotta & Yamamura, 2011; Sabrin, 2020). In a study led by Guzmán (2018), most parents reported having aspirational capital, wanting their children to have a better future with better jobs than they had, and linguistic capital, recognizing the value of bilingual skills for their

children in future jobs. At the same time, parents recognize their own navigational capital of learning the educational system in the United States to better assist their children in school (Guzmán et al., 2018).

Social Network Theory

Cultural wealth also allows parents to be more engaged when they feel invited and especially when they feel connected to other parents, often by way of volunteering or working together on committees. In the case of Latino parents, those relationships can lead to greater self-efficacy and involvement as they learn from other parents, particularly with a shared culture and language, making them more comfortable in the schools. Parents also become more aware of social issues that affect them and their students and bond with other parents to advocate for needed change (Curry & Holter, 2019; Fernández & Paredes Scribner, 2018; Ishimaru, 2019). Activities that encourage social networks and community engagement should become an integral part of school culture for family engagement to be a collaborative effort (Auerbach, 2009). Parent involvement efforts that focus on parent needs will be more successful and help school officials better understand parent motivation. Parent social networks are a great resource and a source of motivation; when schools help provide those networks, they instill confidence in parent abilities rather than the usual deficit model where parents are made to feel lacking in skills and expertise (Curry et al., 2016). This is an important process for parents as they observe other parents through modeling and receive encouragement to act and become engaged in the schools, further enhancing partnership efforts between home and school. These partnership efforts help parents gain confidence for continued involvement in the learning process of their students (Curry et al., 2016).

These efforts may be especially important when working with Latino parents to better draw in those with limited connections to the school. Immigrant and minority families often have constraints due to limited social ties and language barriers (Raymond-Flesch et al., 2017), but parents are often more comfortable attending events if they know other parents who are there. In this way, schools benefit from bridging the social network gaps between parents and being culturally responsive (Curry & Holter, 2019). When educational leaders use culturally responsive practices by addressing community needs and not just school goals, they become much more successful in family engagement, particularly as a “commitment to social justice and educational equity for disenfranchised Latino families” (Gil, 2019, p. 377).

Latino communities rely heavily on social capital, particularly when there is a large minority presence in schools among both students and teachers. Teachers who share the same ethnicity of the students share encouragement, social support, and mentorship that Latino immigrant students may not have otherwise. Regardless of whether Latinos are a majority in their schools, staff need to work with both students and parents to provide a sense of community (Lee & Klugman, 2013). Positive relationships of students with teachers have a direct effect on student behavior at school, and while this relationship is important for student success, it is even more important to have positive connections between Latino parents and teachers as this relationship has the greatest effect on academic measures of students (Jeynes, 2003). The social network connections between students, teachers, and parents help reduce misunderstandings of cultural differences and contribute to students having higher levels of respect for teachers, based on the respect shown to their parents. Latino children are taught to respect adults, and

seeing their parents and teachers working together for their education leads to better student outcomes (Reyes & Elias, 2011; Woolley et al., 2009). Students must see a positive parent-teacher relationship as it influences not only parental involvement but also the student-teacher relationship due to a sense of teamwork between parent and teacher and an acknowledgment by the teacher of parents' efforts (Grace & Gerdes, 2018). The leadership practices in schools is an important component to ensuring these positive relationships.

Effective Leadership Approaches for Parent Engagement

Effective leadership involves shapeshifting; rather than focusing on acquiring more power individually, leaders give power to others by empowering them that would often increase a leader's own power (Lumby, 2018). There are several theories of leadership, which would empower parents, and therefore contribute to student success. Since the Latino population has a great emphasis on cultural wealth, the behavioral approach may be seen as effective. This theory provides a framework for assessing the behaviors of others, and according to Nordbäck and Espinosa (2015), the approach becomes even more significant when working with groups where cultural values may affect leaders' behavior, demonstrating the importance of coordinating behavioral leadership actions. Given that the situation with immigrant Latino parents is a newer concern to schools and causes them to rethink what they already do, the situational approach is another theory that may be useful for leaders of parent engagement. This approach takes into consideration both individual and organizational needs by recognizing that situations change, and adjustments based on individual behaviors may be necessary as new needs arise (Walls, 2019).

