

**Academic Achievement & Parent Engagement in Latinx Families**

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### Abstract

The purpose of this project was to increase understanding of the needs of Latinx parents when engaging in their children's academics. Moreover, it was important to provide the community center with recommendations based on the study's results so that the center may better serve Latinx parents. Five mothers from Lafayette, IN discussed their strengths, challenges, and desired resources when being involved in their children's learning and school activities. Five major themes were identified in the interviews. *Theme 1:* Ensuring that their children were at school on time was identified by most participants as the primary responsibility of parents. *Theme 2:* Having good communication was described as the main responsibility of teachers. *Theme 3:* Most mothers said that making sure their children were completing their homework was their biggest strength. *Theme 4:* Most participants revealed the language barrier was the biggest challenge to being involved in their child's academics. The language barrier made it difficult to communicate with teachers, help with homework, and often made them feel uncomfortable in the school setting. *Theme 5:* A couple of the mothers stated that they desired more tutoring resources because they did not have the knowledge needed to understand and help with assignments. Based on these themes and the poor enrollment of Latinx students at the community center's youth program, it is recommended that the center implement a marketing plan to reach the Latinx community who is not utilizing the center's tutoring and other resources.

### **Academic Achievement & Parent Engagement in Latinx Families**

The community center where this project was implemented is a non-profit and multi-service agency located in Lafayette, IN. The center aims to serve low-income, minorities, youth, seniors, and their families. The primary groups of people served are African American, Latinx, and low-income families. A youth program is offered during the school year and provides the following services:

- Yoga
- Daily snack
- Arts and crafts
- Junior Achievement
- Homework assistance
- Healthy Kids Program
- Financial Wellness Program
- Games and special activities
- St. Elizabeth School of Nursing Healthy Presentations

Additionally, a summer program is offered while schools are closed to continue to provide children with positive experiences. Through positive interactions and relationships, the center aims to foster a sense of community and self-efficacy among youth. Based on the demographic's served, the center's youth program offers resources to children ages five through twelve who are at a high risk of being part of the academic achievement gap.

The capstone student collaborated with the community center for the completion of this community research-based capstone experience. The capstone student set out to better understand academic disparities and conduct research on the barriers to academic parental

engagement in Latinx families. The data from this study will help increase understanding of the challenges within this population to offer resources and programs that can better serve the identified needs of the community. This study will add to the existing research on the strengths and barriers to academic parental engagement of Latinx parents. Increasing understanding of the topic is important to open the dialog between parents, teachers, school board members, and other community members to help increase academic parental engagement within the Latinx community. The capstone student chose to focus on understanding the implications of parental engagement because it has been shown to be a valuable factor in academic achievements. The author also wanted more knowledge in conducting a qualitative research study. The student intended to increase skills in conducting semi-structured interviews, data collecting, data analysis, and disseminating research findings. Furthermore, the capstone student set out to improve networking skills and increase awareness of available community resources.

### **Needs Assessment**

A needs assessment began with the capstone student noticing a trend among parents of the Latinx community. While working in community-based organizations, Latinx parents would report that their children were not kindergarten ready. A year later, the same children were held back because they did not have the skills and knowledge to progress to first grade. To better understand academic achievement gaps and the barriers to parental engagement within the Latinx community, an extensive literature review was completed. Additionally, a semi-structured interview was conducted with the executive director of the community center. During the interview, the stakeholder described the center's youth program, the demographics, community needs, academic gaps, and parental engagement. They also confirmed that many of the students who attend the youth program are behind in their academics. Additionally, the stakeholder

reported that some students are not kindergarten ready, especially in their reading and math skills. The director also noted that it can be difficult to interact with Latinx parents who do not speak English; relationships are weak with these parents who also tend to rush out of the door. It would be beneficial for the student to focus on the Latinx community because they can overcome the language barrier and get an insight on these parents' perceived challenges and strengths when it comes to being involved in their child's academics. A need to better understand the barriers to parental academic engagement in the Latinx community was identified.

## **Literature Review**

### ***Impact of Parent Involvement on Academic Achievement***

Parental behaviors and beliefs can have an influence on children's school-related development and academic achievement. Factors that appear to promote early academic success include a secure living environment, participation in high quality early childhood programs, parental knowledge of importance of engaging their children in rich learning home-based activities, parent involvement, and parental beliefs and feelings about school settings (Garcia, 2015; Puccioni et al., 2019; Taylor & Clayton, 2004). Student development and school readiness is also influenced by parents' efforts to promote development through activities and adult-to-child interactions (Garcia, 2019). Additionally, Tan et al. (2020) found that the aspects of parent involvement positively associated with student achievement included parental academic expectations, parental support for child's learning, parent-child discussions about school, parent and child reading together, parent involvement in school events, and parental emphasis on education. Furthermore, Puccioni et al. (2019) reported that parents who had strong beliefs on the importance of school readiness actively participated in more home-based activities (i.e.,

reading, singing songs, counting, playing board games, or naming shapes) that engaged children in learning. The participation in these home-based learning activities was positively associated with increased levels of academic achievement, social skills, and self-regulation skills.

According to a meta-analysis, parental involvement in schooling activities (such as checking homework, talking to the child about school issues, communicating with teachers, etc.) has a higher positive impact on school success than general parenting styles (Piquart, 2016). Moreover, when combinations of parental involvement strategies were explored across ethnic/racial groups it was found that “among Hispanic/Latino adolescents, the combination of more academic socialization, more home-based involvement, and more school-based involvement was associated with higher GPA” (Day & Dotterer, 2018, p. 1345). Demonstrating the positive impact parental involvement can have on their children’s school grades. The term *academic socialization* is used to describe the compilation of both the behaviors of parents (i.e., engaging home-based learning activities) and the parents’ beliefs on the importance of school readiness (Taylor and Clayton, 2004). Academic socialization practices are influenced by the parents’ experiences and feelings about school settings (Taylor and Clayton, 2004). This is important to note because a negative school environment can foster negative parental academic socialization practices. However, a school environment that is trusting and inviting can foster healthy collaborations between children, families, and the school setting.

