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Effects of Latino Parental Involvement in Their Children's Academics

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Senior Capstone

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### Abstract

Parental involvement is a large factor in a child's life. It has been around for many years and has been interconnected with students' academic achievement regardless of race and socioeconomic status. Research indicates that Latino parents are less involved in their children's academics due to their personal definition of parental involvement. However, Latino parents really want to get involved in their children's education, but there are barriers that limit the type of parental involvement they exhibit. Teachers and administrators value parental involvement and try to encourage all parents to participate but at times do not understand the struggles some Latino parents face. This senior capstone examines the underlying effects of Latino parental involvement in their children's academics through use of literature review and survey with a set of questionnaires to Latino parents, teachers, and administrators of Salinas City Elementary School District.

## Introduction and Background

As a first generation Mexican American student, I have grown to view and respect Latino parental involvement through a different lens. I grew up in a working middle class family with parents who only speak Spanish and work twelve-hour days. I knew that it was impossible for my parents to take me to school in the morning, for them to be chaperones on a school fieldtrip, for my mother to come in and be a parent-teacher helper and of course I was also aware that sometimes they would not be able to attend parent-teacher conferences due to their high demand factory jobs, even though they really wanted to be there. My parents did not receive an education like the one I have been blessed to achieve but they have worked hard and continue to work so my siblings and I could achieve the level of education that all four of us have worked hard to accomplish. My parents may have not been present on campus or involved with school events but they were indeed involved in my life and with everything that I brought through the front door of our house. The type of parental involvement they provided for me might have been different to the traditional type of parental involvement in a child's life that others may be used to, but their involvement was more than enough to shape me into the person that I am today, and the educator that I plan to be.

As a future educator, I am aware of the possible barriers that Latino parents may encounter that forbid them from being involved like other parents. I also understand that it is crucial to have parental involvement in a child's life regardless of how that involvement is transmitted. Parental involvement in a child's life is important and necessary for the success of the children and it can be achieved within school grounds or in the child's home. Knowing how difficult it can be for Latino parents to be involved

within the classroom, I am satisfied knowing that there is some type of parental involvement at home. Latino parents may have a hard time understanding what is going on at school or what their child's homework reads because of language barriers but one thing Latino parents do not have a hard time understanding is that respect is important. Latino parents respect their children's teachers and value their work; therefore, they feel that even with the lack of involvement from their part they know that the teachers are there for the best interest of the children. Latino parents view teachers highly and expect a lot from them, as they are unable to educate their children academically and can only provide nurture, moral support and instill positive behavior" (Marschall, 2006, p. 1056). To many Latino parents the type of involvement they bring forward from their behalf is more than enough; however, to educators it seems like a lack of interest in their children's academics and these Latinos parents are viewed negatively. Schools need to establish a community within their campus where parents of all cultures feel safe to participate and know there will be support for them as their role as involved parents. "Studies have shown that parent involvement patterns vary according to parental social, racial-ethnic and economic characters" (Desimone, 1999, p.12). Teachers today, tend to only focus on formal and traditional activities to be the definition of parental involvement when in reality they are neglecting culturally specific perspectives of minority populations and deflecting attention away from establishing effective parental involvement, especially within Latino parents (Marschall, 2006, p. 1057).

Through my senior capstone I have worked with a few different schools under the Salinas City Elementary School District as well as some of their staff members and parents. My research papers' main focus is to understand obstacles that Latino parents

face as parents of students in a school system that have different views on what parental involvement is and how they feel their involvement helps their children. In order to be able to conduct accurate research I have focused on a primary question being, How does Latino parental involvement affect their children's academics? Which will help me better understand other Latino parent involvement besides the one I experienced. With this primary question I am seeking to see how Latino parents get involved with their children and how they believe their involvement makes a difference in their children's lives. To follow my primary questions I have concluded some related research questions to further my research in a school-based environment, which would be 1) What does research say about effects of parental involvement in students' academics? 2) How does Salinas City Elementary School district involve Latino parents? 3) How do Latino parents get involved in their children's academics as students at school?

### **Literature Review**

As I reflect on my personal parental involvement and the ways it shaped me, it is also important to understand others points of view on the topic of parental involvement. Researching parental involvement through literature review will allow growth on the topic and produce a less biased research project. Through literature review we will gather information that will give us a better understanding of what "parental involvement" means to other and what research says to be the benefits of this involvement for children.

