

LATINO EDUCATION IN THE TIME OF COVID:

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



Acknowledgments

This report was developed in partnership between Latinos for Education, Amplify Latinx, the Greater Boston Latino Network, and the Massachusetts chapter of the Association of Latino Administrators and Superintendents.

Additionally, we are working in collaboration with In Pursuit of Equity, Accountability and Success (PEAS) who is continuing to gather insights from Latino students, families and education leaders. The preliminary data from their convenings reinforces our findings and includes additional insights from P-20 grade levels.

Our efforts were supported by organizations and individuals committed to ensuring the voices of Latino parents, educators and cross-sector leaders across Massachusetts inform the response to COVID-19.



BRIEFING OVERVIEW

- **Section I:** Summary
- **Section II:** Gathering the Latino Perspective
- **Section III:** Key Themes
- **Section IV:** Conclusion



Photo by: Erin Clark / Boston Globe

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 Gaston Institute, “Latinos, who make up 12.3% of the state’s population, account for 30 % 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 twenty two percent of students across Massachusetts are Latino. The hardest hit cities in the Commonwealth serve a majority of Latino students. In order for our student population to be successful, Latino students and families need to be successful.

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 350 Latinos in Massachusetts (Spanish-speaking families, teachers, school leaders, and multi-sector leaders) on how COVID-19 is uniquely impacting Latino students and families.

We sought to answer the following questions:

1. How is COVID-19 uniquely impacting Latino students and families?
2. What policies and solutions should be created to support Latino students and families through this pandemic?

SCHOOL DISTRICTS WITH LARGEST LATINO STUDENT POPULATION



Percent Latino

Lawrence Public Schools	93%
Chelsea Public Schools	88%
Holyoke Public Schools	81%
Springfield Public Schools	67%
Lynn Public Schools	66%
Southbridge Public Schools	60%
Revere Public Schools	57%
Everett Public Schools	57%
Fitchburg Public Schools	53%
Marlborough Public Schools	52%
Worcester Public Schools	43%
Waltham Public Schools	42%
Somerville Public Schools	42%
Boston Public Schools	42%
Salem Public Schools	41%



SECTION II:

GATHERING THE LATINO PERSPECTIVE

As COVID-19 began to unveil the systematic inequalities that already existed within the educational system, Latinos for Education distributed a Spanish-language parent survey and convened Latino leaders. In partnership with, El Mundo Boston and Telemundo Nueva Inglaterra, we surveyed 255 Latino Spanish-speaking parents and guardians across Massachusetts.

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

- Academy of the Pacific Rim
- American Institutes for Research
- Berkshire School
- Belmont Day School
- Boston Day and Evening Academy
- Boston Public Schools
- Boston Teachers Union
- Chelsea Public Schools
- East Boston High School
- Educators for Excellence
- Friends of the Hernandez
- Greater Egleston High School
- Harvard Graduate School of Education
- Hennigan K-8
- Hurley K-8
- Humanity Advanced, LLC
- Latinos for Education
- Lawrence High School
- La Alianza Hispana
- Latino STEM Alliance
- Latinx Leadership Initiative at Boston College
- Lawrence Public Schools
- LEAF
- LEAD Media
- Libertas Academy Charter School
- Mass Insight Education and Research
- Massachusetts Association of Hispanic Attorneys
- Metro Credit Union
- Massachusetts General Hospital
- MIRA Coalition
- Medford Public Schools
- Morgan Lewis
- MTR Consulting Services
- NAACP
- Nashoba Brooks School
- Nellie Mae Education Foundation
- Northern Essex Community College
- P.A. Shaw Elementary School
- People's United Bank
- Sánchez Strategies
- Sociedad Latina
- State Street
- Stop and Compare Markets
- The Boston Foundation
- Tufts Health Plan Foundation
- The Education Trust
- Tufts University
- U.S. Department of Education
- uAspire
- Umana Academy
- UP Academy Leonard
- Wolters Kluwer