One of the most popular leadership approaches is that of transformational leadership, an approach that transforms both leaders and followers and develops the leadership potential of others by giving followers the opportunity to learn through delegation, thereby allowing them autonomy in learning new tasks and problem solving (Jiang & Chen, 2016). This approach has been successful in organizational development, and while the use in educational settings has produced positive outcomes in school environments and teacher motivation, the effects on student achievement have not been shown to be as significant (Shatzer et al., 2014). However, it is possible that the four factors that make up this approach could be adapted for work with parental involvement in schools, which may lead to higher student achievement: a) inspirational motivation; b) individualized consideration; c) idealized influence; and d) intellectual stimulation (Shatzer et al., 2014). Each of these factors alone may provide individual opportunities for growth; when used together, the results establish autonomy by creating a common vision and allowing followers the opportunity to work together to accomplish the vision (Shatzer et al., 2014). It is known that teacher trust is vital to the success of schools and especially for meaningful parent engagement. School leaders can influence teachers in these areas through transformational and instructional leadership by inspiring and encouraging collaboration among staff and parents toward common goals and shared challenges (Leithwood et al., 2010).

The theory of authentic leadership, developed from research on transformational leadership, is a relatively newer approach that has gained the attention of researchers and practitioners alike and stems from the need of followers to have leaders they can trust (Nyberg & Sveningsson, 2014). In a school setting, social and relational trust among

adults is vital in the achievement of students (Goddard, 2003). The most important steps to building trust with immigrant Latinos in a rural setting is to learn about their experiences and their needs and then affirm the strengths that they have in family and community (Coady et al., 2015). Authentic leadership focuses on the ability of a leader to be able to establish positive team relationships as well as demonstrate ethical decision-making processes, an approach that lends itself well to educational leadership (Shapira-Lischchinsky, 2014). Not only is this important for principals, but also for teachers acting as mentors as they lead new teachers to develop pedagogy and learning initiatives (Shapira-Lischinsky & Levy-Gazenfrantz, 2015). In looking at this approach in terms of possible authentic parent engagement, it has been shown that higher leadership effectiveness allows educational leaders to create authentic spaces in all levels of the organization, schools, and communities (Nyberg & Sveningsson, 2014; Shapira-Lischinsky & Levy-Gazenfrantz, 2015).

Similar to both transformational and authentic leadership is the theory of servant leadership, a theory that has received renewed interest as organizations look to add components of social responsibility and ethical leadership (Lapointe & Vandenberghe, 2018; van Dierendonck, 2011). Servant leadership consists of seven leader behaviors which are very applicable to effective parent engagement: a) emotional healing; b) creating value for the community; c) conceptual skills; d) empowering followers; e) helping followers grow and succeed; f) putting followers first; and g) behaving ethically (Lapointe & Vandenberghe, 2018). Based on these behaviors, servant leaders have the ability to influence both the behavior of followers and the culture of the organization (Lapointe & Vandenberghe, 2018), as well as enhance the group's social capital

(Linuesa-Langreo et al., 2018). This type of leadership is well suited to the field of education as the purpose of a servant leader is to cultivate the potential of the followers (Letizia, 2014) and is based on a belief that people are an organization's most important resource (Barnes, 2015). Servant leadership may be seen as the ultimate form of leadership, that which focuses on the good of the whole and the members of it and it allows leaders to share control with followers, which will serve to further empower parents (van Dierendonck, 2011).

The newer approaches of transformational, authentic, and servant leadership put the emphasis on the needs of the followers and in how to engage them to create change moving forward within the organization. With the Latino community emphasis on cultural wealth and *familismo*, servant leadership may be the best approach for providing opportunities for parent engagement. By achieving partnerships through servant leadership, the teachers and administrators are creating a family atmosphere that recognizes cultural wealth, individuality, and welcomes all families, not just the easy to reach ones (Epstein, 2010). Schools that support reciprocal relationships where parent needs and school needs are considered, create conditions for shared responsibility and mutual goals for children's education (Curry et al., 2016).

