NEEDS ASSESSMENT FOR PARENT LITERACY PROGRAM

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MASTER OF SCIENCE

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Latina/o students do not perform at the same level of achievement as their peers, and often lack of parent presence is mistaken for apathy towards their children's educational success. This research examines the strategies Latina/o parents take in navigating the school system and advocating for their students. A local nonprofit organization with the goal of achieving educational equity for Latina/o parents will utilize these findings and recommendations to develop curricula for a parent literacy program.
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Miranda Andrade González
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would first like to thank the participants in this study, for welcoming me into their homes, sharing their experiences with me and trusting me to serve as a platform for their voices. Furthermore I’d like to thank them for grounding me in this life experience that helped me reconnect to my roots by simply conversing with me.

Next I would like to thank my advisors Dr. Mariela Nuñez-Janes (Profe) Dr. Alicia Re Cruz, and Dr. Amy Fann for their guidance in my research, their encouragement to constantly push myself and grow beyond my comfortable limits, their consejos, their paciencia, and the enduring reaffirmation in my abilities as a young Latina anthropologist. I am indebted to them for their influence in this research as well as their apoyo throughout my graduate school experiences here at the University of North Texas.

I also received support, feedback, constructive criticism, and encouragement from my mother, Angela Andrade, my father, Edward Gonzalez, my stepmother, Barbara Gonzalez my two sisters, Alana and Selena, my grandpa, “Papa” and grandma “Tito.” The connection my family has with me, even hundreds of miles away is a sacred connection that (thanks to technology) I still felt daily. My friends within the cohort also gave me feedback, helped provide perspective, spent long hours with me, edited and reviewed papers, finals, transcriptions, translations, and out loud thought processes. I’d also like to thank Brooke Okada, Natalia Datsko, Jason McClung, and Cristian Gonzalez for their thousand-mile support as friends and study-buddies. My accomplishments are truly the results of a group effort and I am indebted to each individual who walked with me through my work.
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DESCRIPTION OF APPLIED THESIS PROJECT

Research Intent

This research aims to better understand the needs and concerns of Latina/o parents in Denton Independent School District (DISD). A local organization called Partners United for Excellence in North Texas Education, better known as PUENTE, requested to help them reach their goal of achieving educational equity for Latina/o students by providing additional resources for families in DISD.

In Spanish, the word puente means “bridge.” In their goal of providing an additional resource to parents and bridging pathways for academic success, PUENTE also intends to bridge parents with existing resources available within the community.

Client Development

PUENTE began meeting in the summer of 2012 with the goal of helping Latina/o parents become more involved in their children’s academic education and ultimately closing the academic achievement gap. Their mission states their “commitment to enabling student success by creating opportunities for student leadership, parental involvement and engagement in the educational process.” Members initially consisted of professionals throughout the district and employees of the University of North Texas, most of whose children attended Denton ISD schools. Mostly Latinas/os themselves, their goals came from wanting to empower families within the district and advocate for a community to which they also belong. They decided that their most effective way to share information with the parents was to present various sessions at a conference the following year.
In February 2013, PUENTE organized and held a conference that served roughly 150 Spanish speaking Latina/o parents of students in DISD. Over twenty sessions disseminated information regarding a wide array of topics under four main concepts: General Education, Elementary School, Middle School and High School, and College and University. Local news covered the event in Spanish and English.

Intro to Involvement with Client

In mid October 2012, I was introduced to PUENTE through Dr. Mariela Nuñez-Janes, while they prepared, organized, and recruited for the conference. I presented myself to them as a student whose interests were in Latina/o parent involvement and Latina/o education. They invited me to join the committee monthly meetings. I quickly became involved in helping prepare for the conference, which intended to provide information to parents about Denton Independent School District. The organization tailored the conference primarily for a Spanish speaking audience, and a preliminary survey was conducted in both languages to better know the parents and understand more about their interests. In the following months leading up to their conference, I spent time with the board members in observing their communication with various organizations and resources in the community.

In the summer of 2013, I met with some of the board members to readdress the mission of the organization and discuss their ideas about a potential research project. PUENTE’s outreach, while successful for the conference, lacked a consistent follow up to maintain a large parent and community engagement. Furthermore, they desired a
more informal connection with parents in order to create a more sustainable parent oriented organization.

Deciding Upon the Project

After the conference, there was a delay before the board members reconvened. The Spring semester of any school year is understood to be the more chaotic semester both within the K-12 public school system and in the university, starting off with several three day weekends, resulting in less time in February, more events, spring break, university applications and acceptances, preparation for financial aid, Advance Placement exams, and, of course, standardized testing throughout the district. This, compounded with shifting roles of board members, added to the difficulty of scheduling an optimal meeting time. This also resulted in a few months of quick changes in roles expected of the members who still attended the monthly meetings.

In October 2013 after a few informal monthly gatherings, PUENTE revisited their efforts of being more grassroots oriented. Instead of promoting a conference, a series of workshops or sessions it was decided that they would provide some information presented in the conference. More importantly, they would provide information that the parents themselves expressed an interest in learning and influence a curriculum in a parent literacy program. This parent literacy program would go beyond basic language literacy in English and emphasize literacy in multiple aspects of a parent-school dynamic. At that monthly meeting, we connected with some parents in an informal gathering at North Lakes Park. We proposed ideas that should be explored in interviews with parents that would help inform PUENTE for the sessions they would hold in a rotating series, or literacy program. Main questions to be asked would be about
relationship dynamics between the teacher, the school, the parent, and the student, as well as information for parents of students in various stages in the K-12 pipeline.
CONTEXT OF PROJECT

Contribution to Anthropology

PUENTE is fairly new organization in Denton. Much of the research done on parent empowerment groups has focused on groups that have already been established within their respective communities. However, my contribution to anthropology provides some insight regarding obstacles that emerging nonprofit organizations face, whether they come from within the organization or they are external factors that influence the development and growth of the organization.

Another contribution this research provides to the discipline is to augment the literature that highlights the agency of the parents. Parent support is very real and very present within Latina/o families (Delgado Gaitán, 2004; Padilla, 2007), but is often misunderstood, disregarded, or undermined by school systems. This misunderstanding results from existing impressions of Latina/o parents with students in the K-12 school setting such as the belief that Latina/o parents are uninterested and apathetic in academic success, do not care if their children go to college, and are unwilling to involve themselves in school affairs (Delgado Gaitán 2001; Delgado Gaitán 2004; Zarate and Conchas, 2010). It is important to bring the methods of parental support to light and for the school systems to be aware of the action already being taken by parents to support their children. I find this more important than stating the deficiencies of students’ performances on standardized test scores, or restating that the dropout rate is higher among Latina/o students than their White peers. In fact, Latina/o students who enroll in university state that the support they receive from their families provides an important reinforcement to success especially in their first year of school (Padilla 2007).
This emphasizes that parental involvement impacts academic success and their benefit to Latina/o students still remains unacknowledged.

Latina/o Parent Involvement in Education

National Level

As of 2011, the U.S. public school system serves over 12.4 million Latina/o students (Fry and Lopez 2012). They consisted of nearly one in five high school students and one in four elementary school students, indicating a growing Latina/o youth (Fry and Lopez, 2012). In the past 40 years, the Latina/o student population grew 18% and their population continues to grow at an increasing rate (Fry and Lopez, 2012). In the next twenty years, Latina/o students will be one out of every three students nationwide (U.S. Census Bureau 2008).

