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SOC264: Latinxs in the South

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Exploratory Paper

### Parental Involvement in the Latinx South

North Carolina has experienced a high rate of Latinx immigration. Compared to other states, it has become a new destination for this community (Green 2017; Paredes 2017). This high influx of students with a unique background have resulted in schools that are unable to meet the needs of children's education. Schools are faced with students new to the U.S. education system, and parents are met with the decision of what approach they would like to take towards their children's education in addition to other challenges. To the public, especially schools and their personnel, it seems as though Latinx parents are uninterested in playing an active role in their children's education. There has even been a theoretical model developed to predict the parental involvement of Latinx parents. It has been suggested that cultural and socioeconomic factors determine the ways in which Latinx parents participate, and the approach parents have chosen to follow can often give off the idea that they are uninterested. Nevertheless, their overall approach seems to be one that is done consciously for the good of their kids, and it is the one that makes most sense with their lifestyle. While schools view this as a negative impact on students, this is the way that Latinx households have learned to approach education leading up to and during their high school years.

Numerous studies have analyzed the factors that contribute to the way Latinx parents become involved. One of the approaches taken to understand this is the Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler model which attempts to explain Latinx parents' involvement behaviors (Walker et al

2011). It has been concluded that there are cultural implications to parents' participation in their children's education. Parental involvement for Latinx parents is defined by their presence in their children's lives overall. They do not specify which areas they focus on wholly because that is not their goal; they do not infiltrate into certain aspects of their student's lives. This may be a way for their kids to gain independence and develop their own character towards their responsibilities. Latinx parents describe life participation rather than academic involvement when talking about how they are involved in their children's lives (Zarate 2007). There are socioeconomic as well as cultural challenges that prevent parents from becoming involved in the way that the U.S. education system desires them to do so. Families who have immigrated to the U.S. for economic opportunities may have parents and/or students who are working several jobs, learning English, and just learning how to navigate the U.S. education system.

Despite this, indirect involvement from Latinx parents is intentional. One study examined how parental involvement differed in Mexico and the United States; students who had attended school in both countries noticed a high contrast in their parents' participation. In Mexico, there was a feeling of shared responsibility, meanwhile in the United States, a child's life was compartmentalized (Petrone 2016). This is reflected in parents' perception of school being out of their authority; it is the teachers' job to take care of school business directly with their students rather than through their parents in the U.S. (Zarate 2007). Latinx parents also assist their children with challenges they face in school that have nothing to do with their grades. Latinx immigrant students have emphasized that their parents help them maintain their cultural identities and overcome racism in addition to encouraging them to do well in school (Green 2017). Parents indirectly provide support to students by helping them overcome social issues that may be detrimental to their education in an environment that may be unwelcoming. As for the

students themselves, their education is something that they take care of (Zarate 2007). Less parental involvement in later education is something that students expect and are comfortable with. This must be because students who have immigrant Latinx parents are aware of the circumstances that may disable or enable their parents to have a more active and visible role in their education. Schools may also expect this, but they do not desire it. They want parents to be present at the schools. Schools have a definition of what it means to be involved in a student's education. For them, parental involvement involves all that Latinx parents do, but school personnel assume the level of involvement through two signs: the performance of a child in school and the physical presence of parents in the school itself. School personnel can assume that parents are not involved in their children's work if they perform poorly or if the parents do not come to school events or meet with the parents in the school building (Petrone 2016; Walker 2011).

Plenty of literature offer the following suggestions to increase Latinx parental involvement: bilingual school personnel or translators, Spanish messages sent to Spanish-speaking homes, educational parent workshops, and school counselor outreach to parents (Paredes 2017; Zarate 2007). It is ultimately the schools' responsibility to fill the gap that schools see in parental involvement. Structural barriers have shown to be the cause of the lack of involvement coming from parents. It is often teachers who shape the schooling experience through personal interactions with students and their outreach to parents (Green 2017). Some schools in the south have example programs which seem to follow the suggested approaches in the literature; Parent University is one of those. This is a collaborative effort between Chapel Hill-Carrobo City Schools and community leaders to provide parents with the confidence and skills that are essential to their children's success. This resource also gives parents an

understanding of the public school system. This comes in the form of learning plans outlined by the collaborators that can be done from home. On the district's website, there is a tab called "Parent Voices" with the following quote from Marian Wright Edelman as the header: "Parents have become so convinced that educators know what is best for their children that they forget they themselves are really the experts." This quote directly aligns with the perceptions expressed by Latinx parents, that their child's schooling is to be handled only by teachers since they are the experts. Another quote at the bottom of the page from Mahatma Gandhi reads, "Every home is a university and the parents are the teacher." The outlook on student education shown by Chapel Hill-Carrobo City Schools shows that they are aware of the position disadvantaged students face in the South, and they are taking the necessary steps to make sure parents feel empowered in their approach to education and that they encourage their growth. They are not trying to change the ways in which parents choose to participate, but they are acknowledging them as valid and providing resources for them to improve.

As the Latinx population make the South their home, they struggle against a countless amount of challenges. Navigating the U.S. education system is one of them, as they are new to their expectations, environment, and ways of interacting with families. While their style of involvement can differ from other communities, Latinx parents' participation is unique and can definitely be aided by participation from the education system. School personnel putting an effort into encouraging and making it easier to participate in school matters is a way to facilitate not only immigrant families' student's education, but also increase the possibilities that parents will find their own ways to become more involved.

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