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Allowing Latinx Students' Voices to be Heard

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## **Abstract**

There are too many Latinx students falling behind academically, and coming to First Tee helped improve their academic performance. The First Tee of Monterey is a local non-profit organization that was established in 1997 and is based in Salinas, California primarily serving students who come from low-income backgrounds. The agency strives to support Latinx students who are fourth, fifth, and sixth grade who have a language barrier, not enough tutoring support, and not enough parent and teacher involvement. This increases the likelihood of dropout rates, mental health issues, and unemployment. Implementing an evaluation that the students can take part in allows First Tee to hear from the participants on how coming to First Tee has improved the students' performance. After conducting the survey, the overall result was that the students do enjoy coming to First Tee, as it helps with their confidence. The driving range was the dominant favorite. The next steps that the agency can take are to continue the student evaluations to come up with even more fun activities for students.

*Keywords: Latinx, First Tee, low-income, school, education, academic confidence*

## **Agency & Communities Served**

The First Tee of Monterey is a local non-profit organization that was established in 1997 and based in Salinas, California. The primary population served at the agency includes minorities, low-income youth, pupils with impairments, at-risk youth, and girls who were historically denied access to the game of golf and its good principles. The organization is dedicated to providing a better future for underserved youth of Monterey County. The main focus is to teach life skills through the sport of golf. They offer a day program and an after-school program that helps students with tutoring and homework. Through the day program they teach life skills such as good sportsmanship and confidence. The vision for First Tee, Monterey County “is dedicated to providing youth of all backgrounds an opportunity for a brighter future. First Tee – Monterey County enables kids to build the strength of characters that empowers them through a lifetime of new challenges” (First Tee Monterey County, 2024a, para. 2). Their mission is to “Deliver a targeted curriculum of golf and character development, life skills, academic support, higher education, mentorship, and career development” (First Tee Monterey County, 2024a, para. 3). Most of the participants that come to First Tee are the underserved communities from East Salinas. In terms of ethnicity and gender, 48% are female, and 52% are male; as for ethnicity enrollment is 96% underserved minorities (First Tee Monterey County, 2024b, para. 3).

## **Problem Model Background and Literature Review**

### **Problem Statement**

Too many Latinx students are falling behind academically, meaning that they are being held back from the next grade level. This is an issue that is common among the underserved community. Some of the contributing factors to this issue include the language barrier, not

enough academic support, and not enough teacher and parent involvement in education. Most of the children in these situations come from families that are considered lower class. According to an article in the *Journal of Career Development*, “lack of teacher support, limited financial and language resources, lack of access to information, and negative peer influences [act] as barriers to their education” (McWhirter et al., 2018, p. 332). According to the *Journal of Education Policy Analysis Archives*, “Latinas graduate from high school at lower rates than any major subgroup; more than one in five has not completed high school by the age of 29” (Turner, 2021, p. 13). Through this, it is clear why so many students are falling behind in school. There are many reasons why too many students may fall behind academically such as the language barrier, not enough tutoring support, and the lack of teacher and parent involvement. These contributing factors can also lead to consequences such as increased dropout rates, mental health issues such as depression, and unemployment. These are illustrated in the problem model in Figure 1 below.

The primary challenge that many Latinx face when going to school is the language barrier. A lack of language skills has negatively affected one's grades. Due to many students learning English later, many students aren't able to keep up with their peers. According to Halle et al. (2012), English Language Learners “who were not proficient by first grade had the largest initial gaps in reading and math achievement compared to native speakers” (para.1).

**Figure 1: Problem Model**

<b>Contributing Factors</b>	<b>Problem</b>	<b>Consequences</b>
Language barrier	Too many Latinx students are falling behind academically	Increased dropout rates
Teacher/parent involvement		Mental health

Insufficient tutoring support		Unemployment
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## **Contributing Factors**

### ***Language barrier***

Students are failing in school due to a language barrier. Given that most Latinx students come from families who don't speak English, it can be a challenge for the individuals to communicate. The ability to speak English can impact education attainment levels. According to the Pew Research Center, only 34% of Mexican immigrants have English proficiency (Budiman, 2022). The *National Assessment for Educational Progress* shows an alarming achievement gap between 29 and 30 percent for English Language Learners (ELL) students in the fourth and eighth grades, which places them significantly behind their counterparts who speak English fluently (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2009). These articles show that the language barrier continues to play an ongoing issue in the role of education for underserved communities.