With the increase of Latina/o students in K-12 public schools, Latina/o parental involvement becomes imperative. To put it simply, "Latino parents expect to be involved in elementary schools" (Delgado Gaitán, 2004). Especially as parents of school aged children, the public school system and parents must come into contact. However, for Latina/o parents, the school is not as open of an environment as it may be for others, and often they feel their presence unwelcome by the school (Jasis and Ordoñez-Jasis, 2011). Parents experience structural limitations and often the schools misunderstand their lack of on campus presence for apathy (Delgado Gaitán, 2001). For the school system, faculty, staff, and administrators are ill equipped to efficiently communicate with Latinas/os and other parents of varying backgrounds and cultures. (Olivos and Mendoza 2010).
Denton Independent School District

With the projected increase in population over the next few years, if the situation remains unaddressed, the achievement gap will only increase, impacting the district’s largest minority (Denton ISD). Nearly 30% of the students enrolled in DISD in 2010 identified as Latina/o, according to the Texas Tribune (Smith, 2014). While the district performs above the state average on their standardized tests overall, the trend does not hold up under examination by race, performing both below the state average among Latinas/os and below the district average across all races. PUENTE aims to become an additional resource along with other organizations and the district to help Latina/o students and parents.

Latina/o Education

As previously mentioned, Latinas/os currently make up nearly one fourth of all students enrolled in public schools nationwide (Fry and Lopez, 2012). However, Latina/o students remain outperformed by their White peers, resulting in an ever-growing educational achievement gap (Hemphill and Vanneman, 2011). According to the National Assessment of Educational Progress, in 2009, White students in eighth grade scored better than Latina/o students in math at an average of 26 points across the nation and in reading by 24 points. While scores have increased in the past twenty years for both groups, the gap did not significantly decrease, demonstrating ongoing educational inequalities. The gap becomes even more problematic when comparing Hispanics as English Language Learner (ELL) and non-ELL students. While the gap has decreased by roughly 5 points between White students and non ELL Hispanics in
the past 15 years for math, it has grown by roughly 5 points, most notably among fourth
grade ELL students (Hemphill and Vanneman, 2011).

Along with language acquisition, immigrant status also adds to obstacles for
many Latina/o youth in regards to educational attainment (Padilla, 2007). Students who
speak both languages may actually achieve higher success than their monolingual
peers in Spanish or English. However, because society places exclusive value on
English as the only valid language in which to academically succeed, language
discrimination is effectively embedded in policies regarding education (San Miguel and
Donato, 2010).

Literature on Latina/o students continues to describe feelings of discrimination
from the school system against students as well as their parents, especially when
discussing academic challenges and success or failures (Camarrota, 2004; Delgado
Gaitán, 2001; Fernandez, 2002; Padilla, 2007). In their struggles to resist subjugation,
responses vary by gender of Latin@ youth (Cammarota, 2004). Latinas find motivation
in academic success as a resistance to their societal oppression, avoiding being
stereotyped as underachievers, domestic housewives, or ever-sacrificing mothers,
through resiliency (Rodriguez, 2011). They strive towards academic success because
they perceive social benefits that will gain them economic and social mobility not
afforded to the women of previous generations (Cammarota, 2004). Latinos, who too
often recount experiences of being profiled as thugs or criminals, manifest their
resistance by cutting class and avoiding interaction in spaces where these
confrontations occur (Cammarota 2004).
According to the College Board, a number of standardized tests throughout the country can demonstrate this academic achievement gap (College Board 2006). The SATs, for example, demonstrate the gap by race, where black and Latina/o students score roughly a hundred points less than their White peers on both the math and critical writing sections of the exam (College Board 2006). Furthermore, students identified as Hispanic or Latina/o scored even lower within their group if English was not their first language. This suggests that the standardized tests are stratified in multiple dimensions including cultural variance and socioeconomic factors, leaving students of Hispanic or Latina/o background at a significant disadvantage. As of 2010 nearly 40 of all Latina/o students did not graduate from high school, compared to 12% of White students (U.S. Census Bureau 2012).

**Texas**

The racial political climate of Texas has a long history of segregation, with the politics influencing the climate of school districts statewide (Foley 2010). Furthermore, educational outcomes have always been divided along racial lines and often been tied to immigration policies (Valenzuela, 1999; San Miguel and Donato, 2010; Zarate and Conchas, 2010). Latinas/os were not considered White, and so they suffered legalized discrimination and institutional violence, limiting their access to adequate education, resources, and qualified teachers (San Miguel and Donato, 2010). With several institutional obstacles facing parents long overlooked, a growing body of literature focuses increasingly more on Latina/o parents and their influence on the academic success of their children (Lipman 2002).
Denton Independent School District

Denton Independent School District (DISD) serves over 25,000 students, nearly a third of whom self identify as Hispanic or Latina/o (Tabor 2012). While the state’s graduation completion rate stands at 84.3% in 2010, DISD’s completion rate is ten percent above the average at 94%, according to the Texas Tribune (Smith, 2014). However, when the demographics are desegregated by race, Hispanic students at the state level complete high school at a rate of 78.8%, and DISD students do slightly better at 86.8% than the state average for all students. The gap among Latina/o students in DISD and the general average is nearly 10%. In addition, Latinas/os in DISD consistently perform lower on the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) than at the state level (Smilth, 2014). Table 1 and Table 2 illustrate the achievement gap at both the state and district levels among White and Latina/o students in Math and English in 2012.

Figure 1. TAKS passing rate: Math 2012 (iexas Tribune, 2014).
In the school district, Latina/o students experience a 5% lower passing rate than the district average for all races. However, when disaggregated by race and ethnicity, the achievement gap increases by another 5%. At the state level, White students in DISD pass above the average across all races, but Latina/o students in DISD fall behind the state average for all races and the average for other Latina/o students statewide.

DISD performs above the state average across all races, and when disaggregated by race and ethnicity, each group in the district out performs its respective statistic at the state level. Yet, Latina/o students in DISD still perform below the state average across all races by a percent, but trail behind even further in the district’s overall average, and even further behind than their White counterparts at both levels.

*Figure 2. TAKS passing rate: English language arts 2012 (Texas Tribune, 2014).*
PROJECT DESIGN

Main Questions

The main questions in this project are:

• What do Latino and Latina parents want or need to know about the school system?

• How do parents perceive that the educational needs of their children can best be met?

• How can funds of knowledge (collective group knowledge) and culture be incorporated into best meeting the needs of parents in communicating with the school?

Data Collection and Methodology

Data collection used a qualitative approach, including semi-structured interviews, participant observation of PUENTE meetings, and online research of parent literacy programs and other existing organizations within the region that incorporate parents into their outreach. Critical race theory and Latina/o critical theory were used as lenses to inform the research design and analysis.

Critical Race Theory and Latina/o Critical Theory as Methodologies

There are five tenets in critical race theory:

1. The centrality and intersectionality of race and racism, intersecting with other forms of oppression and marginalization (Fernández, 2002:47)
2. The challenge to dominant ideologies, emphasizing culturally relevant ways of knowing and calling into question the exclusive principles that disregard non-traditional forms of knowledge (Delgado Bernal, 2002: 109-110; Fernández, 2002:47)

3. The commitment to social justice, in resisting oppression and pursuing equitable social change (Delgado Bernal, 2002: 109-110)

4. The centrality of experiential knowledge, which views the knowledge held by people of color as a strength and directly challenges the deficit mentality present in schools (Delgado Bernal, 2002: 109-110; Fernández, 2002:47)

5. The interdisciplinary perspective to draw on strengths from other approaches and disciplines to “improve the educational experiences of students of color” (Delgado Bernal, 2002: 109-110; Fernández, 2002:47)

One of the main contributions from Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Latina/o Critical Theory (LatCrit) is the value placed upon experiential knowledge (Fernández 2002). Experiential knowledge as presented in narratives, testimonios, and other forms of storytelling are “critical ways of knowing” and allow the speaker to consider their own experiences, publicize them, and ultimately challenge the unquestioned notions of realities and authoritative voices (Fernández, 2002). Because of this value, I found myself acting as researcher and honorary board member, recruiting for PUENTE’s meetings while simultaneously recruiting for parent interviews. Furthermore, use of CRT and LatCrit enabled me to serve as a platform on which the parents and board members could share their own voices and experiences in this study.
Funds of Knowledge

Every household must negotiate its resources among the members living in it. Members contribute and draw upon these resources or “funds” in a household economy. Many of these funds refer to concrete and tangible resources, like money or food. Vélez-Ibañez and Greenberg (1992) identify “funds of knowledge” as “wider sets of activities requiring specific strategic bodies of essential information that households need to maintain their well-being” (Vélez-Ibañez and Greenberg, 1992:314). The third research question of this study mentions funds of knowledge as collective group knowledge that may be found in households or “clustered households” along a connected social network through which information and other necessary resources travel (Vélez-Ibañez and Greenberg, 1992). Clustered households may fall in both countries for immigrant families and communities, due to unstable incomes and inconsistent access to resources.

