

LATINO EDUCATION IN THE TIME OF COVID:

The Pandemic's Unique
Impact on Latino Students
and Families in Houston



Acknowledgments

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Most importantly, we extend our appreciation to the Latino parents and families who are deeply impacted by COVID-19 and were willing to share their stories in this report.

BRIEFING OVERVIEW

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- **Section II:** Gathering the Latino Perspective
- **Section III:** Key Themes
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SECTION I: SUMMARY

COVID-19 is decimating the Latino community. Latinos are experiencing higher rates of infection, mortality, job loss and barriers to accessing education. Disparities that have long existed for black and brown students and families have been exacerbated by COVID-19. According to the Texas Department of State Health Services, “Latinos, who make up 40% of Texas population, account for 52% of all COVID-19 cases.”

This pandemic’s impact has left an undeniable mark with long lasting effects on the Latino community and in particular its children. Over 50% of students across Texas are Latino. The hardest hit cities in Texas serve a majority of Latino students. The collective well-being of Latino students will determine the future of our cities.

As the public became aware of the tragic realities falling on the Latino community, non-Latino leaders speculated on the Latinx experience and often proposed simplified solutions without fully understanding the nuances within our comunidad. The void of Latino representation at decision-making tables has never been more apparent. In order to highlight the Latino experience and identify needs and solutions Latinos for Education gathered the perspective from over 400 Latinos in Houston (Spanish- speaking families, teachers, school leaders, and multi-sector leaders) on how COVID-19 is uniquely impacting Latino students and families. We also asked Latinos to share insights for solutions to support the Latino community through this pandemic.

SCHOOL DISTRICTS WITH LARGEST LATINO STUDENT POPULATION



School District	Number of Latino Students	% of Latino Students in District	Rank
Houston ISD	129240	62%	1
Cypress-Fairbanks ISD	51593	45%	2
Aldine ISD	45808	72%	3
Pasadena ISD	44323	84%	4
Katy ISD	28149	36%	5
Alief ISD	24637	54%	6
Klein ISD	22068	43%	7
Spring Branch ISD	20514	61%	8
Fort Bend ISD	20058	28%	9
Galena Park ISD	17616	80%	10
Spring ISD	16264	46%	11
Humble ISD	15748	37%	12
Goose Creek ISD	14851	65%	13
Lamar CISD	14330	45%	14
Clear Creek ISD	13184	32%	15
Alvin ISD	10056	41%	16
YES PREP Public Schools	9979	86%	17
KIPP Houston	9897	66%	18
Channelview ISD	7632	80%	19
Pearland ISD	7447	37%	20



SECTION II:

GATHERING THE LATINO PERSPECTIVE

As COVID-19 begins to unveil the systematic inequalities that were already holding Latino children and families back, Latinos for Education distributed a Spanish-language parent survey and convened Latino leaders. Latinos for Education surveyed over 300 Latino Spanish-speaking parents and guardians across Houston. Additionally, Latinos for Education convened more than 100 senior multi-sector Latino leaders (CEOs, board members, senior staff) and Latino educators (teachers and school leaders) to identify how COVID-19 is uniquely challenging Latino students. Latino leaders from the following organizations were represented:

ORGANIZATIONS REPRESENTED

- Aldine ISD
- ALPFA
- A+UP Charter School
- Arts Connect Houston
- AVANCE-Houston, Inc.
- American Leadership Forum (ALF)
- Association for the Advancement of Mexican Americans (AAMA)
- Baker Ripley
- Baker Ripley Promise Community Schools
- Breakthrough Houston
- Center for Pursuit
- City of Houston
- Cypress- Fairbanks ISD
- Comcast
- El Centro de Corazon
- Galena Park ISD
- Good Reason Houston
- Gulfton Super Neighborhood Council
- Harris Co. Dept of Education
- Houston Hispanic Chamber of Commerce
- Houston GPS
- Houston ISD
- Houston Classical Charter School
- James Bowie Elementary
- Klein ISD
- KIPP Texas Public Schools
- Leadership for Educational Equity
- LULAC Council #60
- Nieto Technology Partners
- NestQuest
- Periscope Strategies
- Project Blueprint
- Prospanica Houston
- Pro Unitas
- Raul Yzaguirre School for Success
- Region IV
- Small Steps Nurturing Center
- SER Jobs
- SERA
- Spring Branch ISD
- Spring ISD
- TEACH
- Teach Plus
- Tejano Center for Community Concerns
- The Latin Women's Initiative
- The Morales Memorial Foundation
- The Opportunity Project
- Univision 45 Houston
- University of Houston
- University of Houston - Clear Lake
- United Way Houston
- Veritas Total Solutions
- Waltrip High School
- Wells Fargo
- YES Prep Public Schools