Parental involvement has been around schools for a long time and the benefits it brings forward in a child's academics are endless. Around the 1920's a larger role for parents became acceptable within school grounds but the schools dictated their role;

ideally, parents would be involved as helpers and supporters of what teachers and the school needed (Zellman & Waterman, 1998). Parental involvement has been found to positively correlate with student academic achievement and “traditionally, involvement has been operationalized as behaviors such as attending parent-teacher conferences, checking homework, helping with homework, and volunteering in schools” (Pstross, Rodriguez, & Paris, 2016). For many Latino parents, the simplicity of helping their children with homework at home can be a difficult task when there are barriers that constrict them from assisting. For the past 40 years, parental involvement in the education of their children has been viewed to be an important element of effective education and an advantage for children of all ages (Hornby & Lafaele, 2011). Parental involvement in schools has been valued for many reasons like, an efficient social investment with a payoff, it addresses considerations of equity and equal opportunity, and it is consistent with the strong belief in this country that the primary responsibility for children’s well-being lies with the parents (Heclo, 1997).

Parent involvement has been a central factor interrelated “with improved academic performance, higher test scores, more positive attitudes toward school, higher homework completion rates, fewer placements in special education, academic perseverance, lower dropout rates, and fewer suspensions” (Carreón, Drake & Barton, 2005, p. 466). It is clear that every parent wants their children to be successful in their schooling and to keep striving to achieve their goals, which is why parental involvement regardless of ethnicity is extremely important when looking at the success of each child. Hispanics have become the largest ethnic group to populate the United States meaning that our cultural views should be shifted by now, especially in school settings. Schools in

the United States have increasingly been asked to serve diverse student populations with a focus on improving the academics and social outcomes of racial ethnic minority and low-income students. With a specific group in mind, “it is therefore imperative that we increase our understanding of how parent involvement best can be employed for all children, especially for those at risk of educational failure” (Desimone, 1999, p. 12).

Latino parents have indeed been involved in their children’s academics but in a way that goes seen unnoticed due to a clear picture of others seeing parental involvement through a different lens. There has been research done to show that teachers often misinterpret parents’ lack of involvement as lack of caring for their children when in reality that is not the case for these Latino parents.

Moreover, Latino parents care very much about their children’s schooling, but they tend to have different perceptions as well as expectations about the roles of teachers and parents in the education process (Marschall, 2006). When Latino parents are asked to take responsibilities that they view as a domain of the school, these parents become unsure of what role to take because they do not want to overstep boundaries and feel as if they are invading upon the schools territory. Aside from Latino parents not wanting to overstep their boundary with their child’s educator, many feel that their lack of proficiency in the dominant language has a negative influence on their ability to get involved like other parents (Pstross, Rodriguez, Knopf, & Paris, 2016). With a language barrier many Latino parents have reported to have a difficult time getting in communication with their child’s teacher to obtain information in regards to their child’s academics. Perez, Drake and Calabrese (20005) stated the following in an article, “as with any human action, parental involvement is not a fixed event but a dynamic and ever-



changing practice that varies depending on the context in which it occurs, the resources parents and schools bring to their actions, and the students' particular needs," (p. 467). It is necessary to understand that there are structured activities created by school personnel to promote parental involvement; however, those activities do not always fit the schedules or abilities of all parents. These parents are now expected to agree with and support the structure and dynamics in already in place at their children's schools and when they do not, they are seen as "problematic." The benefits of parental involvement can vary but most of the time they include; improved parent teacher relationships, improved attendance, attitudes, behavior and mental health of children and can increase parental confidence and satisfaction (Hornby & Lafaele, 2011). Latino parents do not always think of the benefits that come with parental involvement because Latino parents have confidence in their children's teachers to do what is best for the child in school without them having to be there.

### **Methods and Procedures**

During my time at California State University of Monterey Bay, I was required to do service learning and I chose to do my hours at schools in Salinas, California. It was during these service-learning hours that I began to notice how Latino parents were hardly ever on campus or in the classroom helping. I began to think of my personal life and how my parents were not involved in school activities and wondered if it was due to the same reason that my parent could not participate.

