ENGLISH LANGUAGE ADVISORY COMMITTEE: THE BRIDGE OF INFLUENCE
FOR LATINO PARENT INVOLVEMENT

A Thesis

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in

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(Multicultural Education)

by

Alejandro Delgadillo

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ENGLISH LANGUAGE ADVISORY COMMITTEE: THE BRIDGE OF INFLUENCE
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Susan Heredia, Ph.D.

Graduate & Professional Studies in Education
Abstract of
ENGLISH LANGUAGE ADVISORY COMMITTEE: THE BRIDGE OF INFLUENCE
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Statement of the Problem

The purpose of this study was to investigate the factors that impact the participation of Latino parents in their school site’s English Language Advisory Committee (ELAC). Even though Latino, especially ELL, parents have tried through different school venues for decades to be included in the education of their children, there is still the unfortunate perception from many educators that Latino parents do not value nor prioritize education. All literature compiled in the study verify that Latino parents want and are enthusiastic to be included in the education of their children. Latino parents that have entered the education field have encountered many institutionalized, economic, social, and racial barriers that have prevented them from being active school parent participants. The Latino parents that are able to enter the institution do not only empower themselves, but “seek to transform parent involvement with the goal of making education a democratic and reflective action” (Olivos, p. 112, 2010).

Sources of Data

Personal observations, one-on-one interviews, a focus group meeting, and
multiple recordings were conducted in an effort to find the specific factors that affect Latino parental involvement in ELAC. There were five (one father and four mothers) that were randomly selected of which all self-identified themselves as English language learners (ELL), Latino, active ELAC parent, and had at least one elementary (K – 6th) child at the school site.

Conclusions

The results of the study confirm that Latino parents are and continue to be interested in the education of their children. All participating parents agreed ELAC served as an important bridge which influenced parent participation in American Schools in spite of the cultural and gender differences. Their participation in ELAC made them aware of the differences in their approach to schooling in México in stark contrast to expectations to U.S. schools. The conformism (conformismo) that is brought by many Latino parents prevents them from fully participating in school related events and meetings. Moreover, they see upholding the traditional views of their home country education could potentially be detrimental to their children’s U.S. education. Furthermore, involvement in ELAC provide an environment for parents to become self-aware to the degree in which they themselves could start critiquing the varying levels of these differences they see among other Latino parents, as they lament over such low parent involvement. The decrease in parent involvement beyond second and third grade
may be tied to premature autonomy parents present indirectly to their children. Finally they articulated, even with encouragement from school staff, the difficulty in crossing over to other parent school groups. They described feeling invisible and unheard.

_____________________________, Committee Chair
María Mejorado, Ph.D.

_____________________________
Date
DEDICATION

I dedicate this thesis to everyone who supported me in the completion of this very important step in my life. I am extremely grateful to my wife, Fabiola –your infinite support speaks to the great wife, person and mother you are. Your understanding in constantly keeping our little angels out of the office, especially Dali, so that I would concentrate and have quiet time made a huge difference. I love you, thank-you! Dalila and Isaías, your daily smiles and midnight cries provided me with daily inspiration to continue and be better prepared as an example that nothing is impossible to accomplish in life.

Le dedico este tésis a todas las personas que me apoyaron en el proceso de completar este importante paso en mi vida. Estoy extremadamente agradecido a mi esposa, Fabiola –tu apoyo infinito habla de la gran esposa, persona y madre que eres. Tu apoyo constante en mantener nuestros angelitos fuera de la oficina, especialmente Dali, para que yó me pudiera concentrar y tener silencio hiso una gran diferencia. ¡Te amo, gracias! Dalila e Isaías, sus sonrisas y desveladas de media noche me proveyeron con inspiración diaria a continuar y estar mejor preparado como ejemplo que nada es imposible de tener en la vida.
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This thesis is possible thanks to the support and help of the entire Bilingual Multicultural department (BMED) at Sacramento State University. I am forever grateful to all of you!

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Alejandro Delgadillo
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Chapter I

INTRODUCTION

Background

Being successful in school has been defined in many different ways within the United States of America’s public school system. For many, success continues to be measured by student popularity, academic awards, high scores in formal assessments, letter grades, and even for making it to graduation day. Although these aspects are symbols in American culture that define “success”, a key common ingredient that is tied to each and every one of them is parental involvement. It is the parental involvement puzzle piece in education that plays a crucial role that no parent or educator should disregard.

The theme of parental involvement has received a great deal of attention for the last few decades from different researchers, practitioners, media, state and the federal government who recognize it as a key component in the growth and development of all students’ academic years (Bickley, Keith, Keith, Singh, Trivette, and Troutman, 1993; Comer, 1986; Epstein 1992). Parental involvement in schools, whether initiated by the parents or the schools, has a profound effect on academic, social, and emotional development that matures as children grow and go through the multiple levels of the public school system. Parental involvement has long been considered a critical factor in children’s success. In her study, Durand (2011) states that “parental involvement in children’s schooling is an important component of children’s early school success” (p. 469) and also a vital piece for positive student academic achievement. Increasing parent
participation in school is often a proposed solution to alleviate the poor education outcomes of minority students. Although parent involvement has been defined and measured in numerous ways in literature, Epstein, Coates, Salinas, Sanders, and Simon (1997), creators of the National Network of Partnership Schools (NNPS) and developers of research based programs on family and community involvement, created the much-admired framework of six types of involvement that has impacted the way schools view, approach, and interpret parental involvement. These categories are based on the relationships between the family, school and community: parenting skills, communication, volunteering, learning at home, decision making, and collaborating with the community. It is clear that Epstein’s work suggests and affirms that schools and students are more productive when they modify a school’s professional teamwork to a school learning community. A learning community not only includes principals, teachers and staff, but also incorporates students, parents and community partners who work together to improve the school [and at the same time] invigorate students’ learning opportunities (Epstein, 2001; Henderson and Mapp, 2002; Sheldon, 2003).

In 1990, California became the first state in the nation to implement a state board of education comprehensive policy on parent involvement, and approved a state law requiring parent involvement in school districts and schools (CSDE, 2012). This policy was adopted on January 13, 1989, and was later revised in September 1994 – which defined six research based types of parent involvement for districts to follow and implement. The different types of parent involvement are:
Type 1. Help parents develop parenting skills and foster conditions at home that support children’s efforts in learning.

Type 2. Provide parents with techniques designed to assist children in learning at home that will help students and schools reach stated goals, objectives, and standards.

Type 3. Provide parents with skills to access community and support services that strengthen school programs, family practices, and student learning and development.

Type 4. Promote two-way communication, school-to-home and home-to-school, about school programs and students' progress.

Type 5. Provide parents with strategies and techniques for assisting their children with learning activities at home that support and extend the school's instructional program.

Type 6. Prepare parents to actively participate in school decision making and develop their leadership skills in governance and advocacy (CSBE, 2012).

After the education comprehensive policy was executed, the state also approved Assembly Bill 322 (part of President Bush’s America 2000 strategy), which became effective in 1991 and provided further support for parent involvement. This law made the application of parent involvement programs an obligation in order for schools to receive state school improvement and economic impact aid funds (CSDE, 2012). As a result of the state law and comprehensive policy, California schools developed Parent
Teacher Organizations (PTO), School Site Councils, and other programs that involve parents.

Knowing that parental involvement is a fundamental tool for students to have in order to raise the probability for academic success, many citizens automatically think that parental involvement is tied exclusively to school-only involvement activities. In other words, the more parents are physically present at the school, the more the students are going to be motivated and prosperous in their academics. What about the parents who desire to be in their children’s classroom, but are unable to do so because of socioeconomic reasons? Does that make them bad and careless parents? As in the case of many Latino and minority parents living in the United States of America, a deficit model of understanding has been written, proposed, published, and put to practice suggesting that the causes of low achievement for Latino and other minority students are the students and their [family] backgrounds (Good, Masewicz, & Vogel, 2010). Although there are many citizens –including well-educated individuals –who blame the persistent growth of the achievement gap on the students and their families, the entire blame cannot and should not be placed entirely on them. Shah (2009), whose research is focused on the impact of minority representation on public policy outcomes, claims that “minority parents participate less than white parents and suggests that their participation is hindered by both structural constraints and motivational barriers” (p. 213). The fact is that student achievement and parental involvement come side-by-side as part of a big “package” that gets directly and indirectly influenced by a high number of policies that
have been instituted and are constantly reinforced through the work of policymakers and educators.

Statement of the Problem

For the past four years, I have been a resident of a community that includes an elementary school site located within a Northern California rural public school district. This school district currently serves students through a number of school sites; ten elementary schools, two secondary schools (middle schools), two high schools, one charter school, and an adult education center. Besides the students having different types of needs throughout the school district (social, academic, linguistic, etc.), most of the students enrolled at the site where this study was conducted are categorized as Latino or Hispanic (78%). In addition, slightly over one-third of all students (K–6th grade) currently enrolled are categorized as English language learners (ELL) (38%) – the term currently used in American schools to identify students whose native language is one other than English.

Due to these demographics, it is important to acknowledge that ELL students are present and comprise a significant number of pupils at this school site. School administrators and staff, strong educators and believers of parental involvement in every phase of the classroom and school environment, are often alarmed at the low percentage of Latino parental involvement in English Advisory Committee (ELAC) meetings. It does not attract the number of ELL parents as it is intended to by law. Teachers and administrators have noticed that, as their children advance from the early elementary school grades (Kindergarten – 2nd grade) to 6th grade, parents stop or limit their
attendance to ELAC meetings. Yet they are at a loss and cannot offer a remedy. ELAC is composed primarily of ELL Latino parents whose main purpose (in theory) is to advise the principal and school staff on programs and services for ELLs, yet the percentage of participating ELL parents continues to remain low each year and the number of new parents getting involved in ELAC is not growing.

The school site offers other multiple avenues (Boosters Committee, BEST team, the Fall Festival Committee, several fundraising parent groups, and School Site Council) through which ELL parents can become active in school. The degree to which this occurs is still very low and Latino and minority parental involvement is very limited – especially as students get promoted yearly from the early grades (Kindergarten – 2\textsuperscript{nd} grade) to the upper elementary grades (4\textsuperscript{th} – 6\textsuperscript{th} grade). In other words, as ELL students advance yearly in this school site, parental involvement in ELAC meetings continues to diminish which correlates with the continually increasing achievement gap of minority and ELL students. Therefore, the question raised in this research study is: What are the factors that impact Latino parent participation in ELAC meetings as students advance from Kindergarten to 6\textsuperscript{th} grade within the school site?

English Language Advisory Committee (ELAC)

The physical presence of the parents at the school site is most evident in the lower elementary school grades (K-2\textsuperscript{nd}). ELAC, as defined by the California Department of Education (2012), is a committee comprised of parents, staff, and community members specifically designated to advise school officials regarding English Language Learner program services. All of the parents that attend ELAC
meetings at this site are Spanish speaking and refer to themselves as English language learners as well. The percentage of English language learners or ELLs at this school site is thirty-eight percent of the total student population. Although all of the parents attending these meetings consider themselves as ELLs, they only represent six percent of the school’s total ELL student population. There is an average of seven to nine parents that attend each scheduled monthly meeting making a very small group with few new faces seen yearly.

In addition, the committee affords ELL parents the opportunity to elect representatives from their peers and is provided with training and materials to assist each member to carry out his or her legally required advisory responsibilities at the school and district level. Thus, ELAC meetings provide the opportunity to partake in school policy and encourage home-based activities by advising parents of ways to help their children directly and indirectly, to reach and experience academic success.

Theoretical Frameworks

In this study, the importance and significance of parental involvement will be discussed through the lens of two theories: the ecological systems theory and critical race theory. Bronfenbrenner (1976), co-founder of the Head Start program in the United States for disadvantaged pre-school children and world leading scholar whose focus is on the interplay between research and policy on child development, created the ecological systems theory that supports and explains the connection between culture and the child’s education (Appendix A). The Harvard Family Research Project (2006) – whose main roots were greatly influenced by Bronfenbrenner’s research, affirms that
“the family seems to be the most effective and economical system for fostering and sustaining the child’s development” (p. 1). This notion sustains the positiveness that parental involvement creates in the educational lives of their children. In his child development work, Bronfenbrenner (1974) suggests that research is better informed when institutional policies encourage studies within natural settings and theory finds greater practical application when contextually relevant. Bronfenbrenner was able to elaborate upon his Ecological Systems Theory—which he delineated into four types of systems that depend on each other to support children’s overall growth. These were the systems that lay the groundwork for the fundamental processes that guide life-span development. The first level, the microsystem is the closest level to the child and incorporates the child’s immediate surroundings (e.g. family, gender, and health,). The mesosystem is the second level and refers to the interaction between two microsystems (e.g. the school and the home). The third level, the exosystem, refers to social settings that indirectly influence the child (e.g. parent’s work place, government policies, school board decisions). Lastly, the macrosystem consists of shared cultural values, beliefs, customs, and laws that are part of a child’s culture (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998).

Each of Bronfenbrenner’s systems contains roles, norms and rules that can powerfully shape the development of any child. It is also evident that parental involvement can be easily identified within each of the systems. As parents are in direct contact with their children, there is interaction between parents-and-teachers, parents’ lives affect their children’s academic outcomes, and parents also design and apply the beliefs, values, and customs that combined with each other create the greater whole of a
child’s culture and identity. Bronfenbrenner, as stated in Darling (2007), “emphasized that processes operating at each of these levels could not be looked at independently of one another” (p. 210). In simple terms, their interrelationship needed to be respected – as puzzle pieces that make up the life-long learning experiences of a human being. After Bronfenbrenner developed the Ecological Systems Theory, there were many researchers who were strongly influenced by his work and models for understanding parenting. Fletcher, Darling, and Steinberg (1995), psychology professors from Temple University in Philadelphia, moved away from the then current thinking of family and peer influences as two distinct spheres oppositional to one another – to overlapping domains that interact with each other and directly dictate the effect of peer influences in an individual. In other words, Fletcher and his colleagues challenged Bronfenbrenner’s Ecological Systems Theory by applying it a step further and concluding that parental monitoring is an effective tool in the prevention of drug usage.

Furthermore, Fletcher et al. (1995) also argued that understanding the influence of parental monitoring on adolescent substance use required an understanding of the joint association of parents and peers in conjunction with the current status of the child. Although the study’s main focus and research was on adolescent substance abuse and predicting how adolescents who were at different points in the transition to substance use – non-users, experimenters, and regular users – would be differentially influenced by parental monitoring and peer substance use. We can argue that Fletcher and his colleagues’ findings are equivalent and applicable to parental involvement at school and home. Just like Fletcher et al. (1995) argued that adolescents of high-monitoring parents
would move toward their non-substance-using friends and the adolescents of low-monitoring parents would move toward their substance-using friends, we can also declare that parents who are more involved in their children’s academics are more likely to influence their children positively in making the best academic decisions (i.e. paying attention in school, doing their daily homework, taking notes in class, showing their best behavior, etc.). On the other hand, parents who do not establish much parental involvement in their children’s academics, are less likely to have children that are prosperous and successful academically. Therefore, we can infer that parents who check, supervise, and are active participants of their children’s education are directly and indirectly providing a safe pathway that will benefit them academically in the long-run.

Critical Race Theory (CRT)

Critical Race Theory (CRT) is the second theoretical lens utilized to further explain the background behind Latino parental involvement in the public school settings (ELAC) and its views in American society. Bourdieu and Passeron (1977) argued that “the knowledges of the upper and middle classes are considered capital valuable to a hierarchical society”. In other words, being part of a “colored” culture meant that all of its members were automatically at a disadvantage and “whose race and class background had left [them] lacking the necessary knowledge, social skills, abilities and cultural capital” (Yosso, 2005, p. 70). Gloria Ladson-Billings (2000) and Dolores Delgado Bernal (1998) have also asked: whose knowledge counts and whose knowledge is discounted? Since the foundation of our country, race and racism have
been influential puzzle pieces that have shaped and molded the views, and beliefs of how things are to be called “acceptable” within American society, politics and education. Yosso (2005) whose teaching and research apply a framework of CRT to examine educational access and equity, emphasizing the community cultural wealth students of color bring to school, asserts that “CRT shifts the research lens away from a deficit view of communities of color as places full of cultural poverty disadvantages, and instead focuses on a lens from the array of cultural knowledge, skills, abilities and contacts possessed by socially marginalized groups that often go unrecognized and unacknowledged” (p. 69).

Solózano (1997, 1998), a UCLA professor and researcher that has reported significantly on issues of educational access and equity for underrepresented minority populations in the United States, applied Bourdieu and Passeron’s theory (1997, 1998) to education and identified five tenets of CRT that can and should inform theory, research, pedagogy, curriculum and policy: (1) the intercentricity of race and racism, (2) the challenge to dominant ideology, (3) the commitment to social justice, (4) the centrality of experiential knowledge; and (5) the utilization of interdisciplinary approaches. Although these five principles are not new, Yosso defines CRT in education as “a theoretical and analytical framework that challenges the ways race and racism impact education structures, practices, and discourses” (Yosso, 2005, p. 74). In other words, questioning the already established educational, political and social structures that dictate the every-day lives of all human-beings in this country. For many citizens, there is a belief that being alive in the twenty-first century and living in the
United States of America represents having an automatic “access” key that provides admission to all places and opportunities. The unfortunate truth is that “racism is often well disguised in the rhetoric of shared ‘normative’ values and ‘neutral’ social scientific principles and practices” (Matsuda, Lawrence, Delgado and Crenshaw, 1993). As a result, the deficit thinking model has blossomed and acknowledged that minority students and their families are at fault for poor academic performance because students enter school without grabbing the “normative cultural knowledge and skills; and parents neither value nor support their child’s education” (Yosso, 2005, p. 75). Just as Bourdieu and Passeron (1977) compared all other forms and expressions of ‘culture’ to the American norm (White, middle class culture), researchers applying the CRT lens have spoken for decades to confirm that the communities of color contribute with six forms of capital that have always been very intricate yet they have never been given the credit as strong and positive building blocks of knowledge.