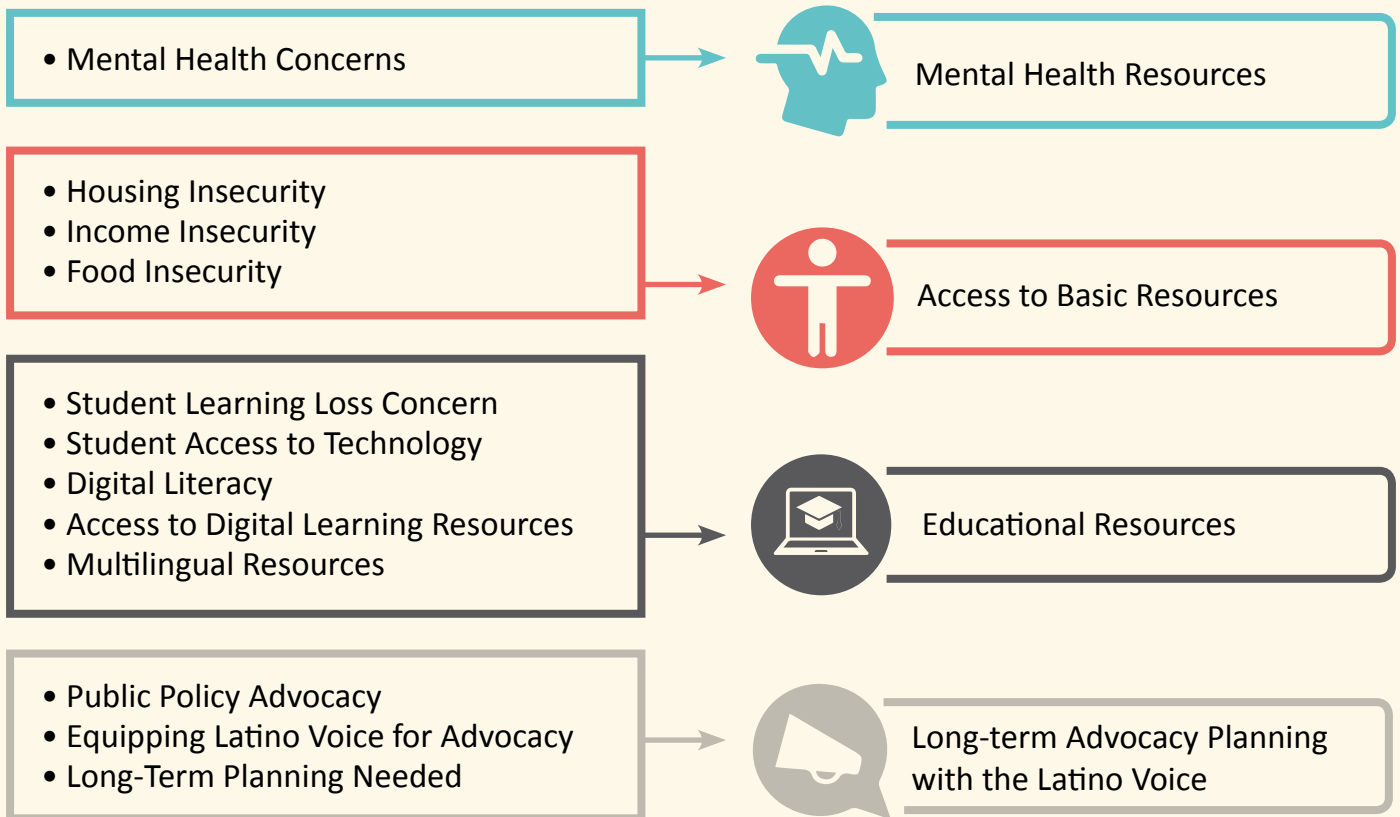
SECTION III:

KEY THEMES

While each group surveyed shared different perspectives on the needs of Latinx students and families based on their vantage point, there was an overlap in identifying the most pressing needs. The 10 key themes were narrowed into four categories of key insights.

