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Si Se Puede: Continuous Barriers in Latino Education  
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### **Abstract**

The focus of this Capstone Project is on the continuous barriers in Latino Education. This is important because we are still seeing the same issues of inequities, lower academic attainment, and achievement gaps growing. Although these issues have been brought up and discussed, so little has been done to resolve them. By continuing to address these issues, it allows us to keep generating the conversation on what more we can do for Latino students in the United States. It allows us as a community to see the bigger picture and be able to formulate new plans that will close achievement gaps between them and other students. The three primary stakeholder perspectives chosen were Latino Students, Latino parents, and teachers because they are the focus of this capstone project. Three action options emerged from the analysis of the data collected and explored as ways to address the issue presented. Encouraging and motivating Latino parents is argued to be the most effective way to achieve the goal of ensuring Latino students reach their full potential and are able to obtain academic success. Based on the data that was collected, this option will have beneficial outcomes and shows us that academic success begins at home and it is important to draw bridges between students' home and school environments.

“Ours must be a politics of revolution, freedom can’t exist until the most disadvantaged are free”  
(Rupi Kaur, 2020).

When you come from a small town with a population of around 4000 people, there is a tall tale that could be told about the community. If a person were to be dropped in the middle of the town, the direction you decide to take will begin to reveal the community that resides within it. If you drive up north for ten minutes you will find yourself in a nicely landscaped neighborhood with groceries stores on about every corner you turn. The streets are clean, and the air seems to feel more freeing. To some, this is a perfect suburbia and a place to leave your footprint. However, if you drive south ten minutes and end up on “the other side of the tracks,” your perfect suburban town suddenly will not look so similar. Instead of grocery stores on every corner, you find liquor stores, fast food restaurants, and houses that look run down and need tending too. One might question, why is there such a difference between these two areas? That there is a clear display of the socio-economic differences between both inhabitants. Through further digging, you would learn that the people who live in these areas are those who have been given inequitable opportunities compared to the rest. These people are often offered so little and using that as means to survive. Unfortunately, we are also able to see that the majority of people come from Latino backgrounds and other minority/ethnic groups.

This is where the story begins, when you immerse yourselves with the people who reside in these communities you will find culture and stories filled with dreams and passions. In this neighborhood lives a young latino boy, Sebastian, who has first-hand experience with the disparities that come with a background like his. At a very young age, he and his mother fled Mexico to escape their abusive household in search of a better life. Like many Latino

immigrants, they were leaving their homeland in hopes of better opportunities and the chance to provide a better future for their children.

Growing up, Sebastian encountered many disparities and discovered the barriers that come with being a Latino student in the United States. Sebastian found himself in a school where the majority of the students were Caucasians. He was surrounded by people he could not identify with, and that resulted in Sebastian dealing with insecurities regarding who he was as an individual. A core memory that Sebastian has, was when a teacher asked him if he knew how to speak Spanish, and in order to appear “less Mexican” to his peers he said “no.” This left Sebastian to feel ashamed of who he was, he knew that he was slowly losing his identity and where he comes from. He was forgetting that he comes from a place filled with culture and light; that he comes from people who fight for their rights and seize opportunities to get them ahead. He was forgetting that there were people before him that put up a *lucha* (fight) in order for him to be where he was standing.

Many of the struggles that Sebastian was facing was living in a household with only his mother supporting them both. This caused Sebastian to live most of his life in poverty. Due to his mom being the only one to provide an income, Sebastian would also have to begin working at a young age. During the summers he and his mother were out in the fields picking a variety of fruits and vegetables that many families would enjoy for dinner. Every paycheck that Sebastian earned would go towards keeping his family afloat. Although Sebastian had to work at a young age, he knew the importance of maintaining an education. He knew that the only goal his mother ever had for him was that he would earn a college education. Many would criticize Sebastian's mother for not being present in his education, and at times he felt sad that his mother would miss out on certain events. However, Sebastian knew that his mother was his biggest advocate for his

education. Educators have to be able to understand that just because a parent is absent for most of their child's education does not mean they are neglecting their education. Other factors are set in place that make it difficult for Latino parents to be present.