Funds of knowledge may be extended to include strategies or methods taken by households and family members to navigate their way through the school system in order to access resources, and communicate with educators. This study intends to explore the funds of knowledge present and understand how families currently utilize them in regards to school success.

Recruitment

Parents were contacted through information they provided to PUENTE during the parent conference as well as through word of mouth through participants. Because the February conference largely targeted the Spanish speaking population, the researcher
provided outreach to the parents for the purposes of the interviews in Spanish. Emails were sent out several times and phone numbers given upon arranging a scheduled interview. The email introduced the researcher and her connection to PUENTE, as well as a brief description of the purpose of the study. She also invited parents to do an interview at the end of the monthly meetings. Snowball sampling was also used, where participants would contact friends and acquaintances and other potential participants.

At the beginning of the meetings, when meeting with a parent, the researcher read through the copies of informed consent and explained the research. Because the Institutional Review Board’s informed consent sheet was only in English, the researcher made sure to explain clearly in Spanish the details of the form so that the participant would clearly understand the study and its intended purpose. All interviewed board members had the informed consent explained to them before beginning the interviews as well. All participants received copies of the IRB and were assured that their information would be kept anonymous.

*Semi Structured Interviews*

Semi-structured interviews were conducted both among the board members as well as parents. For the parents, keeping in mind the community PUENTE serves, the researcher wrote the protocol in both English and Spanish. As it turned out, the parents interviewed only spoke Spanish. Protocol for PUENTE members was conducted only in English.

Board member interviews explored aspects of PUENTE as an organization as well as with respect to its connection to parents. Three major concepts shaped the
typed of questions asked: the development and direction that PUENTE would take, anticipated and relevant resources for a parent literacy program, and topics that parents should be informed about throughout their education in DISD and going into college. Interviews with the board members lasted mostly around forty-five minutes though one lasted over an hour and a half. Depending on how much time board members had, meetings were scheduled during the workday and expected to take under an hour. Interviews took place between November 2013 and January 2014.

Interviews with parents focused on the relationships between the students, the parents, and the school system, and information they would want from PUENTE in four main areas: financial aid, programs for immigrants, options beyond high school, and information for elementary school parents. Interviews lasted roughly thirty-five minutes, and were conducted mostly in their homes, regardless of the time of day. Because the researcher was unsure of the daily schedules of the parents, the interview questions were expected to take less than an hour as well, in the event that parents may prefer to interview during a lunch break or immediately after work. All parent interviews were scheduled between December 2013 and January 2014.

Participant Observation

While the researcher had been informally involved with PUENTE since 2012, research did not start until October 2013. The researcher conducted over 40 hours of participant observation not including online communication for scheduling our meetings and concerns between them. In the time spent with the board, the researcher also acted as an honorary board member and actively aided the community in organizing the
conference, recruiting parents, and attending the monthly meetings in which PUENTE began its informal parent outreach.

Online Research

The researcher also looked for other resources for Latina/o parents in Denton. However, there were no Latina/o parent advocacy organizations located in Denton with a website. The researcher broadened her region to include the Dallas/Fort Worth metroplex and found only three organizations in the region.

Data Analysis

Data analysis primarily focused on data gathered from the interviews and monthly meetings held by PUENTE. Interviews, meeting notes, observations, and reflections were all transcribed in Word.

Interviews were digitally recorded and then transcribed into Word. After being transcribed, all interviews were coded by hand, using an open coding method to find naturally occurring themes. Codes are an assignment of phrases to an idea or category that ultimately relates to an overarching idea or theme. The researcher used Grounded Theory to allow the data to lead the findings. According to Merriam (2009) Grounded Theory uses open, axial, and selective coding in three phases. While some codes were immediately more visible than others, other codes were not as apparent until later interviews were coded, and the researcher would go back through the interviews again.
Twenty-three codes were established from the interviews, some of which were subdivided. Merriam suggests axial coding as the second coding phase of Grounded Theory to refine already present categories to each other (Merriam, 2009:200). The researcher examined these codes to explore their relationships to the main research questions.

Notes and observations were examined to review the codes and resulting themes that arose from the interviews. They also informed the researcher from one interview to the next, so that the researcher was already aware of possible themes or trends in the same time that the interviews were being conducted.

**Research Population**

This project focused on Latina/o parents of students in DISD schools, as well as the board members of PUENTE. All parents interviewed had at least one student currently enrolled in a DISD school. Three of the parents had students who had already completed the K-12 pipeline, but of those three students, only one was enrolled in higher education. One parent had two students not yet old enough to enter DISD.

Board members of PUENTE are also parents, and of those who were interviewed, at least two of their children were currently enrolled in a DISD school, and all their children were between K-12 and had not yet graduated from high school. The following chart displays the participants, how many children they have, and the grades.
Table 1

*To maintain confidentiality, all names in this study are pseudonyms*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th># of Kids</th>
<th>Before School</th>
<th>Pre-K</th>
<th>Elem.</th>
<th>Middle School</th>
<th>High School</th>
<th>Beyond HS</th>
<th>Out of School</th>
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<td>Miguel Chavez</td>
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<tr>
<td>David Lopez</td>
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<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Christina Vega</td>
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<td>Anissa Duran</td>
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<td>Lupita Baez</td>
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<td>Yessenia and Marcos Leon</td>
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<td>Yasmin Ramirez</td>
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FINDINGS

Mire. Mi pensar en de un maestro, es motivar a todos los niños. Sea quien sea.

Look. My thoughts of a teacher, is that they motivate all children, whoever they are.

Along with the abundance of information addressed by the board members, every one of them referred to “the language barrier.” Three board members discuss it throughout their interviews in terms of the parents, emphasizing that the language barrier contributed to their inability to access the school. David Lopez, a board member, refers to the language barrier as an obstacle for parents, but in spite of it, emphasized that parents need to communicate with teachers and the school, even into middle school. Both Christina Vega and Anissa Duran acknowledge how much information there is: “There’s just so much, and when you have a language barrier on top of that;” “There’s so much, and then it doesn’t help that we have this huge language barrier.” Both of these board members view the language barrier as an obstacle to the already daunting task of distributing information about the school. However, Christina mentioned that parents in fact have a right to communicate with the school, and that “all they have to do is call and say they need a translator…not to be afraid.” This is further demonstrated by Anissa stressing that the same conversations that happen in English can “very easily happen in Spanish.”
While Miguel Chavez, also a board member, doesn’t elaborate on the language barrier regarding the parents, both Miguel and Anissa state that students and parents shouldn’t feel a sense of shame for speaking Spanish. When asked what they envisioned for the parent program, along with the “endless possibilities”, Anissa stated, “The most important point was that you are not less because you don’t speak English”. Miguel refers to the students in that there is a message being sent to students that “we’re not worthy of your education or that somehow, if they maintain their cultural identity that they’re less than you.” Miguel also emphasizes the desire to encourage them to maintain their home culture, and that pride is empowering for parents. Spanish and culture are directly related to each other, and while every board member acknowledges the need for students and parents alike to learn English, Christina states, “it’s not about deprogramming them of speaking Spanish at all. It’s that this is where they’re living, and for them to be successful, they’re going to have to learn to speak English.”