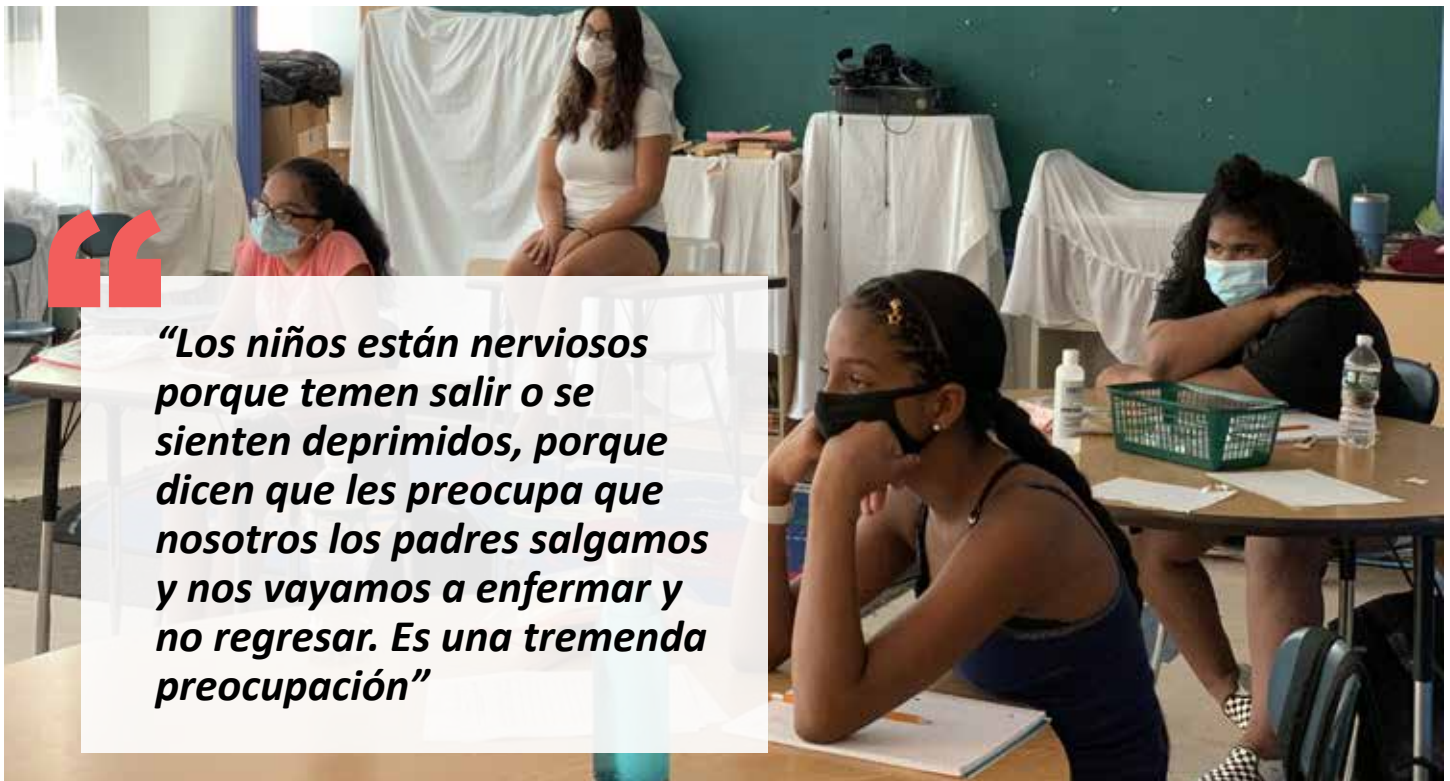
KEY THEMES

MAIN CATEGORIES



KEY INSIGHTS:

1. Relative to their children, Latinx parents are most concerned with their mental health.
2. Inequitable access to basic needs such as income, housing and food is a major barrier to student success.
3. The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted and exacerbated the digital divide and Latinx students' access to technology and wi-fi.
4. Latinos must be represented in leadership and driving decision making on long-term solutions to systemic inequities



“Los niños están nerviosos porque temen salir o se sienten deprimidos, porque dicen que les preocupa que nosotros los padres salgamos y nos vayamos a enfermar y no regresar. Es una tremenda preocupación”

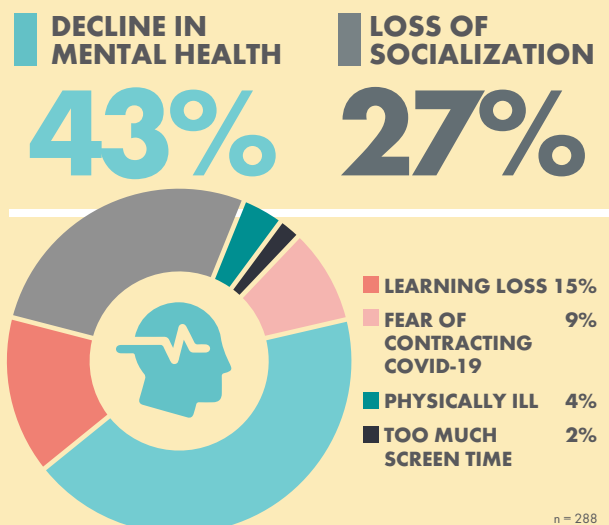
“The children are nervous because they are scared to go out, or they feel depressed because they say they are concerned that we will go out, get sick and not return. It is a great concern.”