The six forms of capital include aspirational (the ability to maintain hopes and dreams for the future even if barriers exist), linguistic (intellectual and social skills attained through communication experiences in more than one language and/or style), familial (cultural knowledge nurtured among familia), social (networks of people and community resources), navigational (ability of maneuvering through social institutions), and resistant (the knowledge and skills fostered through oppositional behavior that challenges inequality) (Yosso, 2005, pp. 78-81). These various forms of capital are active building blocks that assemble to each other as part of community cultural wealth—making these forms mutually exclusive.
With the abundant number of research based theories that support parental participation, it is clear that the ecological systems theory and CRT offer positive constructive methods of analyzing our educational system as it is currently structured. These theories provide strong reasons for parents and members of society to participate in school, but they affirm that everything that surrounds a child is noteworthy for his/her academic growth. Who wants to be an active partner in an environment where the institution in place is always right and everything that has to do with your persona and identity is wrong or not beneficial? This study is to explore how a group of parents view and negotiate their school involvement.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative study is to identify the factors that drive and/or discourage Latino parent involvement in the school’s ELAC meetings as students move from one grade to the next (Kindergarten – 6th grade) in elementary school. In addition, it is with high hope that the analysis of the results can provide clear, usable, and easy-to-understand recommendations that can be applicable to educators, and administrators working within similar school settings with equal or similar ethnic, social, and economic standpoints. Furthermore, there will be an attempt to not only answer the research questions, but to also report on the responses that the following questions might generate;

- What is the parent impact on students’ academic persistence –even if they are not able to attend school-based activities and/or ELAC meetings?
- Do parents’ views of school involvement change over time?
• How does society and family “culture” influence the way parents see public education?
• How does the school district, administration and school personnel impact parental involvement—especially from ELL parents?

It is also important to mention that all data collected will be evaluated and reflected upon through two well-researched theories that will lay the foundations for the understanding of the study.

Limitations

As a result of the very unique demographics, it is important to acknowledge that this study might not be applicable to all regions of the state or country. One of the limitations of this study is that all participating parents identify themselves as Hispanic or Latino, have all resided in the United States for a minimum of nine years, and have at least two school-aged (K-12th grade) children. Even though most participating parents have resided in the country for almost two decades, they still all maintain close ties with relatives and friends in México.

Another limitation to consider is that this case study was conducted with a small number of (5) ELL Hispanic parents that were randomly selected from ELAC meetings. Thus this study may not be generalizable. All parents in this study are active participants of ELAC at the school site. It is my assumption that all data collected and the final analysis would be different if the number of participating parents, type of parents (linguistically and ethnically), amount of data accumulated, and/or data gathered was different and collected through an alternative qualitative or quantitative source.
Definition of Terms

_Bicultural_ – a term to refer to, in general, individuals or social groups who live and

“function in two [or more] distinct sociocultural environments: the primary
culture, and that of the dominant mainstream culture of the society in which they

*Cultural Capital* – forms of knowledge, skills, education, and advantages that a person
has, which give them a higher status in society. For instance, parents provide
their children with cultural capital by transmitting the attitudes and knowledge
needed to succeed in the current educational system (Bourdieu & Passeron,
1977).

*Culture* – the complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, law, morals,
custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man/woman as a
member of a society. (Tylor, 1874). Culture is not stagnant, but fluid and
changes with experiences and exposure to other factors in society. In other
words, it is the full range of learned human behavior patterns.

_English Language Advisory Committee (ELAC)_ – a committee comprised of parents,
staff, and community members specifically designated to advise school officials
on English Language Learners (ELLs) program services (California Department
of Education).

_English-Language Learner (ELL)_ – the term to identify persons whose native language
is one other than English and whose difficulties include speaking, reading,
writing, or understanding the English language which may hinder the
individual’s ability to achieve in classrooms where instruction is provided in English (California Department of Education).

*Latino/Hispanic* – both terms are used interchangeably by the U.S. Census Bureau to refer to persons of Mexican, Puerto Rican, Cuban, Central and South American, Dominican, Spanish, and other Hispanic descent; they may be of any race. In this study the subjects are primarily of Mexican descent (U.S. Census, 2010).

*Parental involvement* – the participation of parents in regular, two-way, and meaningful communication with school staff involving student academic learning and other school activities.

*Socioeconomic status or “SES”* – an economic and sociological combined total measure of a person's work experience and of an individual's or family’s economic and social position in relation to others, based on income, education, and occupation. When analyzing a family’s SES, the household income, earners' education, and occupation are examined, as well as combined income, versus with an individual, when their own attributes are assessed (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2008).

**Organization of Thesis**

This thesis is organized into five chapters. Chapter One includes a background, statement of the problem, theoretical framework, purpose of the study, demographics, limitations, definitions of terms, and organization of the thesis. Chapter Two provides a review of related literature. In chapter Three, there will be an explanation of methods and procedures used in the research. It will describe the participants of the study, the
instruments used, and the procedures followed to conduct the study. In Chapter Four, all
data collected is analyzed and a summary of all significant data gathered will be
presented. Finally, in Chapter Five, all conclusions are placed forward from the
analysis as well as a set of recommendations. Participant consent letters (see Appendix
B), parent surveys, and questionnaires in both English and Spanish are included in the
appendices.
Chapter II

LITERATURE REVIEW

The U.S. Census

According to the United States 2010 Census, the Hispanic population increased by 15.2 million between 2000 and 2010, accounting for over half of the 27.3 million increase in the total population of the United States. Between 2000 and 2010, the Hispanic population grew by 43 percent, which was four times the growth in the total population at 10 percent. The Mexican origin population increased by 54 percent and had the largest numeric change (11.2 million), growing from 20.6 million in 2000 to 31.8 million in 2010. Mexicans accounted for about three-quarters of the 15.2 million increase in the Hispanic population from 2000 to 2010 (U.S. Census 2010).

Given the fact that the Hispanic population contributed to more than half of the growth of the total population in the United States in the past decade, it is impossible to deny that Latinos by their sheer numbers are capturing the public’s attention, particularly those in education as they make up 25% of each kindergarten class. This group is and continues to be an active group in America that wants to do better (e.g. politically, economically, educationally, etc.) in spite of constant waves of racial and ethnic discrimination that have happened since the creation of the our nation. As Latinos continue to shape the diversity that currently exists in our schools, “many [schools] are beginning to consider what they can do to strengthen their academic success” (Rolon, 2005, p. 31) starting with acknowledging what each child brings from home and taking advantage (or not!) of it.
Schools and Education

Education is the battle ground where many dreams will bloom and where others will wilt and die. Policymakers attempt to create legislation and mandates that promise equality for everyone in the public school systems across the nation without taking first into consideration the current status of our schools. In order to reach equity, students must first have access to all learning materials without taking into account the location of the school geographically and economically. Duncan-Andrade and Morrell (2008) state that, “When a set of schools is given the resources necessary to succeed and another group of schools is not, we have predetermined winners and losers” (p. 1). Our schools are and will continue to be the “socio-economic sorting mechanism” (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008, p. 2), for Latinos and other minorities, if true and concerned social justice citizens do not step in and make their voices be heard. Although the studies conducted by Gay and Rist (1970), the U.S. Civil Rights Commission (1973), and Tenenbaum and Ruck (2007) were published decades apart from each other, they have all regretfully revealed that classroom teachers continue to have lower expectations for African-Americans and Latino students. Teachers made more positive referrals and fewer negative referrals for European American students than for Latino and African American students (Tenenbaum & Ruck, 2007). Studies have also indicated that White teachers have lower expectations for their non-White students and that a classroom environment of acceptance is linked to increased student achievement, especially among minorities in the classroom (Bennett, 1995). Consequently, many schools and teachers do not inspire minorities to strive for academic achievement,
instead function as institutions that serve as training grounds for accommodating the existing status quo, permitting students to simply stay where they are with no opportunities for advancement. Although the results of the previous studies mentioned were disseminated to the general public decades ago, it is unfortunate that the state of our public schools in equality, financial resources and academic opportunities for every child has not, is not, and continues to be unequal.

According to the Census 2000, nearly 70% of ELL students nationally enroll in only 10% of elementary schools, and in these schools ELL students account, on average, for almost 50% of the student body—which shows a strong disparity compared to the 5% of ELL students enrolled in the average low-ELL school. Most schools with a large ELL student population have a large low-income population as well (Cosentino de Cohen, Deterding & Clewell, 2005), as confirmed by data from the U.S. Census (2010) that indicates a strong correlation between lack of English proficiency and poverty. In 2000, 68% of the ELL students in pre-K to 5th grade were low-income, as were 60% of ELL students in 6-12th grades. These rates are nearly twice as high as rates for English proficient students in comparable grades. With the higher levels of poverty come attendance hardships in school. For instance, ELL immigrant students are typically concentrated in high-poverty schools that commonly suffer from shortages of trained teachers with previous experience and instructional materials. As a result, poor schools serving concentrated populations of low-income ELLs have a generally low instructional capacity (McDonnel & Hill, 1993).
Jussim (1994), professor of social psychology at the Rutgers University was the first to study and explore the relations between teacher expectations, student achievement and self-fulfilling prophecies. Through a social psychological research lens, he found that student achievement may confirm teacher expectations because these expectations create self-fulfilling prophecies, create perceptual biases, or accurately predict, without influencing, student achievement. The first two, self-fulfilling prophecy and perceptual biases involve the teacher’s beliefs and how these beliefs influence student achievement. The third reason, accuracy, refers to the teaching successfully predicting without influencing students’ achievement. Self-fulfilling prophecies occur when the teacher persuades a student to perform at levels consistent with the teachers’ erroneous expectations. Perceptual biases occur when the teachers base evaluations of students on the teachers’ expectations rather than on the students’ performance (Jussim, 1994). In other words, he speculated that students who were devalued in school were mostly susceptible to confirming teacher’s expectations. Students with “low self-concepts of [academic] ability or with previous records of low achievement were…considerably more vulnerable to self-fulfilling prophecies” (Jussim, Eccles, & Madon, 1996) –the self-fulfilling prophecies that predict erroneously the outcomes of many stigmatized or minority students.

In their article, Ladson-Billings and Tate (2009) affirm that “the quality and quantity of the curriculum varies with the property values” (p. 172) thus continuing the segregation model that ensures that whites are happy regardless of whether African-American and other students of color achieve or remain. Educational attainment,
measured in the median years of schooling completed, continues to be one of the most conspicuous status indicators pointing to a substantially lower socioeconomic position of Hispanics in comparison to non-Whites (Grebler, Moore & Guzmán, 1970; Gándara, 1995; Chapa & De La Rosa, 2004). As a group, Hispanics participate less and worse academically than any other group in the Southwest except for Native Americans, with indications that there is a widening academic gap between these students and other groups. This schooling gap between Hispanics and other ethnic groups, [especially Whites], contributes to the depressed economic condition and social status of this minority (The Achievement Council, 1984). Are racism and class part of today’s school system? Do they have any direct influence in the way bicultural and minority parents, especially Latino parents, view parent involvement at their children’s schools? This study will shed light on these questions.

Racism, Class and Marginalization

Since the creation of the civil rights movement, many American citizens would affirm that our American society is non-discriminatory in comparison to what was offered and available to all White and minority citizens in our country prior to the Civil Rights movement. Many would even argue that education, jobs, and upward economic and political mobility is equal and at the same ground level for everyone. Unfortunately, that is not true as there are many factors like race and class that keep some people from reaching the American Dream. “Many modern-day scholars believe that racism is declining or that class today is more important than race” (Delgado & Spefancic, 2001, p. 9). Racism and class are parallel to each other and deliver the standards of acceptance
that we are all, as a society, supposed to be following. It also ignores the already established diversity and experiences of its people and their descendants as it assumes that everyone at the same starting line regardless of gender, class, race, social and/or economical present and past situations.

The dominant hegemony of society, especially in America, suggests that a few will become successful only if they decide “to leave their community” and “join a [more] successful one” (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008, p. 83). There are also large organizations, unfortunately, in our country that try to define what makes America and what it needs to happen to keep it as “White” as possible. Bilingual education and the term urban, are expressions that are well defined by many as “non-white second language learning” hence retaining these words in “lower status or with the meaning of black” (Delgado & Spefancic, 2001, p. 176). In other words, if a student identifies with an ethnic minority and resides in an urban ghetto or barrio, then this student is already at a disadvantage given that the student does not measure to the already recognized and accepted status quo of European, White, middle-class, capitalistic America.

Why is it important to acknowledge and act on the fact that oppression keeps permeating through our country through politics, socioeconomic status, and unquestionably through all local schools? American society needs to understand that “whiteness” is not what makes America great, but instead, its ethnic and linguistic diversity. The multiplicity of cultures and languages may sometimes generate feelings of uneasiness for certain, but not all, segments of European descent Americans. The reality is that the rest of the world is not just interested in arriving and thriving
economically in the United States, but in its diversity and established federal regulations that clearly state that our country is unique, interesting, and safe with no distinction whatsoever to anyone based on gender, ethnic background, language or place of origin.

Poverty

For many people who reside in the United States, poverty a concept that is very much present and continues to worry many citizens, local authorities, and politicians. Many people around the world assume that the United States is the country where “green-bills” are easy to attain and spent in return for something that will make us feel better. The reality is that poverty is present all over the country with citizens that simply lack the economic funds or “money” to have the most basic needs of food, shelter, and clothing. In simplistic terms, poverty is a barrier in the everyday life of many human beings living in America. Posnick-Goodwin (2012), whose articles have been published in the award-winning magazine California Educator, states that, “Poverty is no longer the exception: it’s just a way of life” (p. 9). Meaning that poverty is becoming a style of living that no one can ignore as it is thriving and spreading in many communities. In communities where poverty was rare and unusual, it is now a reality for most minority and poor children in America. According to a new report from the Center for Community Economic Development, “Children of color are four times more likely than white children to be born into the most ‘economically fragile’ households, with 69 percent of Latinos and 71 percent of African Americans categorized as “income poor,” compared with 32 percent of whites” (Posnick-Goodwin, 2012, p. 10). Given the results from this report, we can determine that poverty is no longer an urban issue, but a
concern that is also affecting students in rural America as well. As the economy worsens more students are getting affected and feeling first-hand the effects of their families not having “money” for their most basic daily needs (food, shelter, clothing, transportation, etc.) thus increasing the non-stopping achievement gap. State and national policy makers should become knowledgeable before creating and approving laws that regulate or limit the funds that go directly to poor children – thus affecting numerous minority students.

Everyone would agree that the achievement gap between the poor and the rich is not shrinking or diminishing, but growing and evolving into something that is becoming less-and-less capable of compressing and slowly disappearing. “Multiple studies show children living in poverty are at greater risk of emotional problems including anxiety, depression and low self-esteem” (Posnick-Goodwin, 2012, p. 10). In simple terms, it is unfair and highly unrealistic to mandate children, greatly affected by poverty, to meet No Child Left Behind (NCLB) standards, a federal law enacted in 2001 that supports standards-based education reform based on the premise that setting high standards and establishing measurable goals can improve individual outcomes in education, when the majority are “fac[ing] more [economical] obstacles” (Posnick-Goodwin, 2012, p. 11) than the normal middle and upper class student.

In Ladson-Billings’ 2006 Presidential Address, she reaffirms that the achievement gap is one of the most talked-about issues in U.S. education. The term “achievement gap” refers “to the disparities in standardized test scores between Black and White, Latina and White, and recent immigrant and White students” (Ladson-
In her article, she explains the achievement gap as misleading and renames it as the “education debt.” This debt comprises historical, economic, sociopolitical, and moral components that have blended into our current educational debt that is very complex and difficult to confront and disentangle into smaller pieces.

In an interview conducted by Houston A+ Challenge (2010), an independent nonprofit organization that has supported local public school improvement and education leadership development since 1997, Landon-Billings further explains that the education debt is equitable to the national debt. In other words, it has been left unattended every year with the lack of and inequitable levels of funding, many people have been left out of the political process, and most importantly — there is no accountability. Just like citizens become concerned and take responsibility in improving the national debt, “the educational debt throws-it back to everyone” (Houstonaplus, 2010). That is, what is everyone’s part in it? What should “we all” be doing to make it better?

In an effort to make her renaming valid, Ladson-Billings (2006) consulted Prof. Emeritus Robert Haveman of the University of Wisconsin’s Department of Economics, La Follete Institute of Public Affairs, and Institute for Research on Poverty, he stated:

The education debt is the foregone schooling resources that we could have (should have) been investing in (primarily) low income kids, which deficit leads to a variety of social problems (e.g. crime, low productivity, low wages, low labor force participation) that require on-going public investment. This required investment sucks away resources that could go to reducing the achievement gap. Without the education debt we could narrow the achievement debt…. (February 6, 2006, e-mail).
Even though Ladson-Billings’ discussion with Haveman was informal, we can infer that we would need to reduce one (the education debt) in order to close the other (the achievement gap). In simple terms, the historical, economic, sociopolitical, and moral decisions and policies that have characterized American society since the creation of the original thirteen colonies have heavily engraved an education debt.

As the achievement gap keeps broadening and in an effort with communicating with students’ homes, schools with a high ELL population face the challenge of connecting with parents; many of whom have comparatively low levels of literacy in their native language—in addition to not speaking or reading the English language. Many ELL parents have not completed a high school education and have little formal education compared with native-born parents. The U.S.Census (2010) reported that almost half of ELL children in elementary school had parents with less than a high school education, and a quarter had parents with less than a 9th grade education. In comparison, only 11% of English proficient children had parents without high school degrees and just 2% had parents who had not completed the 9th grade. In secondary school, a lower share of ELL students had parents without high school degrees (35%), this was still several times the share for children of native-born parents (4%) (Capps, Fix, Murray, Ost, Passel, & Herwantoro (2005).

Due to their race, class, immigrant status, language proficiency and level of education, many ELL parents fit the description of a marginalized group (Hudak, 1993). The term has been used to describe individuals who are labeled “outsiders” based on race, class, gender, sexual orientation, immigrant status, and physical ability.
Researchers describe “marginalized” parents as those who are not “involved at the same rate as many White, middle class parents” (Hudak, 1993). Marginalized parents often have limited exposure to schools, or prior negative experiences with school organizations. However, marginalized status does not mean that ELL parents are not concerned about their children’s education. On the contrary, research has confirmed that linguistically and culturally diverse groups share a deep concern about the education of their children (Delgado-Gaitán, 1987). Minority parents’ worries and interests encourage many parents to “work authentically and collaboratively with their children’s schools” (Olivos, 2010, p. 13) in an effort to result in positive and constructive educational change. Nevertheless, ELL parents frequently view their role in schooling very differently from the way that mainstream English speaking communities view their relationship with schools. For instance, many see school and home as two distinct environments that do not overlap. The home is the sacred place for family members to teach customs, beliefs and language that are not seen as important or taught in school. School is seen as the place where children learn the necessary skills to survive – especially in American society. The lack of representation and the ability to self-identify with schools are also important factors that influence parents’ views on education.

In order to further understand some of the basics that impede the percentage of Latino parental involvement in schools, it is important to examine “the legacy of institutional racism [that] may still significantly influence minority parents’ sense of
acceptance, belonging, and shared community” (Nzinga-Johnson, Baker & Aupperlee, 2009, p. 10).

