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Parents just don't understand

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Parents Just Don't Understand: Is It Their Fault?

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Abstract

This project explores what resources and support systems are necessary to assist parents of first and second-generation Mexican-American students in helping their children succeed academically. Research demonstrates that it is important for parents to form better partnerships with school administration, learn about various available academic resources, and employ various means of assisting their children during the learning process. The researcher collected data at an elementary school through interviews; this data revealed that parents of first and second generation Mexican-American students needed to become greater advocates for their children's education, schools needed more fluent bilingual teachers, parents and students needed to create stronger partnerships, and that parents needed to be more actively involved at their children's schools. The researcher created an informational brochure for parents that focused on improving the education of Spanish-speaking students and working with the parents of such students.

Setting the Stage

One of the main things teachers should examine is their own classroom demographics to help guide the classroom curricula. In the 2012-2013 academic school year, 52.71% of students enrolled in a California public school identified as Hispanic or Latino (California Department of Education, 2013). As the number of Latinos in California increases on a yearly basis, the state of California will in turn see a growing number of Mexican-American students in their school systems. The increase in Mexican-American student presents a challenge for elementary school teachers as they must determine the kinds of resources and support parents of first and second generation Mexican-American students need from elementary schools in order to provide maximum potential for academic success. Through the research conducted, the researcher has learned that the kind of support these families need is to form better partnerships with school administration, to learn about various available academic resources, and to find various ways to assist their children in the learning process.

Personal Connection

As a first generation Mexican-American student, the researcher was aware of the various struggles that his peers and their families faced, as well as those of his own family. Since the researcher's parents were illegal immigrants, they mostly had to work labor-heavy jobs such as a dishwashers and cleaning ladies. The researcher's parents usually came home tired from working their hard jobs, yet they still made sure that they helped the researcher and his sibling with school where they could. Although the researcher's parents were able to assist the researcher and his sister with their school

work, life perhaps wouldn't have been so tiresome if perhaps they knew of resources and support that were made available to them through the schools.

Another issue that the parents of first and second-generation Mexican-American students may encounter is difficulty with the English language. Although some schools may have had school faculty that spoke Spanish, some of the researcher's Mexican-American classmates' parents felt uncomfortable trying to communicate with faculty who only spoke English, thus not being as involved in their children's learning process. By establishing a successful manner of being able to communicate with parents in a way that doesn't create any awkward scenarios, faculty and parents would be able to establish better partnerships in their children's learning process.

Why is this an issue?

As the state of California receives a greater influx of individuals from Mexico, we begin to see the establishment of more and more Mexican-American families being formed. Many of the issues Mexican-American families face in trying to provide their children with a greater chance to succeed in their academics is more information about how to deal with various issues such as, parents not being familiar with the English language, always working and not spending time with their children, and knowing about the various resources available to Mexican-American students. As this takes place, it is imperative that elementary schools reach out to those families and assist them in helping their kids maximize their potential for academic success. As a result, the public schools in California must make it a point to assure that the resources and support systems offered are not only made known to the parents of these first and second generation Mexican-American students, but that they are useful as well.

One of the important aspects of this study was the focus on first and second generation of Mexican-American students. The particular reason for the focus on these particular Mexican-American students was because by establishing a firm foundation amongst these first and second generation families gives these families' children greater opportunities for future jobs and education. By providing the proper resources and support systems to Mexican-American students' parents, and making them aware of resources and support systems, the parents will have multiple tools to help their children become academically successful.

Background/History

In the past there were many organizations that had assisted Mexican-American students. Groups that helped Mexican-American students were prevalent in California, groups such as AVID (Advancement via Individual Determination), which "targets students in the academic middle- B,C, and even D students- who have the desire to go to college and the willingness to work hard. AVID places academically average students in advanced classes and provides them with an elective class that prepares them to succeed in rigorous curricula, enter mainstream activities in school, and increase their opportunities to enroll in four year colleges" (AVID, 2013). Another such program was Upward Bound, which "Provides fundamental support to participants in their preparation for college entrance. The program provides opportunities for participants to succeed in their precollege performance and ultimately in their higher education pursuits" (U.S. Department of Education, 2013). Although there are many programs offered to Mexican-American students, there aren't many well-known organizations aside from a typical Parent-Teacher Association that many parents may know exist.

Part of this study was spent examining an organization located at Freeman* Elementary School in Seahorse*, California. The program observed was ELAC, which stands for English Language Advisory Committee.

As stated on Freeman Elementary's website, "English Language Advisory Committee (ELAC) provides parents of English learners opportunities to learn more about the variety of programs offered to their children at Freeman* School. ELAC members advise the principal and the school staff of the most positive and effective strategies for teaching English learners, involving parents in their students' education and ensuring that students attend school regularly" (Freeman website, 2013).

The researcher chose to focus on Freeman Elementary's ELAC group because it was a local school in which the researcher had done their Service Learning, as well as being a school that is part of my community.

Terms of Importance

- ❖ *Mexican-American*: Those individuals reporting Mexican cultural heritage, whose self-identify as permanent resident of U.S. regardless, of legal residency (Lipson, et. al, 1996).
- ❖ *Familism*: Involves a deeply ingrained sense of the individual being extricably rooted in the family. The term encompasses attitudes, behaviors, and family structures within an extended family system and is believed to be one of the most important factors influencing the lives of Latinos (Bacallao, Smokowski, 2010).

Research Questions

Primary question

- ❖ What resources and support do parents of first and second generation Mexican-Americans need in order to maximize potential for academic success?

Secondary Questions:

- ❖ What are some of the challenges that school personnel face in educating Mexican-American children who are first or second generation?
- ❖ What are some of the challenges that Latino parents have dealing with public education, teachers, and administrators?
- ❖ How does parent support and educational resources benefit a first or second generation Mexican-American student?

Literature Review

Forming Partnerships with Parents

One of the important aspects of this research project was how parents could form better relationships with school administration. In his article, Dr. Arriaza (2004) discussed current reform initiatives to get Mexican-American parents more involved with local schools. The Arriaza (2004) article supported this research project because the it was based out of Salinas, California, which provided an example of what was currently in the local community. As one of his conclusions, Arriaza (2004) stated, "This agency (parental involvement) is important because of the centrality given to public education as

sustenance of local control and of democratic political discourses, particularly when a community has traditionally been defined in deficit terms by those in power” (p. 10).