### ***Barriers***

**Financial Barrier.** Financial strain has been associated with decreased parent involvement at school (Camacho-Thompson et al., 2016). Academic achievement has been found to be highest when there is lower economic adversity (Gordon, 2017). There is a strong

correlation between a child's social economic status (SES) and kindergarten achievement disparities (Garcia, 2015). The biggest concern with the early kindergarten achievement gap is the future implications for the success of these children. In 2017, the dropout rate of Hispanic youth ages 15 to 24 years old was 6.5%, higher than any other group (McFarland et al., 2019). Additionally, the National Center for Education Statistics revealed the dropout rate for White youths decreased from 6.1% in 1977 to 3.9% in 2017. However, there was not a decrease in the dropout rate of Hispanic youths.

There appears to be a relationship among the three factors of high financial burden, low academic parent engagement, and poor school success. However, if the financial burden is removed parents can focus more on being actively engaged in their child's education. A recent study showed that children with a higher SES begin school with higher levels of academic achievement and greater social and self-regulation skills (Puccioni et al., 2019). SES has a compound effect on achievement gaps (Garcia, 2015). First, there is the direct association between economic advantages and education outcomes. Second, there are significant associations between SES and other factors that indirectly impact education outcomes. These factors include the living environment, participation in high quality early childhood programs, and parent engagement with their children in instructional and motivational activities. Parents with a lower SES have less resources to purchase stimulating toys, visit museums, or learn about the importance of children's interactions with adults.

Findings from a study that examined the relationship between community disadvantages and school success among Hispanic adolescents also correlated with previous studies that demonstrated the compounding effects of low SES on achievement gaps (Gordon, 2017; Puccioni et al., 2019). Living in disadvantaged communities negatively impacts Hispanic

adolescents' academic achievement (Gordon, 2017). In contrast, Hispanic adolescents living in communities that are most advantageous and have parents who are involved in their schooling demonstrate the highest academic success (Gordon, 2017). According to the U.S. Census, Hispanics made up 28.1% of the population in poverty in 2019, but only comprised 18.7% of the total population (Creamer, 2020). The high percentage of Hispanics living in poverty is alarming when considering the impact poverty has on academic achievement. Financial strain is a difficult barrier to parent engagement, and it starts a cycle that can lead to poor academic outcomes in Latinx students.

**Sociocultural Barriers.** Three crucial values in Latino culture include family, respect, and education (Marrero, 2019). The family is at the center of Latino culture since it provides support and encouragement throughout life. There is a strong sense of commitment and obligation to one another which can sometimes have a negative effect on education. For example, if family members need financial support, Latino students will often postpone their own educational aspirations. Additionally, respecting their elders, family relationships, community, and other adults is also emphasized in the Latinx culture. Latinx students respect familial advice. When compared to other ethnic groups, Latinx families have a stronger influence on their children's educational decisions (Marrero, 2019). Lastly, education is important, but Latinx families view education through a different lens. "Latinos believe it is their responsibility to educate their children for life, not just school" (Marrero, 2019, p.181). For example, Latinx parents will work on educating their children on work ethic and caring for younger family members. After all, there is a collective responsibility for the care of their children in Latinx families (Marrero, 2019). If teachers want to build strong relationships with Latinx parents, it is crucial for organizations and schools working with Latino students to understand these cultural



values. Improving parent-teacher relationships can aid in improving parent engagement and lead to better student outcomes.

**Additional Barriers.** Family stressors, lack of transportation, or feeling unwelcome in schools can make it difficult for parents to be actively engaged in their child's academics. Camacho-Thompson et al. (2016) reported that Latino caregivers provided less in-home engaging activities when they faced familial stressors such as a family member's death or having to move away from family. This is important to consider when looking at Latinx children because of the strong cultural value placed on family and the significant impact family can have on these student's academic success. Lack of transportation has been shown to be associated with lower school success (Alexander et al., 2017). Alexander et al. also found that students' success was lower when they perceived that their parents were not involved in their school activities due to them feeling unwelcome or uncomfortable. It is important to note that even when caregivers were not involved, most Latino adolescents reported that their caregivers did value their education. These findings emphasize the dangers of assuming that non-involved Latino parents do not care about their children's education.

There is a need to further understand the barriers of engagement in school-based activities within the Latinx community. The community center has a unique opportunity of being a bridge between families and schools to better understand the unique barriers that Latino families living in Lafayette, IN face. Understanding these barriers will help provide resources, increase positive school experiences, improve parents' self-efficacy, and improve overall parent involvement.

### **Guiding Theory and Model**

Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory can be used to better understand how family, school, culture, and SES can affect academic achievement. The ecological systems theory claims that child development is influenced by the ongoing interactions that occur between different environmental factors (Guy-Evans, 2020). This theory forces one to look beyond individual development and consider the influence a child's environment has on their development and, consequently, on their academic achievement. Bronfenbrenner classified five ecological systems that are dynamic and interrelated which means that one system will influence other systems. The first level is the microsystem, included here are factors that have direct contact with the child such as family, teachers, and peers. The second level is the mesosystem in which the child's microsystems interact (i.e., the relationship between parents and teachers). The third level is the exosystem encompassing environmental factors which do not directly involve the child but affect their development such as parents' economic status. The fourth level, the macrosystem, describes the culture or society the child is born into (i.e., ethnicity, geographic location, ideologies of the culture, and socioeconomic status). The fifth and final level is the chronosystem which consists of lifetime changes such as major life transitions or historical events (Guy-Evans, 2020). Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory supports the findings discussed in this paper regarding the impact parent involvement, SES, and cultural difference can have on Latino students' academic achievement.