Institutional Racism

The United States is believed, by many, as the land of opportunities. With self-motivation and self-determination, everything can be within reach for any individual. Yet, the reality is that sexism, classism, and racism have existed since the creation of our country—starting within its original English thirteen colonies and its European inhabitants. Slavery, “the system under which people are treated as property to be bought and sold, and are forced to work” (Brace, 2004), was an unfortunate American human practice that stained our history with more than two centuries of abuse and deprivation of the most basic human rights to a massive number of human beings in our country. Anti-slavery sentiments were alive for a long time and were partly a cause for the development of the American Civil War. After the war was over, segregation took place and thrived successfully as it was institutionalized in accordance with Jim Crow laws—separate but equal! These inequitable national, state and local regulations were later abolished by the 1954 Brown v. Board of Education decision which clearly stated that segregated schools were unconstitutional—which led to the Civil Rights movement throughout the United States of America (Library of Congress, 2012).

Nevertheless, the last fifty years have revealed as new critical theory pedagogues and scholars have been “interested in studying and transforming the relationship among race, racism, and power” (Delgado & Spefancic, 2001, p. 2). Despite the awareness and acknowledgements of Americans that affirm the state of our
society, there are “large segments of society that have little incentive to eradicate racism” (Delgado & Spefancic, 2001, p. 7). To eradicate racism, a whole mind set needs to be changed from society, from top to bottom, in order to break its proliferation and persistence in the future. Paulo Freire, an influential Brazilian theorist of critical pedagogy, defines and divides society into two different classes: the oppressors and the oppressed. In these roles, those who commit the injustice, the oppressors, do not only deny freedom to those they oppress, they also risk their own humanity, because oppressor consciousness "tends to transform everything surrounding it into an object of its domination" (Freire, 1993, p. 40). These roles are so ingrained in society that in the "initial struggle for liberation," the oppressed frequently strive to imitate the oppressor. They see that role as the "ideal model of humanity" (Freire, 1993). But how can the oppressed reach this realization? We need to understand that the oppressor needs to cooperate, work in a team, and give up “something” in order for these actions to happen. The oppressed, in any society, can admit and attain a state of mind that admits their status and its importance in any given social condition. They can work to change it for the dominant well-being of the majority of the oppressed, but if the oppressor does not admit it nor see it through an oppressed lens, then social issues in and out of the education arena will be accomplished partially and inadequately. Herein lies the challenge in many educational settings. President Bush attempted to address the inequities in American schools by initiating a federal policy, NCLB.
The NCLB Act of 2001: It’s Impact on Parental Involvement

The NCLB Act of 2001 is a U.S. federal law that was endorsed under President George W. Bush’s administration in 2001. The legislation funds a number of federal programs targeted at improving the performance of U.S. schools by increasing the standards of accountability for states, school districts, and schools. It also provides parents with more flexibility in selecting which schools their children will attend. Additionally, it supports an amplified focus on reading and math. The intent is that all children will meet state academic achievement standards to reach their full potential through improved programs. The law is based on ESEA’s (Elementary and Secondary Education Act) framework: accountability for results; an emphasis on doing what works based on scientific research; expanded parental options; and expanded local control and flexibility (USDE, 2003). Under this law, parents are given the right to request information about their child’s progress and performance of the school. It provides parents with the choice to transfer their child to a higher-performing school in the area or receive supplemental educational services. In addition, through the application of Title I funding, “schools are required to improve the education of disadvantaged students, turn around low-performing schools, and increase choices for parents” (USDE, pp. 8-9, 2003).

Parental involvement is one of the six-targeted areas under NCLB, which stresses accountability and a strong school-home connection that would help “to close the gap between disadvantaged, disabled and minority students, and their peers” (www.ed.gov). Even though this national school reform was created with “students in
mind”, there is a large movement by a number of well-known organizations and groups in the country that oppose it and strongly believe that school reform efforts alone will not raise student achievement (Good, Masewicz & Vogel, 2010). Although the legislation mandates grade-level proficiency (100%) of all student subgroups by the year 2014, Good, Masewicz & Vogel (2010) argue that this is not attainable without resources, capacity, and will (p. 322). Meaning that if the funds are limited, the aptitude is inadequate from schools and determination is missing from teachers and administrators; taking a step forward into proficiency is unrealistic.

Lack of Representation in Parent Involvement

For many citizens, the phrase “parent involvement” speaks for itself: parents get involved! Although this is a concept that has been pronounced constantly after the approval of NCLB in 2001, parent involvement resonates differently for different ethnic groups in America. In her research study, Shah (2001) states that the “low participation rates among minority groups [in school-based parental involvement opportunities] are a manifestation of their internalized feelings of powerlessness. These attitudes change, however, when they see people ‘like themselves’ in positions of authority” (p. 213). Many educators might disagree with Shah expressing that parents do have a voice and “power” to shape their children’s school environment, but many are unaware or uneducated in available methods that convince and attract parents to the public school settings. The main questions to examine at this point are: who defines parent involvement and how is it different for parents of color? It is also critical to understand
the historical treatment of minorities in the United States and the politics of inequity that have shaped minority groups’ perceptions of school.

Minorsities, especially the Latino community, understand very well that “school is the vehicle for social and economic advancement” (Good, Masewicz & Vogel, 2010, p. 324) yet school is not just a socially constructed place where students learn, it is also the place where students engage and acquire the skills that are necessary to navigate through society successfully and productively. For many students and parents of color, working and learning in an atmosphere where no other student, or educator looks physically like them is challenging. In order words, there is an indirect message that testifies that students and parents cannot acquire and/or hold a position of authority, in this case, a teaching or administrative position. Mena (2011), whose research focuses on the area of multicultural psychology and marginalization through oppression, suggests that “the combination of Latinos being the largest racial/ethnic minority group and among the least educated has serious ramifications for political and economic representation, and overall quality of life” (p. 491). Representation is very important as it translates to the activity of making citizens’ voices, opinions, and perspectives present in the policy-making processes. This is when Latino and other minority’ leaders speak, advocate, symbolize, and act on the behalf of others in the political arena (Dovi, 2001). Since the 1980s many politicians have labeled Latinos as a “sleeping giant”; this perception is no longer valid as Latinos exercised their right to vote in record numbers for the 2008 and the 2012 presidential elections that gave the higher number of electoral votes to Democratic candidate and President, Barack Obama. According to a November
A 14th study from Pew Research, “the Hispanic electorate is expected to double by 2030. That analysis is based on Pew studies, U.S. Census data, Election Day exit polling and a nationwide survey of Hispanic immigrants” (Burdette, 2012). Many would claim that it would take decades for Latinos to be the majority therefore there is little, politically, to worry about. Although Latinos will not become the majority in the country in the next fifty-years, there are 53 million Hispanics that make up 17 percent of the country's population. “Latinos are by far the nation’s youngest ethnic group –which means that their share of the age-eligible electorate will rise markedly through generational replacement alone” (Burdette, 2012). The election results have spoken and have clearly shown that “Latinos made up a growing share of voters –especially in key swing states of Nevada, Colorado and Florida” (Tórrres, 2012).

In addition to symbolic representation that has been important in the political arena, Shah (2009) has also argued that the theory of symbolic representation predicts that the psychological orientations of minority parents will change in response to the presence of minority school board members or administrators (regardless of policy shifts), and that this internal change will manifest in the form of behavioral alterations. In other words, “the interactions [of parents, teachers, and administrators] mirror the power dynamics that exist in society” (Nzinga-Johnson, Baker & Aupperlee, 2009, p. 3) thus changing the atmosphere and impression of education in any local school. Without authentic voices of color (students, parents, teachers, administrators, and community members) it is doubtful that we can say or know anything useful about education in any community (Ladon-Billings & Tate, 2009). So what if voices are not heard? Are we not
a country built on democratic beliefs that affirm that the rule of the majority is the rule of all in the land? The immediate answer would be a definite yes, but what about everyone else that gets left behind? Wouldn’t we be able to work better and with more parental support, in this case educators and administrators, if parental involvement was seen with an additional cultural lens? For many, the immediate response would be a definite “no”. An unfortunate and unfair “no” that automatically leaves a big piece of minority students and future American leaders out of the loop with no chance of success in the country they call home. On the contrary, if it is a yes, then our society is recognizing that all deserve to have a genuine opportunity that allows culture and self-identity to enter the classroom which will result in self-academic growth, and the well-being of their families and our country in the long run.

Funds of Knowledge: Home Awareness and Feeling Accepted

As previously mentioned, there are a high percentage of teachers that sadly believe that many Latino students are not academically prepared for the demands of daily schoolwork. In other words, these students are categorized as coming from families that either do not prepare them “enough” at home or simply do not believe in exposing their children to activities or places that could enrich their academic growth. Fortunately, we know that Latinos are interested in their children’s school development—which has been highly supported by prominent researchers for the past thirty years. Moll, González, Greenberg, and Velez (2012), whose research through the University of Arizona has addressed the connections among culture, psychology and education – especially in relation to the education of Latino children in the United States – contend
that existing classroom practices underestimate and constrain what Latino and other children are able to display intellectually. They believe the secret to literacy instruction is for schools to investigate and tap into the "hidden" home and community resources of their students. As a result of this research, Moll and his colleagues created the term “funds of knowledge” which is defined as “the historically accumulated and culturally developed bodies of knowledge and skills essential for household or individual functioning and well-being” (Moll, Amanti, Neff & González, 2001, p. 133). Teachers are not only the experts in the classroom, but so are students as well; they have the opportunity to get to know their families in new and distinct ways. These new ways not only open the eyes of the classroom teacher to the rich culture and cognitive resources of each student, but it also provides an opportunity to create culturally responsive and meaningful lessons that tap on students’ prior knowledge.

Although there are many researchers and educators that have created positive and constructive theories that have utilized Latino “funds of knowledge” (Moll, Amanti, Neff & González, 2001) and taken the richness of other minorities’ homes as strong building blocks to achieve, transform and enrich academics in the public school systems (Gándara, 1995; Delgado-Gaitán, 1987); there are others who “[have] consistently defined ‘their’ language and culture as disadvantages that hinder learning” (Rolon, 2005, p. 32). Studies have shown that the single best strategy to improve school learning is through the [direct] usage of [their] culture and [their] language (Rolon, 2005; Krashen, 1982).
According to Greenberg, funds of knowledge exist in every child’s home and “refers to those historically developed and accumulated strategies (e.g., skills, abilities, ideas, practices) or bodies of knowledge” (Greenberg, 1989). An underlying harmful assumption of many educational institutions has been that linguistically and culturally diverse working-class students, which includes a large portion of the Latino population in the United States, do not emerge from households rich in social and intellectual resources. (Greenberg, 1989). Rather than focusing on the knowledge Latino students bring to school and using it as a strong and firm foundation for learning, many schools unfortunately have emphasized what these students lack in terms of the forms of language and knowledge sanctioned by the schools. This emphasis on the so-called “disadvantages” has provided [with prejudiced] justification for lowered academic expectations and inaccurate portrayals of these children and their families (González, et al., 1993). Households are often viewed as units from which the child must be rescued and saved, rather than as repositories or mines of great knowledge that can foster the child’s cognitive development. In an important study sponsored by the National Center for Research on Cultural Diversity and Second Language Learning that focused on the funds of knowledge that teachers were able to document directly through home visits, González (1993) stressed that, “[many teachers] continue to devalue the household knowledge of non-mainstream children.” [In addition], teachers in [the] study found the knowledge base in households to be broad and diverse, encompassing a range of skills from agronomy to soil and irrigation systems, to trans-border marketing and ethno botanical expertise—the study of documenting, describing and explaining the complex
relationship of culture and the usage of plants, focusing primarily on how plants are used, managed and perceived by society. Any of the numerous funds of knowledge found within the households could form the basis for curriculum units in science, math, language arts, and other subjects (González, et al., 1993).

Even though multiple sources about the uses of students’ funds of knowledge in the classroom increase academic success, many continue to label and track students as deficient in school-sanctioned knowledge. In other words, these students are automatically categorized as being deficient – for a high number this results in lowered academic opportunities, beliefs, and academic potential. When students feel alienated from learning, the results may be nonparticipation, misconduct, and low academic achievement. A long-term after-effect of disengagement is that the student drops – out of school or decides to follow the route of misconduct. Students disengage from school when they believe that teachers are uninterested in them, [there is no self-identification with the teacher], and when they believe that their opportunities for involvement and success are restricted (Hawkins, Doueck & Lishner, 1988) or highly limited.

Teachers’ expectations are frequently based on generalizations that low socioeconomic students and students of color or minorities from oppressed groups do not perform adequately in school (Baron, Tom & Cooper, 1985). Studies document that students are classified, segregated, and taught differently starting with their first days of school (Tenenbaum & Ruck, 2007), which will be explained further under institutional racism. In a significant study conducted by the U.S. Commission of Civil Rights (1973), it aimed at discovering whether there were significant differences in how teachers
reacted to students of other ethnic backgrounds, indicated that Hispanic students were significantly less likely to be praised, less likely to be asked questions, and less likely to have their contributions elaborated on by the teacher in relationship to their white peers.

Researchers Schlosser (1992) reported that teachers who were most successful in helping culturally diverse students be more engaged in school demonstrated two unique classroom approaches. Those teachers knew about their students’ home lives and cultural backgrounds, and about the impact of young adolescents’ developmental needs on learning. Because these teachers created new links to all their culturally distinct students’ groups, they constructed stronger student-teacher relationships. These interactions or connections led to an increase in student motivation and aspiration that encouraged students to develop a sense of identification that correlated with success and optimism at school.

But, what do funds of knowledge and parent involvement have to do with each other? As previously stated by the U.S. Census 2010, there have been significant changes in the demographic profile of the United States and within its nationwide student population. During the 2000 – 2010 decade, the fastest growing segment of the school-age population in all states in the nation has been English Language Learners (ELLs). At the same time, “parents of ELLs face daunting barriers as they try to become informed or involved in their child's school. These barriers, which include the inability to understand English, unfamiliarity with the school system, and differences in cultural norms and cultural capital, can limit parents’ communication and school participation” (Arias & Morillo-Campbell, 2008). All research conducted in this area for the last forty-
years has persistently supported the importance of parental involvement for improved
student achievement, better school attendance, and reduced dropout rates regardless of
socioeconomic background or ethnicity. Therefore, given the achievement gap between
ELLs and English proficient students, it is important to identify the practices that
improve ELL parental involvement and thus student achievement through the already
established funds of knowledge. Yet many programs and schools often make little effort
to promote ELL parental involvement and its “home” strengths, defining parental
involvement only in terms of the schools’ needs or in terms of a deficit-based
perception of ELL families.

All individuals and professionals working in direct contact with students,
especially Latino and other minorities, should become aware that diversity exists even
within their own groups. For instance, some value traditional versus non-traditional
parental involvement models or vice versa. There is also a variation in language
proficiency, communication and how much their communities are recognized and
integrated within schools’ mainstream culture (Arias & Morillo-Campbell, 2008).
Therefore, to insinuate that “all” Latinos and other minorities are “all” the same within
their own groups is a dangerous assumption. What may be familiar, welcoming and
academically strong for one child, might be unfriendly and detrimental for another.

Regardless of what the federal, state, and school board policies mandate,
parental involvement cannot and will not take place if schools, administrators, and
definitely educators are not “responsive to the needs and ideas of parents” (Baker, 1997,
p. 139). Olivos (2010), in his intensive work with bicultural parents reaffirms that
Latino parents, if asked, will “work authentically and collaboratively with their children’s schools in an effort to effect change” (p. 13). In simple terms, parents feel welcomed when educators and administrators listen to their concerns and acknowledge their struggles for educational justice. Parents need to feel welcomed and not feel “pushed aside” or they will commit to little or no parental school-based involvement. According to a study conducted by Uludag, whose research focused on the opinions of elementary preservice teachers on parental involvement, “most educators enter school without an understanding of family background, concepts of caring, or the framework of partnerships. Most teachers are not prepared to understand, design, implement and evaluate practices of partnership with the families of their students” (Uludag, 2008, p. 809). In other words, teachers are being prepared in their subject areas yet they are missing the crucial component of knowing how to work with parents. For the majority of the participant preservice teachers in Uludag’s (2008) study, “they [teachers] emphasized the importance of teaching programs to provide specific information on how to implement successful parental involvement programs without adding an extra course to their program of study” (p. 814) Yet, parents are the essential element in their child's success, and it's up to educators and professionals that come in daily contact with students to tap into them as the resource and look to find unique and special attributes they have to offer. It seems so simple, yet it does not happen often enough in school.

In the eyes of the majority of Latino and minority parents, their children’s teachers are highly regarded as the ones who hold the knowledge and expertise that can
teach their children what they need to know in their respective grade level. As a result, they do not want to interfere with the teacher’s work in the classroom. The other side of the coin affirms that many parents (especially Latino and minority parents) have lost their sense of trust in their children’s school. Research often shows that parents feel mistreated. For example, parents reported that “the school personnel were arrogant, disrespectful, and discriminated against them based on stereotypes (Good, Masewicz & Vogel, 2010). Research by Nzinga-Johnson, Baker and Aupperlee (2009) revealed that teachers who rated parents low on involvement had more stereotypic judgments of the abilities of parents who were less educated.

As an educator, teachers have to be sensitive to stereotyping as it categorizes and degrades people, and has the probability of negatively affecting their relationships with students. Parental involvement and learning how to welcome parents to one’s classroom should be a mandatory prerequisite for all teachers to learn, and a part of every teacher credentialing program. We cannot assume that every teacher preparation program mentions parental involvement as a crucial piece for long-term academic achievement. A study conducted through the California Department of Education and in collaboration with the University of California in 2008, stated that teachers with [stronger] attitudes, skills, and knowledge are much better prepared to teach cultural and linguistic minority children. In addition, they are more likely to have the abilities to make connections with students’ families (Maxwell-Jolly, Gándara & Shiels, 2008). This study also confirmed that “frequent teacher to home communication [of high quality teachers] has been found to be a common factor in classrooms where students’
academic achievement was highest” (Maxwell-Jolly, Gándara & Shiels, 2008, p. 2).

Thus, it is imperative that teacher training programs across the country require teaching approaches to parent involvement, if new teachers are to be fully prepared for the students and their families.

**Parental Involvement: School Culture vs. Home Culture**

So, what is parental involvement? The education field is filled with many theories and research-based definitions that claim to have discovered the true meaning of parental involvement and its meaning for local schools. According to an action guide for parents and communities published by the Public Education Network (2004), an organization that mobilizes resources for quality public education for all children through a national constituency of local education funds and individuals, affirms that parental involvement is the assisting of their children’s learning by being actively involved in school, serving as full education partners, serving in advisory committees, and carrying out activities as those described in section 1118 (Appendix E) of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA).