Both Dr. Bacallao (2007) and Dr. Smokowski (2007) discussed how the structure of Mexican families changed after moving, and how these changes impacted Mexican families as a whole. This article related to school administrations establishment for better partnerships with parents of 1st generation Mexican-American students. These life-altering changes included different cultural perspective, a family perspective on an educational process of Mexican-American children. When examining these areas of concern, Bacallao and Smokowski (2007) made an interesting discovery, when they noted, “Parents became more authoritarian in order to shield their adolescents from perceived dangers in the U.S. Without extended family support that protected children in Mexico, parents were reluctant to let their adolescents recreate in the new U.S environment with Latino friends, and this generated conflict in parent-adolescent relationships” (p. 66).

Dr. Morales (2007) and Dr. Saenz (2007) discussed various correlation of standardized testing to evaluate academic achievement with the Mexican-American culture. In this study, an integrated model (individual, family, peer, and institutional factors) was used to enhance the readers’ understanding of the disparity in standardized mathematic test scores between Mexican-Americans and White students. Morales and Saenz’s (2007) findings were explicit, “Background analysis showed that Mexican-origin students scored on average about seven fewer points on the math tests than did White students. Thus, the Mexican-origin average score was about 85% as high as that of the White students” (p. 357). When looking at how these test scores were differentiated in the

Mexican-American community itself, Morales and Saenz encountered the immigration optimism hypothesis, which "...argues immigrant parents pass their optimism of upward mobility to their offspring. Thus, it is the native-born children of foreign-born parents, the second generation that will outperform their peers, because foreign-born students may be initially disadvantaged because of their limited English skills" (p. 352).

Dr. Rodríguez (2012) added to the discussion of schools establishing better connections with parents by focusing on the educational challenges of Mexican American and immigrant students in one of the poorest areas of the Rio Grande Valley of south Texas, and the academic expectations teachers have for them. The research methods were conducted by direct observations and interviews of the various teachers and administrations of this region. Rodríguez (2012) found that the principals of this region had many difficult tasks, which included changing the mindset of teachers with low economic expectations, as well as establishing academic partnerships with Mexican-American students and their parents. One impressive method was used by Principal Emily Morales, as Rodríguez (2012), noted,

"At the beginning of October, Principal Morales used one of the allocated teacher professional development days on a Saturday to take her teachers on a 'Neighborhood Bus Tour.' The teachers spent the morning touring the neighborhoods and apartment complexes where their students lived. They stopped at two prearranged sites and were able to meet informally with parents and students. The goals of these meetings were not necessarily to talk about student progress but rather to begin forging communication networks between teachers and parents" (pgs. 28-29).

Waterman (2008) researched the ways schools have reached out to Mexican mothers that critique deficit views, as well as illuminated ways to support meaningful parent-school collaboration. Research was conducted by Waterman (2008) through observations and interviews with school faculty and the Mexican mothers themselves. Waterman's (2008) results showed that, "...the mothers who received meaningful support of their goals actively engaged with their children's education and took steps to collaborate with teachers and principals" (p.144).

Parents Learning about Resources

Another important aspect of this research project was having parents learn about various available resources and accessing them. For this section, it's important to understand how different resources made available to parents of Mexican-American students were successful or not. In her article, Dr. Bauman (2008) discussed various difficulties Mexican American students encountered in the 3rd-5th grade levels in schools throughout the Southwestern part of the United States. As Bauman (2008) stated, "Among Mexican Americans, whose cultural values were collective (as compared to individualistic), relationships with others were important. For schoolchildren who were moving beyond the family and forming friendships with peers, victimization that damaged those friendships were particularly harmful, leading to symptoms of depression" (p. 547).

Both Dr. Franquiz (2004) and Dr. del Carmen Salazar (2004) added to the discussion of possible resources offered to parents by attempting to identify the factors that supported or constrained the development of Chicano students' academic difficulties, which ultimately helped educators understand Chicano students' approach to academics

in school. Franquiz and del Carmen Salazar (2004) were able to collect their data through a 5 year study that included them recording their findings through observational data, interviews, and ethnographic perspective. Franquiz and del Carmen Salazar's (2004) study showed, "...that teachers who practice using a humanizing pedagogy steer Chicano students towards academic success" (p. 37). As a result of implementing a humanizing pedagogy, teachers "...fostered healthy educational orientations among Chicana/o adolescents, which in turn results in their academic resiliency against all odds" (p. 43).

A study conducted by Garza and Garza (2010) added to the conversation of resources being made available to parents by examining the perceptions, beliefs, and life experiences of White female teachers and the practices they brought to their classrooms. Garza and Garza (2010) collected their data through observational data and interviews, and their findings suggested that the teachers observed in this study often did not have high hopes for Mexican-American students, and that they often had a difficult time dealing with these students and their families. One of the principals interviewed was asked to share about teachers in her school that had the most success in establishing relations with Mexican parents, and, as Garza and Garza (2010) state, "The principal nominated these teachers because she considered them to be highly effective with their students. According to the principal, the four teachers studied here 'went above and beyond, had high expectations for students, were traditional and no-nonsense, and had positive attitudes' " (p. 192).

Dr. Petrzela (2010) added to the conversation of possible resources offered to parents by exploring the impact of the Bilingual Education Act not only at the federal level, but also at the state and local level. The primary purpose of the article was to

explain the impact of the Federal Bilingual Education Act and the impact it has made on the California public educational system. As stated by Petrzela (2010), "One of the results of the BET is that its structure pushed districts and states to question the received attitudes about Mexican American underachievement. On the other hand, the BEA supplanted earlier, locally developed programs, increasing oversight and enforcement and often casting districts as villains and at times even checking adventurous earlier programs" (p. 407).