Additionally, the Ecology of Human Performance Model (EHP) guided the planning of this project. The fifth level of intervention, *create*, of the EHP was utilized for this community-based capstone project. The fifth level of intervention does not assume a deficit, but rather focuses on creating an environment that enhances the engagement in occupations and learning (Hinojosa & Kramer, 2017). The goal of this project is to better understand academic

achievement gaps and conduct research to gather data that will help better understand the strengths and barriers of Latinx parents in the Lafayette, IN community. This information can aid the community center provide resources based on the identified needs. The center will become more equipped to create an enriched environment with resources tailored to the needs of a group of individuals who are more susceptible to occupational injustices.

### **Capstone Project Plan and Process**

A student learning plan was developed to guide the process of the capstone project. It was reviewed and signed by the student, department research coordinator, site mentor, faculty mentor, and capstone coordinator. The project goals, which were described in the learning plan, consisted of finding a gap in the community, conducting a research study, and disseminating findings. The following are the goals and objectives of this project:

- Project Goal 1: The student will collaborate with a community center to determine a “gap” in the organization and propose a plan for a doctoral capstone project.
  - Objective 1: The student will conduct a needs assessment to determine specific needs of the organization, available resources, and the population that the organization serves.
  - Objective 2: The student will complete a literature review to use evidence-based reasoning for the capstone project and determine guiding theory.
  - Objective 3: The student will utilize information collected from needs assessment and literature review to propose a plan for the doctoral capstone project.
- Project Goal 2: The student will conduct research to increase the community’s understanding of the needs that Latinx parents face when attempting to support their student’s academic achievement.
  - Objective 1: The student will clearly define the measurable outcomes.

- Objective 2: The student will research and select appropriate methodologies and tools for the targeted population to effectively measure outcomes.
- Objective 3: The student will implement an outcome measurement tool and assess data collected to determine the needs of the targeted population.
- Project Goal 3: The student will disseminate research to inform stakeholders of findings and suggest potential ways to better serve the needs of the targeted population.
  - Objective 1: The student will develop a visual of findings that is easy to understand and visually appealing.
  - Objective 2: The student will provide a community center suggestion of potential changes or resources that would benefit the targeted population.
  - Objective 3: The student will disseminate the project at the IU OTD Capstone Presentation Forum to inform stakeholders of findings.

Goal one and its objectives were completed at the initial planning stage. Goal two was accomplished by utilizing a qualitative research method. It was decided that interviews would provide rich information from the participants and that thematic coding will be best suited for data analysis. Goal three was accomplished through the recommendation of implementing a marketing plan that will target the Latinx families so that this population may utilize the resources at the community center. These goals and objectives were written to address the need of increasing the community's understanding of the barriers to parental academic engagement in Latinx parents so that they may better support this community.

The first two weeks were spent familiarizing with the site. During the first week, the capstone student met staff working at the center, seniors who participate in the senior program, and students who participate in the after-school youth program. The first week was spent observing and becoming familiar with the flow of services at the center. The second week, the capstone student spent more time interacting with seniors from the senior wellness program and building relationships with students. Additionally,

time was spent working on the capstone paper and finalizing the capstone process. Weeks three and four were spent working on the capstone paper and recruitment material. At the center, the capstone student became more involved in helping students with homework, engaging in student-led activities, and continued to interact with seniors attending the senior wellness program. Weeks five and six were spent recruiting participants and creating interview questions. Weeks seven through nine were spent conducting interviews and transcribing. Weeks ten through twelve were dedicated to data analyses and completing a research paper. Additionally, the capstone student met two times per month with their capstone mentor to discuss progress and plan of action. The student also communicated updates to the site mentor as needed.

### **Project Implementation**

To ensure equitable participation, recruitment flyers were created in both English and Spanish (see Appendix B and C). The flyers were reviewed by the site and capstone mentors. Interview questions were also written in both English and Spanish (see Appendix D and E). The methods of recruitment included word of mouth and sharing flyers on social media. The capstone student shared flyers with members of the Latinx community who also shared with potential participants. Communication between the research student and the potential participants occurred via Facebook messenger and text messages.

The inclusion criteria for this research study were Latinx parents living in Lafayette, IN who have children in grades preschool through twelve. A total of five interviews were conducted. All five participants identified as women. To maintain client-center practice and accommodate for participant's long working hours, two out of five interviews were scheduled and took place during the evening times. Participants were given the choice to complete interviews at the community center, their homes, their workplace, or any other location in the community. Three participants chose to complete interviews at their home and two preferred to complete interviews at their workplace. Participants were given the option to complete interviews in Spanish or English. Two participants chose to complete interviews in English and three chose to complete the interviews in Spanish. The two participants who chose to

complete the interviews in English were fluent in both languages. The three participants who chose to complete interviews in Spanish were not fluent in English.

The participants were verbally informed of the purpose of study, potential benefits, they were reminded that participation was voluntary, and that they could terminate the interview at any time. The student researcher informed participants that the interview would be recorded and transcribed for data analysis. The participants verbalized understanding and gave verbal consent. All participants completed the entire interview. Interviews were recorded using a smartphone and transcribed on a word document. Then, the capstone student found, organized, and analyzed common themes among all interviews. Finally, a copy of the project was given to the stakeholders.