Throughout Sebastian's education he encountered issues with his own identity, family abuse, and issues regarding his socioeconomic status. However, through all those issues Sebastian was able to overcome and achieve success in his education and personal life. Through the years, Sebastian would soon earn his P.hD and achieve a success that exceeded his own mother's expectations. Sebastian would go from working in the fields to becoming a doctor that is well-respected by all who interact with him. Sebastian can be viewed as a poster child for all Latinos to look up to. No matter the barriers that are placed in front of you, if there is a will there is a way. However, we are still seeing a number of Latino students that are not pursuing more in regards to their education. There is a trend for Latino students to have high dropout rates in high school, and a decrease of Latino students attending community colleges and universities. Although many make the argument that it is up to the individual to take charge of their success, we cannot deny that outside factors/barriers influence those choices. We must continue to find new ways to support Latinos in education and ensure them that they are bigger than the barriers they encounter.

### **Literature Synthesis & Integration**

There are many Latino students with aspirations and dreams they one day wish to accomplish. Many have seen the sacrifices their parents have made through their lower-socioeconomic life, and wish to one day get them out of that cycle. Many of these Latino students then become strong believers of the American Dream. However, when social and economic inequities have failed to support the first and second generation, these students will

find themselves trapped in the same low-income setting which then leads them to develop a negative view on school. Then for many, education becomes a representation of failure rather than opportunities. As a result, it is more reasonable to reject school before it can reject them.

### **WHAT IS THE PROBLEM?**

For many Latino students in the United States, their educational journey is one that is built on many disadvantages. For one, Latino students begin their schooling without the economic and social resources that many of their peers will have, and oftentimes schools are ill-equipped to compensate for these disparities. For Latinos, the initial disadvantage stems from their parents' immigrant and socioeconomic status and their lack of knowledge about the educational system. As Latino students continue to progress through their schooling, inadequate school resources and weak relationships with teachers continue to undermine their academic success. This starting disadvantage will continue to accumulate, resulting in the Latino community having the lowest rates of high school and college degree attainment. This clear barrier of college attainment is the increasing number of high school dropouts; only 54 percent of US educated Latinos complete high school (Zarate, 2010). The result of this will eventually hinder their chances for stable employment. This issue for Hispanics educational attainment is an issue for not only local, but national concern. The reason being that there are more jobs that are only available to those with a college degree. With a large group like the Latino community, these jobs can be occupied by them and changing the face of the workforce. With that being said there are a multitude of disparities that Latino students are facing, and it is becoming apparent that due to these disparities there is an overrepresentation in lower educational outcomes. A majority of the Latino population come from a lower socioeconomic status and we are able to draw a bridge between their status to the disparity of their schools and districts. In America

alone, we know that nearly 62 percent of Latino children live in or near poverty (Gandara, 2017). There is a disparity in funding when we compare urban schools to a suburban school. Latino students that come from a low-income family often attend an urban school that is lacking in proper resources, and has a failing district. Due to these disparities, many Latino students can face the possibility of a weak education.

### **WHY IS IT AN ISSUE?**

Given the growth of the Latino community, which was more apparent in the last decade (U.S. Census Bureau, 2001), and the greater importance in attaining a college degree for a stable job, the barriers that the Latino community is facing in regards to their educational ambitions is increasingly a policy concern. We have come to understand that poverty is the major driver behind low educational attainment (Ganadra&Mordechay, 2017). In front of our eyes we are continuing to see the poverty cycle continue to negatively impact the Latino community. There is a trend of increasing drop-out rates and students not receiving an education that will give them the foundations to become more than what they come from.

There was a glimpse of hope when we started to see a change when more Latino students enrolled in colleges, increasing from 3.17 million in 2016, to 3.27 million in 2017 (Quintana, 2020). With an increase in these numbers, we were expecting for the number of Latinos with a college degree to increase as well, however that was not the case. We are able to see that by comparing the 47.1 percent of white adults, slightly more than 22 percent of Latinos have earned some form of college degree (Schak & Howard 2017).