Dr. Retish and Dr. Kavanaugh (1992) added to the discussion of resources that should be made available to parents by discussing various myths associated with teaching Mexican-American students. One the myth they sought to debunk was the myth that Mexican-American parents don't want to be involved in their child's education. Retish and Kavanaugh (1992) stated, "Not only do Mexican American parents want their children to get much more education than they themselves received, but these parents also expect their children to postpone marriage and having children and wait for full-time employment until after they have finished their college education" (p. 94). Another big issue this article explored was the issue of bilingual education, and how it has actually impacted Mexican-American students and their families. The conclusion was reached through various interviews of experts in the field of bilingual education, and the overarching belief among these educators was "...bilingual education fails to provide these children with a solid grounding in English and fails to integrate them with the culture of their peers it does not grant them a chance for successful educational and economic opportunities" (Retish & Kavanaugh, 1992, p. 92).

Parental Involvement

Another aspect of this project is to find the various ways parents can assist their children in the learning process, and what affects this parental involvement has on the child's learning process. Dr. Atschul (2011) focused specifically on Mexican American families and youths, a population at high risk for academic underperformance. The purpose was to find out how big of an impact parental involvement had on a child's academic success, and if so, what form had the most impact. Atschul's (2011) findings showed that the positive effects of parental involvement among Mexican American parents occur through involvement in the home. As Altschul (2010) states in her article, "Model results show that the following parenting factors were related to higher test scores in order of impact: extracurricular instruction, educational resources in the home, parents and children engaging in enriching activities together, and parents discussing school matters with children" (p. 165).

Dr. Hawley-McWhirter (2007) added to the discussion of finding ways to have parents get involved in their child's learning process when she discussed the differences in barriers students of Mexican-American and White students face in pursuing a higher education. Although Hawley-McWhirter's article focuses primarily on high school aged Mexican-American children, this article described many of the difficulties that also faced elementary aged Mexican-American children, one being the education level of the students' parents. Contrary to her own previous premises, Hawley-McWhirter (2007) stated, "With respect to parent education, we had suspected that participants whose parents had more formal education would perceive fewer barriers to postsecondary education and training pursuits. That is not the case, ruling out the possibility that

parental education would account for some of the large ethnic group differences in perceived barriers that have been identified in previous research” (p. 131).

In their study, Dr. Ojeda and Dr. Flores (2008), added to the discussion ways parents can assist their children by examining contextual factors related to the educational aspirations of 186 Mexican American students. The results of this study were acquired through a 3-step hierarchical regression analysis that determined the influence of gender, generation level, parents' education level, and perceived educational barriers on educational aspirations. Results by Ojeda and Flores (2008) indicated that perceived educational barriers significantly predicted students' educational aspirations above and beyond the influence of gender, generation level, and parents' education level. After collecting their data, Ojeda and Flores (2008) came to the conclusion that, “Parents of Mexican American students who have gone through the U.S. school system themselves may be more prepared to help their children navigate the school system than are parents who were educated in Mexico. This firsthand knowledge and experience may help Mexican American students from higher generation levels to set higher educational aspirations” (p. 91).

In his article, Dr. Tapia (2000) added to the discussion of finding ways to have parents get involved in their child's learning process by using household analysis to illustrate how students' schooling and academic achievement are influenced by household members' activities at home, in the community, and in the schools. Tapia's (2000) analysis indicated that family stability, as well as social and economic factors has direct correlations with students' learning and academic achievement. When observing one of the households, that of the Diaz family, Tapia (2000) noted, “Both parents' high level of

school participation and their knowledge of the curriculum resulted in high academic performance for most of the children” (p. 38). Another important factor that Tapia (2000) brought up is the importance of the language being spoken at home when he states, “Compatibility between language of instruction and students’ and parents’ home language facilitate students’ learning. However, changes in a household’s economic and survival strategies, in some contexts, are more important for learning than language of instruction” (p. 42).

Dr. Urrieta and Dr. Martinez (2011) added to the discussion of finding ways to have parents get involved in their child’s learning process by exploring parents' and grandparents' perspectives about why going to Nocutzepo in Mexico was important for their children and grandchildren's cultural identities, even when their children were truants from schools in the United States. The majority of this article’s findings were found through interviewing parents and grandparents from Nocutzepo who took their grandchildren on trips to Nocutzepo. Urrieta and Martinez (2011) concluded that, “...people from Nocutzepo actively engage in alternative educational practices that supplement US schooling. Through pueblo visits, parents and grandparents were actively and meaningfully teaching their children and grandchildren ancestral diasporic community knowledge” (p. 257).

Methodology

Given the growing number of the Hispanic population in the state of California, California’s public educational system must find ways to help students of Hispanic background to succeed academically. Research was done to determine the resources and

support parent of first and second-generation Mexican-American students need in order to maximize potential for academic success.

Context

Research took place in Seahorse*, California. This town was located near the Pacific Ocean, and the majority of the community was of low-to-middle socioeconomic status. Research was conducted at Freeman Elementary School*. The population served by the school consisted of White, Hispanic, Asian/Pacific Islander and African-American ethnicities, and the population was primarily families of low-to-middle socioeconomic income status. As stated by Sweeney (2012), the principal at Freeman Elementary in 2012, “The free or reduced-priced meal subsidy goes to students whose families earned less than \$41,348 a year (based on a family of four) in the 2011-2012 school year. At [Freeman], 88 percent of the students qualified for this program, compared with 58 percent of students in California” (p. 13).

FAMILY FACTORS	OUR SCHOOL	COUNTY AVERAGE	STATE AVERAGE
Low-income indicator	88%	72%	58%
Parents with some college	19%	37%	57%
Parents with college degree	10%	20%	33%

Figure 1: Family factors of parents at Freeman Elementary (CLPADS)

The school had a total of 396 students; at 73%, Hispanic students were the ethnic majority

ETHNICITY	OUR SCHOOL	COUNTY AVERAGE	STATE AVERAGE
African American	7%	1%	6%
Asian American/ Pacific Islander	12%	4%	11%
Hispanic/Latino	73%	76%	53%
White	4%	15%	25%

Figure 2: Ethnic demographics of Freeman Elementary (CLPADS)

The school was located in a suburban area, and it was surrounded by the homes of middle-income families and military veteran couples, as well as the city's fire department and a local K-8 charter school. The school itself was once a middle school, became a K-8 school in 2006, and has since been a K-5 elementary school since 2009. The classrooms provided adequate space for both teachers and students to move around comfortably, and most classes tended to have from 20-26 students. The classes were always well-lit, and each class appeared to have enough supplies for day-to-day instruction. The school has two playgrounds: one playground was used for all students, and the other playground was used primarily by children in kindergarten. There were also two gardens on Freeman Elementary's campus that were home to various vegetables and fruits. Freeman Elementary School was chosen due to the majority of the school consisting of Hispanic students and because they had an ELAC program (English Language Advisory Committee). ELAC was a resource for parents who want to advise the principal and the

school staff of the most positive and effective strategies for teaching English learners, involving parents in their students' education and ensuring that students attend school regularly.