### ***Teacher/parent involvement***

Many students who come from low socioeconomic backgrounds struggle with not being able to receive tutoring support from their families or teachers. According to an article in the *Journal of Education and Learning*, "Latino students perceived their teachers as unhelpful and wondered why they chose the teaching profession in the first place" (Arbelo Marrero, 2016, p. 182). This example shows the sad reality of the struggle that students face when they need support. In terms of family support in one's education, the family considers taking care of basic needs for the child to be appropriately supported. In an article Arbelo Marrero shares "Latino parents consider engagement in their children's education as checking homework, instilling strong cultural values that support education, conversing with their children, and making sure

their children are well rested” (2016, p. 182). A similar article in *The Review of Policy Research* reiterates the fact that parents are involved in their child’s education just not in terms of academic subject matter tutoring. Marschall shares “Latino parents perceived their role as providing nurturing, teaching values, and instilling good behavior” (2006, para.1).

### ***Insufficient tutoring support***

The Latinx community is continuously faced with obstacles regarding receiving a greater education. Some of the obstacles include language, barriers, cultural values, and lack of tutoring support. An article in the *American Journal of Community Psychology* called *Culturally Responsive Practices: Insights from a High-Quality Math Afterschool Program Serving Underprivileged Latinx Youth*, written by Mark Vincent B. Yu, Yangyang Liu, and Stephanie Soto-Lara, shows the reality of how cultural values play a role in one's education. It states that “Programs that do not align with or are not responsive to youth’s culture are likely to create situations that lack the cultural person-environment fit and lead to negative developmental processes” (Yu et al., 2021, p. 6). This means that even though there are academic services available, Latinx students tend not to utilize them as much.

### **Consequences**

#### ***Increased drop-out rates***

Education plays a very important role in one's life, but if one doesn’t have access to resources then one falls behind. Latinx communities are faced with numerous challenges with education that sometimes can lead to dropping out of school. Cultural differences and family background are often big contributing factors as to why so many Latinx students end up dropping out of school. According to an article called *The Complexity of Non-Completion: Being Pushed or to Drop out of High School* written by Christen L Bradley and Linda A. Renzulli,

“dropout rates of black and Latino students are higher than their white peers” (2011, p. 522).

Through this, we can see that Latino students have a higher rate of dropping out of school.

Another source that reiterates how high the dropout rate is is a 2020 news release from the California Department of Education which reported Hispanic or Latino drop-out rates at 10.2% in 2019 and 9.8% in 2020. Both of these sources stress the reality of high school dropouts amongst Hispanic youth. An article called *Understanding Why Students Dropout of High School* shares that some of the reasons why dropout rates are so high are due to financial issues and early pregnancy (Doll et al., 2013, para.7)

### ***Mental health***

Another common consequence that is seen amongst the Latinx community is the unnoticed and untreated mental health struggles students are facing. Since there isn't much talk about mental health in the Latino community, most individuals don't end up getting diagnosed later or at all. This often impacts their academic performance, impacting their mental health and confidence. A study by the University of Michigan found that 4 out of 5 students based their self-worth on their academic performance (Harter, 2002). This shows the correlation between how one's self-esteem can impact an academic performance. Latinx students are very vulnerable to low-esteem In an article called *Peer Victimization and Mental Health Problems: Racial-Ethnic Differences in the Buffering Role of Academic Performance*, written by Rui Fu, Tracy Evian Wassdrop, and Julie A Randolph, the team shares that there are “negative links between academic performance and mental health problems” (2021, para 10). In another article called *Culture and Educational Stress and Internalizing Symptoms Among Latino Adolescents: The Role of Ethnic Identity* written by Stephanie A. Torres and Catherine DeCarlo Santiago (2017), they show that the amount of discrimination that Latino youth experience can not only affect

their education experiences but also their mental health.

### ***Unemployment***

Having a good education can impact one's future and will allow for more job opportunities. However, for those who aren't able to receive a great education, falling behind academically can lead them to very low-paying jobs or it can leave individuals unemployed. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2023), “workers age 25 and over who have less education than a high school diploma had the highest unemployment rate (8.3 percent)” (para.2).

A similar article called *Latinos in the United States In 2000* describes the relation between the level of education one receives and the future of employment (Marotta & Garcia, 2003). “Regardless of educational level, Latinos have higher unemployment rates than those of the total U.S. population, although the unemployment rate diminishes with a higher level of education for Latinos” (Marotta & Garcia, 2003, p. 25). Both of these articles show the influence of the level of education and how it can impact employment for such a vulnerable population.