Comparing these numbers, it is evident that there is still an issue when it comes to Latinos attaining a higher education and the chance of this can stem from their trends in elementary, middle, and high school. It is easy to put the blame on the individual and state “if



they wanted to truly go to school, they would,” or “they chose that lifestyle, no one forced them into that.” Although those statements can be used as a rebuttal as to why Latino students' academic attainments are not higher, we have to begin to analyze the outside factors that are influencing the choice of dropping out of school and not pursuing an education. We should not be hearing cases of Latino students having to quit school in order to provide for their families. A study has shown that roughly around 17.5 percent of Latinos drop out of school due to their financial issues (Doll, 2015). Latinos are the second largest student population enrolled in our nation's schools, and improved educational outcomes for Latinos have not kept pace with their rapid growth (Kohler, 2007).

### **WHAT SHOULD BE DONE?**

There are many steps that we have to take in order to support and provide Latino students. We need to provide them with the tools and resources needed to be successful in school. It is evident that many Latino students will attend low-funded schools, and that is the first step in closing the achievement gap amongst this community. Latino students will encounter many obstacles in a low-funded school, and that will hinder their learning outcomes and success (citation?). It sounds like a simple, yet difficult task, but there has to be a policy reform when the topic of school funding is discussed. The more prepared and equipped a school is, the more it will be able to offer to its students. Well funded schools will be able to provide relevant course context, well-prepared teachers, and a safe environment. This means targeted increases in funding could help narrow the achievement gap between poor and nonpoor students (Chingos, 2017).

A second way schools can help Latino students is by looking at the level of training that is provided to their teachers, counseling staff, and administrators. If we have school staff that are

not prepared in areas of cultural relevance, language acquisition, or a general understanding of the issues, changes will not happen. How will they be able to connect and understand their students? It is crucial for a school with a large Latino population of students who are falling behind, to examine their teaching models that they are using in the classroom. Latino students have a unique linguistic need, and it is important to address that language acquisition is essential in their academic growth.

As a school, it is just as important to connect with the students, but to their community as well. This means parents, caregivers, etc, anyone who could potentially be involved in their students academic and social circle. An important factor in a student's success is the role that parents play in their students' academics. For many Latino students, they are often first-generation students with parents that are full time workers. For one, many parents may not have the time or knowledge to evaluate the quality of their children's education and may not feel empowered to press the schools to strengthen their offerings (Gandara, 2017). This means that parents are not as involved as they would like to be in their child's academics. However, it is important for schools to know this and understand that lack of parent involvement does not always mean they are pushing aside their child's success. Oftentimes Latino parents are putting every penny they have in order to ensure that their child's get the best education they are able to provide. This is when schools can find different methods of reaching out to parents to find some form of support and ways they can be involved in their child's academics. By searching for new means of parent involvement we can hypothesize that the students' academic growth will improve.

The Latino population will continue to rise, but the same barriers that affected past generations will still be present in the generations of today and to come. Many Latino students

are still going through a system that has repeatedly failed them. Latinos are constantly facing barriers with economics, social, knowledge gaps, and language barriers that are allowing the cycle of underperformance in education to increase. There is still too little being done to address this issue and we have to reform our educational system that is lacking in providing a quality education to Latino students across the State of California and the Nation.

### **Method**

There is a clear crisis when it comes to Latinos and their success in education. For this capstone project I investigated how students, parents, and teaching administration view the crisis in education for Latino students and what they think could be done to improve it. Based on the analysis of the data and the relevant research literature, I used what I have learned to formulate an action that responds to the barriers that many Latino students are facing in regards to their education.

### **Context**

The Central Valley is demographically diverse, especially given that agriculture is one of the most important occupations in this region. According to the 2020 census, Sanger has a population of about 25,505 people and of those people 83% are of Latino or Hispanic origin. This goes to show that the majority of students in the classrooms of Sanger California are from Latino families. Most students that walk into the classrooms are also first generation students that are looking at the future with the hope of achieving greater opportunities than what were given to their parents. It is important to note that within the Sanger community only 12.2 of adults between the ages of 18-25 receive their bachelor's degree from a four year college or university (U.S. Census Bureau 2019). This statistic is incredibly alarming considering the

percentage of Latinos within the population. While the Latino population is large, you can see its influence within the community and the culture it provides.

### **Participants and Participant Selection**

The participants in my research are Latino students that are currently enrolled in elementary and high school. Engaging with different age groups will allow me to paint a picture of what school means. It will provide insight on how different age groups view school and the importance it has to them. Currently, five participants are in elementary school and five participants are enrolled in High School.