Participants and Participant Selection

- ❖ *Teacher 1:* A female Asian-American pre-Kindergarten teacher at Freeman Elementary who has been a teacher for 24 years, and has been teaching in the city of Seahorse over the course of her entire career. Throughout her career, this teacher has taught all grades from pre-Kindergarten to third grade.
- ❖ *Teacher 2:* A female Mexican-American second grade teacher at Freeman Elementary. Has been a teacher for 19 years, and has also taught previously in both the Santa Cruz and Salinas areas. Throughout her career, the teacher had only taught grades 3-5, but has taught 2nd grade at Freeman Elementary the past 3 years.
- ❖ *Teacher 3:* A female Mexican-American first grade teacher at another elementary school located in the city of Seahorse, California. She has been a teacher for 11 years, and has been teaching her entire career at her current elementary school working with grades K-2.
- ❖ *Parent 1:* A male, Mexican parent of a Kindergartener, who is also the President of Freeman Elementary's ELAC program.
- ❖ *Parent 2:* A female Mexican parent of children in second grade and Kindergarten. Is also involved in Freeman Elementary's ELAC.

- ❖ *Student 1*: A college student at the local community college located in Monterey, California. Is a male, first-generation Mexican American student who is studying to become a pilot.
- ❖ *Student 2*: A college student at the local community college located in Monterey, California. Is a male, first-generation Mexican American student who is studying to become a computer technician.
- ❖ *College Professor 1*: A White, female professor in the Liberal Studies department. Was previously an administrator for the Migrant Education Program, Region XVI, at the Monterey County Office of Education, and also in San Diego.
- ❖ *College Professor 2*: A White, female professor in the Liberal Studies department. Was previously an elementary school principal in the Monterey County area, as well as Fremont, California and Roseville, California.

Researcher:

The research conducted in this project was done by a senior at California State University, Monterey Bay, a Liberal Studies major. By offering resources and support to parents of first and second generation Mexican-American students at Freeman Elementary, parents help first and second generation Mexican-American students succeed academically, thus helping them access more educational and vocational opportunities. Through the research conducted, the researcher had determined that the support these families needed was to form better partnerships with school administration, to be made aware of various available academic resources, and to be motivated to find various ways to assist their children during the learning process

Semi-Structured Interview/or Survey Questions

For survey questions, see Appendix A.

Procedure

Data was collected through interviews with stakeholders at Freeman Elementary, which included first and second generation Mexican-American college students, parents of first and second generation Mexican-American students, teachers of first and second generation Mexican-American students, and former school administrators who are now professors at California State University, Monterey Bay.

Student Interviews

Contact was established with Student 1 and Student 2 through face-to-face contact. They were both friends of the researcher, and they were asked if they would prefer group or individual interviews. They both stated they would prefer a group interview in order to be able to provide in-depth answers by feeding off each other's experience.

Student 1's parents were involved in committees when Student 1 was in elementary school. The parents of Student 2 were not involved in any sort of program or committees while Student 2 attended elementary school. Both students were asked to answer interview questions (see Appendix A), as well as share their separate experiences in elementary school. The interview was informal and was conducted at their junior college on benches outside of the college's library. When given the choice to remain anonymous, both students chose to remain anonymous.

Teacher Interviews

Contact was made with Teachers 1 and 2 through previous service learning experiences of the researcher at Freeman Elementary School. These teachers were chosen specifically because the researcher knew from previous dialogues that they had extensive experience working in communities in which Hispanic populations were the majority. The teachers were asked to answer interview questions (See Appendix A), as well as discuss their experiences working with parents of first and second-generation Mexican-American students. Interviews were conducted in their classrooms during their lunch breaks. Both Teachers 1 and 2 chose to have individual formal interviews. The interview questions for Teachers 1 and 2 were originally open-ended in order to obtain a more extensive dialogue. As a result of initial dialogues with Teacher 1 and 2, the researcher was able to create more questions for other stakeholders, which in turn broadened the amount of possible questions for all stakeholders.

Contact was established with Teacher 3 through one of the researcher's family members, who was an elementary school teacher. The researcher's family member had previously worked with Teacher 3 in the same grade level. The interview was formal, and it took place in Teacher 3's classroom. All 3 teachers chose to remain anonymous.

College Professors Interview

The college professors interviewed taught classes the researcher has taken. Contact was established with Professor 1 by e-mail and the interview was conducted in her office. Professor 2 was interviewed in a classroom setting. The majority of both of the Professors' interviews were spent talking about their experiences in the public education system. While discussing their experiences, the researcher then asked what resources and

support they felt were most successful in assisting parents of Mexican-American students during their time in the public education system.

Parent Interviews

Contact was established with Parent 1 and Parent 2 by meeting them at Freeman Elementary's ELAC (English Language Advisory Committee) meeting, of which both parents are currently involved. The researcher knew of the ELAC meeting as a result of calling Freeman Elementary and asking about the ELAC meeting schedule. The interview took place in Freeman Elementary School's library, which is where ELAC meetings were usually held. Before the interview process began, the parents were asked if they wanted their responses to be anonymous, and both parents elected to remain anonymous. The parents were asked interview questions (see Appendix A), as well as why they were involved with ELAC and what resources and support they felt would be most beneficial to parents of first and second-generation Mexican-American students. Both parents chose to take part in a group interview, as they both wanted to be able to share their ideas with one another during the interview.

Data Analysis

To analyze the interviews, the researcher transcribed the conversations of those interviewed during the interviews themselves and then used a table (see Appendix B) to compare overarching themes amongst the different groups. Questions used in Appendix B were modified to be applicable to the individuals being interviewed. All questions used were open-ended.