There is also “little consensus about what constitutes effective parental involvement” (Baker, 1997, p. 127). Although “parental involvement” sounds straightforward to define, it is complex as there are multiple factors that different individuals and cultures pay attention to and, ultimately, define it for them. For most European descent, White, middle class, American parents, parental involvement can be described as “a combination of commitment and active participation on the part of the parent to the school and the student” (LaBahn, 1995, p. 1). LaBahn’s “commitment and active
participation” is not just home-based academic help and support, but also a direct physical influence in school-based activities as well. According to Barth (2011), “Good relationships between public schools and parents go a long way toward maintaining the school’s central place in [any] community. Effective two-way communication cultivates more parental support for the school’s priorities and policies” (p. 32). In other words, setting out the welcome mat for parents helps them feel secure about sending their children to school every day knowing they are with adults committed to their learning. This view of “American parental involvement” is not only the image that fits the existing culture, but it is also the status quo that is used to define and grade minorities and people of color that differ in following and/or understanding what education commitment really means.

Contrary to popular belief, Olivos’ (2010) research, which focused on the relationships between bicultural parents and schools as well as the development of bilingual educators, has revealed that parents do “have an interest and desire to participate in their children’s education” (p. 3). One key factor of difficulty in engaging with schools he discovered was that bicultural parents lacked the political consciousness necessary to grasp how the school system implicitly (and explicitly) works. Therefore, not knowing how the American public school system works discourages the active, authentic, and meaningful involvement of low-income, bicultural parents and their communities. Olivos’ contribution to the field of education on behalf of bicultural parents has been strong as he was able to explicitly show the parents’ process of self-empowering and transformation, and being able to take control of their community
school. For instance, Latino parents began bringing their concerns to their school’s administration not just orally, but “expressing their concerns in writing” (Olivos, 2010, p. 6) –providing them with a powerful step into realizing the importance of the written word and the practices of the dominant culture. In other words, it was the authentic voice of the parents that not only challenged the deficit thinking and status quo systems, but they were able to successfully express their concerns and transform themselves and their children’s academic future.

As previously stated, “parental involvement has been shown to be an important variable that positively influences children’s motivation” (Deutscher, 2002, p. 2). Even though there are many studies that have confirmed lower Latino parental involvement compared to other ethnic groups, Good, Masewicz and Vogel (2011) have stated that the power and influence of Hispanic parents on their children’s education has been ignored by many and underestimated by most (Gándara, 1995; Delgado Bernal, 2001). The common misperception has been that Latino parents are not involved or as interested in their children’s formal education (Mena, 2011). Latino parents care about the education of their sons and daughters, but educators must understand the dynamics of how culture defines and structures parental involvement.

Traditional cultural values and beliefs of Hispanic families focus on relationships and not on competitive factors such as academic achievement. These values can contrast sharply with those of the mainstream U.S. education system, in which individualism, self-reliance, and academic achievement are held in high regard
Therefore, the Hispanic culture is highly relational, whereas American culture, as exemplified in schools, is individualistic and competitive. These two views of culture on education are oppositional and also detrimental to the overall experience of Latino students in the public school system. Even though Latino parents may not be physically present in school-related activities, they are unquestionably active participants of their children’s learning at home. Latino parents restrict their role in their children’s education to the home – guaranteeing their children are fed and clothed, and providing the moral support to continue in school (Good, Masewicz & Vogel, 2011). That is the support that not only encourages their children to attend and succeed in school daily, but most importantly, high expectations for positive behavior that result in respect and attentiveness towards the teacher in the classroom.

Schools and teachers are highly respected, and many Latino parents see involvement in schools as an encroachment” (Shah, 2009, p. 217). To walk into the classroom and offer personal help to the teacher is viewed as an intrusion for many Latino parents especially Latino fathers. In the Latino culture, “families, and especially Latino men, are not expected to be involved in the schooling of their children. It is considered rude for a parent to intrude into the life of the school” (Martínez & Pérez, 2008). For that reason, parents believe that it is the school’s job to educate and the parents’ job to nurture and that the two jobs do not mix. This is the perspective that is heavily ingrained in many educational systems across the majority of Latin American countries that, subsequently, shows up when they [immigrants] migrate to the United States or when they start enrolling their children in public schools. Olivos (2010), on the
other hand, affirms that bicultural parents “make many attempts to interact effectively with the school system yet they often find that navigating through an intensely political and bureaucratic institution [that] is unwilling to authentically collaborate with them is a much greater challenge than they [envision] or [expect]” (p. 75). It is the challenge that many bicultural parents do not expect to confront, yet they are expected to directly challenge it if they truly believe in their children’s education and the future of their community’s schools.

Bourdieu and Passeron (1977) have argued that the knowledge that is perceived and clearly marked as culturally profitable in the United States is the one that gets passed on from White, middle and upper classes. Thus, it automatically stamps and establishes Latino and other minorities’ cultural capital as insufficient and/or insignificant for success in the United States. Although that perception has existed for many generations, Latino and other minority cultures have understood that being able to pass the power of “stories” to younger generations is critical to “transmit the group and family beliefs, attitudes, aspirations, and self-images” (Gándara, 1995, p. 51) especially in a society that does not value nor nurture your persona as a whole. Gándara’s (1995) research book examined the combination of conditions that supported the high level of academic achievement of 50 Chicanos who excelled in school and earned terminal degrees. This small group of Chicanos that grew up in poverty not only broke through formidable barriers, but they created a new generation of Chicano scholars “born in the fields and the barrios, but educated in the nation’s elite universities” (Gándara, 1995, p. 11). Whether family stories of pain, language, migration/immigration, failure or
accomplishments are true or not for many Latino families, Gándara (1995) was able to perceive through her intensive study that these stories were a big “part [of student’s] perceptions of themselves, and their families, that they came easily to mind without prodding” (p. 54). She also suggests that successful academic results are likely “the product of design rather than of accident” (p.1). What was also notable through her study was that most stories mentioned were told by women. It is through these stories that women play the largest role in supporting their children’s academic aspirations, and also a way for “mothers to convey to their children that the current circumstances in which they live [are] not one in which they need to remain” (Gándara, 1995, p. 55) or not to move forward. This supports the important role that Latino parents are a crucial puzzle piece in the academic life of their children. They encourage and motivate their children to succeed academically so that one day they are able to attain highly respected positions in society that will provide them with economic stability and self-achievement. Bandura (1990), a teacher and researcher at Stanford University and a great contributor to the psychology domain in a variety of capacities, expresses that one of the four principle ways in which children develop a “self-belief of efficacy,” that is, the strength and determination to persevere in face of obstacles and sometimes even rejection, is through modeling. In other words, “the models in people’s lives serve as sources of interest, inspiration, and skills” (p. 327).

Mena (2011), whose research focused on Latino parent home-based practices, proposes that parental influence not visible to schools can, and should, be better understood as a contributing factor” (p. 499) – a factor that may not be visible to the eye,
but full of motivation and different levels of academic assistance at home. The few Chicanos and minorities that make it through the system are not the “cream of the crop” nor the special ones that knew how to maneuver their way through the educational system in their favor. On the contrary, these were the students whose family and culture support at home were a huge factor that dictated their later academic success. Steinberg, Brown, Cider, Kaczmarek, and Lazzaro (1988) concluded that “students perform better when they are raised in homes characterized by supportive and demanding parents who are involved in schooling and who encourage and expect academic achievement” (p. ii). Gándara’s study challenges this all too common notion that parents had to be involved in school for their children to excel academically. She showed that there was a clear response from the majority of the subjects that confirmed the developing of self-independence as a very important component of growing-up – “especially for farmworker parents where independence was not an abstract concept but a reality of everyday life” (Gándara, p. 31). Though many Latino and minority parents can offer limited but hard earned resources and little experience with schooling, they can definitely offer their children “verbal support and encouragement for their educational undertakings” (Gándara, 1995, p. 39). It is also crucial to mention that even though Gándara’s subjects were predetermined to not succeed based on how our American educational system works, they were surrounded by unseen and unrecognized cherished literature and familial interactions at home. Going to the public library for many Latino families may not be a priority, but having newspapers, magazines, and daily routine “discussions on politics, labor organizing, neighborhood, and world
events” (Gándara, 1995, p. 41) are a priority for many households. These forms of literature and family interactions may not only be in English, but in their primary language as well thus engaging everyone in the family in intellectual activities and readings at home. Gándara aligns with Vygotsky, a famous Russian psychologist who revolutionized contemporary thinking about literacy, who contended that written language develops as speech does, in the context of its use, hence the importance for learner to be immersed in language in order for literacy to be less complex (Goodman & Goodman, 1990).

Immigrant and ethnic minority parenting and parental involvement “have often been framed within a deficit perspective, whereby what constitutes “good” parenting can be equated with being White and middle class” (Durand, 2011, p. 470). If Latino help is labeled as not “decent” enough, then most likely parents will not participate in the classroom or anything directly having to do with their children’s school. Also, only middle-class and Euro-American parents may have an advantage in the social and cultural capital they employ to promote children’s achievement (Durand, 2011). An invitation [to parents to assist in school] is not enough –parents must have positive perceptions of the invitation as well. Latino parents often find the school environment “unwelcoming” or “discouraging”. Invitations from school administrators to participate are therefore not seen as opportunities to interact with their child’s educators but, rather, as criticisms of their parenting and opportunities to highlight their ignorance as parents (Shah, 2009). The claim to understand at this point, is knowing how to build and maintain trust at schools for all parents, especially Latino and minority parents.
According to Posnick-Goodwin’s article published in the award-winning magazine *California Educator* sponsored by CTA (California Teachers Association), “parental participation and trust in schools is of utmost importance” (p. 10). Because parents are the first teachers for their children, it is crucial for teachers to develop a positive relationship with them.

Educators, including administrators, school board members and all school personnel need to better understand the impact of culture on teaching and learning. Understanding and getting familiar with students’ culture provides educators with the golden key that helps transmit academic instruction positively and effectively while at the same time acknowledging the strengths that each student brings to the classroom. According to Good, Masewicz and Vogel (2010), “changing a school culture and creating trust within and outside of the school system is a more complex challenge. Trust and a supportive school culture [through parental involvement], are key elements to improve student academic achievement” (p. 334). The challenge for educators and policymakers has been to develop strategies and policies that foster school-parent collaborations; one of those strategies could be the hiring of more educators and administrators that “look like” and understand the community they are serving. In her study, Shah (2009) found that Latino parents are “more likely to participate in school governance activities (27%) when their children have a Latino teacher” (Shah, 2009, p. 225). These results again suggest a strong symbolic role for Latino representation; parents and students who see individuals like themselves in positions of power are more likely to come around and become involved in school environments. Bandura (1990)
affirms that, “Seeing people similar to oneself succeed by sustained effort raise[s] the observer’s beliefs about their own efficacy” (p. 327). It is the symbolic representation, who has made through the system, that sends a message that it is possible to achieve and attain respected positions in society. In simple terms –if he/she made it, why can’t I?

Besides symbolic representation, multiple researchers have linked parental involvement as a key element in improving all aspects of children’s education such as daily attendance, student achievement, behavior and motivation (Delgado-Gaitán, 1987; Deutscher, 2002; Gándara, 1995; Olivos, 2010). Are there any other factors that hinder the direct parent-involvement at school? Beyond not feeling welcome in their local schools, some parents may not have access to transportation, childcare, and/or they may have jobs that offer little or no flexibility in their work schedule. “Another logistical consideration a few parents mentioned, during the study, was the lack of money to participate in some of the activities offered in the school” (Baker, 1997, p. 136). Money, for the majority of parents, is a barrier that could prevent them from not participating in school. There are many activities (e.g. food sales, raffles, books fairs, school auctions, science nights, back to school, open house, etc.) that require some monetary availability in order to fully participate in some school functions. Although parental involvement is one of the key reasons why these events are put in place, it also offers schools the opportunity to collect funds that will benefit the school and students directly or indirectly through technology, hands-on equipment and activities, fieldtrips, and classroom materials.
Knowing the outcomes of parental involvement and the specific results that pertain to Latino parents, educators need to understand that “parental involvement is more a function of parental beliefs than of family demographics” (Shah, 2009, p. 226). Latino parents engage with their children in various ways not visible to the school system such as encouraging positive school behaviors, tutoring until the students’ academic knowledge exceeds their own, as well as telling their children that they want them to have a better life than they have had and that this may be achieved via education (Mena, 2011; Valdéz, 1996; Gándara, 1995). Before policymakers create and enforce a law, they should seek advice from parent-school organizations as there have been very few opportunities for parents to meaningfully express their beliefs and share their opinions and ideas about this issue. All parent concerns should be taken seriously at the local, state, and national level as their concerns reflect the communication gap that exists from school to home; and negatively impacts students, and their academic endeavors.

What about the potential of “dichos”?

Just like symbolic representation is an important concept for students to have, *dichos* are a puzzle piece of Latino home based teaching that are underestimated and, for the most part, unseen by many educators, administrators, and policy makers. *Dichos*, culturally driven idioms that are used in family settings to explain life lessons, have been part of the Latino culture for centuries. Because language is very complex and continues to change with time, the number of *dichos* available to families has changed with each generation. Gould (2011), whose research title started with the question –
Does it really take a village to raise a child (or just a parent)?, stated that “the challenge of school districts is [to] identify factors which positively impact levels of student achievement, student satisfaction with school, student connecting to school, and the number of students graduating from high school” (p. 28). One factor is the use of Latino “culture” in the form of “dichos” as a culturally and linguistically appropriate strategy for family involvement. Another way to define dichos is to define them as “the authentic funds of knowledge [that] can be used as mottos or slogans” (Sánchez, Plata, Gross & Leird, 2010, p. 247), which encourage and motivate students in their overall academics. Dichos are a Latino parental involvement strategy that gets overlooked by many researchers and educators as they are culturally relevant to each specific family, and for the most part, do not translate to English very well. Sánchez, Plata, Gross and Leird (2010), in their study, affirm that dichos facilitate the communication with Latino Spanish-speaking families as they are a key component of the Latino oral culture and Spanish-language discourse. As short traditional guides of conduct, dichos endorse moral and ethical values as well as transmit cultural values and beliefs to younger generations by teaching lessons about life, offering advice, summarizing ideas, and expressing a specific perspective on a given situation. These metaphorical images of Latino cultural values and beliefs are spontaneous, brief, and often developed with rhyme (Sánchez, Plata, Gross & Leird, 2010, p. 242). Given their cultural and linguistic relevance among Latinos, and their potential to impact individuals’ beliefs systems, dichos prove to be effective tools that influence both the ways in which parents bring up a child and their perspectives on formal education.
Both, teachers and students have consistently identified in countless studies communication gaps as the major barrier that impedes student achievement (Good, Masewicz & Vogel, 2010). In other words, one way schools could relate to families’ diverse circumstances is by integrating culturally and linguistically appropriate strategies [in the classroom and in parent oriented meetings] to encourage family involvement among Latinos. In order for schools to be successful, there has to be a direct connection between home and school for the greater academic good of each student. *Dichos* are culturally and linguistically appropriate tools for two reasons; they validate the language and culture of the home which hearten family participation in children’s education, and the metaphors expressed in the parents’ native tongue help overcome language difficulties that stem from the interaction between families and school staff with dissimilar linguistic and[/or] cultural backgrounds (Hamilton, Roach & Riley, 2003).

Conclusion

The literature review has explored the theoretical foundations and prominent research on parent involvement over the past 30 years and has identified and discussed studies that have examined parental involvement that involves or affects minorities – especially Hispanic and English language learners. As research has confirmed for the past few decades, parental involvement in the education of children results in positive academic and behavioral outcomes. Strictly speaking, the immediate influence of family members on the education of children is of tremendous importance, including the need for a strong positive relationship between schools and parents. Though many models
and strategies have been offered by many researchers in response to the need to increase Latino parental involvement, many schools still continue to struggle in obtaining and maintaining significant Latino parental participation.

It is imperative to understand that Latinos are no longer the ethnic minority in many school districts across the state and nation. As the U.S. Census keeps reporting numbers every ten years, Latinos have continued to move forward in search of better jobs and opportunities thus changing the demographics that currently exist in our state and nation. As the demographics change, so do the needs and available resources that are important to have in order for this ethnic group to be successful and a productive segment in our society. Although Latino parental involvement is seen as “lacking enough interest” from parents themselves, there are many social, linguistic, economic, and historic barriers that need to be examined and understood first that have prevented parents from getting involved in their children’s education. Such barriers include lack of time, long work days, lack of education in their native language, cultural differences in their views towards education, negative feelings and experiences towards schools, lack of transportation and child care, lack of resources, lack of English skills, and lack of resources, amongst others.

In order for schools to be fully effective, especially with minority English language learner parents, educators and administrators have to be culturally competent, be culturally sensitive to all students’ cultures, and learn to appreciate what each student brings as their funds of knowledge to the classroom. The funds of knowledge brought to the classroom not only define each student by what they know, but provide an array of
learning styles and needs that make each and every classroom unique. These funds of knowledge are not signs of deficiencies, but positive building blocks that make and define who the child is.

Although the NCLB Act of 2001 has brought a decade of what the government calls “accountability and research based teaching”, many students have fallen through the cracks and have been unable to meet state benchmarks in English Language Arts and Math. Unfortunately, many of these students identify themselves as Latinos and have parents that are unaware of how to best help their children succeed academically. A key strategy for every school to strive and maintain is being able to find or have something that students and parents can self-identify with. Meaning that if students can self-identify with the teacher, they are going to be more successful as they see themselves in future positions of power (e.g. US president, doctors, lawyers, teachers, etc.). Parents, on the other hand, will recognize and be thankful that their children’s school appreciates their culture and is open to discuss any concerns or thoughts regarding the whole academic instruction of their child.

It is of great importance to admit that although there are numerous studies that confirm the positive and constructive effects that flourish as a result of the combination of school and parental involvement, especially in ELAC, there was no study that examined the direct relationship between low ELL parental involvement and ELAC. Although the NCLB Act of 2001 gave a key to parents to openly participate in their children’s school and collaborate as a group for the academic well-being of their
children, the parental participation has been low to nonexistent for many ELL and minority parents.