In effort to understand what exactly was going on with Latino parental involvement in schools, I began to casually ask the teachers I was working with why there was not a lot of Latino parents when the school is highly made up of students with a

Latin decent and they all had different views and responses on the topic. With all of that in mind, I knew exactly what I wanted to do for my senior capstone project and that was to focus on Latino parental involvement and what it was that was creating barriers for them to be there or how they felt they were a part of their children's academics. I began with a lot of literature review articles that expanded my knowledge on parental involvement itself. As I kept doing more research through literature review articles I began narrowing it down to Latino parents and was extremely impressed with how much research there was behind this topic.

As my scholarly research continued, I knew it was going to be important to question more teachers (See Appendix A for Interview Questions for Teachers), administrators (See Appendix C for Interview Questions for Administrators) and of course parents but in specific Latino parents (See Appendix B for Interview Questions for Latino Parents in both English and Spanish). Nonetheless, I created a questionnaire for all three groups of individuals that I felt would bring forward answers to my questions that would expand my knowledge but better yet help me understand what was going on with Latino parental involvement in Salinas City Elementary Schools (See Appendixes A-C). I conducted this questionnaire with full consent from each participant, which was constructed of three administrators, five teachers, four Latino parents, and two non-Latin parents. I expressed what my project was and how it would be presented when all of my research had been conducted. I explained to the participant who agreed to take my questionnaire that it would be via email and that the responses would remain anonymous beyond my point of investigation. All of my participants were glad to be apart of my senior capstone research project and were able to return the questionnaire to me in an

effective matter of time for me to evaluate their responses. In search for participants to help me develop this project and further my knowledge on Latino parental involvement, I decided to also ask participant of a non-Latino decent to have some data to compare and I believe that was very effective with my end result. The reason I decided to gather information via an emailed questionnaire was because I did not want to rush my participant with their answers. I felt that if I interviewed them in person, we would be limited time and that their answers would not be as precise compared to having days to respond to each answer. I wanted my participants to really reflect on their classroom and schools as well as the different ethnic groups that created their schools. I wanted these groups of individuals to look into all of the parental involvement they had experienced throughout their careers and lives as parents. I felt that with this method of research I was going to be able to get answers for my questions that related in specific to my research questions.

### **Results, Findings & Discussions**

The questionnaire given to Salinas City Elementary School employees and parents was a great asset to finding adequate results to my questions. My methods allowed me to view Latino parental involvement in my community but also compare it to findings from literature review to get a broader result. Nevertheless, I attained the data that was needed to answer my questions through literature review and by a constructively created questionnaire for teachers, administrators and parents. The data revealed barriers that parents encounter that reduce the type of involvement they portray and how members of Salinas City Elementary school define the parental involvement they see through their classrooms.

Latino students are not equally academically successful like other racial group students and Latino parental involvement can be a major factor. I concluded through my research that Latino parents are involved with their children's academics but in a non-traditional matter. Latino parents have expressed that they do not have the privilege to be classroom helpers or be chaperones on a class trip but they are always there to support their children with love, food and school supplies.

*What does research say about effects of parental involvement in students' academics?*

Parental involvement in children's academics comes with positive academic performance. Traditionally, we view parent involvement as attending conferences, checking or assisting with homework and of course doing volunteer hours on school grounds but that is not the only form of parental involvement as we have discovered. Parental involvement can be more than what teachers expect and all form of parental involvement can result in children achieving higher education. Children who are able to succeed and are prepared for higher education are of those parents who are involved with homework, reading and activities in or outside of school but education begins at home. The more parental involvement there is in a child's life, the more children re likely to become productive members of society and excel in their academics.

*How does Salinas City Elementary School district involve Latino parents?* Salinas City Elementary School District has been around for many years and it is located in a primarily Hispanic community. Within this school district there are fourteen schools and various campuses that offer bilingual curriculum. Administrators that participated in my questionnaire all had positive feedback to say in regards to the school district and the

actions it took throughout the school year to involve all parents. One administrator said, “our school district is very well aware of the diversity between all of the schools but they are most certain that our schools are populated primarily by Latino students therefore, our district focuses a lot on having bilingual staff members throughout the schools.”