SECTION III: KEY THEMES

While each group surveyed shared different perspectives on the needs of Latino students and families based on their vantage point, there was overlap in the most pressing needs surfaced. The following themes and categories emerged.

KEY THEMES

- Student Mental Health Concerns



Student Mental Health Concerns

- Housing Insecurity
- Income Insecurity
- Food Insecurity



Family Access to Basic Resources

- Student Learning Loss Concern
- Student Access to Computers & Wi-Fi



Student Access to Technology

- Digital Literacy
- Access to Digital Learning Resources
- Multilingual Resources



Student Learning Loss

- Public Policy Advocacy
- Equipping Latino Voice for Advocacy
- Long-Term Planning Needed



Long-term Advocacy Planning with the Latino Voice

KEY INSIGHTS:

1. Relative to their children, Latinx parents are most concerned with their mental health.
2. Inequitable family access to basic services such as income, housing and food is a major barrier to student well-being and academic success.
3. The COVID-19 pandemic has illustrated the inequitable student access to technology and wi-fi.
4. Student learning loss will continue with the absence of quality virtual learning experiences.
5. Latinos must be represented in leadership and driving decision-making on long-term solutions to systemic inequities.



“Se encuentran nerviosos, molestos la mayor parte del tiempo, asustados, y preocupados hacia el futuro. Regularmente preguntan cuándo terminará todo esto.”

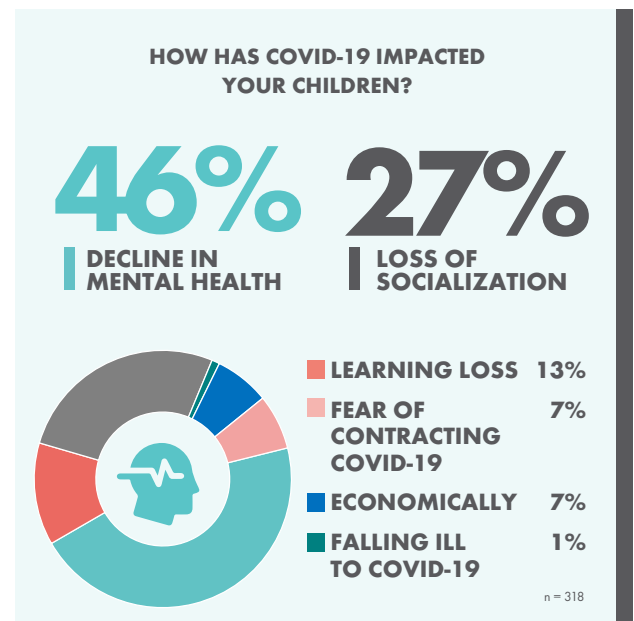
“They are nervous, upset most of the time, scared, and worried about the future. They regularly ask when this will all end.”

STUDENT MENTAL HEALTH

When Latinx families were asked how COVID-19 has impacted their children, 46% of Latinx parents said a decline in their child’s mental health was their top concern. This was a surprising response considering that conversations around mental health are often taboo in the Latino community.

Parents reported a wide-range of examples that illustrate how their children’s mental health has been impacted as a result of COVID-19: For example, a parent shared that her child cries and asks constantly to be taken to the hospital to ensure he/she doesn’t have COVID-19 after finding out that a family member had contracted COVID-19. Other parents reported their children are now scared of leaving their homes and refuse to go to the park because they fear contracting COVID-19.

While the pandemic has brought up conversations about mental health across the country, we must pay close attention to how the Latino community is talking about this issue so we can create solutions alongside Latino families. Mental health conversations are nuanced for Latinos, including in Spanish-language households where translations can have different connotations.