### **Evaluation**

Interviews, a qualitative research method, allow in-depth exploration of human experiences and facilitate the findings of common themes and trends among participants (Beck & Manuel, 2008). Using open-ended questions, semi-structured interviews provide participants a guiding question without hindering the richness of their response by permitting them to elaborate on their thoughts (Alsaawi, 2014). Because this research study aimed to understand human experiences, it was determined that the use of a qualitative semi-structured interview research method was best suited. Open-ended questions that focused on the research topic were constructed prior to the interview (see Appendix D and E). *Voice recorder*, a voice recording phone application was used to collect the raw responses which were then transcribed. According to Alsaawi (2014), recording and transcribing interviews reduces research bias, human errors, and allows deeper analysis of responses. A thematic coding approach is commonly used in social research (Alsaawi, 2014). Due to its benefits in qualitative research, a thematic coding method was used for this study's data analysis and interpretation. According to Robson (2011), there are

five steps to the thematic coding approach: (1) data familiarization; (2) generating initial codes; (3) identifying themes; (4) constructing thematic networks; (5) integration and interpretation.

The capstone student utilized word webs (see Appendices F, G, H, I, and J) to organize responses, highlight similarities, generate initial codes, and identify the themes among all discussions.

In addition to evaluating the data collected, the student received feedback from their site mentor and reflected on their own learning process to evaluate the success of this experimental capstone experience. The data collected from the interviews helped guide recommendations to potential resources for the targeted population. Additionally, the site mentor's feedback and self-reflection were used to evaluate the success of the capstone student's learning and skill development.

### ***Results***

Five semi-structured interviews with Latinx mothers from Lafayette, IN were conducted to better understand the strengths and barriers within this population regarding academic parental engagement. Participants were diverse in age, ranging from their late twenties to early fifties. Additionally, all participants spoke Spanish but only two identified as being fluent in English. There was 100% completion of all interviews.

The semi-structured questions were constructed to encourage conversations related to participants' experiences with their children's academics. Some of the topics discussed included the following: parent and teacher responsibilities; barriers and strengths of being involved in their child's academics (i.e., homework help, attending school events, attending parent-teacher

conferences); and perceived support. The following five themes were identified among all discussions.

**Theme 1: Punctuality.** Four out of the five mothers identified their main responsibility as ensuring their child gets to school on time. Participants discussed not only the need for their children to attend school to learn but also to be on time. Mothers recognize the importance of punctuality so that students do not miss classes, breakfast time, or other meaningful school experiences in the morning.

**Theme 2: Communication.** The theme of communication emerged twice during the interviews. Most participants, 4 out of 5, revealed the primary responsibilities of teachers as having good communication with the parents. Mothers said that teachers must communicate any needs, concerns, and let them know how their child is doing in their overall academic performance. Not surprisingly, 3 out of 5 mothers also reported feeling most supported by the school when there was sufficient communication from the teachers. All mothers noted that they appreciated when teachers send notes home with any concerns or updates. Mothers who do not read English reported that they use a translator or ask a family member or friend to translate the notes. Additionally, non-English speaking parents are able to write and send their notes in Spanish.

**Theme 3: Checking Assignments.** When asked to describe their strengths regarding their engagement in their child's academics, three of the five mothers mentioned they did a satisfactory job checking their child's assignment. It appears that most participants consider homework assignments as a crucial part of their child's learning experience. They ensure that assignments are completed and recognize this as a strength.



**Theme 4: Language Barrier.** Participants were asked to identify the barriers to being involved in their child's academics. Those who were not fluent in English, three of the five, identified the language barrier as their most difficult challenge. The language barrier makes it difficult for parents to help their children with assignments. Additionally, communicating with teachers is difficult and requires extra steps or other resources, such as interpreting and translating resources. Some mothers also discussed insecurities they feel about attending school activities due to the language barrier. Furthermore, parents note feeling out of place and not knowing what to do when they arrive at the school and are unable to speak English. This is important to note because in previous themes parents reported feeling a sense of support when there was decent communication with teachers.

**Theme 5: Resources.** Two of the five participants reported feeling supported by the various resources (i.e., after school programs, tutoring, early intervention programs, and therapy available at school) their schools and community offers. Some parents find it difficult to help their children with actual schoolwork because they, themselves, do not have the educational background to know the material. One parent noted that they would like the school or community to have a home tutoring program so that their child may have someone to help them with schoolwork. Another parent mentioned it would be helpful for schools to offer longer after school homework help (their school currently only offers one hour) to ensure their children get sufficient help and to accommodate for parent's long work hours.

## **Discussion and Impact including Sustainability Plan**

### ***Discussion***

Parents and caregivers play an important role in a student's academic success. A child depends on the decisions made by the parent; therefore, parental beliefs and behaviors can influence academic achievement. In fact, multiple studies have shown that when a caregiver strongly believes in the importance of school, are involved in school events, and incorporates learning activities at home children have better academic outcomes (Garcia, 2015; Puccioni et al., 2019; Taylor & Clayton, 2004). These findings make sense since a parent who values education and academic success might provide their children with more learning opportunities and attend school events. Home-based activities such as reading, playing board games, checking homework assignments, singing songs, counting, and naming shapes are all correlated to better academic achievement (Puccioni et al., 2019; Tan et al., 2020). More specifically, Latinx students have been shown to have higher grades when their parents exposed them to both home and school activities. Ideally, all students would have an equal opportunity to receive rich learning experiences, caregiver support, and resources, but that is not the reality we live in. In fact, academic achievement gaps have been identified in minorities (Garcia, 2015). Furthermore, high school drop-out rates are high among Latinx students (McFarland et al., 2019). The academic disparities were also noticed among the children who attend the after-school program at a community center in Lafayette, IN. Due to the significant influence parents have on students' academic success and the academic achievement gaps that exist among Latinx youth, there was a need to further explore the strengths and barriers to parental academic engagement within the Latinx community. The first goal of collaborating with a community center to determine a "gap" in the organization and propose a plan for a doctoral capstone project was successfully accomplished.