Implications for Administrators in Leadership

For Latino students and parents to feel empowered, school personnel need to be proactive in understanding and including cultural sensitivity in all areas. Teacher preparation programs must include diversity training for all and acknowledgment of the importance of cultural wealth in parent and student engagement. Parental leadership programs benefit not only students and parents but also teachers and administrators as

they break down barriers of communication and cultural misunderstandings (De Gaetano, 2007; Fernández & Paredes Scribner, 2018; Ishimaru, 2019; Lowenhaupt, 2014).

Principal preparation programs must include training to make sure that leaders infuse family engagement throughout the curriculum as assets-based and not as deficit-based strategies meant to correct parents (Ishimaru, 2019). It is important to value the assets these immigrant families in rural areas have, such as their diversity, linguistic skills, social networks, survival skills, and their contributions to the economy of the community (Coady et al., 2015). Principal preparation programs must also include practicum experiences aligned with this view. Practices among principal candidates and current administrators must focus on nurturing community cultural wealth with the ability to lead both within their school building and outside in the larger school community (Auerbach, 2009; Fernández & Paredes Scribner, 2018; Khalifa, 2012). This is especially true for schools in a majority-minority community where resistance to the new immigrant communities still exists.

Wang (2018) discussed social capital as a dominant concept in educational leadership; when integrated with trust, it becomes relational. Including cultural relevance when engaging Latino parents is important for building trust and establishing relationships with them. Without these relationships and frequent interactions. Adams et al. (2009) maintained that parents would not develop “emotional and cognitive connections through which trust beliefs form” (p. 29) and allow parents to learn appropriate measures of influence. Trust as a leadership model from principal to the teacher does not always translate to higher student achievement, although much of the research suggests that it does. A study by Wahlstrom and Louis (2008), while

recognizing the importance of trust, concluded that depending on and trusting in principals for instructional support is a passive form of leadership and that trust among teachers themselves may achieve more changes in practice. Therefore, the same may be true for teachers and parents; teachers will rely on each other to help establish parent relationships and shared responsibility for cultural relevance, rather than waiting for guidance from school leaders. Studies on the science of learning for educational leadership maintains that accountability increases when all school learners, including parents, are supported and that educational programs and best practices are best viewed from a lens of learning (Myran & Sutherland, 2019), allowing for the idea of cultural relevance as a new best practice to be learned. As principals consider their role as school leaders, they must decide to become community leaders, advocating for the causes of the community, regardless of race or ethnicity, thereby building trust and rapport in the schools among minority or immigrant communities. As parents feel more accepted and welcomed, student academic outcomes will also increase (Auerbach, 2009; Khalifa, 2012).

Principals as School and Community Leaders

While much of the research has focused on teachers working effectively with parents, there is also a need for principals to understand the important role they have in gatekeeping. They often hold the key to whether parents feel comfortable in engaging with the school or whether they are intimidated. This focus on principals is important as they have the best knowledge for available resources and can best promote reforms in their schools. They are also best positioned for empowerment due to district and state

policies, and as such, may also be held as the most accountable when there is a lack of progress (Khalifa et al., 2016).

Principals should acknowledge and embrace their role as community builders, particularly with marginalized families (Barr & Saltmarsh, 2014). An important area of leadership for the school principal is to determine a definition for the school's parental engagement that meets the expectations of all stakeholders, including teachers, parents, and community leaders. This could be the first step to better establish and improve communication with parents and for them to become more engaged (Young et al., 2013). It must be pointed out that some schools may not welcome the idea of further engaging with the community for various reasons. Those schools that have already received negative feedback may feel less likely to expose themselves to the community, and teachers experiencing burnout may be much less likely to offer to extend their workday. The final barrier to successful community engagement stems from the teachers' and administrators' attitudes and perceptions of their community. When they believe that their community does not care or does not have the necessary resources, they may not attempt to engage the community, regardless of the contributions that can be made to student success (Sanders, 2001).