Educators can use a number of strategies to increase participation of Latino parents, “such as offering flexible schedules for meetings, setting up a welcoming school environment, connecting families to community agencies and events, adding diversity and bilingual staff to schools, offering ESL adult classes with [parental choice for] different trainings focused in increasing parent skills, and providing parents with tools and lessons to be implemented at home” (Avelar, 2012, p. 30). Whether families identify themselves as members of a minority group or not, the best way to educate students is to create a strong bond of the school and the home. When both the home and school are in mutual agreement, students receive high expectations and instruction that result in better grades, more academically challenged students, a better socioeconomic future for the families and students, and a safer future society in general.
Chapter III

METHODOLOGY

For the past few years, the principal and teachers have noticed a continuous decline of ELL Latino parental involvement, as their children advance from the early elementary school grades (Kindergarten – 2\textsuperscript{nd} grade) to 6\textsuperscript{th} grade, stopping or limiting their attendance to ELAC meetings. Although large quantities of time were dedicated in the search of previous studies that would state the lack of ELL Latino parents’ interest and participation in ELAC, there was no work found to compare this study against it or favor it on. Given that these were the circumstances the researcher encountered, there is an assumption that there is a gap that needs to be studied and examined as it affects a large segment of a fast growing minority in thousands of schools across the state and nation.

Even though ELAC is composed primarily of ELL Latino parents whose main purpose (in theory) is to advise the principal and school staff on programs and services for ELLs, the percentage of participating ELL parents continues to remain low each year and the number of new parents involved in ELAC is very limited. There appears to be a decline of Latino parental involvement, especially among ELL parents, in the school site in spite of the great number of prominent studies that affirm the direct connection between parental involvement and academic accomplishment. Even though parental participation from ELL parents seems to be more noticeable at the lower elementary level grades (Kindergarten – 2\textsuperscript{nd} grade levels) in school and in parent committees and groups, it seems to decline as students get older and advance into the
upper elementary grades (4th to 6th grade). The parental involvement of ELL Latino parents specifically in ELAC, by the time their children reach the upper elementary school grades, drops vastly and remains very low.

- What are the factors that contribute or deter ELL parents continued participation in ELAC over the school years in this school site?

The purpose of this study is to find the specific factors that drive and/or eliminate Latino parent involvement in ELAC as students go from one grade to the next in the elementary school years. It is also important to remember the following questions, as they could generate further depth into the study;

- What is the parent impact on students’ academic focus even if they are not able to attend school-based activities?
- How does society and family “culture” have an influence in the way parents see public education?
- How are principals/vice-principals and/or teachers key components or barriers in the creation and/or destruction of parental involvement?
- Why does ELL Latino parents’ participation in ELAC decrease as their children get older at the elementary school level?
- Is “biculturalism” and “bilingualism” a priority for all (or just for some) parents in ELAC?

Research Design

This thesis was conducted as a qualitative research study where the researcher observed and took field notes (Appendix F) from three ELAC meetings prior to the beginning of any personal or focus group interview. Personal one-on-one interviews (Appendix C) were conducted first as a way of preventing any parents from getting influenced or persuaded from responding or “leaning” a certain way to the interview
questions. After the personal interviews were finished and critical points were dissected from each of the recordings, the focus group (Appendix D) was completed and more important points-of-views were analyzed. To expand the study, the researcher attended an additional three meetings after all interviews were concluded with the hope to continue collecting additional helpful and insightful data.

This research is based on Olivos’s (2003) study of the relationship between Latino parents and the public school system within a socioeconomic “structure of dominance”. Because a study “cannot rely on a single data collection method,” it needs “multiple sources of evidence” (Yin, 1993, p. 3). Through observations, recordings, focus group questioning and individual interviews, Olivos’ research was able to conduct a detailed, triangulated parental involvement study that described and explored the views and perspectives of a group of Latino parents (Olivos, 2003, p. 91). The rationale for including individual interviews in addition to the focus group and observations is grounded in the assumption that multiple perspectives under different contexts present a greater wealth, and depth, of data.

This thesis is guided by the need to fill the gap that currently exists in most school districts in the region, and possibly the state, where large percentage of Latino English language learners (ELLs) are served and there is very little to no Latino ELL parent participation in the federal and state mandated ELAC meetings. The study’s purpose is to shed light on the factors that deter and/or encourage ELL Latino parents, within a
Northern California rural community, from participating and being fully active in their school’s ELAC committee.

Individual interviews took place at the location the interviewees felt most comfortable (i.e. their personal homes or school building). Then, all subjects were gathered for a focus group meeting interview where some of the initial interview questions were expanded upon further. Individual and focus group questions were asked in Spanish, but the translated questions in English were also provided for future reference. Translated consent forms (English/Spanish) were also provided to all participating parents that clearly stated the purpose of the study. Six formal ELAC meeting observations took place to further expand parental involvement understanding through a researcher’s lens.

Demographics

This study was conducted within a rural Northern California school district that serves a student population that exceeds 10,000 (K-12th grade). The school district includes three (3) infant-toddler programs, six (6) preschools, ten (10) K-6 elementary schools, one (1) elementary charter school, two (2) middle schools, two (2) comprehensive senior high schools for grades 9-12, a continuation high school, and an adult school. They also provide Alternative Education: K-8 Home Study, Community Day School serving grades K-6, and an Independent Learning Center (ILC) for grades 9 through 12.

The demographics of the school site the year this study was concluded was the following: 78% Latino, 17% White, 2% African American/Black, 1% Asian Americans,
and 1% Multiracial. Almost 90% of all students served at this site are eligible for free/reduced price lunch, 58% are labeled as English language learners (ELL), and 11% qualify as GATE students. Only 18% of the total student population was eligible for special education services. The parents’ education at this site also varies with about one third (32%) of the parents as high school graduates, 29% have never attained their high school diploma, 34% have some college or are college graduates, and only 4% of the remaining parents have a graduate school degree or background.

Although there are different types of industries that provide employment in the area, many families depend heavily on the immediate surrounding area’s employment opportunities that are largely based on agriculture. Because of the large crop production, there is also a large transportation industry that has played a role in the community’s and city’s economy. In addition, many parents depend on the industrial sector that has grown within and around the community with the numerous manufacturing and warehouse centers established by major retail stores.

It is important to point out that even though many families have moved within and outside the school district due to economic hardships, the percentage of Latino students served within this school site, and school district, continues to increase slowly each year. For the past two years, this school has had approximately 90 students that have transferred from within other schools in the district and from other school districts in the county, and state. Of those students, 69 of them (77%) have self-identified themselves as Latino or Hispanic –this speaks to the fact that Latinos are not only
moving within the school district, but families are as a result of social, political and current economic reasons.

The school is not only centrally situated in a community that is quickly becoming Latino and East Indian, but it is also overcrowded (32 to 1 student-teacher ratio) and considered the poorest school compared to the other elementary schools in the district. During the 2010-2011 school year, there were 426 students (80.8% of the student body) that took advantage of the free and reduced priced meals offered daily in school versus 439 students (88%) during the 2011-2012 school year. These numbers not only tell us that more students are eating at school, but that the number of students that depend on a daily lunch and/or breakfast served at school is rising –this correlates with the state of the current economy and the hardships parents are encountering in finding a job within the community.

Additionally, the school site is considered a Title 1 school –which means that it needs to make Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) or it will be identified as a Program Improvement (PI) school under the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) (California Department of Education, 2013). Unfortunately, the school site has not been making sufficient academic progress in Math, English Language Arts (ELA) or with any of its subgroups for the past three years. At the end of the 2011-2012 school year, only 26.6% of all students in the school site scored proficient or advanced in ELA and 40.7% scored proficient or advanced in Math. Given that these percentages are not
meeting the state and federal school growth benchmarks set by the federal NCLB legislation of 2001, the school site is currently categorized as a PI school.

Population and Context

A total of five out of nine randomly selected parents for this case study. Of the five participating parents, four were mothers and one was a father. In order for parents to randomly qualify and be chosen for this study, they needed to be currently involved with ELAC (English Language Learners Advisory Committee) at the elementary school level, be a parent of a student attending the elementary school where this research study was taking place, be an ELL (English Language Learner) parent themselves, and represent any ethnic minority within the school district. Any conflict of interest as an elementary school teacher was prevented by conducting the study in a school site other than the researcher’s workplace. The information of all participants is highly confidential and pseudonyms or “false names” were used to protect the identity of all subjects.

Procedure

Before starting this study, the researcher met with the school’s administrator to present and inform the details of the study. The administrator was welcoming and opened the doors to his school site as he highly acknowledged the need to conduct the study in his school. Even though he had just been assigned the administrative position of his school site five months prior to the starting of this research study, he had worked in other sites within the school district as a vice-principal and noticed the lack of Latino
parental participation in elementary schools and decline in ELAC interest. Since his school was not exempt from the lack of parental involvement and with his administrator’s permission, the researcher was able to get in touch with the ELD (English language development) coordinator in charge of ELAC to receive the dates and topics of all prescheduled meetings.

After the researcher was able to attend at least three consecutive ELAC meetings, subjects were randomly selected and were explained the purpose of the study, the impact their participation could have, and the effect that could result in attracting more parent involvement in ELAC and the rest of the school. All parents provided the researcher with their phone numbers and personal interviews were conducted a week later. Three of the parents invited the researcher into their personal homes where the interviews took place in the dining room. The dining room table available in each home provided a quiet to semi-quiet environment where questions were asked and notes were taken. Due to personal, family, and work scheduling conflicts, the last two parents were not able to meet the researcher at their personal homes. One interview was conducted at the school site’s cafeteria and the other one thirty-five minutes prior to a doctor’s appointment in a local health clinic. All five interviews were audio-recorded with the usage of an ASUS tablet.

Two weeks after all personal meetings were concluded, all parents agreed to meet once again with the researcher for the focus group meeting interview. The meeting lasted a little more than one hour following the conclusion of a scheduled ELAC meeting. To make parents with younger children feel more comfortable during the
focus group meeting, ELAC’s child care was extended one extra hour with the assistance of the school’s principal. After all needed and scheduled interviews were conducted, the researcher continued to attend ELAC meetings scheduled at the school site to collect as much information as possible.

Collection and Analysis of Data

This thesis was conducted as a qualitative research study. All information for this thesis was gathered primarily through a review of the available literature on parental involvement at the elementary and secondary school level. The literature review was conducted via EBSCO’s HOST, ProQuest, and ERIC databases. Such databases were accessed through the university’s library web page. The main key terms used to find information were parental involvement, English language learners, importance of parental involvement, student achievement, Latino parental involvement, etc. The thesis was based on the need to fill the gap that currently exists in most school districts in the region, and possibly the state, where a large percentage of Latino English language learners (ELLs) are currently served.

Individual interviews took place at the location the interviewees felt most comfortable (i.e. their personal homes, school cafeteria, and local clinic). Then, all five human subjects were gathered for a focus group meeting interview where some of the initial interview questions were expanded upon further. Individual and focus groups questions were asked in Spanish to maximize understanding and minimize any misinterpretation of the data collected. Parents were also provided with a copy of the questions in English and Spanish for any future personal reference. The content of the
individual interview and focus group questions had four areas: (1) personal, (2) community, (3) family and academic gain, and (4) political input. After each personal interview was concluded and the focus group interview was finalized, a transcription was created and a bullet list of each was produced to highlight any similarities and/or patterns that would respond to the research study’s questions.
Chapter IV

ANALYSIS OF THE DATA

Presentation and Discussion of the Findings

In this chapter, the researcher studied the data gathered from participating parents to see if there are any similarities that would help in answering the main research question—what are the factors that contribute or deter ELL parents continued participation in ELAC over the school years in this school site? The researcher examined all data using two theoretical frameworks: The ecological system theory and critical race theory (CRT). It can also be established that all participating parents had been born and raised in México, attended public school in their native towns, and are fluent Spanish speaking parents. Even though two parents had been residing in the country for more than two decades and the other three parents for about a decade, they all referred to themselves as English language learners. This is the term parents first used during the focus group interview when they discussed the challenges in becoming more involved in school for they also see the importance of learning English. Thus they labeled themselves as English Language Learners, a term usually designated for K-12 students.

Ecological Systems Theory: Culture and Education

The ecological system theory was the first lens that was used in an effort to fully understand and respond to the statement of the problem presented in this study. Through all of the data that was collected and presented, the researcher was able to affirm the strong tie between culture and education. Although this study was not targeted
specifically on the academic growth of elementary aged students, it explained the factors that greatly affected Latino parents in their continuous attendance in ELAC meetings. The researcher was able to follow Bronfenbrenner’s (1974) suggestion in conducting this case study within natural settings which permitted participating parents in the study to be more open and sincere with their answers. The researcher also concluded that even though all four of Bronfenbrenner’s defined systems were visible in the study, two of the four systems were very much prominent throughout the study – the micro and meso systems. For instance, the majority of participating parents in the study and in ELAC meetings were mothers (microsystem) and participating parents were in constant interaction with their family and school site (mesosystem).

It can also be inferred that Bronfenbrenner’s theory is visible through the data gathered as it integrates the multiple influences that surround and affect directly parental involvement in ELAC. Though Bronfenbrenner later engaged in self-criticism for focusing too much on context (Bronfenbrenner, 1989), he also devoted a lot of attention to the personal characteristics that individuals bring with them into any social situation (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998) – which clearly aligns with the way Latino parents perceive and interpret ELAC at the school site. For instance, participating parents expressed the many difficulties ELAC parents encounter in attracting new parents, especially “fathers”, to join ELAC. Mrs. Andrade stated, “…the more they go to meetings, the more they [parents] are going to be prepared to help their kids at home”. She feels that many Latinos, especially Mexican parents who grow-up in México, arrive to this country and send their children to school with a sense of
“conformismo” (conformist). They follow their old ways of “...school is for the teachers and the home is for the parents”, which she believed was against the way schooling ran in this country. All participating parents in ELAC took individual roles to change their environment, resources, and raise parental desire/drive at their school site. Mr. Barajas stated, “We [parents] cannot just complain about the teachers all the time. We [parents] have to poner nuestro granito de arena (do our part and obligation as parents).”

Critical Race Theory: The Existing Power Structures

CRT was the second theoretical lens utilized to understand the factors that affect Latino parental involvement in ELAC. Through all interviews and observations, the researcher was able to affirm that the deficit thinking model was still believed by all participating parents to be in place as they (parents) were distrustful of the school system. The experiences of all participating parents in this study are and continue to provide clear examples of the engrained racism that is part of American society, and the state of the existing power structures that exist in a public school – a public institution. That is, the existing power structures that blame the students and their families’ for poor academic performance and for not attaining what is normal cultural knowledge and skills (Yosso, 2005). It is also highly prejudicial to conclude that all Latino parents are uninterested in their children’s education. The data collected revealed that parents do care and factors that negatively affected parental participation in ELAC and other school functions. Furthermore, the researcher was able to discover that CRT was a tool that some participating parents in the study were using to challenge the ways structure and practices were conducted in district wide, and school-site meetings. Mrs. Delgado
explained, “They [school’s administration and teachers] cannot just respond to the parents’ needs with any answer. Their answers need to be true, valid, and nothing can be left on thin air.”

Though Yosso’s (2005) six forms of capital were observable with Latino parents at the school site, there were two building blocks that were very evident – navigational (asking questions in response to their children’s needs in school), and resistant (the in-progress knowledge and skills to question and challenge inequality). Mrs. Andrade stressed, “We are given the opportunity, as parents, to express ourselves. All parents’ voices and opinions [are] equally heard.” Mrs. Delgado also stated, “ELAC does not completely help you with your kids, but it provides you with the opportunity to ask questions.” The parents’ comments documented that they are very much aware of the benefits of questioning in response to their children’s direct needs that is not a one-time thing, but an ongoing process that needs to come out from all participating Latino parents in the community that demonstrate that parents are paying attention.

Through these building blocks of knowledge, CRT shifts the research lens away from the deficit view of Latinos and other minorities as places of cultural poverty disadvantages, and instead focuses on the cultural knowledge, skills, and abilities that most times go unacknowledged. Because of the CRT approach to education and the commitment of all ELAC participating parents, the school site at which this study was conducted (as well as other similar school sites) can start developing learning atmospheres that acknowledge the multiple strengths of the Latino community and other minorities.
ELAC: Symbol of Parental Involvement

In this research, ELAC was found to be an important symbol to parents of the Hispanic culture. As a result, they enjoyed participating and attending all scheduled ELAC meetings. For Mrs. Andrade and Mrs. Cabezas, ELAC was the positive avenue through which ELL Latino parents learned about their parental rights and how they interacted with the school environment as described in Bronfenbrenner’s mesosystem. The majority of the participating parents (3 out of 5) did not know how to approach their children’s school administrator and teacher prior to ELAC. These parents acknowledged not having the tools or knowledge in knowing how to approach and productively question the educational system. The parents’ lack of confidence may be attributable to being unfamiliar with a different educational system from their home country. Or more likely is their lack of English speaking and literacy skills. This may explain why they referred to themselves as English Language Learners, a label used to describe their children.

Culture Upbringing: Gender Roles and Conformismo

Culture is the complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, law, morals, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man/woman as a member of a society (Tylor, 1874). In addition to their lack of confidence about approaching school site staff, all parents with the exception of Mrs. Enríquez, agreed that culture dictated who was present at the school meetings. Even though Mr. Barajas was the only participating father in the study he stated, “It’s sad! We [parents] need to be más concientes (more conscious) of our decisions as they affect our children’s
education directly.” All parents established that culture was an important puzzle piece in their everyday lives which impacted everything from family choices, to school and work related decisions. As a result, there were imbedded societal gender roles that were expected of each ELAC member to follow. Four of the five participating parents in the study are mothers and they all stated that their husbands would never or rarely attend any school functions having to do with school meetings. All participating mothers are presently staying home or doing so at one point mainly to take care of the family, thus inheriting the responsibility to tend to most, if not all, education related needs, events, and matters. Consequently, over 90% of the time, it is mothers who were seen at these meetings. Mr. Barajas was the only father who attends the ELAC meetings, although not as consistently as all mothers in this study. He felt that both mothers and fathers needed to be equally responsible for the education of their children though his ex-wife and mother of his two daughters never attended school functions or meetings with the exception of parent conferences.