The goal of conducting research to increase the community's understanding of the needs of Latinx parents when supporting their children's academic achievement was met as evident by the completion of the current qualitative study. Past research has identified financial strain, lack of transportation, sociocultural differences, and familial stressors as barriers to parent involvement in their children's academics (Alexander et al., 2017; Camacho-Thompson et al., 2016, Gordon, 2017; Marrero, 2019). In this study, to improve understanding of strength, barriers, and desired resources five Latinx mothers from Lafayette, IN were interviewed. The primary barrier identified from the study was language differences. This is extremely important because the interviews also revealed that most participants believed that the teacher's main responsibility was to have good communication with the parents. Although they did not explicitly identify not understanding homework topics as a barrier, some mothers revealed that they would like the school to provide homework help either at their home or at school to accommodate for the lack of their own knowledge and inability to help their children with homework assignments. This led to identifying tutoring help as a needed resource. Even though some mothers are unable to help with the actual homework assignments, most of them described that their strength in ensuring their child's academic success was to ensure that homework assignments were completed. This project met the goal of informing stakeholders of findings and suggesting potential ways to better serve the targeted population as evident by conversations held between the student and stakeholders and identifying the tutoring need. The community center offers tutoring services at their center, but it appears that there is a lack of awareness among Latinx families of this resource. It is suggested that the center prepare an advertising and marketing plan that will better reach the Latinx community.

**Limitations.** As with all research studies, there were multiple limitations to the current capstone project. First, there was a small sample size. Additionally, all participants were mothers. It would have been beneficial to have a father's perspective on the topic. The study also only included mothers living in Lafayette, IN.

### *Impact*

It was surprising to find out that every participant reported they received written notes from the school in English and not their primary language, Spanish. Something worth noting is that mothers who did not speak English described feeling uncomfortable or out of place when arriving at the school and expressed more difficulties communicating with the teachers. However, there is credit to be given to caregivers and teachers because, although there is a language barrier, they both attempt to use outside resources (i.e., translators and interpreters) to communicate concerns or questions. Mothers report asking family members or friends for help when receiving notes in English. It would be beneficial for teachers or other staff members to become aware of whether non-English speaking caregivers have the resources and knowledge needed to translate written documents. Additionally, there is an opportunity for schools to demonstrate a stronger effort to send documents in their native language. This is an area worth improving. Aside from facilitating communication, sending information in the family's native language can show that the school cares about the relationship between parents-teachers.

The same efforts should carry over in the Occupational Therapy profession. Better outcomes can result when there is rapport with clients. It will be difficult to build positive rapport with poor communication. Additionally, it is important to provide resources in the client's native language to promote equity and inclusion. A client should be receiving high

quality of care regardless of whether they speak English or another language. This demonstrates the need for diverse occupational therapists to better serve the needs of diverse communities.

The main impact this study had on the community center is highlighting the need for tutoring services in the Latinx community. Parents who had a poor education or received little schooling often cannot help their children with homework assignments. The youth program at the center offers tutoring for children ages 5 through 12, but there is little to no use of these services by the Latinx community. It would be beneficial for the community center to develop a marketing strategy to reach this underserved community. The center could incorporate advertising their youth program in Spanish on their social media and sharing with Latinx Facebook pages. Additionally, Spanish flyers could be distributed to Latinx owned businesses. Furthermore, the center could collaborate with the school to send out flyers in Spanish to Latinx families. The center has the advantage of having a Spanish-speaking staff member who can optimize their efforts. The increased efforts could lead to an increased enrollment of Latinx children and an increase utilization of their services among this underrepresented population.

In addition to the impact of the study itself, the capstone student made an impact on the members of the community center through a holistic experience of all services the center offers. Although the research study was not focused on the seniors who attend the center, the student interacted with them and developed meaningful relationships. The site mentor offered the following feedback: “[the capstone student] has been an asset. Not only for the capstone project, but for the center itself. She has engaged with those that we served and created a natural relationship for those that she communicates with. The staff feels the same”. Interchanging ideas on mental health, exercise, cooking, finding new interests, the LGBTQ+ community, racism, and inclusion was enlightening to both the student and the seniors involved in those conversations.

Through these conversations, the capstone student improved skills in communication and built more confidence by being courageous enough to respectfully express her own beliefs even when they were different from the opinions of those who were much older. Leadership skills were increased by learning to organize, develop, and carry out a research study that was student-lead. Consequently, knowledge on qualitative research was gained. The student improved skills in formatting open-ended questions and completing interviews in both English and Spanish. Furthermore, there was an improvement in understanding and implementation of the thematic coding method for data analysis.

### **Conclusion**

The purpose of this project was to increase understanding of strengths and barriers of Latinx parents when it comes to engaging in their children's academics to better inform community partners of the needs of this population. Moreover, it was important to provide the community center with recommendations based on the study's results so that the community may better serve Latinx parents. Personally, and professionally, the student sought out gaining knowledge in the qualitative research method. Additionally, the student wished to increase leadership skills, interviewing skills, and social skills by the end of the experiential experience.