“

*“Nos falta comida en casa
y nos falta el trabajo.”*

■ *“We lack food here at home and we need a job.”*

FAMILY ACCESS TO BASIC RESOURCES

COVID-19 has left many Latino families struggling as many have lost their jobs and are trying to find ways to both stay in their homes and put food on the table. When asked about how the pandemic is impacting their families, 52% cited that their biggest concern was income insecurity followed by 41% stating food insecurity.

The Latino community is resilient, but they are being hard pressed on every side. Many of the parents shared that they don't have money to pay their rent, bills, and other basic necessities. Parents also shared that their food expenses at home have increased since their children are not going to school making their situation even more difficult to manage.

As we prepare for school reentry, it will be imperative for different systems locally and statewide to collaborate in order to support families and their children during this time as housing and food insecurity have a direct impact on children's physical health, mental health, and ability to learn. Additionally, school systems may need to prepare to see an increase in student mobility rates due to the increase of income and food insecurity as a result of COVID-19.

WHAT ARE THE TOP THREE CONCERNS
YOU HAVE ABOUT YOUR FAMILY AS A
RESULT OF COVID-19?

52% **41%**
| **INCOME** | **FOOD**
INSECURITY **INSECURITY**

MENTAL HEALTH/
EMOTIONAL
SUPPORT

EDUCATIONAL
RESOURCES

HEALTH

RECREATIONAL
ACTIVITIES

ACCESS TO
MEDICAL CARE

LACK OF PPE
(E.G. HAND
SANITIZER)

19%

14%

10%

5%

4%

2%



n = 318



“Le falta una computadora y una tableta ya que yo no tengo una. No puedo comprarle tampoco ya que no tengo trabajo.”

“My son doesn’t have a computer or tablet since I don’t have one. I can’t buy one either because I don’t have a job.”

STUDENT ACCESS TO TECHNOLOGY

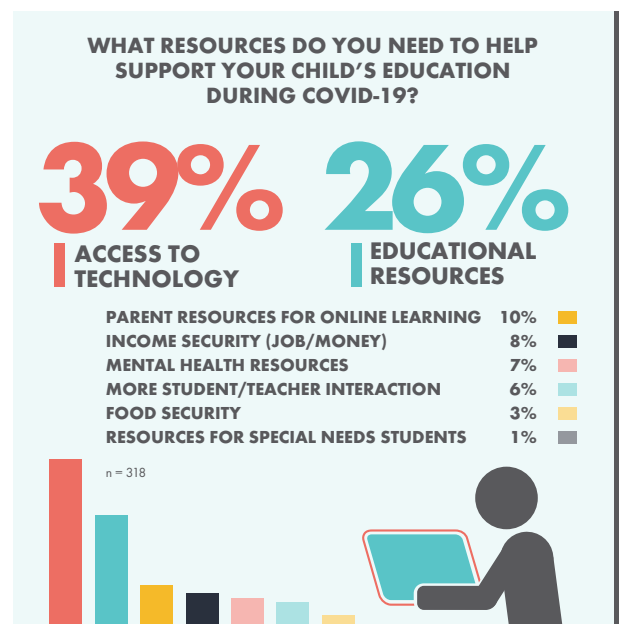
In March 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic forced schools to close and school districts across Greater Houston shifted to virtual learning. This shift highlighted an equity gap in access to technology as many Latino families were unable to access educational resources due to not having a computer or the internet. Many families experienced delays in obtaining resources for virtual learning, including in school districts where computers were distributed.

Additionally, many of the resources were not accessible in multiple languages. Spanish-speaking families received limited information about how to support their child’s learning in a virtual environment. When asked about what educational resources they need, 39% of Spanish-speaking families cited access to technology or the internet and 26% reported quality educational resources.

As school districts prepare for school reopening, many school districts across Greater Houston are deciding to continue virtual learning and working to ensure families have access to computers and the internet. It is imperative that school districts and schools also focus on creating high-quality resources in multiple

languages. This includes creating more translated documents, utilizing Spanish-language videos, and working more collaboratively with organizations or individuals who are fluent in a student’s home language.

Educational resources need to be created for not only students, but parents as well. Latinx parents are eager to support their child’s education but feel ill equipped at doing so. Strong collaboration between school systems and Latino families will become even more essential as families navigate how to provide support and accountability for their child to continue learning in a virtual environment.





