



# THE POWER OF LANGUAGE:

EDUCATIONAL TRANSFORMATION THROUGH THE LENS OF LATINO PARENTS AND EDUCATORS



## INTRODUCTION

As the educational landscape continues to evolve, Latinos for Education is committed to meeting the needs of our increasingly diverse student population in Greater Houston. Because we know centering the voice of our parents and educators is critical to student success and fostering a more inclusive and effective educational environment, we conducted a survey of 400 English and Spanish-speaking Latino parents and educators – many of whom are both parents and educators – in the greater Houston area to learn about their priorities.

Parents and educators who live in Harris, Fort Bend, Montgomery, Brazoria, Galveston and Liberty counties made up our respondents and shared more about their experiences and recommendations.

## KEY FINDINGS

Clear communication and engagement strategies are important to any parent, regardless of educational background or language preference. Our survey results were clear: Latino parents want to be involved in their children's schools, but barriers limit their ability to do so, and they favor the expansion of bilingual programs and language access policies.

Our survey, which included both monolingual (English or Spanish) and bilingual parents, highlighted a few key takeaways.

### **1. Latino parents want to engage and hear more from their schools and districts, which they view as essential to their children's success.**

Nine in ten Latino parents see high-quality public schools as instrumental for their children's success. That number is even higher among immigrant Latino parents (95%). Given the importance Latino parents place on education, it's not surprising that 87% said they want to be kept informed about school board meetings and events. Again, the numbers were even higher among immigrant and Spanish-dominant families. However, language access continues to be a barrier with up to 80% of parents stating they would engage more in their child's education if there were more Spanish fluent educators and administrators.

### LATINO PARENTS AND EDUCATORS

80% 

WOULD BE MORE INVOLVED  
IF MORE SPANISH-FLUENT  
EDUCATORS WERE PRESENT

87% 

WANT TO KNOW ABOUT SCHOOL  
BOARD MEETINGS AND EVENTS



## LATINO PARENTS

**46%** 

REPORT RECEIVING  
COMMUNICATION FROM  
THEIR CHILD'S SCHOOL  
ONLY IN ENGLISH



### **2. Latino parents and educators encounter a variety of information barriers and communication gaps at their children's schools, which underscores their support for expanding access for parental engagement.**

Latino parents and educators face significant challenges when it comes to information accessibility and communication at their children's schools. Of particular concern, nearly half (46%) of Latino parents report receiving communication from their child's school only in English. Alarming, one third (34%) of Spanish-speaking households report receiving no communication in Spanish. Also, 29% of Latino immigrant parents express that interpretation services are not readily available at their children's schools. These issues highlight the increasing need for more effective communication strategies, including better utilization and promotion of the school's Spanish-language website.

### **3. There is strong and broad support among Latino parents and educators for bilingual education programs and policies that provide education access to Spanish-speaking students and parents.**

Latino parents and educators show overwhelming support for bilingual education programs and language access policies, which are seen as essential to facilitating access to the education system for Spanish-speaking students and parents. However, 40% of respondents said there is a current shortage of written policies aimed at non-English speaking families' engagement during school activities. Further, 39% of Latino educators do not believe their districts equip front-office personnel effectively for communication with these families. As a result, there's an urgent call for increased Spanish-fluent and Latino representation in the education workforce, backed by 88% of Latino educators and parents. Overwhelmingly Latino educators and parents also support increasing the number of Latino and Spanish-speaking public-facing staff, in addition to a boost in funding for bilingual programs.

#### **4. Latino parents and educators want to see bilingual programs and access expanded further, to address faculty shortages and representation needs.**

One third of Latino educators and immigrant parents say they have seen Latino teachers leaving the classroom due to reasons like layoffs and better career opportunities. As such, only 22% of Latino parents feel they have adequate access to Spanish-fluent teachers. The expansion of bilingual programs holds the potential to increase teacher recruitment and retention. It provides teachers opportunities for career advancement with the right support, such as professional development, coaching, mentorships, and stipends.

Nearly 90% of respondents endorse the creation of new programs and additional paths to teacher certification to respond to the pressing need for bilingual educators. 86% also favor an online data dashboard or website accurately presenting the diversity of teachers and administrators, including Spanish-speaking and Latino staff. A data dashboard could keep stakeholders informed about how school districts are responding to a community's linguistic and cultural needs.



## RECOMMENDATIONS

**Recommendation 1:** Adopt language access policies that require districts to communicate with families in the languages most used in the district, using the same channels as English communication to keep families informed and connected.

**Recommendation 2:** Create culturally and linguistically relevant family engagement programs to help families understand their role in their child's education, navigating the education system, and understanding academic outcomes for their children.

**Recommendation 3:** Increase funding for bilingual/dual language programs, services, and educators through recruitment and program expansion across districts.

**Recommendation 4:** Expand a culturally competent educator workforce that mirrors the population of the student body in Houston by providing pathways like "grow-your-own programs" and individualized programs of study to support aspiring bilingual education teachers and administrators



## CONCLUSION

Our survey reveals that Latino parents have an unwavering commitment to their children's wellbeing and success. However, because the current state of policies for bilingual education and access falls short, many Latino parents and their children are left at a disadvantage.

Our recommendations to meet their needs not only expand on current policies but call for a fundamental recommitment and restructuring of the educational system so our Latino parents can actively participate and contribute to their children's education.

Latino student success cannot be separated from the overall success of Houston and Region - we must work together to address these opportunity gaps because when Latino students in Houston succeed, all of Houston succeeds.