I am also working with the parents of the students that are participating in my research. All ten parents were immigrants that were able to attain citizenship. Working with these parents provides an understanding of what Latino parents believe when it comes to their child's education.

**Luna Grande.** A Latino male parent of a second grade student and two other children. Parent only speaks spanish and came to the United States at the age of seventeen. Parent also works as a field worker and works approximately 10 hours a day.

**Luna Diana.** A Latina female parent of a sophomore high school student and one other child. The parent is fluent in spanish and are learning english. Parent works in a factory and have average working hours of about 12 hours.

**Luna Chica.** Second grade student who is the child of Luna Grande . Student is in the English Learner Program (ELA).

**Luna Ohio.** Sophomore in highschool and a first generation student. The child of Luna Diana.

**Luna Star.** First year college students who never completed their first year. Is a family

relative to me.

**Luna Hugo.** Freshmen in high school and first generation students.

### **Researcher**

This research project is important to me because I am a child of immigrants. My parents migrated to the United States between the ages of sixteen and seventeen and have worked ever since. Growing up my parents always told us the importance of receiving an education and achieving more than they did. I and I are a few of the first-generation students to be completing a college degree. For this reason I want to see more people from my community also rise up and one day make a difference in this world. Due to the path that I took on my educational career and knowing what it is like to be raised in an immigrant family allows me to understand some of the struggles students like myself face.

One quality that will help me throughout this research project is my ability to speak fluent Spanish. This will allow me to speak with parents more clearly and get a clear understanding of what they have to say. Another quality that will help me succeed is that I am talkative and never shy away from any conversation. As I carry on conversations, I will be able to receive useful information and be able to open up to many different discussion points.

I am having a hard time trying to figure out what biases I may have when it comes to my research project. One that I am currently facing is seeing how our society has let my community down many times. I want to see my people in a better light and I know that I will always stand with my community. During this project I just want to gain more insight on the Latino community and what they believe their biggest issues are in regards to education. This might impact my project in the form that I will only be getting the opinions of the Latino community

and no other one. This will only be focusing on the issues of one group, but this will allow me to have a better understanding of my background and culture.

### **Semi-Structured Interview and Survey Questions**

1. What would you consider the potential benefits and downsides of growing up Latino in America?
2. How would you define the American dream?
3. What barriers do you think you face when it comes down to your education?
4. Do you believe that our education system offers equal opportunities to all students or are some privileged?
5. What changes would you like to see our education system do to advance the Latino community?

### **Procedure<sup>1</sup>**

The participants were recruited through my family's church. The majority of people that attend this church are from Latino and immigrant backgrounds. Because I have a close relationship with these people it was easy for me to get into contact with them and ask them to participate. From the beginning all participants were told that their information would be kept confidential, and no real names would be used throughout the entire project. When recruiting the younger participants I made sure that it was ok for me to talk with them. When talking with the younger participants we did meet after church services and at a distance where the parents could see us.

While talking with the participants I did ensure to get their consent to record the

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<sup>1</sup> <http://my.ilstu.edu/~jhkahn/>

conversation that way I could listen for any details I may have missed. From there I would add to my notes and then I would review. While reviewing my notes I would highlight important things that were said and would add value to my research. It is also important to note that at the end of the meeting I would allow them to add anything they wish to talk about. This will allow the participant to open up on any topics that were not brought up by the questions I have asked them.

At the end I would reward them with a five dollar gift card for a coffee. I did this form of compensation for the adults which would also result in a positive interaction. For the younger ones I asked for their favorite treat and made sure to bring it to them the next time I saw them. I never told my participants that they would be compensated because I did not want it to feel like I was buying them into participating.

### **Data Analysis**

I took the notes from each participant's interview, as well as their recordings and highlighted important statements that were said. From there I was able to categorize main ideas regarding their views on education and how that correlates with being a Latino.