Principals working with immigrant Latino communities must consider the area of social justice and lead with contextually responsive leadership, not only at school but also in the community. In contextually responsive leadership, principals should see the institutional and societal issues of poverty, racism, and inequity that worry their students and families. Although social justice may not be a part of principal preparation, it must be considered as an element in their leadership to better prepare school leaders to work

toward equity and to understand the community's needs for social justice (Reed & Swaminathan, 2016). The work that K-12 principals do in minority communities should have an equity and social justice lens with culturally relevant theories (Rodríguez et al., 2016). It is also important when working with Latino families to understand the concept of *familismo* as community and to take advantage of the opportunities that community organizations offer in terms of active participation for parents. School leaders must look for meaningful and culturally appropriate strategies and create alliances within existing establishments in the community, such as churches and community centers, where parents may already feel valued. Working together as a school and community may translate into better parent engagement at the schools (Aspiazu et al., 1998).

Another area of community-based outreach considers communities with high levels of poverty, which is disproportionately seen in those with high numbers of ethnic minorities. A study by Gordon and Cui (2014) discussed the importance of addressing the limitations of the community when considering initiatives to enhance parent involvement in schools. The community engagement model is based on relationships that should be contextual with school leaders and teachers taking time to learn from the families through authentic engagement. Too often, parent engagement is seen as an extra component or used when issues with students arise, rather than making it a central element in school practice (Torre & Murphy, 2016). School leaders must lead in ways that produce new solutions. It is important that school leaders spend time within the communities and get to know the families with whom they hope to engage (Reed & Swaminathan, 2016). Too often, schools continue adding to the injustices of the marginalized communities through

their policies and practices that often benefit only those students from more privileged backgrounds (Rodela & Bertrand, 2018).

Parents as Leaders

It is for this reason that parents should be encouraged to become leaders as these non-dominant parents are often seen as having no voice to influence change and should be recognized as stakeholders whose leadership and power cannot be ignored (Rodela & Bertrand, 2018). This process of meeting parents where they are, both in cultural awareness and knowledge, and helping them feel included in decision-making also helps to build relationships between parents and teachers as they work to promote change in the schools and the larger community (Guerra & Nelson, 2013). By drawing on their strong sense of *familismo* and of community and as they become more connected with the schools, they will become leaders within the community. One way to empower parents and give them an active role and ownership of their child's achievement is to give them the necessary tools to better understand the educational process and to encourage them to become more involved in the shared responsibility between home and school (Pstross et al., 2016). By educating the parents about school expectations, processes, and available resources, schools can help them achieve their dreams of success not only for their students but often for themselves as well. Allowing parents to complete this type of training through the schools and then celebrating them with a graduation ceremony helps them share testimonies as they begin to lead other parents through the process (Pstross et al., 2016).

Future Decision-Making

Principals should make decisions that affect both internal and external stakeholders who may have very different goals, expectations, and demands. Internally, a principal may deal with staff and students, while the external components include parents, school board, and policymakers at the community, state, and federal levels (Shaked & Schechter, 2019). A study by White-Smith (2012) regarding best practices for student outcomes of minority and low-income students observed how principals served as the instructional leaders of their schools but did not include teachers in the development and participation of the school community model. Since teachers play such an essential role in making parent engagement successful, it is believed that integrated leadership among leaders and their staff would better help to engage all stakeholders in the process, including parents (White-Smith, 2012). While there is much discussion about involving parents as leaders in school decisions, the research is limited regarding the areas where parents should be allowed to contribute and how parent influence may be perceived or accepted when principals engage in decision-making. It does seem clear that in schools where there is shared leadership and where stakeholders, including parents, have more leadership influence, there is also higher student achievement (Ni et al., 2018).