“Estoy preocupada por la educación de mis hijos y que no lleguen a aprender lo suficiente para pasar al próximo año escolar. También me preocupa que los niños no le pongan la misma importancia al estudio y solo hagan lo mínimo sin querer leer o seguir estudiando.”

“I am worried about the education of my children and that they will not learn enough to move on to the next school year. I am also concerned that they will not give the same importance to study and only do the minimum without wanting to read or continue studying.”

STUDENT LEARNING LOSS

Even with access to computers and the internet, we can expect continued student learning loss during the pandemic. The learning loss that happens over the course of the summer months will extend as many school districts are planning for virtual schooling without the support systems in place for differentiated learning.

Families are concerned about learning loss, particularly as they try to navigate supporting the education of more than one child. Forty-one percent of Latino households cited learning loss as a major concern for their child's education. Many of these families include children in multiple grade levels and parents do not have a clear idea about how virtual learning will work, particularly with multiple children who may need access to a computer at the same time.

It was clear from the survey responses that Spanish-speaking parents are desperate to help their children make the best out of virtual learning but they're unsure about how exactly to help their children primarily because their children's instruction is solely in English, their teacher speaks only English, and/or they don't have access to a resource online that can guide them on how they can support their children instructionally during this time.

HOW HAS COVID-19 IMPACTED YOUR CHILDREN?