Student Interviews

When interviewing Students 1 and 2, they were asked these questions in regards to their time spent in elementary school:

In your experience, what successful strategies have your parents used to help you with your academics?

Regarding successful strategies used by their parents, both respondents stated that they felt the most successful strategy their parents used to help them was school was motivation and family support. Student 1's parents and Student 2's parents both did not know much English, but Student 2 stated that the parent organizations his parents were involved in helped equip them with methods on how to help Student 2 with his homework, as well as referring to afterschool programs that could help their child with homework.

What do you believe are current areas of needs among Mexican-American students and their families?

Regarding areas of need of Mexican-American students and their families, both respondents stated that the main need was family involvement. When asked what they meant by family involvement, both stated that they saw their younger cousins' parents would have benefited from workshops on teaching their children morals and positive character traits.

Who did your parents usually consult if they were seeking academic help for you?

When asked who parents of Student 1 and Student 2 consulted when they needed academic help, both Student 1 and Student 2 stated their teachers. Student 1 stated that their parents never sought the help of anyone aside from the teacher, and the only time they sought help was when Student 1 was struggling in school. Student 2 stated that his

parents were in constant communication with the teacher in regards to how Student 2 was doing in the classroom.

What were obstacles you faced in the classroom? What did your teachers do to address these obstacles?

Regarding what obstacles they may have faced in their respective classrooms, both Student 1 and Student 2 stated their main obstacle was methods of instruction used by their teachers. When asked to clarify what they meant by methods of instruction, both Student 1 and Student 2 could have benefited from teachers who weren't necessarily bilingual teachers, but teachers who, "Spoke Spanish and had a better understanding of the Mexican culture" (Personal Communication, November 20th, 2013). Student 1 said there wasn't much his teachers could do to address these obstacles besides talk with his parents at parent-teacher conferences about areas they could have helped him in. However, Student 2 noted that he had more trouble in the classroom as a result of teachers not being able to change their style of teaching to accommodate his style of learning, which he stated was visual.

With the growing number of Mexican-American families, what differences have you noted in California's public educational system since you were in school?

Both Student 1 and Student 2 stated that they hadn't noticed much of a difference in schools from the time they went compared to the present day. The main theme they both addressed was the concept that teachers weren't very well educated about the Mexican culture.

How do you think schools should accommodate parents of first and second-generation Mexican-American students who don't speak English?

Both Student 1 and Student 2 discussed that schools should have more than just translators. Both stated that schools would benefit from bilingual staff since the bilingual staff would be the ones who knew the problems a student may encounter in the classroom, and thus be able to assist them on a more personal level rather than a translator hired by the school.

What were the duties of the translators?

Student 1 and Student 2 stated that although they would've preferred that their schools had an all-bilingual staff, their schools had a few bilingual teachers that were used as translators during parent-teacher conferences. Student 2 also noted that the only other instance he knew of translators he had known were when parents volunteered to translate at parent organization meetings.

Which methods that teachers have employed were the most successful when they sought to establish partnerships with your parents?

Both Student 1 and Student 2 stated that the methods teachers have used to establish partnerships with parents have been primarily through parent-teacher conferences and open houses. Both Student 1 and Student 2 believed that these meetings would usually be the first times teachers got to know parents and that their teachers wouldn't meet with parents after these events.

Did any teacher ever encourage you to further your education after high school?

Both participants stated that no teacher ever encouraged them to pursue a higher education. Student 1 stated that he was motivated by family to pursue higher education, while Student 2 claimed his motivation to be that a bachelor's degree would give him more opportunities in the job market.

Were you ever placed in a transitional program? If so, did you feel it was successful?

Student 2 had never been placed in a transitional program. Student 1 was placed in a transitional program, although he wasn't sure why. Student 1 felt that the program he was in didn't contribute to his current success, since he was fluent in both English and Spanish prior to entering the transitional program.

Teacher Interviews

In your experience, what successful strategies have Mexican-American parents used to help their children with their academics?

Regarding successful strategies, all 3 respondents' first reply was family support. When discussing what family support meant, some common themes emerged, such as parents that attended plays, parent-teacher conferences, open houses, etc. All 3 teachers believed that attending these kinds of events meant a lot to the students and showed them that their parents were there to support them, which in turn encouraged students to do better in their academics. The other common theme that emerged was the involvement of parents in programs for parents.

What do you believe are current areas of needs among Mexican-American students and their families?

All 3 teachers suggested that the biggest area of need was connecting with Spanish-only parents. The main theme that emerged as a result of the language barrier was parents feeling a sense of comfort when talking in Spanish with a teacher. As one teacher described it, "I could be here trying to speak Spanish, but if the parent is having a

hard time trying to understand what I'm saying, our conversation won't have much depth to it. As a result of that, the big concern when talking with these parents is how to create a comfortable environment for them"(Personal Communication, November 15th, 2013).

Who do Mexican-American parents usually consult if they are seeking academic help for their children?

All 3 teachers stated that parents usually consulted their child's teacher when seeking academic help for their child. Teacher 1 stated that she usually has had a Bilingual teacher with her in meetings with Spanish-speaking parents. Teacher 2 and Teacher 3 are both native Spanish speakers, and said they have had parents in their classrooms that weren't necessarily looking for academic help for their children, but the parents frequently asked them for updates on how their children were doing in the classroom.

What current obstacles do Mexican-Americans currently tend to face in the classroom?

In regards to current obstacles Mexican-Americans face in the classroom, all 3 teachers stated the biggest obstacle was the English language. As a result of this, the common theme that emerged was the accessibility of language and the need for bilingual teachers. Accessibility of language was said to be an issue because the teachers noticed that their students would have a tough time adjusting to the English language and thus fall behind their peers and be placed at a disadvantage. The teachers also noted how more teachers should strive to be bilingual, especially considering the growing number of Mexican-American families in their schools.

With the growing number of Mexican-American families, what differences have you noted in California's public educational system?

The common theme that emerged as a result of teachers noting the differences in the California public school system was a decrease in the number of successful transitional programs for students. One teacher noted that the ESL (English as a Second Language) program once employed a scaffolding approach, but has now the ESL program is only reserved for students of lower grade levels.

How do you think schools should accommodate parents of first and second-generation Mexican-American students who don't speak English?

