

CONVERSATIONS WITH LATINO FAMILIES IN SOUTH CAROLINA:

What We Learned



As a part of our ongoing effort to strengthen partnerships between families and schools, the Carolina Family Engagement Center (CFEC) recently enlisted the help of several of our community partners to learn more about how Latino parents are engaging with their children's schools. The insights parents shared in several focus groups are summarized below; they will inform the next steps of CFEC's work as we develop and disseminate resources to enhance the ability of Latino families and schools to work as partners in supporting improved academic and developmental outcomes for children.



FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANTS

Mothers, grandmothers, and primary caregivers represented many different countries including Columbia, El Salvador, Mexico, Ecuador, Guatemala, Honduras, Venezuela, as well as the unincorporated U.S. territory of Puerto Rico.

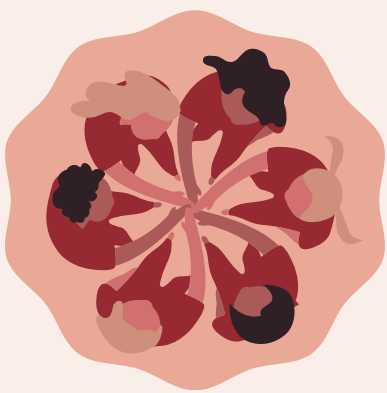
Key Takeaways for Districts, Schools & Family Engagement Professionals



ACCESS TO INFORMATION IN SPANISH

Spanish-speaking families who are not proficient in English struggle to work in partnership with schools if they cannot readily access interpreters or translations of important school information. Federal law requires that schools provide information to limited English proficient parents in a language that they can understand about any program, service, or activity that is called to the attention of parents who are proficient in English*. Without a strategic and sustained district-wide approach to providing these resources, communication gaps can occur at the school level that leave Spanish-speaking parents feeling excluded and unable to help their children.

*See <https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/docs/dcl-factsheet-lep-parents-201501.pdf>



BELONGINGNESS

One of the keys to engaging Latino families is to give them the sense of being invited and welcome. The degree to which the focus group participants felt welcomed at their children's schools corresponded in part to the ready availability of interpreters, simultaneous translation technologies, or other means of facilitating meaningful communication with the school.



MAINTAINING TARGETED SUPPORTS

Focus group participants believe that Latino children and their families continue to need targeted supports through middle and high school. They noticed that schools' efforts to create a welcoming environment and provide resources designed specifically for Spanish-speaking families tended to be more plentiful at the elementary school level but taper off in the upper grades.



LEVERAGING STRENGTHS OF LATINO FAMILIES

All families bring strengths to the table that schools can build on to increase effective family engagement. Latino families are no different in this regard. For example, focus group participants, described how their Latino culture encourages the unity and mutual support that are characteristic of their families. Many also described the dreams they have for their children and the high value they place on education as a pathway for their children to grow into independent and successful adults. Several expressed the hope that schools would challenge their children with rigorous classwork so that they will be competitive in the global economy.



What participants had to say about . . .

RESILIENCY OF THEIR CHILDREN.

Participants expressed pride in their children's ability to adapt to and learn in U.S. schools despite having to navigate many new experiences on their own.

IMPORTANCE OF FAMILY AND CULTURE.

Participants continue to maintain pride in their families' Latino culture and traditions including food, music, and the Spanish language. Although they continue to take pride in their native language and would like to see their children learn Spanish, all participants believed that it was important that their children be fluent in English.

THEIR DETERMINATION TO SUPPORT THEIR CHILDREN'S LEARNING EVEN IN THE FACE OF CHALLENGES.

The participants gave examples of how they and their friends have gone to great lengths to be at the school for their child as much as they can because they value education and want their children to do well.

FEELING WELCOMED AT THEIR CHILDREN'S SCHOOL.

Some participants felt welcomed at their children's schools, particularly elementary schools. Others did not. Again, a key factor for these families was access to interpreters or other means of facilitating meaningful communication with administrators and faculty. Latino families whose children attended schools with a small Latino population tended to feel more disconnected and tended to report that their children were at greater risk of being bullied or teased about their language or culture.

THE MANY WAYS THAT THEY SUPPORT THEIR CHILDREN'S LEARNING.

These participants want to do everything that they can to help their children succeed in school. They described the many different roles that they play at home, everything from counselor to disciplinarian. They want more information and resources in Spanish to help them better monitor their children's homework and grades and advise their children on the best classes to take. These participants generally have not felt welcome in traditional school organizations like School Improvement Council or PTA/PTO and for that reason, tend not to participate.

THE IMPACT OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC ON THEIR CHILDREN'S LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT.

Several participants worried that their children's separation from their English-speaking classmates will slow their children's progress in learning English. In addition, participants themselves are struggling to keep in touch with teachers. The challenge of not speaking English is compounded by the difficulties that both Spanish and English-speaking parents are experiencing in using school technologies, learning platforms while also managing the competing demands of their jobs and the need to supervise their children's virtual learning.



THERE ARE PLENTY OF WAYS TO HELP!

For more information about these focus groups or if you have an interest in participating with CFEC in the development of information and resources for families and schools in the areas listed above, please contact us at cfec@mailbox.sc.edu

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