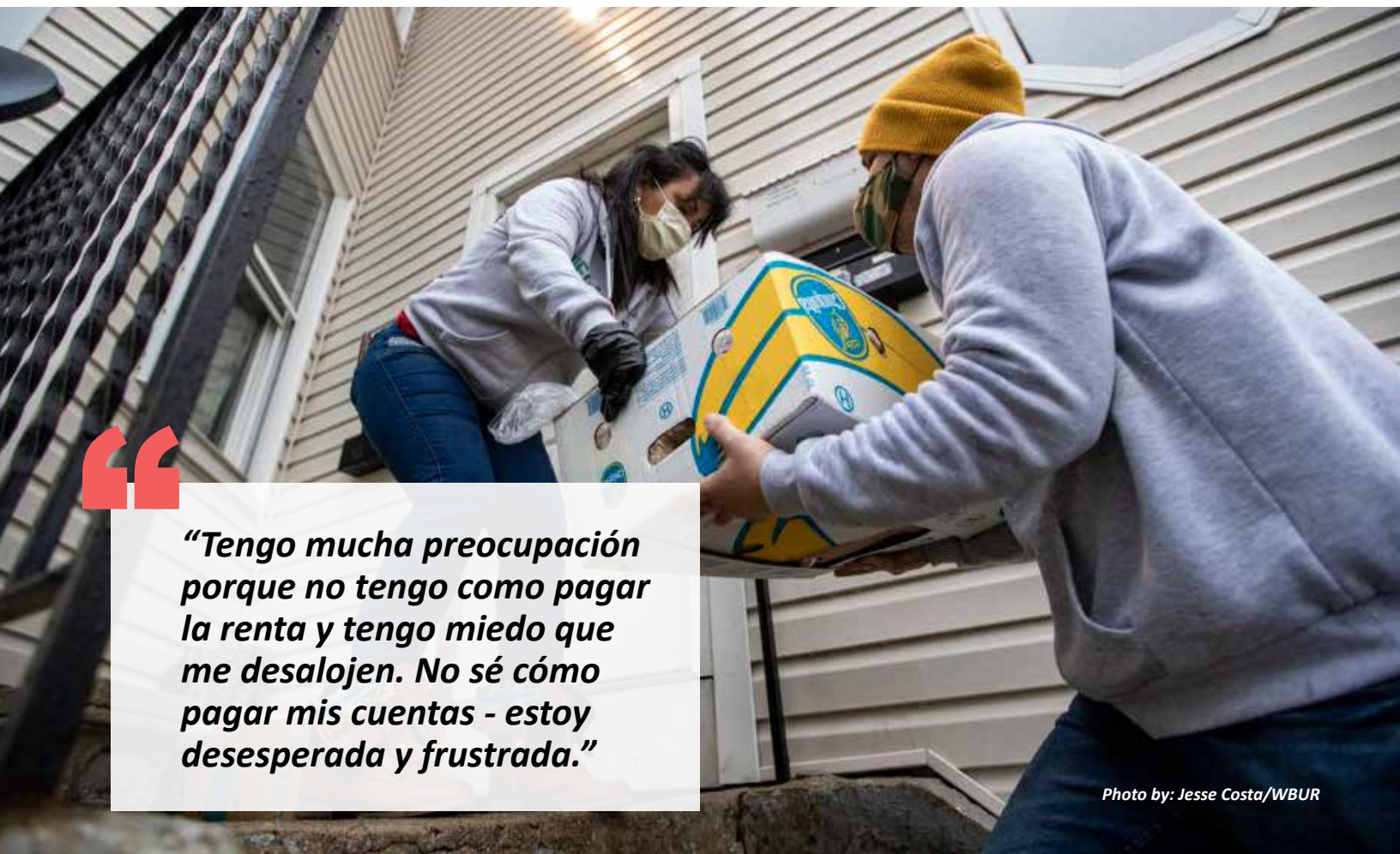
MENTAL HEALTH

In a community where the discussion of mental health is taboo it was surprising that families were openly citing the decline in mental and emotional health of their children. Forty three percent of Spanish speaking families surveyed indicated that a decline in mental health was what was most impacting their children. Decline in mental health and a negative impact of loss of socialization were the two most frequently cited concerns from surveyed Latino families regarding their children. Caregivers shared that their children were showing signs of sadness, anxiety, stress and fear. Many shared anecdotes of children expressing fear of getting sick or dying, fear of leaving the home, fear of family members leaving the home to work, and anxiety of being the cause for illness within many multigenerational homes. Families said some children were refusing to engage with parents or grandparents because they did not want to be the cause of having a family member fall ill and possibly die.