Among the parents, Lupita Baez, Yessenia Leon, Marcos Leon, and Yasmin Ramirez all are able to communicate with somebody at the school when they need to; some approach the counselor or secretary, those in the front office. However, every single parent expressed a desire to learn English, particularly Yasmin: “el español para mí sí es un impedimento” (Spanish for me is an impediment). The “language barrier” isn’t acknowledged as an obstacle between parents and the school, but rather they articulate the idea more as their lack of knowledge of the language. Lack of fluency of English is addressed, instead of a communication block between the institution and the home.
Parents conceptualize the idea of the “language barrier” differently than the board; they own their limited ability to understand and speak English. This knowledge – their inability to fully communicate in English – is an asset to them. There is no deficit mentality, only one more factor they take in consideration in their efforts to communicate with the school. While there is “still so much” according to the board to share with parents, parents for the most part seem to be able to directly approach the school when necessary, despite the “language barrier”. The direction of conversation from parents to the school suggests that the breakdown in communication is not from the parents. Furthermore, lack of resources and documents available from the school in Spanish suggest that the breakdown in communication actually demonstrates an absence of conversation initiated by schools, unless there is a disciplinary problem to be addressed regarding the student. To elaborate, when parents were asked how often the teachers contacted them, Lupita stated, “Only when I go”, Rosa stated, “never”, and Yessenia and Marcos said that there “really wasn’t much communication.”

It is evident among the parents that they use the term *bilingüe* (bilingual education) to include, or when referring to ESL classes, whereas I had understood the term to mean dual language immersion until the parents would explain the classes to me that their students were in. Yessenia wasn’t sure of the difference between regular classes and bilingual classes when I asked, whereas Yasmin wasn’t sure if the school her 7th grade son went to offered it either, but she stated that he was taking a Spanish class, and that he would get A’s because it is “pues, español” (well, Spanish). I asked Yasmin about bilingual classes that had both Spanish and English in the classroom and
ESL, or if there was a difference, and she stated that there was a difference but “she [didn’t] know exactly what.”

Every parent expressed their desire to learn English, and three of the mothers have taken an English class through DISD at some point, but with little satisfaction regarding the results. They were more interested in learning to speak the language instead of reading or writing, “que ya casi no nos interesa cómo escribirlo pero aprenderlo, hablarlo” (it doesn’t really interest us in how to write it, but rather learning it, speaking it). Rosa expresses her frustration when she had taken the class:

Te hacen un examen cuando entra a ver qué nivel estás más o menos. Y te mandan pero, llegó que ni saben ni vienen en el nivel que está uno porque a veces te mandan con unos que ya saben y los maestros se van con los que saben más que los que no saben. No sé, que a nosotros no nos hacen caso. Y pues es difícil allí. Porque como que te quedas, aunque quiere, como es el maestro está más hablando con el que ya sabe poco más y está aprendiendo el otro y nosotros estamos quedando atrás.

They give you a test when you enter to see what level you’re at, more or less. And they give you this, but they don’t come to the level one because sometimes they send you with others who already know and the teachers go with those who know more tan those who don’t know. I don’t know, they don’t pay attention to us. And, well it’s difficult there. Because you stay, even though you want to, like the teacher is talking more to the one who already knows a bit more and he’s learning and we’re just staying behind.

Personal Experiences of Board Members

Board members are familiar with several public resources within the community, and have access to them through professional as well as personal means. PUENTE’s goal is to also serve as an additional resource, and this includes knowledge of programs
and organizations available to the public as well as students. Public organizations and services mentioned included Denton’s chapter of the League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC), United Way of Denton, and the public library. Resources mentioned for students also included the library, summer camps, the advanced technology center, and services covered by tuition fees, including the tutoring center, the writing center, as well as students who are majoring in Spanish. David Lopez mentions the online resource for parents to monitor grades, the “online parent portal.” He also stressed its importance in helping parents be aware of their students’ academic progress.

The personal experiences of board members can shape the curriculum for a parent literacy program. This was decided at a meeting before the research began when PUENTE decided to have a more direct connection with parents. Literacy in this sense refers to knowledge of information, including fluency in English as well as interaction with the school. Both CRT and LatCrit validate experiential knowledge (Fernández 2011) and justify participants sharing their individual experiences to move towards a collective social change.

David also mentioned that access to resources differed from knowledge of resources. In our interview, I mentioned that I was struggling with finding parent advocacy sites for Latinas/os, and that most of my search results were for parents of gifted students. His response demonstrates his familiarity with the situation I faced:

Let’s change the word from advocating to positioning. The talented and gifted parents – I’m one of those now because my daughter’s one of those – it’s all about positioning. You know what? You can say advocate, but you know what I’m advocating for? I’m advocating that my daughter is higher ranked than your daughter. [Laughs]. Or you can say that rhetorically speaking, I’m advocating that you provide me everything I
need to make sure that when it comes time to get that scholarship, my daughter is going to be first. So I like to say positioning. We’re trying to position our children in a place so they can get all that — whatever, they can reap all those resources that exist. Typically when we say advocating we’re talking about ‘Hey man, you know, we need more books.’ [Laughs.]

David’s quote demonstrates his awareness of the power dynamics associated with access to privileged information and resources when he prefers to use the word “positioning” instead of “advocating.” The word “advocate” usually suggests a kind of defensive or proactive idea with a goal towards equity when an imbalance or some sort of injustice takes place. In addition, use of the word “positioning” suggests a strategic planning done by a parent already familiar with the way the school system works, and has access to this privileged information.

Personal experiences of the board members strongly influence the information they want to share with parents. All board members incorporate their professions into their personal experiences. Those who worked with students already enrolled at a local university focused a great deal more on college and paying for it, whereas those who worked with potential college bound students, those still in high school, also touched on students’ self perception and their relationship to Spanish.

Instead of referring to his experiences as a parent, Miguel Chavez refers to his experiences as a student and notes the confusion of dealing with loans and financial aid in general. Given that PUENTE’s meeting in January with parents presented an abundance of information about financial aid, a good follow up would be on money management, such as appropriate ways to spend the grants and scholarships, once a student receives their financial aid. Miguel states he often hears of students who don’t
spend their Financial Aid properly and then they’re left without money midway through the semester. To further develop this, the breakdown of tuition and fees is available online, according to Christina; PUENTE can easily incorporate this information into a conversation with parents about what financial aid goes to, and what it pays for when covering tuition. Because of Miguel’s previous experiences of having lost Spanish in his childhood, he also emphasizes the idea of “pride” in his Latino culture as resistance to institutional oppression. He asserts that it can be empowering for students and parent alike to maintain their language.

Board members in PUENTE are also parents of DISD students and their lived experiences with their children contribute to a collective fund of knowledge available for other PUENTE parents. For example, David’s children had dynamically different experiences within the school system, particularly with his daughter’s academic success in comparison to his son’s. Because his daughter tested into the gifted and talented programs, she has a peer group that David refers to as a “cohort”. His son however didn’t get into this program, and “he’s struggling.” Christina also refers to tracking and the benefits of doing “the AP or IB tracks.”

Personal Experiences of Parents

The personal experiences of the parents widely vary, especially for parents who have sons as well as daughters. For the parents who do have sons and daughters, their daughters seemed to make it through school with great success. Yessenia and Marcos’ older daughter is already enrolled at a junior college in the area. It should be noted that parents discuss their interactions with the schools primarily related to behavior and
discipline. Lupita states that she enjoys asking the school about her son and his behavior in school. Rosa says that because she’s never had problems with her daughter she doesn’t really have any reason to communicate with the school. While Yessenia and Marcos talk to their kids every day about their school and how they interact with their peers and behave in the classes, since there’s no disciplinary issues, they also say there is limited communication with the school. Yasmin Ramirez is the only parent to approach the school regarding her son’s grades.