Upon further examination of the influence of culture through the parents’ lens, the researcher not only found that traditional gender roles negatively impacted school participation, but found another aspect of culture: “conformismo” that negatively affected the participation of ELL Latino parents. The literal translation of “conformismo” is conformity. However the parents used “conformismo” to mean maintaining the separation between home and school as was expected in their homeland.
For parents like Mrs. Cabezas, Mrs. Delgado, and Mr. Barajas, “conformismo” was a cultural concept that most, if not all, ELL Latino parents brought from their country of origin, believed and continued to be enforced in the United States. *Conformismo* or “Conformism” was the delineation of boundaries between teachers in schools and parents at home. Parents were the sole authority at home and the “teachers” at school were responsible for teaching their children everything required for them to succeed productively in society. Teachers were often considered as surrogate parents at school. Parents carried this notion to the U.S. and view teachers as the experts and holders of knowledge from whom children were required to learn information in order to succeed in a modern, American, capitalistic society. Mrs. Andrade, Mrs. Enríquez and Mrs. Delgado agreed that overcoming this barrier called “*conformismo*” was a difficult step for it is in direct opposition to what is expected in American schools. At the same time, the researcher observed that Mrs. Cabezas and Mr. Barajas were in the initial stages of crossing the “*conformismo*” boundaries as they attentively listened to the other three participating parents’ conversation and actively asked questions regarding the necessary steps they needed to know and learn about first before approaching the school’s staff and administration.

Premature Relinquishment

From the data, the researcher also understood that the main reason why parents relinquished their parental participation in ELAC as their children moved forward in the elementary school years, was a result of parental prematurely granting autonomy to their children. As their children progressed through school, ELL parents relinquished
their participation as they offered more autonomy to their children. It was not directly presented to their children, but a gradual withdrawal of the parents’ physical presence at school functions. Their presence was reduced when parents felt comfortable and yet remained in charge at home. Even though Mrs. Andrade felt it was hard for farmworkers and parents with “largas jornadas” (long shift-hours) to attend, she stated, “…the more they go to meetings, the more they [parents] are going to be prepared to help their kids at home. What parents are able to learn in ELAC will later reflect itself in the community through their children.”

Participating parents, Mrs. Andrade and Mrs. Delgado, offered an erroneous interpretation, often held by school staff of this phenomenon, as a way of parents diminishing their school involvement and no longer caring about their child’s academic progress. But this is not the case for they do care and are struggling to negotiate a way to fit into the school’s power dynamics. Through the focus-group interview, the researcher established that this level of independence was granted when ELL Latino parents felt that their child’s academic knowledge was greater than their own and would no longer be able to help their child academically. At first blush, this poses a very compelling question; why would parents be as involved in the education of their children when their children’s academic knowledge is the same or surpassed their academic knowledge—such as in reading, writing, math, and science? Upon closer analysis, acquiring academic knowledge is only a part of the school experience. For Latino parents, the autonomy represents their children’s growth in society as they are developing their future career goals and aspirations. The autonomy given to their
children does not necessarily represent a sign of negligence nor apathy, but an indirect form of letting and encouraging their children to go forward and be able to reach their goals. Yet, in the American school system, the stakes, which build on each other, also increase with each academic year. It is therefore imperative that parents understand this. ELAC has played a role in getting this message across, at least with this small group of parents. The question remains, how can more parents be reached?

All parents interviewed felt it was important for each parent to learn that the American educational system is a structure that not only serves the students, but the parents as well. Parents described schools as being a vital part of the community and have a responsibility to serve the community in every way possible. However, three of the parents (Mr. Barajas, Mrs. Cabezas, and Mrs. Enríquez) mentioned that the majority of Latino parents are suspicious of the American educational system as if an invisible wall prevents parents from fully participating in the school site. For many Latino parents who have not become part of the famous American “melting pot,” there is going to be doubt or belief that their children are not going to be fully treated equally as long as they do not surrender their native culture, language, and traditions. Although all participating parents felt it was good for their community and their family to be active parents in ELAC and school, they had all experienced at least one unwelcoming incident with teachers, administration, or staff that had pushed them away from involvement at their children’s school site as explained below.
Parents’ Resilience

In spite of the negativity regarding the lack of Latino parental participation, the researcher was able to collect data that spoke to the parents’ resilience. Latino parents want to help, learn, and be part of their children’s daily education. Unfortunately, all of the parents in this study expressed at least one experience where they felt pushed aside and discouraged in enforcing their parental involvement. Mr. Barajas and Mrs. Cabezas articulated stepping out of their “conformismo” zone only to encounter barriers at their school site. These parents wanted to be physically present as much as possible. However, they were told by their children’s teacher they were not good role models in the classroom or school as their presence distracted and did not help their children’s academic learning.

Though all five participating parents were active in ELAC and expressed much optimism, they themselves all communicated a level of mistrust for school staff and administrator at the school site. So although parents were encouraged to approach the school and be active participants and offer as much parental involvement, there were minimal methods or ways to attract them. For all participating parents, the term “family” was a word that made them think instantly about their children. For them, the school site needs to be open and welcoming to families at all times. They all believed in the possibility for a mutual school-parent relationship where parents could be open and able to express their needs and concerns to the school. For these participating ELAC parents, trust of the school site was very important. Trust towards school results in positive and productive outcomes for all students, and the school in general (i.e. higher
CST scores, higher student daily attendance, higher academic grades, higher parent participation, etc.).

Unifying All Parents

Besides ELAC, the established PTA group at the school site is another venue through which parents could participate. Despite the attempt from administration to unify and inform both parental groups of each other and inviting ELAC parents to consider joining the Boosters (PTA) parents group, most participating parents in this study indicated very little to no interest in joining. Mrs. Cabezas, Mrs. Delgado, and Mrs. Andrade expressed attending more than one of the Booster meetings, the school’s informal PTA, where they felt ignored and invisible. Their decisions and spoken opinions were disregarded. The agendas and topics chosen to be discussed at the Booster meetings were not only inconsistent, but were not open to the opinions and thoughts of “new” parents. Though they wanted to be more active in other parental groups besides ELAC, these parents described a barrier of mostly “Anglo” parents who were very selective of which parents were included in the discussions and decisions and who were excluded. After hearing all comments and going over recorded data, the researcher concluded that participating and non-participating ELAC parents needed to first feel welcomed and acknowledged before any of them decided to step forward, and join a group that upholds or generates parental involvement at the school site.

Documenting Through Writing

It was critical for the researcher to see the reciprocal interaction of the parents at the end of the focus-group meeting. Mrs. Delgado and Mrs. Andrade expressed the
importance of utilizing the tool of “writing” all needs, meeting minutes, concerns, and questions presented to administration and school staff. By recording everything, “parents [were] learn[ing] to respond to the school in new ways” (Mejorado, p. 23, 2005). Mrs. Delgado expressed, “Everything should be turned in or submitted in writing. That is the formal way of doing things and getting things done in the US.”
While listening to the recorded data, it was noticeable that parents were going through a transformative paradigm of parental involvement. This paradigm for parent involvement “is not a ‘model’ in the sense that it can be replicated on the basis of strategies and techniques; rather it is a general theoretical framework that seeks to pose questions and possible paths that would lead to a more meaningful form of parental participation and voice where parents and teachers develop the tools to understand their social and historical context” (Olivos, 2010, p. 107). They were not only learning how to be more engaged, but also learning how to use and apply the tool of documenting everything in writing, as it is done in this country, for their own benefit and for the advantage of their children’s education.

Padres Conscientes – Conscious Parents

These parents are highly conscious of what is the outcome of ELAC meetings. While parents are provided with training and the right to vote to approve or disapprove actions and agenda items, they witnessed the role of ELAC is to rubberstamp. They felt that many, if not all, of the administrative actions from the superintendent and principal were brought to ELAC for discussion and approval, had already been approved, thus they were just going to the motions or rubberstamping. Even though Mr. Barajas took
part in the voting within ELAC, he felt lost and confused most of the time. He expressed, “If everyone votes yes, then I’m voting yes. If the system says it’s okay, then it must be okay.” ELAC parents felt that their engagement in this process did not make a difference thus disregarding any authentic parental input or feedback.

All participating parents in the study are active ELAC parents, yet only Mrs. Delgado voiced her thoughts about how she believed certain topics, information and agenda items were “sugar-coated” to make parents believe that things were not as bad as they seemed to be. These “sugar-coated” items included, district ELL services presented at the district ELAC (District ELAC) level, and district-wide policies and ideas. While parents may appear clueless and feel reluctant to express their thoughts, they are aware of the problems their children face and what is productive and beneficial for their academic well-being and how they are being used to continue the status quo.

Mrs. Delgado and Mrs. Barajas also mentioned the unfairness in the process of electing ELAC representatives (president, vice-president, and school’s district-level advocate). Parents running for leadership positions in ELAC and within other parent-guided committee or group should be provided with honest and equitable training. That is, if things are fair and equal, then whoever gets elected needs to be prepared to lead, and not just fill a vacant “president” or “vice-president” seat. They also felt “things” that were presented were at times “sugar-coated” or expected to “rubberstamp” to make parents believe that what they were approving was the best and only-way for the academic well-being of their children. Yet, this handful of parents were well aware that
their involvement in ELAC while personally transformative, had its limitations for providing authentic and meaningful parent input.

Each year ELAC provides parent training regarding how to help their children at home, yet these parents felt that ELAC–has the potential to become a place for helping parents serve a higher purpose of social justice by providing a space to raise issues and concerns regarding equity for themselves, their children, and their community. Yet while they recognize that ELAC has this unfulfilled potential, they all believed in ELAC was the first and critical step in learning about how the “real” American educational system works and the expectations schools have of them and their children. All participating parents described ELAC as a toolbox, where productive and powerful tools were available and within reach to any interested parent. However, they also felt these tools were useless unless they were trained on how to use them in a way to authentically help their families and their community.

Another strong commonality among the five participating parents is that as a result of participating in ELAC, they all felt more confident and prepared to raise their hands and ask questions. They described the sense of asking questions, feeling cautious, and fear of being a member of ELAC, and sometimes in the classroom, as concepts of the past. They resented and challenged the idea that at times administration and staff at the school site viewed Latinos, especially ELL parents as uneducated and incapable of understanding and unable to make productive decisions. These parents strongly voiced that regardless of what country parents immigrated from, and the differing views of education or how busy their schedules, if provided with the appropriate tools to
participate more and succeed as parents, they would use them. Who wants to have their children succeed? ¡Todos los padres! (All parents do!).
Chapter V

SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

ELAC: The Gateway to Latino Parent Involvement

There were five parents (4 mothers and 1 father) who were randomly selected and agreed to partake in a survey, personal interview, focus-group meeting and be observed in several ELAC meetings. All participating parents deeply believed that being present in the education of their children was important for them. These parents saw ELAC as the gateway through which they could be informed and make a difference in the education of their children. ELAC was a committee that not only advised administration and staff about the best possible ways to serve ELLs, but it was also seen by parents as the bridge that linked their personal worries and concerns to a staff member or administrator who could help resolve them. Their perceptions of ELAC were positive and recognized that the committee has the potential to offer progressive opportunities that could be applied beyond the home for the academic well-being of their children.

Although all participating parents were punctual and consistent participants of ELAC, they did acknowledge that encouraging other Latino ELL parents was a challenging task. As Latino parents, they all believed it was their responsibility to be active participants of their children’s school. They all admitted that attending ELAC meetings opened their eyes to the inner workings of the American education system that was new to them. All parents agreed that if they would have had their children enrolled in the public school system in Mexico, their expectations as parents would be very
different. They would be expected to follow the school’s *conformismo* and restricted to only helping at lunch and recess time. Student autonomy would possibly be granted to the children much sooner and only moms would be seen present. Nevertheless, all parents in this study felt more confident and prepared to approach staff and attend meetings in their school district as a result of being active ELAC parents. They also felt more motivated to talk about their children’s needs.

Uninvolved Parents: How to Reach out to Them

Unfortunately, all parents recognized that Latinos were unjustly given the titles of “careless” and “uninterested” as a result of the low Latino parental participation in school and ELAC meetings. The majority of participating parents suggested that future meetings needed to be more motivating—starting with new topics and themes that were more meaningful and relevant to attract more Latino ELL parents. They also felt it was important to mention that culture, for Latino parents, was a big factor that dictated which parent attended the meetings and which parent did not. Moms were always the majority at all of these meetings with one or two fathers present at every other scheduled meeting. Fathers, for the most part, were very inconsistent with their attendance. In other words, social expectations parallel to education are very different for mothers and fathers in the Latino culture. Mothers are in charge of the upbringing of the children, which overlaps to education, while fathers are expected to provide economically for all the family’s needs. At times this may require having more than one job in order to make ends meet.
The influence and impact of “conformismo” in many Latino households in which schools and home do not mix, affected parental involvement. Parents that do not attend ELAC meetings are not only left out of the loop, but they continue believing the same ideology that education is administered the same way it is conducted in most Latin American countries in which schools and home do not merge! Addressing “conformismo” must be addressed in a way which bridges what they know and what they need to know. For example, respect for what teachers do in the classroom can be appropriate in the US. However, there are many other related issues in schools for which parent input is important. Some of these issues may require understanding how the district influences the local school’s budget and other policies voted on by the local school board. Additionally, parents need to learn when and how to approach the school district and/or school board to get results. This presents another level of understanding and training needed for authentic parent involvement. Schools may not see the benefit of providing training but they could support parents to become members of organizations such as California Association for Bilingual Education. Such organizations and other offer statewide and regional parent conferences and training which is critical to meaningful parent involvement.

ELAC – The Key to the School Site

Furthermore, all participating parents expressed that the school was not just a school, but a physical place composed of professionals, parents and students. They viewed the school as part of the community, and as such should serve the direct needs of the community. ELAC, for all participating parents, was seen as a community gate
through which parents could approach their school and reach for needed resources.

Some parents expressed interest in bringing back incentives, used in the past, to motivate and attract parents to school and ELAC. Parents motivate other parents to attend and contribute in ELAC meetings, but teachers should also encourage and inspire their students to motivate their parents by offering their own simple, classroom-based rewards. It worked in the past and could work again.

In addition, a certain level of independence was also excavated in this study in which older (3rd - 6th grade) elementary age students were given a certain level of autonomy at school by their parents. Even though all of the parents that participated in this study disagreed with its logic, they all believed the majority of Latino ELL parents at the school site gave their children more academic independence and less parental involvement as they progressed to 3rd grade. The parents in this study believe this ideology is wrong, as all students require more attention at home and additional involvement at school events and meeting as they progress in school. The question remains how can parents be convinced that their involvement becomes increasingly important, as students progressed through school in hopes of graduating from high school. For example, do parents understand the two step process for earning a high school diploma (school credits and the exit exam)?

Parents believe it was important for all Latino parents to have a balance of school and home priorities. These priorities need to academically support what was taught at school—without resulting in a conflict with the home culture. For instance, practicing writing in their native language at home—is a form of home-school practice
for students to exercise their penmanship and writing skills while at the same time involving family members. Participating parents also admitted that ELL parents often feel some level of mistrust or defeat towards their school regardless of how much ELL parents contributed to them. Many felt they were still going to be viewed as being less concerned and therefore judge for not providing, exposing, or engaging their children in academically productive activities and events that more affluent parents.

Unity of Parental Groups

To develop and grow a more cohesive bond with its students’ families, parents suggested schools first had to create unity amongst all parental groups currently at the school site. Even though the PTA was advertised as open to all parents, ELAC parents felt that was not the case. Just like in ELAC, there is also a regular group of loyal parents who attend the informal PTA meetings at the school site. ELAC parents that had tried to join this group felt isolated and experienced a sense of being “unnoticed” and their input being disregarded. Three of the five participating parents in this study agreed that the agendas and topics covered at the Booster meetings were inconsistent with what was described in their flyers. In addition, reminders and flyers were sometimes distributed on the same day of the meetings, thus eliminating and discouraging parents who were interested in attending. Parents in ELAC felt they could voice their concerns and thoughts, whereas in the Booster meetings they could not.

Politics and Parent Involvement

Participating parents did not only feel they were still learning new “things” for themselves, their families and the community, but they also felt politics was a piece of
the puzzle regarding how things were run in ELAC. All parents felt ELAC was originally created to provide a voice for Latino parents –thus placing ELAC as a synonym of the Latino culture. Two of the parents explained that even though ELAC provided them with resources, they still did not feel they knew all of the appropriate steps that would allow them to truly make a change at their school site. After hearing this, all parents agreed ELAC was not the place for social justice. ELAC was the place to get resources (phone numbers, names of important people, addresses, workshops, etc.), but not the place where parents would hear the step-by-step procedures to make changes at the school site or district. One parent stated the importance of writing “all doubts, requests, and points-of-view” and present to the principal. Documenting everything in writing is an important first step as it is how things get recorded and completed in the American educational system. The question remains, what is the next step to ensure that those documents get addressed in a way parents feel validated? There are many more rungs to climb on the ladder to authentic parent involvement.

Even though some of the participating parents acknowledged having very little formal education, they stated being highly aware of what was taking place in ELAC. While some parents may go with the flow, most ELAC parents that attend meetings are able to critically analyze what is presented and are conscious of all actions that are promised and/or mentioned to be completed or what will be put to practice. For instance, the school site’s administrator promised to present to all ELAC parents the school site plan for parent feedback yet it was approved days later by the school board without any of ELAC parents’ feedback. Thus parents, regardless of their educational
level, should be treated with respect and not assume they are oblivious to these types of inconsistencies.

Conclusion

Through multiple sources, the researcher was able to gather data that was analyzed in an effort to respond to the statement of the problem that was previously presented – what are the factors that contribute or deter Latino parents’ continued participation in ELAC meetings over the school years in this school site? Even though Latino communities in many parts of the state and across the nation are perceived as communities that lack the interest in their children’s education, these are communities that are stricken by many personal, social, familial, and economic factors.

Many Latino, especially ELL, parents want to be completely emerged in the education of their children yet they lack the confidence and sometimes feel unprepared – possibly as a result of lack of English skills – to approach school staff and administrators (Figure 1). The participation of many Latino families is strictly limited to the mother figure at home as it is part of the culture that many Latino families bring with them to this country. Many Latino parents, including all participating parents in the study, have realized that being a conformista or a “conformist” does not benefit the well-being of their children’s education. Parents know that they need to be involved directly and indirectly in the education of their children.

School staff and administrators interested in attracting more Latino parents to their ELAC meetings need to truly understand that there is a sense of uneasiness from Latino parents towards the public school system. Although the teaching methods and
models continue to develop and change, parents still feel their opinions and thoughts are unwelcomed in many “parent” committees and school site groups. The elimination of bilingual programs, not having translation services in meetings and committees, and not valuing the funds of knowledge from “home” at school are some perceptions that make parents doubt the public school system and continue being “conformistas.”