41% LEARNING LOSS **27%** QUALITY OF VIRTUAL LEARNING

■ LACK OF SCHOOL FOR SCHOOL YEAR NORMALCY 9%
■ MENTAL HEALTH 8%
■ EXPOSURE TO COVID-19 8%
■ LACK OF SCHOOL RESOURCES 7%

n = 318

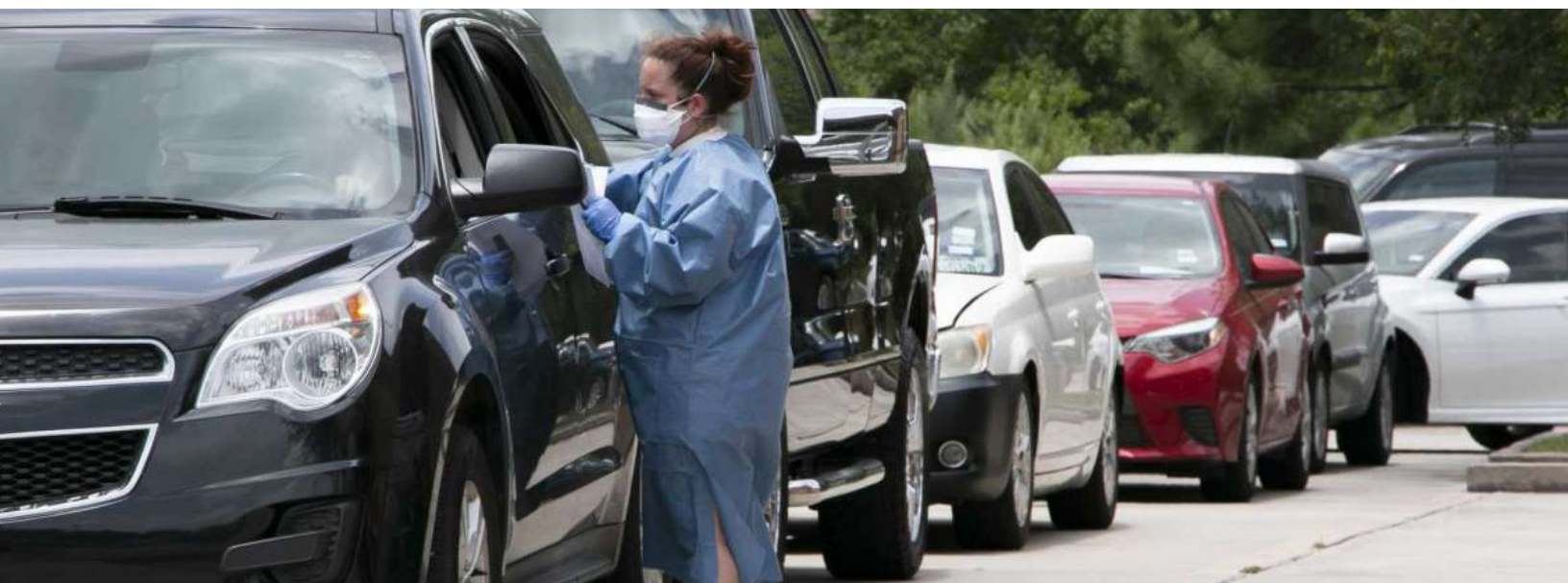


LATINOS DRIVING DECISIONS FOR LONG-TERM SOLUTIONS

Latinx leadership and a coordinated effort to amplify the needs of our community are essential. Many leaders, educators and families expressed that planning and solutions were moving forward with insufficient opportunities for input by the very communities in need.

As schools plan for reopening, Latino voices must be leading this conversation. In early August 2020, the Houston Chronicle reported the difference in perspective among parents surveyed by school districts in Greater Houston regarding their preference for in-person classes vs. virtual learning: “In five districts [in Greater Houston] serving large numbers of...Latino families, about 25 percent to 35 percent are choosing in person classes. By contrast about 55 percent to 70 percent of families” across four school districts in more affluent areas of Houston indicated their preference is to send their children to campuses for in-person learning to start the school year.

It’s critical to understand the nuances behind parents’ perspectives and choices in order to fully address their needs. This requires not just amplifying the voices of Latinos but also an understanding of the nuances within the Latino community. As we collectively develop solutions to address this pandemic, the voices of Latinos must not only be involved in the conversation but they must also be driving decision making.



SECTION V: CONCLUSION:

If Houston wants to be a prosperous and thriving city, Latino students and families need to succeed. We deeply believe that in order for us to improve the quality of education in our region, we need to incorporate the Latino experience in the decisions we are generating for our students and families, many of which are Latino. By taking into account the perspectives of Latino multi-sector leaders, Latino educators, and Latino Spanish-speaking families, we will be able to ensure the solutions we are generating are as effective as possible.

When schools reopen, we must operate differently in order to address the immediate impact of the pandemic on Latino communities.

We must address the mental health of our children. While it's understandable that there will be an immediate temptation to jump into addressing learning loss and focusing on academics, we must respond appropriately to heightened stress and trauma that many Latino families cited. Our children need to first heal in order to continue learning. This requires providing mental health resources and a focus on relationship building between not only teachers and students but between teachers and families as well. Additionally, we must accept that schools cannot be the sole providers for all of the needs of students and families. Now more than ever, we must ensure that cities, districts and community partners are intentionally coordinating efforts to address these needs and communicating the availability of resources in Spanish to Latino families.

We must provide financial assistance and essential needs (e.g. housing, food) for students and families. All assistance should be disseminated in multiple languages and formats so it's accessible (device agnostic) to Spanish-speaking households who have often been the least informed. It is not enough to offer the programs and supports, we must ensure that information reaches those who are in most need. Our government and district leaders have the responsibility to work with community and media partners to ensure Latinos have the ability to access these necessary supports.

Technology and broadband access must be made available to every child and family in Houston. The pandemic has highlighted a technology gap amongst the Latino community and unless we address it immediately, the opportunity gap will exponentially increase as distance learning becomes more prominent in the education of our children. We must provide access to technology for all students, including but not limited to laptop and internet at no additional cost, digital learning resources and digital literacy supports in multiple languages and in different formats.

In any given year, students across Harris County are out of school during the summer for an average of 84 days. Research shows low-income children, in particular, lose as much as two months of learning during the summer. As of the writing of this report in August 2020, children across Harris County are projected to have been out of school for approximately 180 days since March 2020 – an entire school year. Without a doubt, our most vulnerable children will fall behind academically. Our region stands at the precipice of losing an entire generation of children – our future – unless we act boldly. This significant moment in our students' academic journey calls for a significant investment of time, energy, and resources.

Latino representation must be at the forefront of decision-making about long-term solutions through the pandemic and beyond. We cannot effectively create equitable solutions unless we have equitable representation of decision-makers addressing systemic inequities. The pandemic has brought to light nuanced challenges faced by the Latino community and creating long-term solutions will require a nuanced understanding of these needs. Through first-hand experience of these challenges, Latinos are able to effectively lead efforts to create systemic change.