### **Results**

For this Capstone Project, students and parents were interviewed to see what they think could be done to remove the barrier issues that negatively impact Latinos' education. This is important because many Latinos are falling behind in our education system. Many Latinos' education is cut short and enter the same cycle many of their people go through. We see this cycle of a high number of Latinos enrolling in college, but never actually completing their degrees. The Latino population is on a steady rise, however these numbers are not being reflected on those who attain academic success. We ask ourselves what are the trends/barriers that are preventing Latinos from achieving academic success and what can we do to better those situations? Based on an analysis of the data and the relevant research literature three themes

emerged (see Table 1). Evidence-based decision making required evaluating each potential Action Option by the following criteria: Creating a College Culture amongst Latino Students; Enhancing/Modifying Parent Involvement; and Creating Clubs/Organizations for Latino Success/Support. All three actions are important because they all intertwine in helping Latino students remain successful in their education. These actions can help uplift a community and cause a ripple effect on the following Latino generations to come. Based on the evaluation of each Action Option an action will be recommended and justified.

Table 1

*Evaluation of Action Options*

	Time Required	Where	Effectiveness
Educating Latino Students at an early age: Creating a college culture	Medium	Classrooms Community Events	Medium
Parent Involvement through teacher encouragement: Providing parents with resources and tools to best support their students.	High	Schools Homes Community Events	High
Creating Groups/Organizations : creating a support system for all Latino students to feel encouraged and seen.	Medium	Schools	Medium

**Creating a College Culture**



When it comes to attending college, many Latino students find this topic daunting and do not know where to begin. Throughout the interviews many expressed that they were confused on where they stood when it came to attending college and the culture behind it. Many expressed that the idea of college was something they did not grow up with and did not begin to think about it until they got to high school. “One interviewee expressed that college was not a topic that was talked about until it was time to apply for college” (Luna G, personal communication, April 4th, 2021). This data connects with literature that indicates that schools need to create a college culture at the elementary and middle school level. I personally believe that in order for Latino students to be academically successful, schools must expose them to the future that lies ahead.

While reviewing the literature and data collection, an action was drawn up to tackle these issues. Schools should be implementing a college culture amongst the elementary and middle school students. One interviewee stated that if they were talked to about college at an earlier age, maybe that would have given their family and themselves a better chance to prepare for their educational future (Luna S., personal communication, April 12th, 2021). It is common for Latino students to not have conversations about college with their parents due to their lack of knowledge on the issue. Through the data collected, it was discovered that parents did not know how to support their children in the process of applying for college. This can then cause students to be lost in college prep and not know what is needed to be successful. Schools preparing not only Latino students but all students with college preparation, should create a culture that will get them thinking about their futures and what paths they can take. Talking about college at a young age can result in beneficial outcomes in the end.

This action would take a medium amount of time. Creating a college culture is a tool that can be done through everyday interaction within the classrooms. It is a transaction that can be

done through student and teacher relationships. The effectiveness of this plan can be highly beneficial to a student's future. It will allow them to get comfortable with the idea of college, and see it as an opportunity that is open to them. Creating a college culture is a plan that is simple, yet can be impactful in the end.

### **Modifying Parent Involvement**

There is a common term amongst Latino students and that is being a first generation student. A student who is considered first generation is the first of the family to be completing a higher education or any form of education for that matter. Many Latino students are also born and raised in a household where both parents are immigrants and working full time to survive. This can then result in parents being absent in their child's education and not knowing how to support them. However, schools and teachers must not be so quick to judge the lack of parental involvement. A parent interviewee stated that they wish they could be involved more, but with having to work twelve hours a day it almost feels impossible (Luna D. personal communication, April 3rd, 2021). Through this discussion, it was becoming apparent that parental involvement is an important tool that is needed.

Students that come from middle or higher class families often have the privilege of having a parent that has more time to work with their children. They read to them at a young age or they are able to provide tutors so that their children can get the extra help they need. Latino students often do not get this privilege. An interviewee mentioned that they never had a parent read to them, and felt that in some way this delayed their speech and writing (Luna. H. Personal communication April 3rd, 2021). Many Latino students will often have parents that spend all their time working and due to the extensive hours some of these parents work, they would not have time to help with homework. To add to this, unfortunately many Latino students' parents are

not able to successfully help their children due to their language barrier. This then can lead to schools to ask themselves, what can be done?