In spite of the mistrust in the school system and the negative perceptions that some, if not all, Latino parents face, parents want to be active participants in their children’s education. The researcher was able to see the transformational phase of some participating parents as they became enlightened with the knowledge shared by their more active ELAC parents. Some of the parents took it upon themselves to educate the rest of the participating parents during the focus-group meeting so that injustices, questions, and concerns related to their children’s education were clarified. That is, parents were taking a step in teaching and learning from one another how to respond to the school in new ways. Freire declares, “Education…becomes the practice of freedom, the means by which men and women deal critically and creatively with reality and discover how to participate in the transformation of their world” (Freire, 1970).
Finally, the focus-group interview gave a voice to all five participating parents to express their views in regard to social justice at their school site and within ELAC. For these five parents ELAC was the place where they were offered educational tools and workshops to apply at home that would aid their children in succeeding academically. It was an encouraging and positive committee for Latino parents—a committee that is not only mandated by state and federal law in schools, but a place
where parents could extract and learn useful information that could be applied toward the educational growth of their children and themselves.

**Recommendations**

The California Department of Education (2012) requires that all public schools that serve a minimum of twenty-one English language learners or more are to create and support an English Language Advisory Committee (ELAC) that provides the opportunity for participating parents to advise school staff and administration on how to better serve the needs of ELL students. Unfortunately, the attendance rate of Latino parents—especially ELL parents, are generally very low and perhaps also in many schools within the school district and Northern California. As a result of this study, the following recommendations are suggested as tools and ideas for administration and staff to use in the process of encouraging, promoting, and elevating Latino parental participation on their ELAC committee. All recommendations were based on the data collected for this study thus making each adaptable to the needs of each ELAC committee and its community;

1. All parents, ELLs or not, need to feel welcomed and respected every single time they approach their children’s school site. It is short sited to not consider how parents support education at home. The only way parents, at this site, can truly say there is genuine Latino parental involvement and interest is if they have a voice that can truly modify the ways things are conducted at school for the well-being of all students. School staff and administration need to be encouraged to see that value of a more meaningful
level of parent involvement. It requires an investment and an all school goal to create and support such opportunities.

2. For ELAC meetings to attract more parents, meetings need to be more engaging and motivating. In addition to presenting and discussing state mandated agenda items, the researcher recommends providing parents with a choice of topics they would like to study, hear, and learn about (i.e. guest speakers, counselors, community outreach leaders, legal services representatives, immigration lawyers and advocates, etc.). This recommendation should not only be mentioned during the first scheduled ELAC meeting, but as part of every meeting as a way of acknowledging parents’ choice to a topic that might be of great interest to participating parents and possibly the community. These topics would certainly increase parent attendance and easily folded into the other agenda items.

3. Repeating the same ELAC agenda items each year in all ELAC meetings is important for all parents to know. Unfortunately that also keeps parents away as they are exposed to the same information each year. This alone could negatively impact parents attending ELAC meetings for only the early elementary years (K-2nd). For parents that are new to ELAC, they should be provided with an easy-to-understand translated parental packet describing in details what ELAC does, stands for, and benefits ELL students and their parents –including topics of ongoing discussion and of interest to parents should be included. For parents who are more consistent in attending ELAC
meetings, should be provided the opportunity to educate other parents in a workshop where parents can ask questions, and encouraged why it is important to continue to be active participants of ELAC in the future and get support to attend parent friendly organizations such as California Education for Bilingual Education (CABE).

4. Teachers are key in increasing parent involvement in the classroom and the entire school site. Teachers are seen as the carries of knowledge who are respected by the Latino culture and community. Just like teachers inspire, they can also discourage parents to not come back to the classroom and the school site. Teachers need to be culturally and linguistically careful in how they respond to a parent who is interested in helping in the classroom. Not all parents may be able to help in school the same way, but they can help in other ways.

5. Teachers are also an element in promoting ELAC to all Latinos –especially ELL parents. Teachers could provide small, cost-effective, classroom related incentives that could highly motivate students to encourage their own parents to attend ELAC meetings. For instance, parents that assist an ELAC meeting could receive a stamped note that students would give to their teacher the next morning in exchange for some type of reward (i.e. an extra 5-minutes of classroom free-time, homework pass, hands-on activity, extra points towards their trimester/quarter grade or any assignment, bonus pen/pencil from treasure chest/box, etc.) . This was described by one of the
parents as a highly successful approach to increasing parent attendance and creates a win-win situation.

6. More student–parent nights should be created in an effort to not only encourage and attract a higher Latino parental participation, and be explicit about the importance of parents’ continued involvement in school. It also reassures parents that continued involvement in school. It sends the message to Latino parents that students in the upper grades (3rd – 6th) need as much, if not more, attention in their academics, and that their education is an ongoing process.

7. Though not a fundraising committee, another parent suggestion was for ELAC’s president and vice-president to have access to a small account ($100 – $150/per school year) for the purchase of ELAC advertising related expenses (i.e. poster boards, permanent markers, paints, bright colored paper, etc.). Black-and-white posters, home reminders and bulletin boards are good, but using striking and “showy” colors attracts more parents’ attention as they are able to retain the meeting’s dates longer. This small fund, if permitted by administration, could also be used for the purchase and/or creation of incentives that could attract parents as instated in previous years (i.e. raffles, $5 – $10 gift-cards, small snacks, grocery store/restaurant discount cards, etc.) during ELAC meetings for participating parents.

8. It is also recommended for flyers, announcements, posters, and bulletin board notices to be printed, sent home, and displayed at the school site at
least two weeks prior to each meeting date. This would provide parents with a respectable amount of time to make family arrangements so that they are able to attend and not miss a scheduled ELAC meeting. Meetings should be scheduled not earlier than 6:30pm – which provides realistic time for mothers and fathers to clean up and come to meetings with family.

9. Disunity amongst all existing parental groups at the school site is a top factor that discourages many parents in becoming involved beyond ELAC – more specifically active ELL Latino parents. Although the Booster group at the school site is primarily the school fundraising resource and ELAC is an advising committee, there are always ELL parents who would be more than happy to join both groups. It is highly recommended that the Boosters’ meetings be consistent with their meeting dates, bulletins and reminders are distributed with at least a week notice before any scheduled meeting, have translated agendas/meetings, and stay faithful to their scheduled topics.

10. Create a parent-student night based on Project Cornerstone’s “Los Dichos de la Casa” (The Idioms of Home) currently in place in the Silicon Valley for Spanish-speaking parents to better support their children’s education – especially in reading. Parents are not only physically involved and empowered through their funds of knowledge to better support their children’s academic success, but they instill a sense of positive culture, language, and heritage identity.

[http://www.projectcornerstone.org/html/schools_parents_losdichos.html]
In closing, the research described in this study is both hopeful and sobering. It is encouraging because parents were able to articulate the benefits they have received from their involvement in ELAC, beyond what the researcher could have predicted. Parents were also able to compare the differing expectations between their homeland and the U.S.’s educational system and overcome them, however difficult, in the interest of their children’s future. Their ability to reflect upon and rise above this and additional challenges they have had to endure in the public school system is admirable. It is my hope that this information will be utilized, by this school and others to understand why Latino parents are reluctant to get involved and what are ways to more effectively reach out to them. Needless to say more research in this area is needed with a larger number of parents to excavate more broadly and deeply to ultimately address the achievement gap of the nation’s largest growing population, through parent involvement.
APPENDIX A

Bronfenbrenner’s Ecological Systems Theory
APPENDIX B

Consent to Participate in Research

You are being asked to participate in a research study which will be conducted by a teacher at ______ Elementary School and graduate student Alejandro Delgadillo in the Bilingual/Multicultural Education Department (BMED) at California State University, Sacramento. The purpose of the study is to illuminate the factors that impact the participation of Latino and other ethnic minority parents in their school’s ELAC committee meetings.

You will be asked to complete two separate interviews. The first interview will be conducted independently and the second interview will be directed in a focus group setting. Both interviews will be in English and/or in Spanish to maximize the accuracy of the data gathered for the research study. Only parents will be participating and students that are currently part of the researcher’s class will not be eligible to participate in this study.

All individual interviews will take place at a location in which you feel most comfortable. After all five individual interviews have been compiled; all participating subjects will be gathered for a focus (group) meeting interview. This interview may require up to an hour or two of your time. Follow up telephone calls might be necessary to clarify specific points and thoughts attained during any of the two interviews.

By participating in this research study, you are providing insight into what is directly affecting parent involvement in your district’s elementary school ELAC meetings. The concluding results of this research may be used by other parents within the school district, school personnel, and/or administration for making better decisions about how to encourage more parent participation in ELAC committees in all schools within the school district.

Your real name and location will never be used when any reference is made to you directly in my study. All data collected for this study will be locked in a metal cabinet where only I, the researcher, have access to it. Once my degree has been attained, all data will be destroyed (i.e. March 2013).

You will receive a $15 gift card for participating in the two sets of interviews and completing all work for this study.

If you have any questions about this research study, you may contact me, Alejandro Delgadillo, directly at (xxx) xxx-xxxx or by e-mail at adelgadillo@wintersjusd.org. You may also contact the researcher’s advisor, Prof. María Mejorado, at (xxx) xxx-xxxx or by e-mail at mejoradom@csus.edu.

You may decline to be a participant in this study without any consequences. Your signature below indicates that you have read this page and agree to participate in the research.

_________________________                               ______________________
Signature of Participant                                             Date

I,____________, also agree to be audio-recorded for this research study.

_________________________                               ______________________
Signature of Participant                                             Date
Permiso Para Participar en Investigación

Se le está pidiendo que considere participar en la investigación que se llevará acabo por el maestro en la primaria _______ Elementary School y estudiante de posgrado, Alejandro Delgadillo, en el Departamento de Educación Bilingüe/Multicultural (BMED – siglas en inglés) de la Universidad Estatal De California –Sacramento (CSU, Sacramento). El propósito de esta investigación es para iluminar los factores que impactan la participación de los padres Latinos y otras minorías en las reuniones del comité ELAC de su escuela.

Se le pedirá que complete dos entrevistas por separado. La primera entrevista se llevará independientemente (uno-a-uno) y la segunda entrevista será en grupo. Las dos estrevistas serán en inglés y/o en español para mejorar la exactitud de los datos acumulados para el estudio de investigación. Solamente padres de familia estarán participando y estudiantes que sean parte de la clase del investigador no serán elegibles para participar.

Todas las entrevistas independientes se llevarán acabo en la localidad preferible del participante. Después que todas las entrevistas se hallan administrado; todos(as) los participantes se juntarán una vez más para la entrevista en forma de grupo. Esta entrevista pueda que dure de una a dos horas de su tiempo. Pueda que algunas llamadas telefónicas sean necesarias para clarificar comentarios y puntos específicos que se hallan mencionado durante cualquiera de las entrevistas.

Al participar en este estudio de investigación, Ud. estará proporcionando información sobre lo que está afectando directamente la participación de los padres en las reuniones del comité ELAC en su distrito escolar. Los resultados finales de este estudio podrán ser usados por los padres dentro del distrito escolar, empleados de la escuela, y/o administración para hacer mejores decisiones en como incrementar una mayor participación de los padres en los comités de ELAC en todas las escuelas dentro del distrito escolar.

Su nombre real and localidad nunca se usarán cuando cualquier referencia se le haga a usted directamente en mi investigación. Todos los datos recogidos para este estudio se guardarán en un armario de metal, donde sólo yo, el investigador, tendría acceso a ellos. Una vez que mi Maestría (posgrado) se alla otorgado, todos los datos serán destruidos (es decir, marzo del 2013).

Usted recibirá una tarjeta de regalo de $15 por participar en las dos series de entrevistas y completar todo el trabajo para este estudio.

Si tiene cualquier pregunta acerca de esta investigación, se puede comunicar conmigo, Alejandro Delgadillo, directamente al número (xxx) xxx-xxxx ó por e-mail al adelgadillo@wintersjusd.org. Usted también puede comunicarse con mi asesora que me estará ayudando con mi investigación, Profesora María Mejorado, al teléfono (xxx) xxx-xxxx ó por e-mail al mejoradom@csus.edu.

Usted puede negarse en participar en este estudio y no habrá ninguna consecuencia. Su firma indica que usted ha leído esta página y está de acuerdo en participar en la investigación.

_________________________                               ______________________
Firma del participante                                              Fecha

Yo, _______________ , también doy permiso para que toda mi participación relacionada con esta investigación sea audi-grabada.

_________________________                               ______________________
Firma del participante                                              Fecha
APPENDIX C

Personal Interview Questions

1. Are you currently part of ELAC at your school?

2. How long have you attended ELAC meetings?

3. How does it feel being part of ELAC?

4. What is the number one reason that makes you attend ELAC meetings?

Community

5. What do you think is the purpose of ELAC?

6. Do you think ELAC is promoted and accessible to all ELL parents?

7. What do you think of parental participation in ELAC?

8. Do you think all ELL parents should attend ELAC meetings? Why do you think not all parents attend these meetings?

9. Do you think ELAC has a role in the community? If yes, what is it? If no, how come?

Family and Academic Gain

10. Do you think being part of ELAC has affected your child/children’s academics? If so, how?

11. Do you feel like you are making a difference in your child/children’s education through ELAC? If yes, explain why. If no, how come?

12. How has your participation in ELAC affected you and/or your family in the way you perceive parent involvement in public education?

Political Input

13. Do you feel ELAC agenda’s reflect and/or is sensitive to the needs and concerns you have for your child/children?

14. Describe a time when you felt that your concerns or question were not addressed. Please describe with as many details as possible.

15. Do you think there is equity/fairness in ELAC’s decision-making?
Preguntas para la Entrevista de Uno-A-Uno

**Personal**
1. ¿Usted actualmente es parte del comité de ELAC de su escuela?
2. ¿Por cuánto tiempo ha asistido usted a las juntas del comité de ELAC?
3. ¿Qué se siente ser parte del comité ELAC?
4. ¿Cuál es la razón número uno que la/lo hace a usted estar presente en las juntas del comité de ELAC?

**Comunidad**
5. ¿Cuál cree usted que es el propósito del comité de ELAC?
6. ¿Usted cree que el comité ELAC se promueve lo suficiente con todos los padres que no hablan inglés?
7. ¿Usted cree que hay poca participación de padres en el comité ELAC? Si es cierto, explique su respuesta?
8. ¿Usted cree que deberían de asistir para padres a las juntas del comité de ELAC?
   a. Si su respuesta es sí, ¿porqué cree usted que algunos padres no asisten a las juntas?
9. ¿Usted cree que el comité de ELAC tiene algún papel en/con la comunidad? Si es cierto, ¿cuál es? Si no es cierto, ¿porqué no?

**Familia y Ganacia Académica**
10. ¿Usted cree que su presencia en el comité ELAC ha afectado las calificaciones de su hijo/s? Si es cierto, ¿cómo?
11. ¿Cree usted que está haciendo alguna diferencia en la educación de su hijo/a por medio de ELAC? Si es cierto, explica tu respuesta.
12. ¿Alguna vez su participación en ELAC a afectado a su familia en la forma en que perciben el sistema de educación pública?

**Contribuciones Políticas**
13. ¿Cree usted que la agenda de ELAC refleja y/o es sensible a las necesidades y preocupaciones que tenga usted acerca de sus hijo/s?
14. Describa una experiencia cuando se le/hallan dado ninguna importancia. Por favor, describa con el mayor número de detalles posible.
15. ¿Cree usted que hay igualdad y justicia en el proceso de como se hacen las decisiones en ELAC?
APPENDIX D

Group Interview Questions

Personal

1. What do you all think is the responsibility and purpose of ELAC with bicultural parents?

   Do you think ELAC is making it? If not, what is not working?

Community

2. Why do you all think bicultural parents do not participate in public schools?

3. How would you all define parental participation in your school’s ELAC, in and outside your school site?

4. If you we all in charge of promoting and attracting more parents to ELAC, how would you do it?

Family and Academic Gain

5. Do you all believe parental participation in school decreases or increases as students go through the elementary school system? Why do you think this is happening?

6. Do you feel your school site is meeting the diverse ethnic and linguistic needs of its diverse student population and community?

7. Have you ever felt like you have lost your voice or opinion in ELAC or in any other committee or event at school?

Political Input

8. Do you think parental participation in school is a priviledge or a right? Explain your answer.

9. Do you all feel ELAC has the potential to serve as a venue through where parents can feel prepared and responsible for social justice?

10. Do you all feel there is equality/justice in all decision making events that take place in ELAC? Explain your answer.
Preguntas Para la Entrevista en Grupo

Personal

1. ¿Cuál creen que es la responsabilidad y propósito de ELAC – con los padres biculturales?

¿Creén que ELAC lo está logrando? Si no, ¿qué esta sucediendo que no está funcionando?

Comunidad

2. ¿Porqué piensan que los padres biculturales no participan es sus escuelas públicas?

3. ¿Cómo definirían ustedes la participación de padres en el comité ELAC de su escuela, adentro y afuera del comité?

4. Si ustedes estuvieran a cargo de promover y atraer más padres a ELAC, ¿qué cosas harían para atraer más padres?

Familia y Ganancia Académica

5. ¿Ustedes piensan que la participación de los padres en la escuela aumenta o desminuye mientras más grandes los hijos crecen? ¿Porqué sucede eso?

6. ¿Sienten ustedes que su escuela está cumpliendo con las necesidades lingüísticas diversas y étnicas que existen en la comunidad?

7. ¿Alguna vez se han sentido ustedes como si allan perdido su opinión en ELAC y/o en cualquier comité de la escuela, o evento?

Contribución Política

8. ¿Ustedes piensan que su participación en la escuela de sus hijos(as) en un privilegio o un derecho? Expliquen su respuesta.

9. ¿Creen ustedes que ELAC tiene la posibilidad de convertirse en el lugar a través del cual los padres puedan sentirse preparados y responsables para hacer justicia social?

10. ¿Creen ustedes que hay igualdad/justicia en todas las decisiones que se llevan acabo en ELAC? Explique su respuesta.
APPENDIX E

Elementary and Secondary Education Act – Section 1118

PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT

(a) LOCAL EDUCATIONAL AGENCY POLICY-

(1) IN GENERAL- A local educational agency may receive funds under this part only if such agency implements programs, activities, and procedures for the involvement of parents in programs assisted under this part consistent with this section. Such programs, activities, and procedures shall be planned and implemented with meaningful consultation with parents of participating children.