It is important to remember that parent engagement of the future will include support, information sharing, and learning to work together in support of the children. This can be accomplished by keeping in mind the four principles by Georgis et al. (2014); a) “parent engagement is reciprocal”—it must be meaningful and cannot be one-sided; b) “parent engagement is relational”—relationships of trust and of community belonging should be established; c) “parent engagement is culturally and linguistically

responsive”—respect for the parents’ culture and language should be demonstrated; and d) “parent engagement is responsive to the needs and encompassing of the strengths of the families”—the cultural capital and aspirations of the parents should be embraced to strengthen the school-home relationships (pp. 25-26).

Future Teacher Education Practices

Future curriculum for preservice teachers should include community engagement practices as they have been shown to have a positive impact by contributing to increased confidence and self-awareness for the candidates while leading to improved instruction with the knowledge they have about families and communities. These courses on engagement with hands-on activities will help teachers feel more competent about parent connections (Epstein, 2018; Evans, 2013). Teachers educators will need to consider and acknowledge demographic and community factors when including cultural awareness in the training as this will help shape their perceptions on the educational attainment of students of color (Mahatmya et al., 2016). While previous teacher candidates have acknowledged the important foundation of methodology and content knowledge that they received in their coursework, in a study by Irizarry and Raible (2011), many teachers noted that their programs did not prepare them for working with Latino youth and their families with no courses related to cultural or linguistical backgrounds. One participant in the study stated, “[In my program] we never talked about having a clue about the kids you work with. We just never talked about it.” (p. 194).

Much of the research focusing on parent involvement in schools relates only to elementary schools. It is important for future secondary school teachers to understand the importance of continued parent involvement and to not assume that parents are no longer

interested or are not effective advocates for their children, even though they may not be in the same classroom for the entire day. Secondary education should not be seen as a barrier to parent involvement; they should be made to feel as welcome there as in the elementary schools (Toren, 2013). In fact, parents who learn to engage by monitoring schoolwork and communicating academic expectations will help high school students transition to post-secondary education as that support will help to further students' academic engagement during college (Suizzo, 2016).

Another area of consideration for future teachers is that of recruiting Latinos into the teaching field. Many times, students of color do not choose education as their area of study based on a perception that they will be seen in a negative light as compared to other teachers, a perception that is often molded from their own experiences as a student (Quiocho & Rios, 2000). Despite the fact that schools in the United States have become more racially and ethnically diverse, the ideology of education continues to value identity characteristics of "Whiteness," and teachers are often seen as those who consistently had positive experiences in school. Minority students who do choose to pursue teaching do so in order to make a difference in their communities, combat their own negative experiences in school, and to provide future students with the role models that they did not have (Irizarry & Donaldson, 2012). Institutions of higher education should be proactive in preparing leaders in Latino education. It is their responsibility to provide access to best practices so that future school leaders have a better understanding on how to serve and empower Latino families and communities (Rodriguez et al., 2016).

Summary of Findings

Researchers advocate for culturally relevant approaches to parental engagement practices, both formal and informal, particularly with Latino parents who often see their

role of involvement through lessons taught at home rather than participation at school. School leaders may need to reframe definitions of engagement and leadership to better connect with and include parents of the non-dominant culture and to understand that current methods used for parent engagement are based on experiences of White, middle-class parents and students. This is especially true for our newer immigrant communities growing in rural areas. Latino parents need to have a place of cultural acceptance and appreciation to better engage with the school personnel and systems in place. The decisions of educators in leadership roles should be based on these concepts to understand how they are linked to gaining the trust of parents and, therefore, engaging them in the schools to influence student success. It is important going forward that parents be engaged in leadership roles as well to better voice their concerns and to further engage other parents. Teacher and principal preparation programs should include information on cultural engagement practices and, even more importantly, focus on the recruitment of Latinos to the teaching field.