Regarding the accommodation of parents who don't speak English, all 3 respondents mentioned translators. Teacher 1 stated that the need for programs such as ESL were evident in these cases, because having more bilingual teachers would mean better communication and better relationships between teachers and parents. Teachers 2 and 3 felt that bilingual teachers would benefit parent-teacher relationships, but that bilingual classes weren't necessary an answer to schools accommodating parents.

What are the duties of the translators in your schools?

Teachers 1 and 2 stated that they had employees in the school's office that spoke fluent Spanish that could help parents if they had any questions regarding their child. In most cases, the teachers sought the help of a bilingual faculty member if they needed help talking with a parent during a parent-teacher conference or an open house.

Which methods that you have employed have been the most successful in seeking to establish partnerships with parents?

Regarding methods that have been successful in establishing partnerships with parents, all 3 teachers regarded inviting parents to help in the classroom as a successful method. A common theme that arose was the teachers getting to know the families by being involved in various school events aside from parent-teacher conferences and open houses.

What is your policy on informing Mexican-American students about furthering their education?

All respondents stated that the key to informing students about furthering their education is by first informing their parents. A common theme that arose of informing parents was the encouragement from teachers to parents to be advocates for their child's education. Teachers said this was done primarily at parent-teacher conferences.

Did the schools you have worked at ever have a transitional program for students? If so, what were the success rates? How was success determined?

All 3 teachers stated that they worked at schools with transitional programs for Mexican-American students. The teachers all agreed that these programs were structured to be successful, but that the funding for these programs gradually decreased. As one teacher stated, "The programs were extremely successful. It provided students with the opportunity to ease into not only an understanding with the English language, but the American culture in general" (Personal Communication, November 15th, 2013).

Parent Interviews

In your experience, what successful strategies have you used to help your children with their academics?

Both parents stated that they were primarily Spanish speakers, and that the most successful strategy they used with their children was support. Common themes that emerged were motivation and encouraging their children to do well in school. Another successful strategy parents discussed was the use of programs offered by the school, such as afterschool programs, as well as parent organizations that parents could get involved with.

What do you believe are current areas of needs among Mexican-American students and their families?

Regarding current areas of needs amongst Mexican-American students and their families, both parents stated that the biggest area of need was good relationships with teachers. Both parents had children in a class with a bilingual teacher, and they have noticed that the relationship with their child's teacher was a lot stronger than the relationship between parents and teachers who spoke only English.

Who do Mexican-American parents usually consult if they are seeking academic help for their children?

Both parents stated that the people they consulted if they were seeking academic help for their child were their teachers. Since their children had a bilingual teacher, it was simple for them to ask their teacher how their child was doing in the class on a regular basis. For parents who may not have had a bilingual teacher, those parents tended to consult the help of bilingual employees in the office of the school.

What current obstacles do Mexican-Americans currently tend to face in the classroom?

Both parents stated the biggest obstacle facing their children was the English language. The common theme that arose included the instruction methods and how students found it difficult to be in classrooms where the teachers spoke only English and wasn't able to assist the student in Spanish. Another theme that arose was having teachers who knew how to speak Spanish properly, which created more meaningful and constructive instruction between the student and teacher.

With the growing number of Mexican-American families, what differences have you noted in California's public educational system? What adjustments have been made?

Both parents have children who were in kindergarten, and had no prior experience with the evolution of the California public school system.

How do you think schools should accommodate parents of first and second-generation Mexican-American students who don't speak English?

While both parents noted that translators would have been great to have, they both stated that having a fluent bilingual staff helped parents a lot more. A common theme that arose as a result of having a fluent bilingual staff was that the relationships between parents of students and teachers would increase dramatically if they were able to have fluent conversations with one another.

What are the duties of the translators?

Although both respondents did not need a translator with their child's teacher since the teacher was bilingual, they noted that the duties of the translators at the school were to translate for English-only teachers at parent-teacher conferences and open houses, as well as translating for parents at various parent organization meetings.

Which methods that teachers have employed have been the most successful in seeking to establish partnerships with you?

Both parents stated that their child's teachers have established partnerships with the parents through parent-teacher conferences and teachers who were bilingual. Common themes that arose included the success of parent-teacher conferences, which gave teachers opportunities to get to know parents better. Another theme included teachers who were bilingual, which parents stated made them feel more comfortable when talking with the teacher.

Has your child's teacher ever talked to your child about furthering their education?

Both parents stated that their child's teacher helped them during their parent-teacher conferences. The themes the teacher stressed to the parents were trying to encourage their children to succeed in life and to always strive to be advocates for their child's education, no matter how old the child gets.

Does your child's school have a transitional program for students? If so, what are the success rates? How is success determined?

Both parents were unsure what transitional programs were prior to the 2013-2014 school year, but they were involved in Freeman Elementary's ELAC (English Language Advisory Committee) to understand what these transitional programs offered to their children. Both parents felt that the idea of transitional programs sounded good but were apprehensive out of fear that their child's knowledge of the Spanish language would be taken away.

College Professor Interviews

In your experience, what successful strategies have Mexican-American parents used to help their children with their academics?

When speaking to both professors at CSUMB, both stated that parents who get involved with parent organizations and enroll their children in programs offered by the school tend to have children who succeed academically. Another theme that arose was the support and encouragement offered by families to students, regardless of what language was primarily spoken at home.

What do you believe are current areas of needs among Mexican-American students and their families?

Regarding current areas of needs among Mexican-American students and their families, both professors stated that families needed to feel comfortable when at their child's school. A theme that arose was the need for more bilingual teachers and Spanish-speaking employees that would communicate fluently to Spanish-speaking parents. Professors stated that ways this was possible was inviting parents to spend time in the classroom and being encouraged to be advocates of their child's education.

Who do Mexican-American parents usually consult if they are seeking academic help for their children?

Both professors stated that parents usually consulted their children's teachers at parent-teacher conferences when seeking academic help for their children. One professor stated that in some cases in which the parents did not have a strong partnership with their child's teacher, the parent would seek help from a bilingual teacher or a school's bilingual staff member.

What current obstacles do Mexican-Americans currently tend to face in the classroom?