## **Project Description and Implementation Process**

### **Project Description**

For my capstone project, I planned on creating an evaluation that the students of First Tee could take part in. The evaluation allowed the student’s voices to be heard about how they feel not only about coming to First Tee but also if it has been able to help with their education. Some of the questions that were asked on the survey included what grade they are in, what school they attend, and how well has First Tee helped them with the five key commitments which are “Pursuing Goals”, “Growing through Challenge”, “Collaborating with Others”, “Building Positive Self-Identity”, and “Using Good Judgment” (First Tee, 2024c, Key

Commitments section) while focusing on mastering golf fundamentals and building upon a golf skill foundation as they advance within the program. I planned to send out release-of-information forms to the families to ask for their permission. I planned to share the anonymous responses with the agency to assist in program improvement.

### **Project Justification & Benefits**

The purpose of this project was to help students improve their academic performance. The information from the survey was shared with the agency to identify areas for improvement to better support the students. Since the community served is predominantly underserved youth, many of the participants aren't able to get much academic support at home, so they come to First Tee for help. One of the benefits that this project intended to provide for the agency was hearing what the participants of First Tee have to say. By hearing what the participants have to say, the agency would be able to come up with even more activities in the classroom that would help the students with their education. It would allow them to see what improvements they could make.

### **Expected Outcomes & Assessment Plan**

The expected outcome was that 100% of the student participants would be able to give their feedback to First Tee. By providing feedback to the staff directly from the students it would allow the staff of the agency to hear back from the students themselves along with the current evaluation system that they have with the school teachers. Hearing back from both students and staff was intended to encourage them to come up with more ideas for activities for the agency.

In terms of how the overall outcome of the project would be measured, I planned on asking both of my mentors if the results from the survey benefited the agency.

### **Implementation Process**

For this project, the students were informally interviewed in English in order to find out what their favorite activity at First Tee was. In terms of the number of students that were informally interviewed, since each of the 12 schools brought approximately thirty to sixty students to First Tee twice a month I would randomly select fifteen students to interview which also included special education students. Data was collected in a Google spreadsheet and then interpreted into percentages to illustrate the student's favorite station. When collecting the data I combined the special education students with the rest of the students. After collecting the data the first time I asked the students the same question the next time they came and a few students changed their answers.

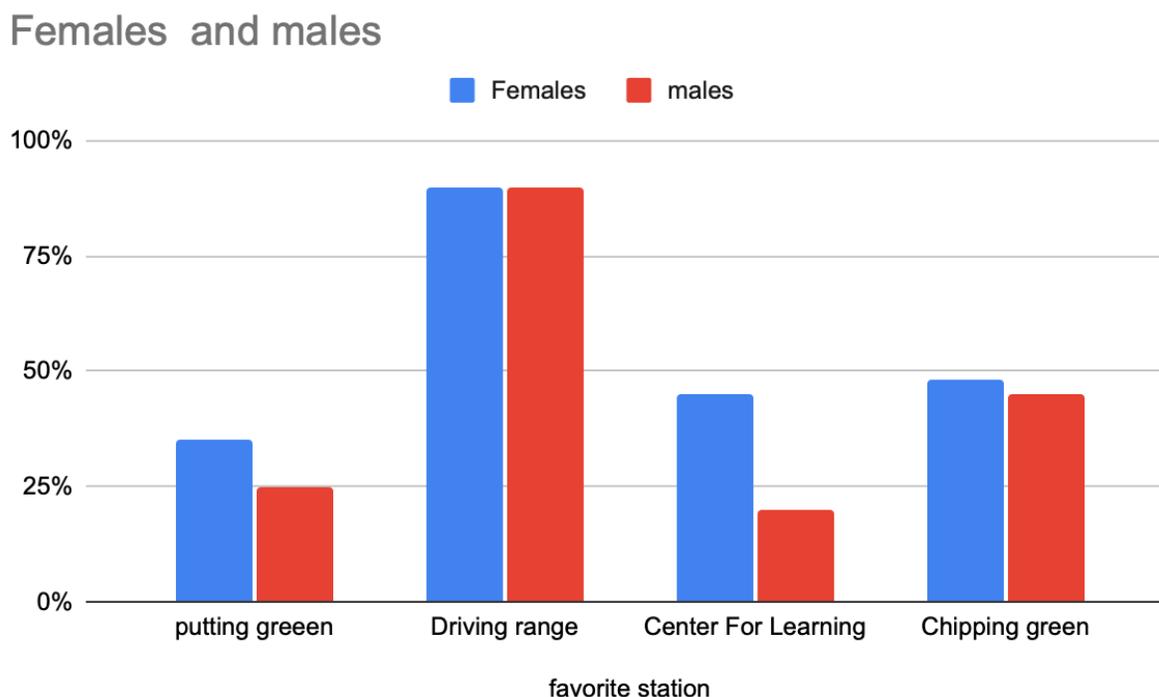
Originally this was supposed to be a Google form survey that was going to be filled out using laptops and a classroom, however, due to roadblocks with the survey approval by my mentor and the school district's approval I wasn't able to conduct the surveys as originally planned. Due to the amount of time spent revising the surveys I wasn't able to ask the district for approval in time. Therefore I decided to gather data using a conversational approach with the students. The method that I used to collect and organize data for my survey was a Google spreadsheet which had all the names of schools that the participants came from along with their grades

