



Policy Memorandum: Strengthen Parental Involvement Supports to Ensure Latino Families Can Engage with Schools

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Who We Are

We are educators working in Title I schools that center around community involvement.

My name is Isaac Cardona, and I am an Area Senior Director in Portland, Oregon, managing elementary and K-8 schools across Oregon's largest school district. We serve nearly 50,000 students, half of whom come from low-income or underserved backgrounds. In my role at the district office, I work to create avenues for parents to feel welcomed and to participate in their school communities, regardless of race, ethnicity, or languages spoken.

My name is Paul Yumbla and I am a teacher-leader at a Title I school in Denver, Colorado, that serves 91% students of color with four languages spoken and 56% English learner (EL) students. As an educator, I try to bridge the gap between a sense of community and academic ownership. This means ensuring that all of our families are not only seen and heard but feel valued at our school.

Background

In the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), every district that receives more than \$500,000 has a Title I parent engagement set-aside of 1%, to be used for parental engagement in schools with input from parents on how to spend those funds. According to an article published by Public School Review in 2018, "extensive research has shown that students achieve more in school when their parents are involved in their education."¹ For families that do not speak English, communication can often be a barrier in partaking in school activities and navigating the complex school system. Families may

lack access to interpretation services and translation of documents as this can be cost prohibitive for schools. By increasing a direct set aside for interpretation services, the funding will allow all families to be able to access their child's education.

Our Ask

- Increase Title I set-aside for parental engagement from 1% to 3%.
- Ensure that school districts with more than 15% ELs reserve 0.5% of the 3% set-aside for translation and interpretation services.

The Need

Latinos are a growing student population. The percentage of ELs in the United States public school system continues to grow each year, with the most common language being Spanish-speaking populations, roughly representing 74.8% of all ELs in the United States.² Although Latinos and ELs represent a growing population of school students, families may not have the ability or comfort to engage with school communities about their child's education.

Parent engagement increases graduation rates. In Colorado, Latinos graduate from high school at a rate of 70%.³ Research has shown that parent engagement and a supportive community would increase graduation rates.

Remote learning—and the long-term impact of the pandemic on learning—increases the need for parent engagement. With remote learning establishing itself as a more constant presence than many of us anticipated, there have been even more obstacles for Latino families to overcome. With school “going virtual,” families where English is not primarily spoken at home are struggling to engage and navigate distance learning. In a national survey by Latino Decisions, the results were evident: The number one concern from Latino parents was “communication with teachers.” Sixty-five percent of parents feel “learning is more difficult now because it is harder to communicate with teachers,” and that difficulty is compounded by those that solely spoke a language other than English.⁴

In Colorado, nearly 30% of the K-12 population is Latino. For every 100 Latino ninth graders in Colorado, only 67 will graduate from high school; only 28 will enroll in college, and only 10 will graduate.⁵ Colorado is last among the 50 states when comparing Latinos (ages 25-64) to Whites who hold an associate's or bachelor's degree. Having more degree-earning Latinos happens when schools have funding dedicated to their holistic needs. Ensuring families have access to interpretation, translation, and robust language supports allows for students to have multiple entry points for college support. This will go a long way in combating Colorado's 35% degree-attainment gap.

Oregon has seen a 72% increase in Latinos in the past 20 years, but now with COVID-19 closures, the achievement gaps that persist for students of color nationally is now compounded by online learning and a lack of engagement by BIPOC students.⁶ In Oregon's largest school district, already 25% of Latino students are struggling to consistently log on to distance learning classes. This trend has been seen in large cities across the United States, including Los Angeles, where last year 50,000 Black and Latino students failed to engage in online classes.⁷

Parents are ready to engage and to support their students, but communication is key. Having the ability to engage with teachers, administrators, and school personnel is an added and necessary step to engaging students in content and closing the achievement gap.

Impact

Knowing very well that the social, political, economic, and cultural factors that impact the educational experience of Latinos in the United States are complex, we would like to hone in on the impact that interpretation services can provide to families, students, and community stakeholders. Ensuring that our schools are welcoming hubs for our most vulnerable families is a small part of a much larger vision of defining, unpacking, and pushing forth this idea of an authentic community school. We firmly believe that supporting families and students in this way will increase K-12 achievement, college readiness, enrollment, persistence, and completion.

All students deserve access to an excellent education, and all parents deserve the ability to help support their students to be successful. We know that these changes will help us to achieve that goal and will allow our Latino students to reach their full potential.

Endnotes

- 1 M. Beatrice Arias and Milagros Morillo-Campbell, *Promoting ELL Parental Involvement: Challenges in Contested Times* (Boulder: Education and the Public Interest, University of Colorado-Boulder, 2008), http://www.greatlakescenter.org/docs/Policy_Briefs/Arias_ELL.pdf.
- 2 National Center for Education Statistics, "English Language Learners in Public Schools," https://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator_cgf.asp (accessed January 20, 2021).
- 3 Colorado Department of Higher Education, "Strategic Goal 2: Erase Equity Gaps," <http://masterplan.highered.colorado.gov/goal-2-erase-equity-gaps/#> (accessed January 20, 2021).
- 4 Latino Decisions and Abriended Puertas / Opening Doors, "Latino Parent Voices: What our families need to know," https://nationalsurvey.ap-od.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/LatinoParentVoices_Report.pdf (accessed January 20, 2021).
- 5 M. Beatrice Arias and Milagros Morillo-Campbell, "Promoting ELL Parental Involvement: Challenges in Contested Times," January 2008, The Great Lakes Center for Education Research & Practice, http://www.greatlakescenter.org/docs/Policy_Briefs/Arias_ELL.pdf (accessed January 20, 2021).
- 6 Casey Parks, "Oregon's Latino Population is Growing Faster than the Nationwide Average," *Oregonian*, January 9, 2019, https://www.oregonlive.com/pacific-northwest-news/2016/09/oregons_latino_population_is_g.html (accessed January 20, 2021) and Rob Manning, "Oregon's Graduation Rate Improves, But Achievement Gap Persists," *Oregon Public Broadcasting*, January 24, 2019, <https://www.opb.org/news/article/oregon-high-school-graduation-rate-achievement-gap-2018/> (accessed January 20, 2021).
- 7 Paloma Esquivel, "L.A. Latino, Black Students Suffered Deep Disparities in Online Learning, Records Show," *Los Angeles Times*, July 16, 2020, <https://www.latimes.com/california/story/2020-07-16/latino-and-black-students-hard-hit-with-disparities-in-their-struggle-with-online-learning> (accessed January 20, 2021).