Both Professors believed that the biggest obstacle facing Mexican-American students in the classroom is the English language. One theme that arose was the need for bilingual teachers, as well as bilingual education. Both professors stated that a process of introducing students to the English language would be more beneficial to a student rather than a full immersion into an English-speaking classroom.

With the growing number of Mexican-American families, what differences have you noted in California's public educational system?

Both professors noted that throughout their years involved with California's public educational system, they have seen less funding for programs that help Mexican-American students. A common theme that emerged was the lack of funding for transitional programs such as ESL, despite the growing number of Mexican-American students in the State of California. Another theme that emerged was the growing need for parent advocacy for their child's education.

How do you think schools should accommodate parents of first and second-generation Mexican-American students who don't speak English?

Both professors believed that there was a number of ways schools could accommodate parents. The first theme that arose was the need for translators, in order for parents and teachers to be able to communicate with one another and make sure they form strong partnerships. Another theme that arose was advocacy, and making sure that teachers encouraged parents to be encouraging to their children. The last theme discussed

was the use of workshops for parents, and providing instruction on how to help a child at home with homework despite not being familiar with the English language.

What are the duties of the translators?

The main point both professors brought up was how translators usually just sat in on parent teacher conferences and translated for teachers who did not speak Spanish. A theme that arose from this was the importance of having teachers who were extremely fluent in Spanish and what that could potentially mean in terms of strengthening partnerships with parents.

Which methods that teachers have employed have been the most successful in seeking to establish partnerships with parents?

Both professors noted that although some teachers they worked with may not have known how to speak Spanish, the most important thing some teachers did was encourage parents to be advocates for their child's education.

What is your policy on informing Mexican-American students about furthering their education?

One professor stated that having service learners from her classes has helped by having elementary students see students of their ethnicity in the same classroom and see that pursuing higher education was a possibility for them after high school. Another theme that arose was teachers urging parents of students to be advocates for their child's education. As one professor stated, "Encourage parents to have kids make goals" (Personal Communication, November 12th, 2013).

Did you ever have a transitional program for students? If so, what were the success rates?

Both professors stated that the transitional programs they had experiences with were all very successful. Some themes that arose were the length of the transitional programs, and the success schools encountered didn't last long as a result of budget cuts that limited the amount of transitional programs offered.

Overarching Themes

One of the overarching themes from the interviews was the need for advocacy from parents. Most respondents identified that advocacy leads to students succeeding academically, as well as parents investing more time and energy into their child's education. Another overarching theme was the need for more fluent Bilingual teachers. As most respondents believed, the need isn't necessarily for translators in schools, but for bilingual staff that interacts with Spanish-speaking students and Spanish-speaking parents on a daily basis and provides a comfortable setting where constructive and meaningful dialogues take place. Another overarching theme was the need for strong partnerships between parents and teachers. Respondents determined that strong partnerships between parents and teachers would increase the number of students being academically successful through similar goals being addressed and reinforcement of daily school instruction in the students' household. The final overarching theme was the need for parent involvement in the school. All respondents believed that when parents were actively involved in their child's classroom, or participating in parent organizations of the school, they would begin to be more involved in their child's education and be equipped with knowledge on how to assist their child at home, whether they spoke English or not.

Results

The researchers' previous assumptions were that the kind of support Mexican-American families needed was to form better partnerships with school administration, learn about various available academic resources, and to find various ways to assist their children in the learning process. As the researcher began to analyze their data, the data suggested that there needed to be teachers who inspired parents to be advocates for their child's education, a growing number of fluent bilingual teachers, strong partnerships between parents and teachers, and more parent involvement in their child's school.

Parent Advocates

One of the most important aspects of this research involved schools encouraging parents to be more involved in their child's education. As Berk (2011) states, "Whereas American parents and teachers tend to regard native ability as the key to academic success, Japanese, Korean, and Taiwanese parents and teachers believe that all children can succeed academically as long as they try hard. Asian children, influenced by collectivist values, typically view striving to do well in school as a moral obligation-part of their responsibility to family and community" (p. 477). All stakeholders felt that parents needed to show an interest in their child's education. As one student said, "When parents began to take an interest in the child's education, we see more and more children becoming interested in their school, whether it's to make their parents proud or to get ahead in life" (Student 2, Personal Communication, November 20th, 2013). As research suggests, having parents be advocates for their child's education greatly benefits children, as Berk (2011) summarizes, "Many factors, including practice,

reasoning, tasks with new challenges, and adult assistance, contribute to improved problem solving” (p.338).

Fluent Bilingual Teachers

One of the most vital resources a school can offer to parents of first and second-generation Mexican-American students was the benefit of clear and constructive dialogue with their child's teacher. In order for this to happen, there should be more bilingual teachers in elementary schools. As Fromkin et. al (2012) states, “Studies show that the most positive affects (e.g. better school performance) generally involved children reared in societies where both languages are valued and whose parents were interested and supportive of the bilingual development” (p. 361). In order for student whose families only speak Spanish to succeed in an English-speaking society, it was necessary to have individuals besides their families that could help support them, whether it's in their own community or in the classroom. As stated by Fromkin et. al (2012), “Many studies have shown that immigrant children benefit from instruction in their native language” (p. 467). Although hiring more bilingual staff could lead to an eventual solution for the issue of this research project, the money needed to hire staff with bilingual accreditation would be something that could not be done as an action for this research project.

Strong partnerships between parents and teachers

Research indicated that strong partnerships between parents and teachers led to students having more academic success. Respondents noted that partnerships between parents and teachers could be strengthened through parent-teacher meetings, open houses, and social events offered by the school. Berk (2011) suggests, “High-achieving students

typically have parents who keep tabs on their child's progress, communicate with teachers, and make sure their child is enrolled in challenging, well-taught classes" (p.582). Although these were all ideal methods to implement as a form of action, the responsibility of forming strong partnerships ultimately falls on the teacher. As one teacher stated in her interview, "Even if I can't speak their language, I make it a point to consistently meet with parents and show that I care. The biggest thing I could do is be transparent in order for them to see that I'm here to help" (Teacher 1, Personal Communication, November 15th, 2013).