Latinx families are bearing the brunt of this pandemic and as we look to serve students and families, it is important to do so with those most affected at the forefront of decision making and address these needs in a culturally and linguistically effective manner. The pandemic has provided an opportunity to rethink and be innovative about how families can access mental health supports such as caregiver support groups and family therapy. School districts are an essential part of addressing and engaging the social emotional needs of our students. Regardless of what format education is delivered in this upcoming school year we will need to begin the year with a focus on students' mental and emotional needs. Relationships between schools and families will dictate the success of each child's ability to engage in learning.

HOW HAS COVID-19 IMPACTED YOUR CHILDREN?





“Tengo mucha preocupación porque no tengo como pagar la renta y tengo miedo que me desalojen. No sé cómo pagar mis cuentas - estoy desesperada y frustrada.”

Photo by: Jesse Costa/WBUR

“I am very concerned because I have no way to pay the rent and I’m afraid of being evicted. I don’t know how to pay my bills - I’m desperate and frustrated.”

ACCESS TO BASIC NEEDS

Latino families are struggling to stay in their homes and feed their families. Fifty two percent of families surveyed indicated that a top concern is income insecurity followed by twenty two percent experiencing food insecurity. Studies show that housing and food insecurity have a direct impact on children’s physical health, mental health, and ability to learn. While we recognize that our focus as an organization is the education of our Latino community, we have a responsibility as Latino leaders to advocate that these needs are addressed by state and local decision makers so that Latino children and families are in environments where learning is possible. With students likely to experience some form of distance learning this upcoming school year, our state and local governments need to ensure they are addressing food insecurity for children and families.

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



INCOME INSECURITY

52%



FOOD INSECURITY

22%

- **7 HEALTH**
- **6% MENTAL HEALTH/ EMOTIONAL SUPPORT**
- **6% EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES**
- **5% RECREATIONAL ACTIVITIES**
- **1% LACK OF PPE (E.G. HAND SANITIZER)**
- **1% ACCESS TO MEDICAL CARE**

n = 288

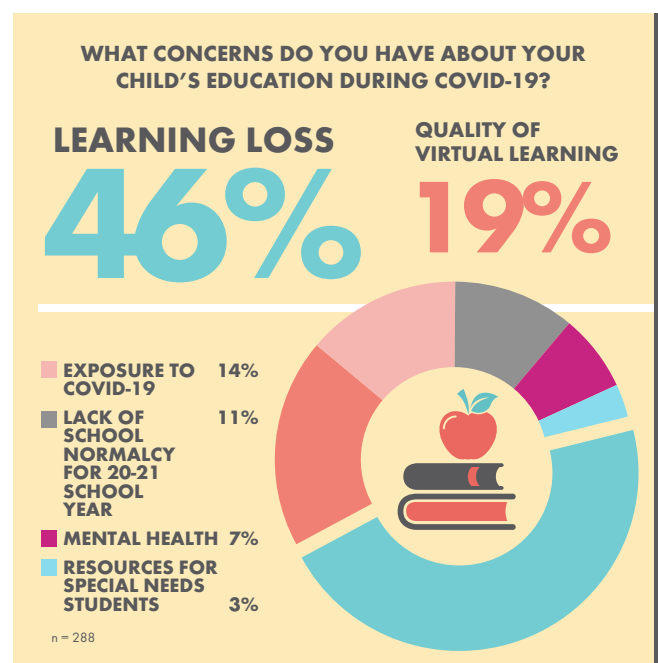


“El impacto fue muy fuerte tanto para los niños como para nosotros los padres. El hecho de que los niños dejaran de ir a la escuela a socializar con los demás niños, fue fuerte porque ellos no entendían el porqué de la situación y en especial para los más pequeños. Para los padres, el quedarse en casa a enseñar a los hijos no fue ni ha sido fácil porque no estamos preparados para enseñarlos, ni teníamos las herramientas necesarias. Por ejemplo en la comunidad latina no teníamos internet ni una computadora para que los niños hicieran sus tareas. No estábamos preparados para esta pandemia”.