## **Results**

After conducting the survey, the overall result was that the students do enjoy coming to First Tee, as it helps with their confidence. I found that the majority of the students said that the driving range was their favorite station at First Tee (see Figure 2). In terms of the other stations CFL, chipping and putting a majority of the students said that they enjoy the CFL because its inside and warm. Another reason is due to the various games they can play help with confidence

when it comes to testing. For example, when I asked what their favorite activity was in the CFL a majority said jeopardy and the word puzzle

**Figure 2: Favorite station by gender**



As I conducted the survey with the students, the question that I asked them was “What is your favorite station at First Tee?” a majority of the students answered that their favorite station was the driving range because “it makes them feel confident about themselves and it allows them to feel free for once.” The next question I asked them was why does it make you feel this way and they shared “ because I can take big swings.” When I asked about the other stations Chipping Green, Putting Green, and Center for Learning the fourth graders seemed to really enjoy them. One student said, “ its because we can go inside where it’s warm and we can play math and spelling games.” Another said, “because it’s not cold inside.” In terms of the chipping and putting green a majority of the students said that it wasn’t their favorite because “ we have to

take small swings.” When I asked about how the students about how they felt overall about First Tee a majority of the students said” they enjoy coming to First Tee because it makes them feel more confident in themselves both physically and academically.

### **Conclusion & Recommendation**

After conducting the capstone project, the overall contributing factor that connects greatly with the project is the lack of tutoring support for the students. The majority of students that First serves are from low-income families which can make it a challenge to receive support from their families. By coming to First Tee these students are able to seek academic support that can help them in school that they wouldn't be able to access at home. The purpose of this project was to see if attending First Tee was helping students academically and as evidenced by my conversations with students, First Tee is successfully adhering to its five key commitments, Collaborating with Others”, “Pursuing Goals”, Building Positive Self-Identity”, Growing through Challenges, and Using Good Judgment.

In terms of Building confidence: Students reported that First Tee activities have helped them build confidence. For example, practicing math skills with First Tee empowered them to feel confident answering questions asked by their teachers without hesitation upon returning to the classroom. As for pursuing goals, students reported that First Tee inspired students to pursue their goals by encouraging them to consider what careers they want to pursue when they are older.

Furthermore, using good judgment students reported that First Tee fostered an environment where students could practice exercising good judgment in their social, educational, and home environments. For example, students thought critically about how their words would impact others before commenting on each other's performance, both academically and at the

various First Tee stations. In terms of growing through challenges, students shared that First Tee supported students in growing through challenges by providing an environment where making mistakes and not succeeding on the first try was acceptable. Students were not discouraged by failures but rather were motivated to continue trying. Finally, Collaborating with others: Students demonstrated collaborative behavior by encouraging each other to, for example, hit the golf balls harder and not worry about missing the shot.

Continuing the student evaluation process is recommended because every voice matters. Making changes to a few of the questions as the years go by is also recommended to keep the survey up to date while also keeping the question interesting. A recommendation to students and mentors would be to make a firm decision about what the project is going to be the semester before as it would allow more time for the full completion of the project as planned.

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## Appendix A

### Project Implementation Plan

Tasks	Timeline/ Deadlines	Parties Involved In addition to intern	Materials/ Services Needed	Deliverables
Talk to mentor about capstone project	December and January	Mentor Janice	Laptop	Capstone approval
Draft survey	January 31st, 2024	Menor Janice	Laptop with Google Forms	Survey
Revise survey	February 12th through 16	Mentor Janice	Laptop with Google forums	Survey
Contact the school district to get the approval of the survey/	February 19 through March 1	Cristian Reyes	Classroom/ computer or tablets	Approval of survey

gather permission slips.				
Unable to get the survey approved by the district	March 3rd through March 13, 2024	Intern and mentors	none	Data
Conduct the surveys using a conversational approach	March 14 through April 5th, 2024	Intern and Cristian Reyes	Google forms and google sheets	Data
Write a summary of project result and show mentors	April 22, 2024- April 25th	Cristian Reyes	laptop/mentor to translate.	Computer

## Appendix B

## Females and males