Parent involvement in the school

The final piece of information that the research suggested was the need for parents to be involved in their child's schools. The data collected suggested this can be done a number of ways, whether through parent-teacher conferences as stated before, or through parents getting involved in groups for parents offered by the school. As one professor stated, "Parents should have the desire to be in their child's classroom and observe what their child's learning" (Professor 1, Personal Communication, November 12th 2013). As one of the teachers stated, "I invite parents to my classroom to see if their child's needs are being met, as well as giving them the joy of being apart of their child's education" (Teacher 3, Personal Communication, November 15th 2013). Although it may be difficult for some parents who may not have the time to be involved in parent organizations, teachers may invite parents into the classroom to be helpers, which helps parents develop a habit of being involved in the school.

Limitations

Unfortunately, while the research revealed some practical solutions to helping parents of first and second-generation Mexican-American students, the study had its share of limitations. One of the biggest issues the researcher encountered while conducting research was time. Unfortunately, with a focus such as providing resources to parents of first and second generation Mexican-Americans, the researcher felt there wasn't enough time in one semester to have completed an action plan that would have a greater impact on parents, such as a workshop or social event inviting parents to join a parent group such as ELAC. Although the researcher was able to interview nine individuals, another limitation was that the research results could have benefited from a greater number of participants. A survey sent out to parents of 1st and 2nd generation Mexican-American students could have provided a larger sample size, but also represented the feelings and sentiments of a greater number of the Mexican-American families at Freeman Elementary.

Action

The researcher decided to go to Freeman Elementary in order to gain a better understanding of how to assist the parents of 1st and 2nd generation Mexican-American parents. This is when the researcher began to be involved with Freeman Elementary's ELAC (English Language Advisory Committee). The researcher noted that this parent group served a lot of purposes, which sought to provide parents of English Learners opportunities to:

1. Learn more about programs offered to their children.
2. Participate in the schools' needs assessment of students, parents, and teachers.

3. Advise the principal and school staff of the most positive and effective strategies for teaching English Learners.
4. Provide input on the most effective ways to support full participation of English Learners in all school activities.
5. Provide input on the most effective ways to ensure regular school attendance.

The researcher noted that ELAC served the needs indicated in the data collected, and noted that this group would be beneficial to parents for a variety of reasons. The committee encouraged parents to be involved with the school, and as a result, they become advocates of their child's education. The committee would also help parents interact with bilingual staff of the school, which provided parents with a representative of the school they could talk to if they were ever seeking academic help for their child.

While attending an ELAC meeting, the researcher noted that there were only 5 parents represented. As ELAC's composition states, "The percentage of parents of English Learners in the ELAC must be at least equal to the percentage of English Learners in the school"(Freeman Elementary, 2013). After talking with the Chairperson of Freeman Elementary's ELAC committee, there was a mutual conclusion that there needed to be more parents present in the ELAC meetings in order for parents to make a difference in their child's education. In order to encourage parents to attend the next meeting in January of 2014, a brochure outlining the purposes of ELAC was created with the intent of distributing said brochures to parents of Freeman Elementary students. By increasing the number of parents present at the next ELAC meeting, the researcher believes that Freeman Elementary will see an increase in parents advocating for their

child's education, more parental involvement at Freeman Elementary, as well as stronger partnerships between not only parents and teachers, but also parents and the school.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the results indicate the researcher's previous assumptions and clarified that the most necessary resource to parents of first and second-generation Mexican-American students is the student's teacher. When teachers are able to form solid partnerships with their students' parents, it opens opportunities for teachers to encourage parents to be advocates for their child's education. When parents become advocates, they start becoming more involved in their child's education, and thus see their child succeed in their academics. Although teachers of first and second-generation Mexican-American students may encounter difficulties if they are not familiar with the Spanish language or the Mexican culture, those barriers can form bonds with parents when teachers choose to work hard and form partnerships with parents.

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Appendix A

1. In your experience, what successful strategies have Mexican-American parents used to help their children with their academics?
2. What do you believe are current areas of needs among Mexican-American students and their families?
3. Who do Mexican-American parents usually consult if they are seeking academic help for their children?
4. What current obstacles do Mexican-Americans currently tend to face in the classroom? How do you address these obstacles?
5. With the growing number of Mexican-American families, what differences have you noted in California's public educational system? What adjustments have been made?
6. How do you think schools should accommodate parents of 1st and 2nd generation who don't speak English? What are the duties of the translators?
7. Which methods that teachers have employed have been the most successful in seeking to establish partnerships with parents?
8. What are your thoughts about workshops?
9. What is your policy on informing Mexican-American students about furthering their education?
10. Did you ever have a transitional program for students? If so, what were the success rates? How was success determined?

Appendix B

	1	2.	3.	4.	5.
Teachers	-Family Support - Programs	-Language Barriers -Comfort	-Teachers	a) Access to language b) Translators i.e. Bilingual staff	Less successful methods of instruction, such as ESL
Student	Family	-Family involvement	-Teachers	a) Methods of instruction - Not meeting learning styles b) Changes have to be on teachers and how they teach	- Lack of teachers' education on how to teach Mexican-American students
Parents	-Family Support -Programs	-Relationships with teachers	-Teachers	a) English language b) Have teachers who know how to speak Spanish properly	
Professors	Programs	-Comfort	-Teachers	a) English language b) Bilingual education/ Bilingual teachers	- Less funding for programs - Need advocacy

	6	7	8	9	10
Teachers	-ESL Classes -Translators		-Home visits -Encouraging parents to be involved in classroom	-Encouraging parents to be advocates for their children	-ESL, was very successful with scaffolding methods
Students	-Fluent Bilingual staff	- Parent-teacher conferences - Open house	-Parent-Teacher conferences	-Went to college because bachelor's is	-ESL -Don't feel transition programs

Students	-Fluent Bilingual staff	- Parent-teacher conferences - Open house	-Parent-Teacher conferences	-Went to college because bachelor's is new high school diploma	-ESL -Don't feel transition programs contributed to success
Parents	-Fluent Bilingual staff		-Parent-teacher conferences and teachers who are bilingual	-Try to encourage children to succeed in life and make sacrifices	Feels transitional programs take away from Spanish -Why they're involved in ELAC -CELDT
Professors	-Translators -Advocacy -Workshops	- Sit in on parent teacher conferences	-Encouraging parents to be advocates	-Service learners - Advocates:	-LULAC -ESL