Teachers and administrators need to find different means of reaching out to Latino parents. The only time a majority of the teachers meet the parents is during parent conferences, meetings, etc. A parent interviewee had mentioned that they only ever heard from their child's teachers during parent conferences. School administrators need to research ways they can help parents become more involved in a way that does not undermine their knowledge. We have to find ways to reinforce a parent's knowledge and use that information to help their students.

A method that we can use to tackle this issue is making teachers culturally competent. In order to prepare teachers for successful parent involvement, there needs to be a clear foundation of family literacy that respects Latino parents. Family literacy is defined as home literacy activities that provide literacy skill-building opportunities for young children while enhancing literacy skill development in all members of the family. This can then lead to teachers becoming more understanding of the acculturation process, or the process of social, psychological, and cultural change that stems from the balancing of two cultures while adapting to the prevailing culture of the society. Ensuring that teachers are prepared in this area will also ensure that teachers will understand how socioeconomic factors can affect a student's education. It will also help teachers learn how to reach parents and work with their diverse languages and literacy. Teachers should be able to be given a renewed understanding of parent involvement and a greater cultural competency.

This action plan would take a large amount of time considering that work will have to be put in outside of the classroom. Schools will have to modify their use of parental involvement and learn what more can be done to help. Way this action plan can be implemented is by creating

events on the weekends, or simply accommodating newsletters in the language that is most appropriate to the family. The effectiveness of this plan would also be high and it is important to learn that academic success starts at home.

### **Students Supporting Students**

It is a natural reaction to believe that our issues at times are singular; that no one else besides oneself would understand the struggles we are facing. This idea was made evident by the Latino students that were interviewed. One student stated that their academic success relied on them, therefore no one else should care about my struggles (Luna O. personal communication, April, 10th, 2021). It is a common Latino belief that one should never ask for help, and that only you can obtain the success that you want.

Due to the lack of knowledge that many Latino parents may have, it is hard for their children to have a support system they can rely on. This can then lead to Latino students making up the idea that they are alone and no one is truly rooting for their academic success. They begin to feel pressured to be successful in order to receive some form of validation from their parents. While others chose to simply not care because they know their parents will lack the knowledge to support them. A study done by EAB presented research that stated that first-generation and minority students were far less likely to identify a professor as their mentor; 72% of white students identified their mentor as a professor, compared with 61% of first-gen students and just 47% of minority students. However, we have learned through the data collection that this is not the case. There is strength in numbers and the Latino community makes up the majority of students in classrooms across California. Schools must encourage all students to obtain academic success, and show them that by working together they could rise to the top.

Schools offer many opportunities for clubs and other organizations to meet on school grounds. However, most of these groups are more general topics such as Future Farmers of America, Art Club, French Club, and the list goes on. We have yet to see a club that is founded on the idea of students supporting students. One way we can ensure that our Latino students feel supported and heard is by creating clubs that will focus on just that. To give them a place to share their struggles and find others with common struggles. Creating a club that focuses on ensuring that each student is on the right path towards academic success. These organizations would not be about singling out other groups, but an organization that focuses on what it means to be a Latino in the education system. Clubs and organizations such as these can allow students to be seen, and not just another head at a desk.

This action would take a medium amount of time. Creating student support clubs or organizations for Latino students can have beneficial results. This plan can be carried out in schools and be recognized as an official club through the schools. The effectiveness of this plan can be highly beneficial to a student's academic success. It will give them a place to find support and discover methods that help them become successful. As stated in the beginning this plan would not require a large amount of time, but the implementation of these groups are needed.

### **Conclusion**

Of all three options stated above I believe that having Latino parents be more involved will better ensure that their students are able to obtain academic success. Creating schools with culturally competent teachers will allow bridges to be built between their school life as well as their home environment. Students' success begins at home, and by giving Latino parents the tools and knowledge to help their children will guarantee that students have someone to help guide them in the right direction. From reviewing the literature and data, I am certain that this is the

right action to take in order to begin helping our Latino students. The following section will discuss the concessions, limitations, and negative outcomes this action plan may have.