Latina/o youth hold different views on what their education can gain them (Cammarota, 2004). Latina students push towards achievement in school in order to resist society’s stereotypes of being limited underachievers with very little autonomy in their future (Cammarota, 2004). They believe that education provides them a form of mobility to open opportunities in their future beyond being a housewife, and serves as a form of self-empowerment (Cammarota, 2004). Latino males on the other hand have drastically different experiences with their education. While society generalizes Latinas as housewives and submissive women, society criminalizes Latino males, labels them as threats, and monitors them in the public sphere (Cammarota, 2004). This surveillance occurs even at school, and the students feel “like [they’re] on the street” (Cammarota 2004:66). Latino males receive the impression that they are not valued as individuals in school (Halx and Ortiz, 2011). In order to avoid these problems at school, and resist these negative interactions with authority figures, they “escape” school and cut classes. It is also a social activity for them, unlike girls who relate their education to learning (Cammarota, 2004).
Lupita Baez, a mother of two boys, elaborates on her experiences with a social worker in helping her navigate through several systems with her older son. Although she “doesn’t know why she attended [to her],” these experiences could potentially contribute to a fund of knowledge available to the entire community as a collective experience from which to draw, “porque yo pasé por eso” (because I went through this). She also tells her son “no te preocupes, mijo, tú vas a subir cuando la eches ganas” (don’t worry, son, you will rise up when you have the *ganas*). Both Lupita and Rosa use this term *ganas* when talking about encouraging their students to do well in school. Lupita, Yessenia and Marcos, and Yasmin use the term *motivar*, motivate as well. Yasmin describes once when her son in middle school came home with a 78 percent, “pero casi siempre me trae arriba de noventa” (“but he always brings me above a 90”).

The encouraging experiences of Latina students are not the same for Latinos. These parents expressed “having problems” and “battles” between their sons and the school. Rosa Pacheco has a particular experience:

**Mother:** There was something that a teacher said that upset the Mexicans. And my son never wanted to tell me his name. I don’t know why, but he didn’t tell me. He said, “If I tell you, who will you go to?” And I tell him

Madre: Había algo que dijo un maestro que les enfadó a los mexicanos. Y [mi hijo] nunca quiso decir su nombre. No sé por qué, pero no me dijo. Dice – sí yo te digo, ¿quienes vas a ir? – Y le digo porque tengo que ir, porque no deben de decirles así, porque eso es racismo...El dijo algo de los mexicanos – No sé por qué los mexicanos están aquí estudiando si no van a estudiar y no van a poner atención. –

Miranda: ¿Dijo eso?

Hija: Sí, mejor que se vayan a buscar un trabajo.

Madre: Sí, que se vayan que no estén acá en la escuela.
“because I have to go. Because they shouldn’t say that to you, because that is racism.” He said something about Mexicans, “I don’t know why those Mexicans are here studying if they aren’t going to study and they aren’t going to pay attention.”

Miranda: He said that?
Daughter: Yes, “better if they go search for a job.”
Mother: “Yes, better if they go, that they aren’t there at school.”

While this experience happened to the son, this also becomes a personal experience of the mother because she felt unable to do anything to advocate for her son. He did not want her to go to campus to “recibir un escándalo” (cause a scandal). While this event happened several years in the past, this still impacted the daughter, also present at the interview. She said she never experienced this from a teacher, but being that this experience is knowledge within the family, this is still within the family’s funds of knowledge. Furthermore, it adds to a collective hurt, or injury. The daughter said of the situation: “Los maestros tienen que apoyarte en la escuela, no de correrte de la escuela” (Teachers have to support you at school, not run you away from it).

While the experiences of Yessenia and Marcos are less overtly racist, their son is still in school, and Yessenia is currently “battling” with him in helping him to become more motivated in his classes. However, her son too feels like his teachers discriminate against him:

Y sí yo veo la diferencia en el trato con otros a conmigo. Y es un niño...sí está esforzando y está sacando buenas grados...pero no se motiva para ir a la escuela...Mire, mi pensar en de un maestro, es motivar a todos los niños, a ser mejores, sea quien sea. Pero si el niño se encuentra que se siente diferencia, siente que no le ponen atención a suficiente a él...Entonces en su autoestima yo sí ha visto como, que fue muy abajo, abajo, abajo. Y hasta que nosotros dimos cuenta, ahora tratamos de
levantarlo pero es un poco difícil, pero allí va. Poco a poquito, se va abriendo el niño. Y ya va abriendo sí a nosotros. Pero le cuesta traer el trabajo y ha sido difícil, el proceso, pero siento que algo. Y entonces en la relación con los padres, el niño con el maestro no ha empatado completamente, con los maestros.

And yes, I see the difference in the treatment with others to me. And he’s a boy. Yes, he’s putting effort and he’s getting good grades, but he’s not motivated to go to school. Look, my thinking of a teacher is that they should motivate all children, to be better, whomever they are. But if the boy finds himself that he feels different, he feels that they don’t pay enough attention to him… Then with his self esteem, I’ve seen how it went down, down, down. And once we realized it now we’re trying to raise it, but it’s a bit hard. But he’s doing it, bit by little bit, the boy’s opening up. And now he’s opening up to us. But it’s costly to bring the effort and the process has been difficult, but I feel something. And so in the relationship with the boy with his teacher, it hasn’t fully connected with the teachers.

Like Rosa, Yessenia and Marcos’ son has more difficulty than their daughters do with their schooling. Rosa described her problems with her son more in regards to the relationship between the son and the school, having heard racist remarks from his teachers. Yessenia described problems with her son also between the son and the school, but her focus was more on how to “motivate him” to continue to do better in school.

Yessenia currently struggles with finding ways to motivate her son in middle school. Both Yessenia and Marcos individually stress the need to find ways to support him because “no quiero que siga con su aburrimiento” (I don’t want him to continue with his boredom). Furthermore, she emphasizes that she doesn’t want this to happen to her younger daughter, currently in fifth grade. She also emphasizes that she’s looked for resources but does not “know where to find the help” to motivate her son. Her son’s needs are motivation and encouragement because of his experiences with
discrimination, and feels that “todos los maestros son iguales” (all teachers are the same) even though she doesn’t want to believe that. Halx and Ortiz (2011) echo this experience, declaring that students need a meaningful human connection with faculty and staff present at school.

Common among all the parents’ personal experiences is the theme that if their students are experiencing challenging encounters with the school (disciplinary problems) they will approach the school, regardless of the language barrier. However, the only parent with any regular sort of communication with the school or their teachers is Yasmin, with her son in Pre-Kindergarten. They contact her normally “to give her information”. Still, while no parent mentions a teacher contacting them regarding their students’ grades, Yasmin recounts an event where her son’s grades were unacceptably low and she approached the school asking what she could do.

Me llegaba esta semestre con un 78, pero casi siempre me trae, arriba de noventa, y me trae dos materias. Pero, hablo con él, lo motivo. Un tiempo me bajó mucho, era demasiado, y hablaba yo con la escuela, qué podía hacer, y les dije ‘lo voy a castigar. Cual quitarle lo que quiero pues sí porque estaba cansada.’ Nos recuerdo que este semestre – él es muy inteligente, simplemente está flojo. Le dije ‘miño, no este, no quiero que va a pasar esto.’ Y al reparar la escuela dijeron no puedes castigar en lugar trata de darle tiempo, salir con él, de hacerlo de otro manera. Lo traté, y puro hablando con él, y ya. Este año ha estado bien.

He came to me once with a 78, but he always brings me above a 90, and he brought me two subjects. But, I talk to him; I motivate him. One time he went too low, and I talked to the school, what could I do, and I told them, “I’m going to punish him, take away from him whatever” because I was tired. I remember that semester – he is very smart; he’s just lazy. I told him “son, I don’t want this to happen.” And upon improving his schooling they said, “you can’t punish him, try to give him time instead. Go out with him, do it in some other way.” I tried, and purely by speaking with him, and yeah. This year he’s done well.
Communication with the student was expressed as a need among both parents and board members. Parents with students who were further along in the system said that there had always been open communication with their children regarding school. However, Yessenia, Marcos, and Yasmin, along with their endeavors to motivate their sons, also struggle with giving them “espacito” (space) while still encouraging them to open up with them. Rosa, Yessenia, Marcos and Yasmin also make a point to say that they had different experiences with their daughters, and that their daughters never really struggled with motivation or communication regarding school.