To accomplish the goal, a qualitative research study was carried on with the use of interviews. Five mothers from Lafayette, IN discussed their strengths, challenges, and desired resources when being involved in their children's learning and school activities. Five major themes were identified in the interviews. *Theme 1*: Ensuring that their children were at school on time so that they did not miss out on learning opportunities was identified by most participants as the primary responsibility of parents (see Appendix F). *Theme 2*: Having good communication

was described as the main responsibility of teachers and parents noted that they felt supported by the school when the teachers communicated how their child was doing in their academics (see Appendix G). *Theme 3:* Most mothers said that making sure their children were completing their homework assignment was their biggest strength (see Appendix H). *Theme 4:* Most participants were not fluent in English; therefore, they all revealed the language barrier was the biggest challenge to being involved in their child's academics (see appendix I). The language barrier made it difficult to communicate with teachers, help with homework, and often made them feel uncomfortable in the school setting. *Theme 5:* A couple of the mothers stated that they desired more tutoring resources because they did not have the knowledge needed to understand and help with assignments (see Appendix J). Based on these themes and the poor enrollment of Latinx students at the youth program, it is recommended that the community center implement a marketing plan to reach the Latinx community who is not utilizing the center's tutoring and other resources.

This study highlights the strengths, barriers, and needs of Latinx parents. This information can be utilized by school boards, community partners, and teachers to strengthen the resources and relationships with Latinx parents. One must refrain from making assumptions that Latinx parents who are not physically attending school events or reaching out to teachers do not care about their child's education. Making these assumptions hinders the parent-teacher relationship and consequently, could lead to parents feeling unwelcome or misunderstood. On the contrary, stakeholders should consider how these challenges influence Latinx parents' confidence of going to the school, speaking with teachers, and helping with schoolwork. Understanding the needs of Latinx parents is important because parent engagement has been shown to play an important role in academic achievement (Day & Dotterer, 2018; Pinquart,

2016; Puccioni et al., 2019; Tan et al., 2020). Furthermore, Latinx students are at risk of being part of the achievement gaps, forcing them into a cycle of disadvantages in their school success as early as kindergarten (Garcia, 2019; McFarland, 2019). Moreover, Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory claims that child development is influenced by the ongoing interactions that occur between different environmental factors, such as SES, cultural differences, and parent-teacher relationships (Guy-Evans, 2020). The goal is to understand parents' needs and put in place resources that dismantle these challenges and promote parent involvement in the Latinx community to help improve students' academic achievement. For this to work, a well thought out plan to reach the Latinx community needs to be implemented. This is needed to promote equity and inclusion within the education system.



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## Appendix A

### Community Center Site Interview Questions

- How would you define the purpose of your organization?
- What primary groups of people do you serve?
- Do you serve Spanish speaking individuals, who do not speak English?
- Do you serve other non-English speakers?
- How is communication accomplished with non-English speakers?
- What kind of programs do you offer?
- What are some major needs that you have noticed in the community you serve?
- Have you noticed any developmental concerns in the children you serve?
- If so, are the concerns addressed with the families. How?
- Have you noticed academic challenges in the children you serve?
- How is the participation in the programs you offer?
- Are parents actively involved? If so, how?
- Do you think that the parents you serve would benefit from an educational program that would educate on developmental milestones and how to intentionally engage with their children to encourage proper development?
- Would it be beneficial if programs were offered in Spanish?

## Appendix B

### English Recruitment Flyer

# PARENTS NEEDED

We are conducting a study that will look at challenges to Latinx academic parental involvement. The goal is to better understand the unique challenges Latinx parents face when trying to engage in their child's academics.



### WHO IS ELIGIBLE?

Latinx parents living in Lafayette, IN who have children in grades Pre-K-12.

### DESCRIPTION OF STUDY

You will be asked to participate in an interview – we will ask you to describe your experiences and challenges to being involved in your child's learning, helping with your child's homework, and participating in other school activities. Participation in this study will allow us to better understand the challenges Latinx parents face when trying to engage in their children's academics. The data will increase awareness and allow us to create resources that target decreasing the identified challenges to help facilitate academic parental involvement within the Latinx community.

### INTERESTED?

Please contact Diana Ortega at 765-656-4208 or [diorteg@iu.edu](mailto:diorteg@iu.edu).

## Appendix C

### Spanish Recruitment Flyer

# SE NECESITAN PADRES

Estamos realizando un estudio que analizará los desafíos en la participación académica de los padres latinos. El objetivo es comprender mejor los desafíos que enfrentan los padres latinos cuando intentan participar en los estudios académicos de sus hijos.



### ¿Quien es elegible?

Padres latinos que viven en Lafayette, IN que tienen hijos en los grados de preescolar al 12 °.

### DESCRIPCIÓN DEL ESTUDIO

Se le pedirá que participe en una entrevista: durante la entrevista le preguntaremos sobre sus experiencias y desafíos en la participación del aprendizaje de su hijo, sus experiencias con ayudar con la tarea, y participar en otras actividades escolares. Su participación en este estudio nos permitirá comprender mejor los desafíos que enfrentan los padres latinos cuando intentan participar en las actividades académicas de sus hijos. Los datos de este estudio aumentarán el conocimiento de este tema y nos permitirán crear recursos que ayuden a disminuir los desafíos identificados para ayudar a facilitar la participación académica de los padres dentro de la comunidad latina.

### ¿INTERESADO/A?

Favor de contactar a Diana Ortega al 765-656-4208 o por correo electrónico al [diorteg@iu.edu](mailto:diorteg@iu.edu).

## Appendix D

### English Parent Interview Questions

1. Describe your responsibilities as a parent in your child's learning experience and school success
2. Describe the school/teachers' responsibilities in child's learning experience and school success
3. What are the barriers to helping your child with their learning or schoolwork?
4. What would make it easier for you to help your child with their learning or schoolwork?
5. What do you feel you do well to ensure your child's success in school?
6. What do you feel you could do better to help ensure your child's success in school?
7. Can you describe what makes you feel welcomed and supported at your child's school?
8. Can you describe how you feel supported by the community?
9. What are some resources or tools that you wish the school or community would offer?