**Concession.** For my action project I decided to work with increasing parental involvement. However it has to be noted that both other actions would also be beneficial for all Latino students. Creating a college culture at the early stages of education will allow Latinos students to have exposure to what their options are for the future. This would prepare Latino students about college and have knowledge on what they need in order to be able to attend a university or any form of higher education. By preparing Latino students from elementary school all the way through high school, it would provide them with the tools needed for college prep. If we raise students in an environment that shows them college is an open door for them and to all, then they will believe that a higher education is something that is obtainable to them. As far as creating clubs and organizations for Latino students, I believe that this is a topic that is worth discussing. This would give a space for Latino students to unite and get help from one another. These groups would be created to show that students could not only have support from their families but from their peers as well. Our education system has been built on this competitive spectrum, however due to this Latino students have been progressively falling behind. Having organizations for Latino students to ensure their academic success will help students cross the finish line together. It goes without noting that both of these action projects have strength to better serve Latino students.

**Limitations.** While choosing to enhance the parental involvement for Latino students as my best options there are certain limitations that need to be noted. Parental involvement has always been a key tool for students' success, but more needs to be done. We need to find new methods that will get these parents involved in a manner that best works for them. For one we

need to take into consideration that many Latino students' parents are working extensive hours and it may be hard to get into contact with them. Due to this, parents may also be tired which affects how involved they can really be in their child's education. Second, it will take a whole lot of effort to ensure that all student's parents are making some form of effort to be involved in their students' school life/work. This adds extra work to a teacher's life and can become a daunting task. However, it does not need to be draining work and new techniques can be drawn up to help with parental involvement that does not take much effort. It can be as simple as accommodating homework, letters, etc to the language that best suits the student and parent.

**Potential negative outcomes.** Just like with any action project that is implemented, potential negative outcomes are sure to follow. In my project one could be that nothing changes and parental involvement stays the same throughout the start of the project. We can also come across some who may not want to be involved and choose to simply keep things the way they are. Thirdly, it can be a difficult task for a teacher to do, but this should not solely be the responsibility of the teacher, but to the entire school administration team as well. Although there may be walls we face during this process, we can always find solutions and create better models that will eventually work for everyone on both parties.

**Conclusion.** Even through discussing all the possible limitations and negative outcomes, I still chose to work with enhancing parental involvement for Latino students. I believe that this action is the most effective amongst the three. As stated previously, a child's home environment largely affects their education and how successful they can be. By helping Latino parents gain more knowledge on the various ways they can help at home or in the classroom will have beneficial factors no matter what. We as educators should not feel obligated to pressure parents into helping, but we can at least provide them with the tools they need to ensure their success as

well. Since most latino parents come from an immigrant background, it is hard for them to understand the educational system that is placed for their first-generation students. This is why I believe that parental involvement is the most important, it will teach parents how their children can have a bright future and how they can ensure their children get the “American dream” they migrated for.

### **Action Documentation and Critical Reflection**

The focus on my research project was to gain more knowledge on the barriers that affect Latino students in the education system. We are seeing this continuous cycle of Latino students not pursuing a higher education and not completing their degree once enrolled. Through my interviewees some have stated that they never felt quite prepared for college and wish they had been better prepared in their earlier educational years. After completing my research, I was able to draw up three action plans that can better prepare Latino students during their elementary and middle school years. Three action plans that were created from my research project were: Creating a college culture in Latino students, preparing parents to better support their children, and creating Latino organizations/clubs for student support and success. I decided to focus and implement better preparing Latino parents because a student's home environment largely impacts their academic success. I felt that this was the most important action plan to focus on because many Latino parents do not have the resources and tools to help with their child's education. I had learned through my research that Latino parents put an immense amount of stress on their children to attain a college degree. However, they do not know the right paths to take in order to ensure this action is attainable.

### **Action Research Project Documentation and Reflection**



Due to the effects of Covid-19, it was difficult for me to meet with school administrators to see what steps we can take to better help Latino students and their parents. Therefore, the steps I took in order to reach out to these schools was to write a letter to school administrators. I decided to write letters to two schools that have a predominantly large Latino population. It was important for me to reach out to these schools because many students from these schools would one day in the future begin preparing for their college education. I wanted to be able to reach out to these schools on the importance of supporting Latino students, and hoping to hear back from them. I was also counting on being able to learn what these schools were already doing to ensure their students' success and what they are doing to have parental engagement. One thing that I found surprising throughout this action was how emotionally invested I would become. Through the conversations I would have and the literature I would read, I found myself on an emotional rollercoaster. Throughout this project I found myself having to step back because I was seeing myself become biased on certain topics and this was affecting my thought process. A change that I had to make was modifying certain questions that wouldn't show favor to a certain group or side.