Research Questions Re-addressed

Question 1: What Do Latina and Latino Parents Want or Need to Know about the School System?

Elementary School

From the perspective of the board, parent involvement emphasized the “line of communication with teachers who don’t speak Spanish,” according to Christina Vega, understanding the “parent role in the school setting” as stated by David, and getting “interwoven into the elementary schools.” They also stressed the importance of consistency in home life, including diet, and Anissa Duran also emphasized maintaining open communication with their kids.
Middle School

The two most common themes among the board members underline the need for parent awareness for college readiness. It starts as young as middle school, according to Miguel Chavez and David Lopez. This was also reiterated among parents, as Yessenia and Marcos Leon had heard of credits but were not sure of their meanings or implications. Yasmin Ramirez was also concerned about her son in middle school, because she did know "how to approach the school."

High School

No parent mentions the Advanced Placement (AP) or International Baccalaureate (IB) programs, though David Lopez declares that getting into a “cohort” or one of the more academically rigorous tracks is essential to a student’s academic success, based on personal experience between their son and daughter. Christina Vega states the importance of parents to know about the programs as well. Yessenia and Marcos Leon make a point to mention that they want to know what programs are available because they’ve heard that there are ways for students to get college credit while still in high school. Yasmin Ramirez has gone so far as to consider moving schools so that her daughter could have more opportunities at a different campus, because she heard that it was a better school.

Information the Board Wants to Share

While no board member specifically mentioned the “pipeline” in terms of goals and information for parents, all of them again stressed the need for college readiness,
and Christina specifically mentions the AP or IB tracks. All board members stressed the importance of simply understanding that grades matter for all four years. Anissa specifically states, “the goal is to get them into college”.

Also among board members was the emphasis that parents "still have rights" or “have every right” to communicate with the school despite any language barriers. Though parent school communication decreases already in middle school, they address the language barrier when referring to information for parents of high school students.

Board members mentioned the financial aspects of higher education, particularly regarding universities. All members mentioned scholarships, grants and loans, for students who were both documented and undocumented. In January, PUENTE’s parent meeting regarding financial aid addressed the differences between FAFSAs and TAFSAs for students of both statuses. While financial aid doesn’t specifically address the K-12 pipeline, it is significant “privileged information,” as referred to by David Lopez, who states that privileged parents are savvier about the system in general.

**Question 2: How Do Parents Perceive that the Educational Needs of Their Children Can Best Be Met?**

Lupita and Rosa both had students who were graduating from high school this year, and so their perspectives varied significantly from Yessenia, Marcos and Yasmin, who had students still in middle school and younger. However, even Lupita shared personal experience with struggling to motivate one of her sons.
When asked about information that they would want from PUENTE regarding their students’ academic success, the answers had less to do with academics and focused more on ways to “motivate” the students, particularly Lupita, Yessenia and Marcos. Parents also emphasized the need for communication with their children as they grow. In fact, all parents said that their students felt comfortable in approaching them about their grades, but this was not a major point of concern as much as motivating them to succeed in school. On the occasions that their grades are below satisfactory, the parents still concerned themselves more with their children’s motivation to do better.

While parents who had sons currently in middle school struggled with motivation, parents also mentioned supplies and materials that students need. Lupita emphasized that sometimes it is as simple as binders and notebooks, basic school supplies, but that this would help students.

Que tengan para estudiar que les ayuden en, como materiales como lápices, como libretas, que no les hagan falta para que no sufran de tanto. Porque muchos ya no pueden estudiar porque no tienen para un lápiz, para una libreta. Y creo que si les dieron la ayuda se sintieran más mejor.

They should have, to study, they should help them, like with supplies like pencils, notebooks, so that they aren’t lacking anything and don’t suffer so much. Because many can’t study because they don’t have a pencil, or a notebook. And I think if they gave them that help, they would feel better.

Question 3: How Can Funds of Knowledge (Collective Group Knowledge) and Culture be Incorporated into Best Meeting the Needs of Parents in Communicating with the School?
It must be acknowledged that currently, the funds of knowledge are present but not necessarily shared. When asked about whether they discuss their children’s problems with the school with their circle of friends, most parents stated that they went “directly” to the school, except Rosa, who went with a neighbor because both of their children were having the same problem with the same teacher. Other than that, “ellos no tienen que saber” (they don’t need to know). Furthermore, parents acknowledge that they don’t know about topics such as financial aid and programs available to immigrants, particularly in Denton, as opposed to Dallas.

Networking was a common idea among board members, where the privileged information as well as information shared at PUENTE meetings would be shared with each family’s social networks. However, because parents do not necessarily speak with their circle of friends regarding their children in school, the way in which PUENTE communicates with parents will need to be compatible with how parents already communicate within their networks.

Lupita was the only parent that stating that she “liked to go to ask about their son.” All other parents involved themselves and communicated with the school when they felt it necessary, but Lupita had a unique relationship with the school in that she stated she enjoyed it, and considered herself “lucky,” in contrast with the other parents. While she has been able to have more successful interactions, again, the direction of communication goes from parent to school.

In addition, Lupita has a depth of personal experiences that contribute to her family’s fund of knowledge. While she does often talk with her neighbors, she’s “grown tired” of trying to gather everyone together. “Digo reúnanse, para que sepan lo que
pasa, y sí hay ayuda para todos.” She has had the most agreeable experience with the school out of the parents, and her experiential knowledge could benefit many other parents in the community, but it first requires that PUENTE have a body of parents with whom to share information and create this collective knowledge.

Yasmin Ramirez stated that she primarily communicated with the school through use of email on her cellphone. While she says she does understand what the emails say, responding to emails becomes a challenge for her, and she does not feel comfortable with her English as it is. Because so much of the district’s attempts at communication are held online, PUENTE will also benefit its families by teaching basic correspondence via emails and access to resources on the district website.

Regional Organizations for Latina/o Parents

_The Concilio_

The Concilio is a non-profit organization in Dallas, Texas that was established in 1982. Its mission statement says the organization aims “to build stronger communities by empowering parents to improve the education and health of their families” (www.theconcilio.org). They serve primarily Hispanic or Latina.o populations, but their resources are available to everyone. Their website is clearly bilingual, with Spanish links over visible when the mouse hovers over the English equivalent. Likewise, the English links are available from the Spanish pages as well. Furthermore, at the bottom of every page, the option is again reiterated with a link to its corresponding page in the other language.
The Concilio offers a program called Parents Advocating for Student Excellence (PASE), which was established in 2002. With the goal of helping the entire family by increasing enrollment in higher education their program is designed to guide parents through a curriculum informing them of their rights, as well as restating their roles and responsibilities as parents of students enrolled in U.S. public schools. There are two curricula available to parents enrolled in the PASE program: one geared towards parents of students in Pre-Kindergarten, called Parents as Leaders (PALs), and the other for parents of students in the K-12 pipeline. The PALs program is a 32-week program that aims to demonstrate to parents that “they are the most important teacher” in their students’ lives, and that this is a lifelong commitment. This program is currently at four separate school locations.

The other curriculum is much shorter, a 9-week program targeted for parents of students in K-12. In this curriculum, parents learn how to be more aware of their roles and responsibilities in their child’s education. They also learn ways to navigate through the system and “engage” with it, particularly in “approach[ing] teachers about grades and expectations of the students”. These skills help boost the confidence of parents involved in the program, which boasts over twelve thousand parent graduates within the past eleven years.