“The impact was very large for both children and parents. The fact that the children stopped going to school to socialize with other children was impactful because they did not understand the reason – especially for the little ones. For parents staying home to teach their children, it was not easy because we are not prepared to teach them nor did we have the necessary tools. Especially in the Latino community, we did not have the Internet access or a computer for children to use. We were not prepared for this pandemic.”

EDUCATION AND TECHNOLOGY

Forty six percent of families surveyed expressed concern over learning loss followed by nineteen percent concerned by the quality of virtual learning. As schools closed in March 2020 to address the public health challenges presented by the pandemic Latino students and families were left with limited information. Information was not immediately available in multiple languages and in addition, many families did not have access to technology equipment, access to the internet, nor access to books and other educational materials. Many experienced delays in obtaining the necessary tools to engage in distance learning and even in districts that were able to provide access to laptops and internet, students were left to navigate a digital world without adequate digital literacy supports at home. Families shared having to sit in school parking lots to access WIFI, and relying on some teachers who were able to guide and instruct them on how to sign



in to zoom and school portals for their children. Many shared that without devices from districts they would not have been able to engage in remote learning. Districts struggled to provide resources in students' home language which created a greater barrier for students and families to adequately engage with the continuation of their education.

In schools with Latino teachers, these Latino educators were a lifeline to resources that otherwise would not have been available to families. As these challenges unfolded Latino teachers and community leaders stepped in to translate documents, create instructional videos and voice memos in Spanish to ensure that Latino families could access basic needs as well as continue their learning.

As district reopening plans are developed, we acknowledge that the challenge is daunting, and the reality is that many students are academically behind. Data has shown us that "Summer Slide" is real, every year students regress academically throughout the summer months when there is a lull in educational programming. Now educators are faced with teaching students who have been disconnected for longer, some since March. It is imperative that we find ways to provide a rigorous education while keeping our students physically and mentally healthy. As a community—businesses, government leaders, educators and families—we have a duty to come together to create holistic solutions and commit to our shared responsibility to ensure that all children and families are equitably served, and their needs are met. As district plans continue to be publicly released it is critically important that students and families are at the forefront and provided access to the educational tools necessary to fully engage in continuing their education.



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 school districts continue to plan for the reopening of school, Latinx voices must be leading this conversation. In a recent poll conducted by The Mass Inc. Polling Group, Latinx parents reported dramatically different experiences with remote learning and were the demographic that showed the least confidence in a safe school reopening. More than fifty percent of Latino families stated they were not confident their school would be able to prevent the spread of the coronavirus, compared to sixty nine percent of white families who felt confident.

Addressing the needs and concerns of the Latino community requires not just amplifying the voices of Latinos but also an understanding of the nuances within the community. As we collectively develop solutions to address this pandemic, the voices of Latinos must be an integral part of the solutions.

SECTION V:

CONCLUSION:

If Massachusetts wants to be a prosperous and thriving state, Latino students and families need to succeed. We deeply believe that in order for us to improve the quality of education in the Commonwealth, we need to incorporate the Latino experience in the decisions we are generating for our students and families. By taking into account the perspectives of Latino multi-sector leaders, educators, and Spanish-speaking families, we'll be able to ensure the solutions we're generating are as effective as possible. This approach will benefit the entire region. When schools reopen, we have to adapt and operate differently in order to address the immediate impact of the pandemic on Latino communities.

1. School districts must focus on building relationships between teachers, students, and families. There is a temptation to want to jump right into catching up on academics and our children need to first heal in order to continue learning. Additionally, it is important to recognize that school districts cannot be the sole providers for all the needs of students and families. The COVID-19 pandemic has increased the need for cities and towns, school districts and community partners to intentionally coordinate efforts to address the basic needs of our most vulnerable populations and to create integrated student supports. There are many community partners who are providing critical services and they have fostered authentic relationships with the Latinx community. Moving forward they will need to be leveraged, adequately resourced, and supported so that their vital impact can continue.
2. Provide financial assistance and essential needs such as housing and food to students and families. All assistance should be disseminated in multiple languages and formats. Our government and district leaders have the responsibility to work with culturally competent community and media partners to ensure Latinos have the ability to access these necessary supports.
3. Technology and broadband access must be made available to every child and family in the Commonwealth. 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 have to 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.
4. Latino representation needs to 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. The pandemic has brought to light nuanced challenges faced by the Latino community and creating long-term solutions will require an understanding of these needs. Through firsthand experience of these challenges, Latinos are best equipped to effectively lead efforts to create systemic change.