## Appendix E

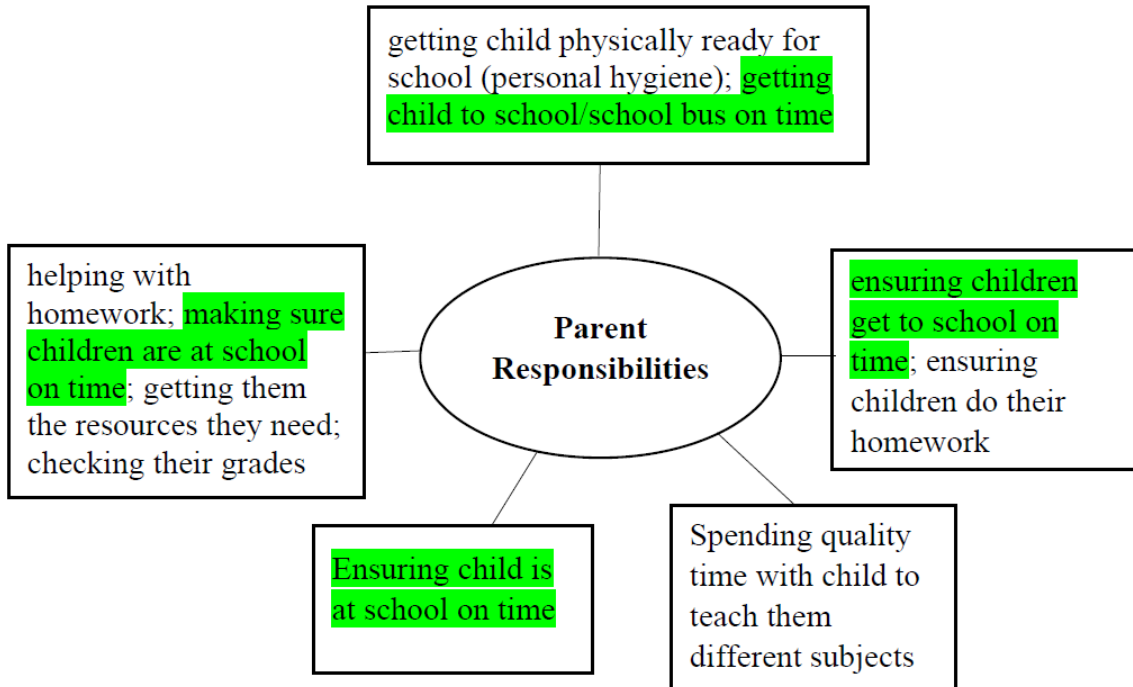
### Spanish Parent Interview Questions

1. Describa sus responsabilidades como padre en la experiencia de aprendizaje y el éxito escolar de su hijo/a.
2. Describa las responsabilidades de la escuela/maestros en la experiencia de aprendizaje del niño/a y el éxito escolar
3. ¿Cuáles son los obstáculos para ayudar a su hijo con su aprendizaje o tareas?
4. ¿Qué le facilitaría ayudar a su hijo/a con su aprendizaje o trabajo escolar?
5. ¿Qué cree que hace bien para asegurar el éxito de su hijo/a en la escuela?
6. ¿Qué cree que podría hacer mejor para ayudar a garantizar el éxito de su hijo/a en la escuela?
7. ¿Puede describir lo que la hace sentir bienvenido y apoyado en la escuela de su hijo/a?
8. ¿Puede describir cómo se siente apoyado por la comunidad?
9. ¿Cuáles son algunos recursos o herramientas que le gustaría que ofreciera la escuela o la comunidad para ayudar a garantizar el éxito de su hijo/a en la escuela?