The Concilio prioritizes parental school involvement because they believe that it is “the most critical indicator of academic achievement (over income, ethnicity, and parents educational attainment)”. In addition, they attribute different cultural norms as one of the barriers to parent-school communication, and proudly assert that their PASE curricula help families become more comfortable with the school system and build
communal support for the parents involved. While not explicitly stated in terms as “funds of knowledge,” communal support and the knowledge shared upon that network benefits members involved in such a social network, becoming like “clustered households” (Vélez-Ibañez and Greenberg, 1992).

*Latino Stand Up*

Latino Stand Up, located in Irving ISD, serves parents at a local high school. They are also a non-profit organization, organized by families partnered with high school staff. Before their official status as a non profit in 2006, they held conferences and workshops open to parents and the general public. Their main goals concern parents being informed about their students’ opportunities in education, particularly regarding the college pipeline. In their mission statement they state “the organization orients families to the American school system” and one of their many objectives is to “improve the TAKS passing rate, high school graduation rates, and enrollment in AP and IB programs”.

The organization holds monthly meetings during which they invite local community members embedded throughout the district, businesses, as well as the government and they distribute information about local resources available to families and students. Parents are active in disseminating information as well as gaining from what is presented at monthly meetings. Since they are smaller than the Concilio, their organization takes a more grassroots approach and focuses their efforts at one particular school. However they “want other parents to enjoy the same benefits” that LSU experiences.
Both the Concilio and Latino Stand Up were suggested to the researcher during an interview with one of the board members. We were discussing the lack of local organizations that engage Latina/o parents with the school system, and he mentioned the Concilio and Latino Stand Up. This further demonstrates the need for an organization like PUENTE to provide its services and bridge parents to other local resources in Denton and enable the Latina/o community to mobilize and advocate for their children’s education.

Parents Step Ahead

Parents Step Ahead is a Dallas based outreach initiative that serves both the Dallas/Fort Worth area and San Antonio areas. Their mission statement is to “recognize, educate, enable and empower parents to take a proactive role in the educational and personal development of their children.” It was started in 2006 by the same organization of El Hispano News, established in the mid 1980s.

Because the initiative does not specifically ground itself to any particular school or district, they maintain their autonomy and can partner with various districts and several organizations, drawing upon their sponsors and other resources through El Hispano News. The initiative holds various seminars that cover computer and Internet literacy, social issues like health care, immigrant rights, gang awareness, and parenting topics such as Love and Logic, father presence, and homework involvement. Parents go through the program in a similar manner as the curricula with the Concilio.
DISD Online Resources

‘Dual Language at Your Fingertips for Parents’ is a page of resources available through DISD for English speaking students to learn Spanish. It is located under the DISD’s bilingual education department webpage. However, there is no Spanish to English equivalent page on the site, where monolingual Spanish speaking students would have an English tutoring resource through the district webpage. The first link in particular refers to the dual language program model for the district. However, the program itself is not available for the parents to see. The following image is a screenshot taken of the district page.

![Image of DISD's bilingual education webpage](image)

Figure 3. DISD's dual language webpage.

Under the English as a Second Language link are various options. Contact information for the staff is available including names, phone numbers, and emails. Biographical, professional and background information is available for the coordinators.
as well. Though there are links leading to blogs, the pages themselves are unavailable, as is the newsletter page for parents. The site has not been updated in quite some time and clearly no regular maintenance occurs on the site.

Under the District tab “For Parents,” there is a column to the left, which indicates several available resources. These resources include information for new families, immunization requirements, calendars, and student grades. While the site is entirely in English, on the bottom right hand side of the page is an option to translate the page from English into several languages, Spanish being the very first option. It is not directly in the part of the page that catches one’s eye, as it is on the very bottom along the margin. Yet, it is still present. If a parent knew the option was available, it would be found. The following image displays the bottom of the “For Parents” tab on the DISD website with the translation option opened on the bottom left.

Figure 4. DISD’s letter to parents.
The tab leading to Adult and Community Education shows that adult education classes are available throughout the weekday at various schools. Instructions on the page indicate that those interested in enrolling for the classes must contact the Adult and Community Education department office to do so. However, the information is entirely in English, so unless the individual is aware of the translation option at the bottom of the page, they may or may not be able to read the instructions.
RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PUENTE

"All the things we take for granted that we think people know, they don't know."

The recommendations are drawn from interaction with board members and parents, supported by our conversations during the interviews. Board member experiential knowledge is one of the first funds of knowledge from which PUENTE can draw in shaping the direction and future of the organization that respond immediately to the articulated needs of the parents. Board members currently involved are also invested in other programs and organizations, which can provide beneficial information to parents regarding high school and university and allow PUENTE to draw from present connections to resources.

PUENTE’s board members have complimentary ideas to expressed needs of parents. However, parents also expressed needs that the board members did not acknowledge during our interviews. Recommendations presented need to keep both in mind in order for PUENTE to accomplish their goal of best serving the parents to advocate for their children and empower themselves.

Monthly Meetings

Miguel stressed his frustration with PUENTE’s inconsistency in maintaining a schedule for parents, which was also echoed by Christina’s feelings that board meetings felt ineffective. In order to maintain a consistent presence for parents to utilize and contribute to these funds of knowledge, PUENTE’s meetings must be organized to anticipate the relevant topics to be discussed at each event.
1. Board members should meet between parent monthly meetings to anticipate the topics to be presented to parents.
   a. Due to busy schedules, online programs such as Skype, Google Hangouts, and FaceTime (with Apple products) can be utilized for members who can not physically attend the meetings.
   b. Use of file sharing through Google Drive can facilitate filling out forms at these meetings as well.

   In my interview with Yessenia and Marcos, I made a point to tell them about the coming PUENTE event. However, with such short notice, they were unable to arrange their weekend plans but were interested in attending the meeting the following month. Furthermore, Yessenia and Marcos demonstrated their comfort with using email by communicating with me to schedule their interview. Yasmin also stated that email was her primary method for communicating with the schools but also mentioned that she does not communicate via email with anybody in Spanish. Furthermore, both Lupita and Rosa made no mention of emails as any form of communication. Outreach to parents must accommodate their present forms of social interactions, communications, and invitations to gatherings.

2. Monthly meetings with parents should be consistently scheduled with agendas sent out in advance.

3. Invitations to parents should be by phone the week before the meetings occur.

4. Connect with parents through already present connections (even if those are through students) and invite them face-to-face.
   a. Develop an incentive to invite at least one other parent
The following recommendations may be used as guidelines for a parent program series:

**Early Education and Middle School**

Both the Concilio and Latino Stand Up provide curricula and a program in which parents go through as students. However, Latino Stand Up also actively incorporates parents in leadership roles within the program. Because PUENTE has expressed a desire to be a sustainable and grassroots oriented community, the following recommendations stress the importance of parents acquiring information as well as contributing to the funds of knowledge within the organization.

1. Parent communication with the schools should be initiated at early stages, but teachers should also be invited to these meetings in order to hear from them.

2. Invite speakers involved in Parent/Teacher organizations to share with PUENTE.
   a. Connect parents directly with these individuals or a Spanish-speaking representative.
   b. Provide a space at the meetings where these professionals can informally interact with parents rather than a “teacher-student” dynamic.

3. Inform parents about the International Baccalaureate programs available at their school.

4. Inform parents about the importance of college readiness as young as middle school.
High School

PUENTE members explained a great amount of information about the AP and IB programs that track students in an education that provides more opportunities. Furthermore, parents expressed that they were unaware of what these programs are, but that they knew they were available. The following recommendations can be directly established from funds of knowledge already present among PUENTE’s board members.

1. Inform parents about Advanced Placement programs and their benefits, like college credit and reducing the overall cost of attending a secondary education institution.
2. Inform parents about the Advanced Technology Center and its availability to students.
3. Inform parents about the importance of grades, as well as the ranking system.
4. Senior Year:
   a. Standardized entrance exams (SAT and ACT).
   b. Top ten percent and admission to state universities.