Limitations of the Review

The limitations of this review include research that is lacking to understand the differences of expectations for male and female Latino children, which perhaps accounts for the differing rates of graduation and post-secondary enrollment for males. There is also a lack of empirical studies regarding the parental engagement role of the father in Latino families as the mothers are mostly shown to be the engaged parents. This may also be tied to the expectations for males in terms of achievement and educational goals and warrants additional study. Additionally, more research is necessary to fully understand the difference in the terminology of parent involvement vs. parent engagement, whether they are interchangeable or mean different things and which may be considered more

desirable. These studies could also include the extent to which parental involvement and/or engagement can be measured in terms of frequency, amount of time spent, and actually demonstrated behaviors of such. Finally, there is a great lack of empirical studies regarding parents as leaders in rural schools and the engagement programs that could foster more leadership opportunities for parents in a culturally relevant, community-based model.

Implications of the Review

Implications for Practice

The purpose of this literature review was to explore the Latino achievement gap and the effects that parental engagement can have on academic achievement while looking at various leadership practices to ensure more quality engagement, particularly with the new immigrants in rural areas. The findings in the literature reinforce Yosso's (2005) framework of acknowledging the cultural wealth of Latino families and their perceptions of appropriate involvement in the schools, culturally seeing their role as modeling respect and passing on the values of hard work and family unity. Epstein's (2010) framework will help school leaders to understand the various areas in which to involve parents by encouraging their engagement on both the school and community levels. Principals should focus on servant leadership approaches, which are best suited for working with Latino communities given that they place great emphasis on cultural wealth and *familismo*; in this way, they are able to achieve partnerships and create shared responsibilities for student achievement.

Finally, preparation programs for teachers and principals should include diversity training and cultural awareness in practicum experiences, including assets-based and not

deficit-based curriculum. Immigrant families in rural areas have much to offer and should be valued for their diversity, linguistic skills, social networks, survival skills, and perhaps most importantly, for their contributions to the economy of the community (Coady et al., 2015). Teacher and principal preparation programs should continue to recruit Latinos to the education field especially since the demographics consistently show an increase in this population. School leaders should be prepared to lead their new communities.

Implications for Policy

It is important to acknowledge that deficit-based assumptions that focus on the lack of parent involvement, often divert attention away from actual policies and attitudes already in place, which cause this lack of involvement. School leaders should examine the policies that contribute to the unwelcome atmosphere of their schools. It will become important in future policy to understand how parental aspirations may vary among races and ethnicities, particularly among first and second generations of immigrants. Policies should be developed with inclusivity in mind to continue to engage parents for increased educational outcomes in the schools. Policies requiring diversity training for all school personnel should be implemented to continue to serve our diverse populations and give all students equitable opportunities. The state-approved curriculum required for preservice teachers and for aspiring principals should be set to include culturally relevant teaching and leadership techniques, as well as the methodology for engaging parents in the decision-making of the educational program of their students.

Implications for Future Research

Epstein's (2010) model may not fully provide for ways that parents of other races and/or ethnicities choose to be involved in the education of their children, and therefore,

there may be a need for other studies that would be more beneficial for Latino parents, particularly for those in high-minority school systems (Bower & Griffin, 2011). More research is also needed regarding the social network theory and social interactions, including building and sustaining parent-school trust and the relationship that plays in school achievement.

A final area of research needed specifically for Latino parents is family roles, since *familismo* is such a large part of the culture. The role the mother plays in the decision of rural Latinas to leave home to pursue a post-secondary degree is an area in need of further study (Stone et al., 2020), along with researching the motivation of Latinas to do so. It is also important to understand what support systems will be necessary for their continued success once the traditional support system of mothers is no longer physically available to them. In addition, further research on the role of the fathers is important in understanding cultural wealth and family obligations and how those contribute to the educational persistence of their children.

The findings of this literature review validate the importance of increasing Latino parent engagement in the schools to improve student achievement levels. As the Latino population continues to grow, it will become imperative for school leaders to reach out to the Latino communities and bridge the cultural gaps by acknowledging their cultural wealth and becoming partners in the education of their children.

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