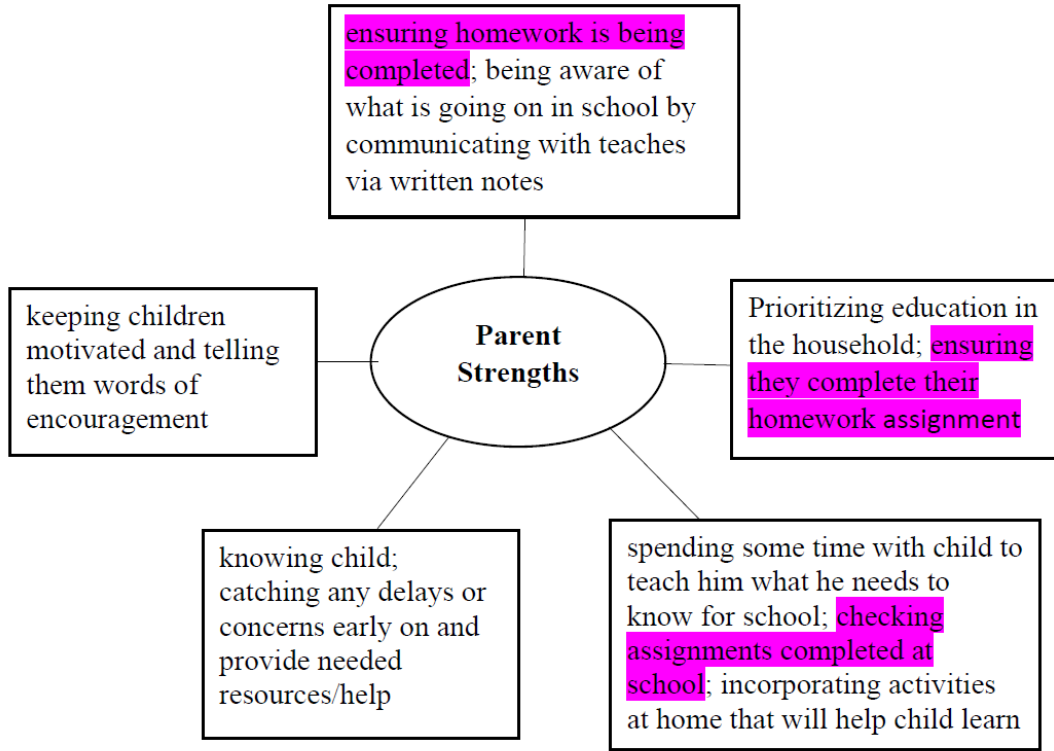
### Appendix F

#### Theme 1: Punctuality



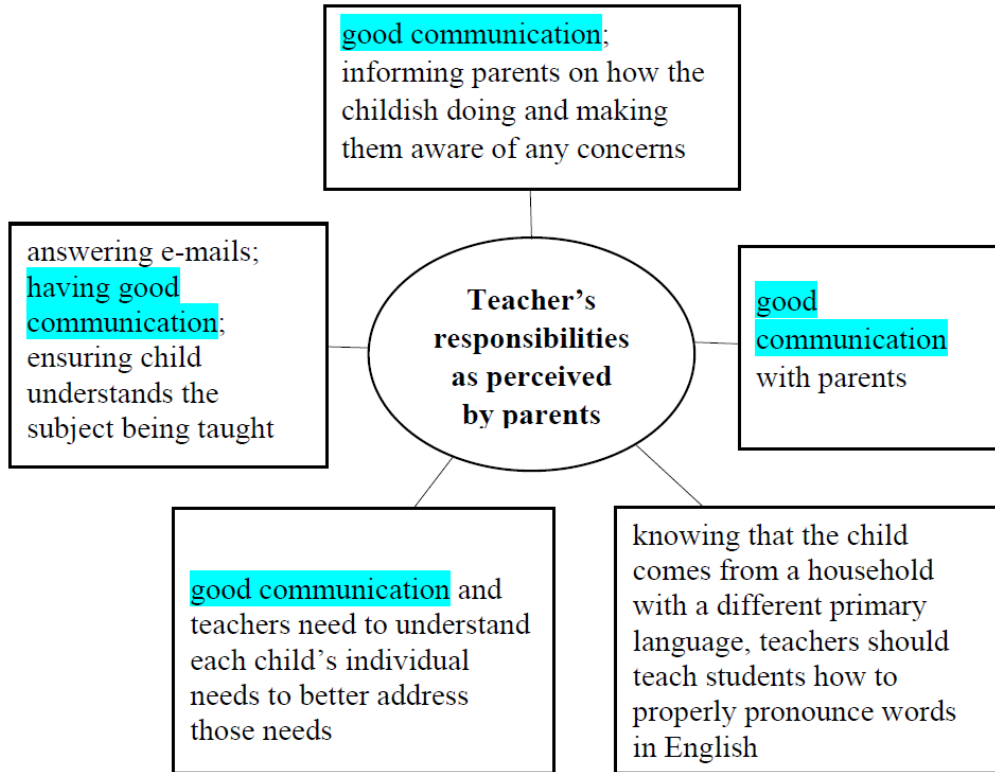
### Appendix G

#### Theme 2: Checking Assignments



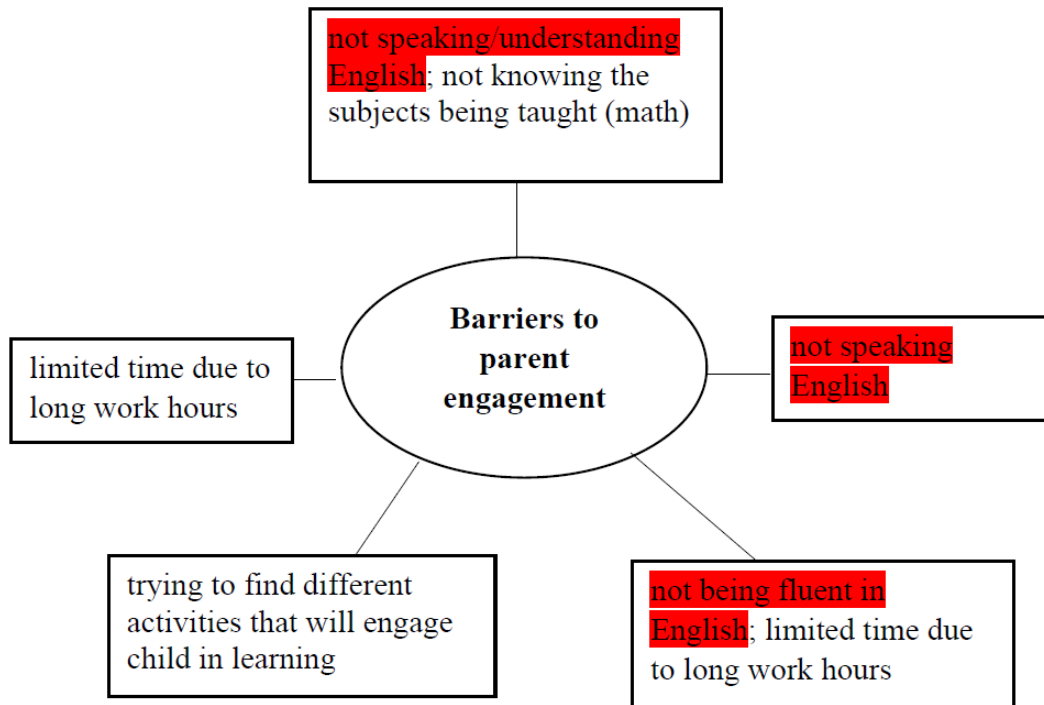
### Appendix H

#### Theme 3: Communication



**Appendix I**

Theme 4: Language Barrier



**Appendix J**

Theme 5: Resources