COLLEGE AND UNIVERSITY

PUENTE held a meeting in January this year that dispersed vast amounts of information to parents regarding financial aid. The information presented discussed access to financial aid, scholarships, grants, applications, and much more. As much information as it was, much of the information would be better presented in smaller doses with more direct conversation with the parents to actively engage in learning the
information presented. The following recommendations propose a smaller series or program in order for the parents to better anticipate the deadlines in the financial aid process.

1. Financial aid:
   a. Build upon the information presented on Federal and State Aid in the January meeting (2014)
   b. Separate into a three part program dedicated to Taxes, completing the FAFSA or TAFSA, and how to manage grants once they are dispersed

2. Inform parents about the difference and benefits of universities and community or junior colleges

School Correspondence

Parents of older students mentioned that their communication with the school became less frequent and less personal. This suggests the need for parents to become more familiar with communication online. The following recommendations encourage parents actively working online and navigating various processes that they will need in real life with guidance and support from PUENTE members and encouragement from other parents involved in the program.

1. Conduct a parent program that shows parents how to translate the DISD website, guides parents through emailing teachers also through the DISD website, and checking grades through the “parent portal”.
2. Create mock parent teacher conference sessions where parents can learn to ask more academically related questions as well as inquire about their children’s behavior and motivation in class
   a. This correspondence can be initiated through emails sent during the computer-based parent program (number 1).

3. Present a session on the importance of non-confrontational (non-disciplinary) related communication with the teacher, and the need to maintain this throughout their child’s education

Home and Student Dynamics

Parents mentioned the need for ways to motivate their children, while board members stated that there are multiple environments in which parents can create these spaces for students to engage in academic learning. Anissa Duran mentioned several programs and resources including the library as a way to encourage reading and literacy beyond reading specifically for studying. This directly responds to ways parents can involve themselves in their students’ motivations to succeed and encourage them to academically excel for their own benefit. The following recommendations elaborate on resources present within the community and demonstrate their capacity and utility to parents.

1. Partner with the public libraries and host a reading event
   a. This could also be a quarterly event throughout the school year to maintain consistency with parents and students and check in with parents to demonstrate the value of reading at home as well
2. Encourage parents to involve their students in their school’s reading marathons

3. Motivation

   a. Hold a session about various extracurricular activities available like sports, music, theatre, student leadership, and technology. Consider inviting parents of students involved in these activities and having one of the board members translating.
DELIVERABLES

This project may result with an assessment of what parents most need from PUENTE in the form of three main deliverables:

• A written report of findings and recommendations to start the parent literacy program (or rotating series
  o Recommendations will be reiterated to help structure preliminary curriculum which may repeat and ultimately be long sustaining by the parents and community members who participate.
  o Knowledge and experiences from the parents will also be provided

• Guidelines/templates for practice sessions for the parent literacy program including
  o Mock parent teacher conference practice guidelines with important questions to ask and an emphasis on non confrontational communication between parents and teachers
  o Guidelines to start computer literacy sessions which can provide exposure to the DISD website, computer literacy and gradual exposure to English text as well. Possible venues to use may be the computer labs at Denton High School or one of the Computer Lab classrooms in Chilton Hall at the University of North Texas

• English Spanish Exchange Meetings
  o The language exchange meetings would take place between parents and students interested in an alternative form of co-learning a language.
The first two deliverables will be in written reports and available to all PUENTE members.
LIMITATIONS

Part of what hindered the research process was timing. While the researcher was involved and volunteering with PUENTE as early as 2012, summer had many uncertainties for the organization that led into the beginning of the 2013-2014 school year. Some of these include missed monthly meetings and varying schedules of board members. Being pressed for time in turn impacted the consistency of the PUENTE parent meetings, which were important for recruiting parents to interview as well.

There were various limitations within the recruitment process as well. As several board members had said, PUENTE had imagined they would have had more families participating in the year following the conference, which would have aided purposeful sampling process. While PUENTE’s contact list has several emails available, contacting the parents may have been more successful were there more phone numbers. Furthermore, contacting parents who had not been at a PUENTE event since the conference may have felt hesitant to communicate with the researcher.
REFLECTIONS

I came to the University of North Texas knowing that I wanted Dr. Mariela Nuñez-Janes (Profe) to be my advisor. In retrospect, this was a great decision for more reasons than I was initially aware of. Coming to Texas from California was a very uprooting process for me, for more reasons than the obvious social and cultural differences between the states. I was one of two Latinas in my cohort, and coming to a town with less than half the population of my home town and a drastically different ethnic demography was often times an isolating experience. Suddenly I was aware that there were no signs on billboards in Spanish. I did not see Indian, Thai, Mexican, Chinese or Japanese restaurants. In fact, I saw very few people of these cultures in general. Most notably, I felt the lack of Mexican presence. ¿Dónde estaba mi gente?

For a discipline that focuses so much about other cultures, different foreign places, and constantly rolls their eyes at novices who “convert” to anthropology because “they just want to travel,” I found a very limited and limiting space in which to discuss my Mexican-ness. Almost certainly it was never in class. I found out later from a friend that based on the few times we did talk about our racialized experiences in class, my peers almost questioned if I actually disliked White people. In fact, talking about race in class at all seemed impossible because I felt I needed to avoid talking about racial stratification in order to avoid offending anybody. My Hermana Tejana and I both had several conversations about how isolated we felt, but we uncomfortable mentioning this to our other friends in the cohort. Not only were we the only two Mexicanas, we were also the only two people of color in our cohort at all.
I make no claim that I did not get along with my cohort. I’ve made some very deep and invaluable relationships with my classmates that sustained me in more ways than I could express, and over time, I did find a few friends who could not directly understand my isolation but did their best to support me through these experiences. I believe if anything I made them more conscious of their own racial presence. Many times we find ourselves in a discussion on the responsibilities that come with privilege, and Whiteness is no different. Other friends who came from towns with varying demographic makeup also experienced culture shock and missed familiarity of other cultures from their hometown as well. I can’t help but wonder why we don’t discuss this more often, when our discipline is all about culture. How is this still taboo?

In the department I finally brought this up to some faculty members with whom I felt safe to share my experiences. I found comfort in their empathy and guidance in their suggestions to connect with other Spanish speaking groups and places within Denton. Perhaps serendipity would have it that I would connect with PUENTE as my research client.

Finding PUENTE as a client provided a stability that I never expected to find when conducting my research. The first time I stepped into a board meeting, several smiles and even a hug greeted me before I even sat down in my chair. Furthermore, not every member spoke Spanish, easing my anxiety that I might be viewed as too “American,” whatever that’s supposed to mean. The PUENTE conference felt in some ways like I suddenly landed in my downtown back home. Everything I heard was in Spanish, and the entire spectrum of skin tones and rolling R’s brought a comfort to me I had not felt since my last time there. My connection to the parents during my research
gave me a sense of cultural stability and also helped me rediscover and develop my Spanish.

I finally found release after discovering literature on Critical Race Theory and Latino Critical Theory. Other authors wrote about Latin@s their experiences in education, and the feelings of isolation the higher we excel in education, including the heavy cost in struggling to maintain a sense of self. I found myself in this work, along with comfort, resilience, and, to be honest, a stubbornness and refusal to diminish my Mexican-ness or downplay my culture.

I came to Denton as a student, with no familiarity of the land, no real connections to the city or the community, hundreds of miles away from my closest friends and family. For the first several months I was incredibly homesick. And yet, in spite of my challenges, I had social and cultural capital to my benefit – I came here as a graduate student, with financial aid, full faculty of the language, and no responsibility to care for any family members out here. I was surrounded by a cohort and connected to other Latin@s quickly and encouraged to succeed in my studies with the friends I had made here. While my experience cannot begin to scrape the surface of the challenges faced by immigrant families and persons who come to any country, the empathy has become more real in exponentially increasing the amount of respect I have for those who risk so much to come here to the States.
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