(2) WRITTEN POLICY- Each local educational agency that receives funds under this part shall develop jointly with, agree on with, and distribute to, parents of participating children a written parent involvement policy. The policy shall be incorporated into the local educational agency's plan developed under section 1112, establish the agency's expectations for parent involvement, and describe how the agency will —

(A) involve parents in the joint development of the plan under section 1112, and the process of school review and improvement under section 1116;

(B) provide the coordination, technical assistance, and other support necessary to assist participating schools in planning and implementing effective parent involvement activities to improve student academic achievement and school performance;

(C) build the schools' and parents' capacity for strong parental involvement as described in subsection (e);

(D) coordinate and integrate parental involvement strategies under this part with parental involvement strategies under other programs, such as the Head Start program, Reading First program, Early Reading First program, Even Start program, Parents as Teachers program, and Home Instruction Program for Preschool Youngsters, and State-run preschool programs;

(E) conduct, with the involvement of parents, an annual evaluation of the content and effectiveness of the parental involvement policy in improving the academic quality of the schools served under this part, including identifying barriers to greater participation by parents in activities authorized by this section (with particular attention to parents who are economically disadvantaged, are disabled, have limited English proficiency, have limited literacy, or are of any racial or ethnic minority background), and use the findings of such evaluation to design strategies for more effective parental involvement, and to revise, if necessary, the parental involvement policies described in this section; and

(F) involve parents in the activities of the schools served under this part.

(3) RESERVATION-
(A) IN GENERAL- Each local educational agency shall reserve not less than 1 percent of such agency's allocation under subpart 2 of this part to carry out this section, including promoting family literacy and parenting skills, except that this paragraph shall not apply if 1 percent of such agency's allocation under subpart 2 of this part for the fiscal year for which the determination is made is $5,000 or less.

(B) PARENTAL INPUT- Parents of children receiving services under this part shall be involved in the decisions regarding how funds reserved under subparagraph (A) are allotted for parental involvement activities.

(C) DISTRIBUTION OF FUNDS- Not less than 95 percent of the funds reserved under subparagraph (A) shall be distributed to schools served under this part.

(b) SCHOOL PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT POLICY -

(1) IN GENERAL- Each school served under this part shall jointly develop with, and distribute to, parents of participating children a written parental involvement policy, agreed on by such parents, that shall describe the means for carrying out the requirements of subsections (c) through (f). Parents shall be notified of the policy in an understandable and uniform format and, to the extent practicable, provided in a language the parents can understand. Such policy shall be made available to the local community and updated periodically to meet the changing needs of parents and the school.

(2) SPECIAL RULE- If the school has a parental involvement policy that applies to all parents, such school may amend that policy, if necessary, to meet the requirements of this subsection.

(3) AMENDMENT- If the local educational agency involved has a school district-level parental involvement policy that applies to all parents, such agency may amend that policy, if necessary, to meet the requirements of this subsection.

(4) PARENTAL COMMENTS- If the plan under section 1112 is not satisfactory to the parents of participating children, the local educational agency shall submit any parent comments with such plan when such local educational agency submits the plan to the State.

(c) POLICY INVOLVEMENT- Each school served under this part shall —

(1) convene an annual meeting, at a convenient time, to which all parents of participating children shall be invited and encouraged to attend, to inform parents of their school's participation under this part and to explain the requirements of this part, and the right of the parents to be involved;

(2) offer a flexible number of meetings, such as meetings in the morning or evening, and may provide, with funds provided under this part, transportation, childcare, or home visits, as such services relate to parental involvement;

(3) involve parents, in an organized, ongoing, and timely way, in the planning, review, and improvement of programs under this part, including the planning, review, and improvement of the school parental involvement policy and the joint development of the schoolwide program plan under section 1114(b)(2), except that if a school has in place a process for
involving parents in the joint planning and design of the school's programs, the school may use that process, if such process includes an adequate representation of parents of participating children;

(4) provide parents of participating children —
   (A) timely information about programs under this part;
   (B) a description and explanation of the curriculum in use at the school, the forms of academic assessment used to measure student progress, and the proficiency levels students are expected to meet; and
   (C) if requested by parents, opportunities for regular meetings to formulate suggestions and to participate, as appropriate, in decisions relating to the education of their children, and respond to any such suggestions as soon as practicably possible; and

(5) if the schoolwide program plan under section 1114(b)(2) is not satisfactory to the parents of participating children, submit any parent comments on the plan when the school makes the plan available to the local educational agency.

(d) SHARED RESPONSIBILITIES FOR HIGH STUDENT ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT- As a component of the school-level parental involvement policy developed under subsection (b), each school served under this part shall jointly develop with parents for all children served under this part a school-parent compact that outlines how parents, the entire school staff, and students will share the responsibility for improved student academic achievement and the means by which the school and parents will build and develop a partnership to help children achieve the State's high standards. Such compact shall —
   (1) describe the school's responsibility to provide high-quality curriculum and instruction in a supportive and effective learning environment that enables the children served under this part to meet the State's student academic achievement standards, and the ways in which each parent will be responsible for supporting their children's learning, such as monitoring attendance, homework completion, and television watching; volunteering in their child's classroom; and participating, as appropriate, in decisions relating to the education of their children and positive use of extracurricular time; and

   (2) address the importance of communication between teachers and parents on an ongoing basis through, at a minimum —
      (A) parent-teacher conferences in elementary schools, at least annually, during which the compact shall be discussed as the compact relates to the individual child's achievement;
      (B) frequent reports to parents on their children's progress; and
      (C) reasonable access to staff, opportunities to volunteer and participate in their child's class, and observation of classroom activities.

(e) BUILDING CAPACITY FOR INVOLVEMENT- To ensure effective involvement of parents and to support a partnership among the school involved, parents, and the community to improve student academic achievement, each school and local educational agency assisted under this part —
(1) shall provide assistance to parents of children served by the school or local educational agency, as appropriate, in understanding such topics as the State’s academic content standards and State student academic achievement standards, State and local academic assessments, the requirements of this part, and how to monitor a child’s progress and work with educators to improve the achievement of their children;

(2) shall provide materials and training to help parents to work with their children to improve their children’s achievement, such as literacy training and using technology, as appropriate, to foster parental involvement;

(3) shall educate teachers, pupil services personnel, principals, and other staff, with the assistance of parents, in the value and utility of contributions of parents, and in how to reach out to, communicate with, and work with parents as equal partners, implement and coordinate parent programs, and build ties between parents and the school;

(4) shall, to the extent feasible and appropriate, coordinate and integrate parent involvement programs and activities with Head Start, Reading First, Early Reading First, Even Start, the Home Instruction Programs for Preschool Youngsters, the Parents as Teachers Program, and public preschool and other programs, and conduct other activities, such as parent resource centers, that encourage and support parents in more fully participating in the education of their children;

(5) shall ensure that information related to school and parent programs, meetings, and other activities is sent to the parents of participating children in a format and, to the extent practicable, in a language the parents can understand;

(6) may involve parents in the development of training for teachers, principals, and other educators to improve the effectiveness of such training;

(7) may provide necessary literacy training from funds received under this part if the local educational agency has exhausted all other reasonably available sources of funding for such training;

(8) may pay reasonable and necessary expenses associated with local parental involvement activities, including transportation and child care costs, to enable parents to participate in school-related meetings and training sessions;

(9) may train parents to enhance the involvement of other parents;

(10) may arrange school meetings at a variety of times, or conduct in-home conferences between teachers or other educators, who work directly with participating children, with parents who are unable to attend such conferences at school, in order to maximize parental involvement and participation;

(11) may adopt and implement model approaches to improving parental involvement;

(12) may establish a districtwide parent advisory council to provide advice on all matters related to parental involvement in programs supported under this section;

(13) may develop appropriate roles for community-based organizations and businesses in parent involvement activities; and
(14) shall provide such other reasonable support for parental involvement activities under this section as parents may request.

(f) ACCESSIBILITY – In carrying out the parental involvement requirements of this part, local educational agencies and schools, to the extent practicable, shall provide full opportunities for the participation of parents with limited English proficiency, parents with disabilities, and parents of migratory children, including providing information and school reports required under section 1111 in a format and, to the extent practicable, in a language such parents understand.

(g) INFORMATION FROM PARENTAL INFORMATION AND RESOURCE CENTERS- In a State where a parental information and resource center is established to provide training, information, and support to parents and individuals who work with local parents, local educational agencies, and schools receiving assistance under this part, each local educational agency or school that receives assistance under this part and is located in the State shall assist parents and parental organizations by informing such parents and organizations of the existence and purpose of such centers.

(h) REVIEW- The State educational agency shall review the local educational agency's parental involvement policies and practices to determine if the policies and practices meet the requirements of this section.
APPENDIX F

Field Notes

Mrs. Andrade – Personal background: Mrs. Andrade is married and is the mother of two sons. The youngest son currently attends the school site (4th grade) and the oldest son attends a local high school. She is from Colima, México and has resided in the country for 22 years. She is a stay-home mom most of the year, but she works seasonally with Migrant Education—a state and federally funded program that ensures that migratory children are provided with appropriate education and supportive services, as a substitute teacher and a K-6 tutor.

She is currently part of ELAC at both of her son’s schools and has been actively participating for the past six years. She has held the positions of president and vice-president in ELAC. She explained that she had learned a lot in the past six years and that gives her security, and self-confidence to better approach and communicate with her son’s teachers. She explained, “Because of ELAC, I am more involucrada (involved) in my sons’ education”.

Community involvement: Mrs. Andrade believed ELAC was for all parents in the community and was a resource for parents to take advantage of how to better help their children. Even though she liked all the reminders, flyers, and little “half-sheets” of papers that were sent home constantly to inform parents of upcoming ELAC meetings, there was still little attendance from the community. She acknowledged that most parents needed to be present at all ELAC meetings, but she felt it was hard for farmworkers and parents with “largas jornadas” (long shift-hours) to attend.
She stated, “…the more they go to meetings, the more they [parents] are going to be prepared to help their kids at home”. She feels that many Latinos, especially Mexican parents who grow-up in México, arrive to this country and send their children to school with a sense of “conformismo” (conformist). They follow their old ways of “…school is for the teachers and the home is for the parents”, which she believed was against the way schooling ran in this country. She stated, “Better students, equals better schools, equals better communities”. What parents are able to learn in ELAC will later reflect itself in the community through their children.

Family and academic gains: In all the years that she has been an active parent in ELAC, she has felt that her family has benefited. She stated, “I’m giving them an example of superación (self-improvement) which is going to follow them a long time” in their education. She has learned the way the American education system works and that has affected her family positively.

Political contribution: Mrs. Andrade confessed that ELAC was a place where parents could express their concerns and hear about some of the topics they would like to learn about in regard to their children’s education. “We are given the opportunity, as parents, to express ourselves.” She also stated that if no one was able to respond to your [parent] concerns, they [ELAC coordinator or principal] would look for and provide an answer. She believed all parent voices and opinions were heard equally.

Mr. Barajas – Personal background: Mr. Barajas is a divorced father with two daughters (1st and 5th grades) that currently attend the school site. He is from Jalisco, México and has been residing in the country for a period of 18 years. He is currently a
farm worker and tries his best to attend all scheduled ELAC meetings. Even though he has only attended ELAC meetings for the past 2 years, he felt he had accumulated a lot of useful information and learned about his daughters’ school’s problems and deficiencies. He stated that the more he was involved, the more knowledgable he became in how to better help his daughters in school. He stated, “We [parents] cannot just complain about the teachers all the time. We [parents] have to poner nuestro granito de arena (do our part at home as parents).”

Community involvement: Though times are rough, Mr. Barajas felt that ELAC’s purpose was to help the school through parents. He believed the majority of parents were irresponsible in not getting involved in their children’s education. “The school is doing their part by announcing their meetings; we (parents) now have to do our part in being present.” Mr. Barajas confessed that he was disappointed with the number of parents that attend ELAC meetings. The number of ELL parents present in meetings did not close to the number of ELL students currently enrolled in school. “It is sad!” He also stated that parents needed to be más concientes (more conscious) of their decisions as they affect their children’s education directly.

Family and academic gains: Mr. Barajas felt that attending ELAC meetings affects and helps her daughters directly. “My daughters get happy when I go to meetings,” he states with a smile. He is quiet for a few seconds and states, “I think everything I am doing will help them academically”.

Political contribution: Mr. Barajas thought everyone that attended ELAC meetings was attentive, but he also felt that the agendas reflected very little of his needs
as a parent. He also believed there was help offered to parents who had questions or concerns. Even though he took part in the voting in ELAC, he felt lost and confused most of the time. He stated, “If everyone votes yes, then I’m voting yes. If the system says it’s okay, then it must be okay”.

Mrs. Cabezas – Personal background: Mrs. Cabezas is a married mother of two daughters and one son, which all attend the school site (5th, 3rd, and Kindergarten). She is native to Jalisco, México and has been residing in the country for 12 years. She is happy to be currently employed part-time in a local hotel where she gets to be creative in the kitchen as a cook.

She has been an active ELAC participant for the past five years and she feels that each year she gains benefits. She always feels informed not just about her children, but also about the current state of the school and how she can best help with problems as a parent. Her children are her number one priority and that is why she keeps attending ELAC meetings.

Community involvement: She strongly believed that ELAC has two purposes: one is to help Hispanic families (how to better help their kids at home better) and the other to help the school grow academically. She felt ELAC was advertised enough, but parents did not want to take advantage of it. “The participation levels are very low,” she expressed. She believed most parents gave priority to their jobs rather than focusing on their children’s future. She thought many parents were attentive to the needs of “the house and the bills,” but always left la educación (education) for last.
She felt that parents who did not attend their children’s school meetings were uninterested in their children’s future. For Mrs. Cabezas, ELAC was a resource for parents to advantage of so they could take what their leaned and apply it at home with their children. Mrs. Cabezas was happy to state that for her, ELAC was a *sinónimo* (synonym) of Latinos as it is organized so that minorities, especially Latinos, take advantage of it. ELAC reminds you of the things that you have to do at home as a parent at home with your children’s education, as well as reminds you of important dates and meetings at the school district level.

Family and academic gains: Mrs. Cabezas stated that she was very happy to be part of ELAC. Thanks to ELAC, she was informed and focused so that she and her husband could better help to prepare their oldest daughter better in qualifying for reclassification last year. “Just the simple fact that I am attending these meetings, my kids are *más interesados* (more interested) in school.” Mrs. Cabezas felt her family has gained from being part of ELAC and as a result their perception of education in this country had changed in a positively way.

Political contribution: Mrs. Cabezas felt the ELAC’s agenda was sensitive to the needs of parents, as it provided a venue for parents to express their thoughts, comments, and questions. She felt her voice was heard and that is why she keeps attending ELAC meetings. She also believed the decision-making process of the meetings was fair and equal; parents were not allowed to complain or gossip on issues unless they were present at meetings.
Mrs. Delgado – Personal background: Mrs. Delgado is a married mother of three children, of which only one currently attends the school site (6th, 9th, and 12th grades). She has been an active member of ELAC for the past 10 years and has held both the president and vice-president positions. She is also currently the school site’s and high school’s representative for DELAC, which keeps her busy with many meetings. Mrs. Delgado expressed that the main reasons for participating in these meetings were her three children and the fact that she was Latina.

Community involvement: Mrs. Delgado felt that ELAC’s purpose was to inform the community, through parents, of what was happening in school. There need to be direct communication between parents and teachers, and not just wait for teachers to bring something up about our kids. Mrs. Delgado also expressed the need for more advertising and “spreading-of-the-word” about ELAC meetings. There has to be more motivación (motivation) not just from parents, but from the people that are in charge as well.

Mrs. Delgado felt there was very little parental participation in ELAC meetings, but that they [school’s administration and teachers] should not blame “just” parents. For many parents, the reasons for not attending meetings included the fact that they were busy at home, or the agenda was “always” the same. For Mrs. Delgado, the school site ignored and continues to ignore the parent’s needs as well as the motivos que mueven la gente (motives that move the people). Mrs. Delgado states, “They [school’s administration and teachers] cannot just respond to the parents’ needs with any answer. Their answers need to be true, valid, and nothing can be left on thin air.” Many teachers
and parents feel uncomfortable when I speak, but it is better to speak-out than to conform.

Mrs. Delgado understood that getting parents interested in ELAC meetings was hard, she mentioned that agendas were repetitive with little new content at each meeting. She asked the question, “Are they doing ELAC meetings because they are required by law or because they are truly interested in educating and helping parents?”

Family and academic gains: Mrs. Delgado feels that she has gained a lot since she has started participating in ELAC meetings. Her children are not just more motivated in school as a result of seeing their mother (Mrs. D.) more active in ELAC meetings, but they are also more respectful. Smiling, Mrs. Delgado asserts, “It may seem weird, but your children te empiezan a valorar mucho más (your children start appreciating you more).” ELAC does not completely help you with your kids, but it provides you with the opportunity to ask questions.

Political contribution: For Mrs. Delgado, ELAC meetings did not reflect the needs of the parents. She clearly stated subjects/themes covered at each meeting were repetitive. She strongly believed in the need to educate new parents, but there was no need to explain things over-and-over again to parents that were active participants.

In addition, Mrs. Delgado believed there was little to no equality in the decision making process. For her, someone who runs for president or vice-president in the committee needs to know what is entailed and not just to fill a position. For equality to happen, all candidates running need to be on an equal playing field and know their responsibilities as participating members of ELAC. In addition, she felt the
administration and staff in charge of ELAC and similar committees needed to be aware that parents are alert to what is happening. Just because parents stay quiet, it does not mean they (parents) are clueless or uneducated. In simple terms, do not present a proposal or plan to parents for parent input when in reality it has already been approved by the school board.

Mrs. Enríquez – Personal background: Mrs. Enríquez was the first and last participating parent for this study. She is married, and a mother of two children at the school site (2nd grade and Kindergarten). She is originally from Aguascalientes, México and has been residing in the country for the past 9 years. She is happy to currently be employed currently part-time as a house-cleaner for a local apartment company. Prior to this interview, she had only attended three ELAC meetings where she volunteered as a candidate and was chosen as ELAC president for this year. Even though she is the parent with the least experience in attending ELAC’s meetings, she felt she was learning about things she was unsure and clueless about. Her children are the number one reason for attending these meetings.

Community involvement: Mrs. Enríquez believed the purpose of ELAC is to educate the Latino community –primarily ELL parents. Unfortunately, there is very little interest from the community to attend these meetings –which in her opinion translates to a lack of interest in their children’s education. Since everything that happens at school is in English, many parents believe ELAC meeting will be the same way. It is the intimidation that overpowers the majority of parents.
Family and academic gains: Mrs. Enríquez has not seen any family or academic gains from attending the few ELAC meetings, but is confident she will notice some positive changes in her family and children by the end of the school year. Mrs. Enríquez has only noticed that her children are more interested in school as a result of her attendance of these meetings.

Political contribution: Mrs. Enríquez believes ELAC’s agendas are fair and sensible to the needs of parents as they always allow parents to clarify and ask questions on what is on the agenda. She does believe, however, in the need for ELAC to have access to some type of fund that would allow parents to withdraw money for the purchasing of materials (i.e. posters, markers, incentives, etc.) that would help in advertising ELAC and better appeal to parents.
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