Unfortunately both schools never reached back to me and I had to be rational for this reasoning. I had to understand that through the midst of this pandemic schools are having to adapt to the new circumstances. The school administrators may not have had time to reach back out and that is understandable. It is worth mentioning that I did call both schools, and they said they would do their best to see if I could get a response from them. Something that I know now is that schools are always thinking of new means of supporting their students and how to ensure their success. This was especially noted when the pandemic started and schools were providing students with the resources needed to ensure they can have access to their schooling. This help

was impactful to many Latino families that did not have access to the internet, and were worried on how they would support their students' education at home. Important steps that we need to take from here is seeing how we can maintain the same level of support for families as done in this pandemic. Latino families rely on the resources provided from public schools and we need to find new methods to continue supporting these families.

Through this project I learned that I am passionate about helping my people and seeing what I could do in the future to help us grow as a community. I have learned that there are Latino people that are still in the need of help and that I am luckier than most. I also know that in my near future I want to create an organization that will help Latino students and provide resources for families in need. I want to be able to provide them with resources such as tutoring and mentors that can act as a mirror for future Latino students. I am proud about being a Latino student and knowing that I had to work ten times harder than most to achieve the success that I have had and the opportunities that have been open to me due to the sacrifices of my immigrant parents.

### **Synthesis and Integration**

As I reflect on the Liberal Studies MLOS, there are two learning outcomes that have notably impacted my professional development. I saw myself grow as a diversity and multicultural scholar, as well as a social justice collaborator. Through this project I have noticed that I took my social identity as the root as to why I wanted to pursue a career in education. I have learned that as a Latino myself, I can serve as a role model to many future Latino students that will one day come into my classroom. I will be able to be part of the diversity representation in schools and be an advocate for schools becoming more culturally diverse. It is important for me to be a culturally competent educator in order to better serve my classroom and community. I

have also noted that there is still systemic oppression that relies within our society that is causing barriers in the Latino community, but other minority groups alike. I have a better understanding of what I need to do in order to fight for our rights and ensure we all have equal opportunities. I have also learned the importance of working with and learning from stakeholders such as students, parents, and teachers. It will one day become my responsibility to ensure that my students are receiving an education that is fair, equal, and accessible to all. Through these learning outcomes I have a more well rounded understanding of what my role as an educator will be.

Dear school administrators of Lincoln School Elementary,

My name is Juan Daniel Sierra. I am currently a senior at California State University of Monterey Bay. I am working on a research project that deals with the barriers that Latino students face. I would like the time to share my idea on what we can do to better support these students. I would also love to hear what methods are already being implemented to ensure student academic success.

From research that I have collected, it is known that a child's education is largely affected by the students home environment. I have come to learn that your school has a large population of Latino students that will one day be the new working generation of the future. However we are also seeing that there is a small percentage of Latino students that are actually completing a college education. Through my data I have come to understand that there is a lack of knowledge about college, not only from the students but the parents as well. This is where I believe that educators and schools need to focus on.

I am proposing that new methods need to be created in order to reach out to parents. I know that parental engagement is something that all schools encourage, however a majority of these parents are in the working class and it is difficult to have free time. With many Latino parents there also comes the issue of a language barrier and due to this many parents are reluctant to get involved in their children's academics. One way I believe can help this issue is by having educators go through training that will allow them to become culturally competent which would allow them to find new methods of reaching out to these parents.

This will allow teachers to gain more knowledge on their culturally diverse students, and become aware of their home environments. It will teach teachers the various beliefs that are practiced at home and how that can affect their schooling. Letting teachers go through these training will create culturally competent teachers that will better serve their community.

I would love the opportunity to get to meet with you through zoom or on the phone to discuss these issues and gain more knowledge from what you have to say. Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

Juan Daniel Sierra  
[jsierra@csumb.edu](mailto:jsierra@csumb.edu)

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