Salinas City Elementary School District takes value in parental involvement and has created many parent workshops that have taken place on school campuses with teachers, administrators, classroom aides and parent leader coordinators. Within these workshops, parents break up into small groups depending on their preferred language and they go into different classrooms learning about their children’s day-to-day curriculum work and applications that the district has adopted to keep parents updated and connected with their children’s classroom teachers. An administrator from a Salinas school also mentioned that on certain mornings, their school hosted morning meetings called *Cafesito* and that in those meetings either himself or the vice principal who are both bilingual would attend those meetings alongside their parent school coordinator and they would talk over the monthly bulletin and allow parents to ask questions in regards to anything occurring on campus or at home with their children in the topic of academics.

*How do Latino parents get involved in their children’s academics as students at school?* Latino parents tend to not be as involved as other parents because they view school involvement differently than others. Latino parents value the work of educators in schools and they feel as if they were to get involved in the class they could make educators feel undervalued. Latino parents get involved with their students’ academics by being nurturers in their homes. Latino parents are always making sure that their children value their morals and respect their elders with good behavior. Latino parents have high

expectations for their children's education and want to participate in their success. When it comes to education, Latino parents want their children to succeed and learn the language of English but they also fear that in their schooling they might lose their home language and culture when they want them to maintain those values in hope to maintain family ties. A Latino parent mentioned in her questionnaire that she feared that since she could not help her daughter with her homework because she could not read nor speak English that her daughter would lose opportunities to become successful and never ask her for help in the future. Latino parents want to be involved and sometimes they can't because of barriers like language or work schedules but they try their best to be attentive at home with whatever it is they can help with academically. A parent mentioned, "*yo quiero ayudarle a mi hijo pero salgo tarde del trabajo y lo que el esta aprendiendo en la escuela se me hace muy dificil porque yo nunca estude mas del sexto grado.*" (Parent A, Personal communication, March 23, 2019). This mother feels incompetent to help her child with their academics but she also mentioned how with her hard work she is able to provide food and school supplies to keep her son healthy and well prepared to go to school and learn from his teacher.

### **Discussion**

Latino parents' attitude toward their children's education has always been to the success of their children. Parents have wanted to actively support and participate in their children's education and moral development and have expressed it in my questionnaire but also those staff members in which they can communicate to when they are at their children's school. Many of the times we hear schools staff members refer to Latino parents as the parents who do not care about their children's academics but these are

rooted perceptions that society has of Latino families. It is generalized that individuals of Latin descent who do not speak English are viewed negatively by many Americans because they are not willing to assimilate to the American culture but it is beyond that for Latino parents. Latino parents have a lot of value in their culture and they raise their children with the same values that their parent instilled in them and that reflects back to respect. A few of the parents that participated in my questionnaire expressed that they feel teachers superior to themselves because they are educated and can teach their children material out of their knowledge. These parents stated that teachers should be valued for their hard work because they tend to do what parents cannot do in the home. Nonetheless, parental involvement has to do with more than what is visible to the eyes of staff members on school grounds. Latino parents work hard to be there for their children and to help them succeed but not in the traditional American way. Latino parents understand the importance of education therefore, they work long days to provide for their children in ways that many educators in classroom cannot.

### **Problems and Limitations**

Through the process of gathering data for the completion of this senior capstone research project, a few limitations ascended. At this time of year teachers and administrators are occupied in preparation for state testing and most of their workday and free time is spent on that preparation. With testing on the mind of these educators, many teachers were honest and respectfully denied to participate in the questionnaire needed to answer related questions to the project. It was difficult to gather teacher and administrator participants but in the end enough agreed to participate to assist the research of Latino parental involvement in SCESD. Greatly it was a different case for the

involvement of parents in the questionnaire. A lot of the parents that were asked to participate were excited and glad to help but the turn over time for them to return their completed questionnaire became a problem. Up to the point of finalizing the senior research capstone project some parents had not completed their questionnaire and returned what they had completed. One limitation that shaped the research was that data was only correspondent to a single school district. Salinas City Elementary school district only manages elementary schools therefore, the data collected only revealed what parents, teachers and administrators knew based out of elementary schools they worked at or had children attending.

### **Recommendation**

Parental involvement is now something we understand through multiple perspectives. Parental involvement within Latino families is existent; however, it is not viewed or acknowledge due to a generic idea of what parental involvement translate to in society. As educators, students and parents we must understand the values behind parental involvement and value that each cultural group expresses that value of involvement differently as those differences still extort positive effectives on students' academics. Latino families have been viewed negatively on this topic but it all has to do with the way we are viewing things as outsiders. My recommendation as outsiders, educators, students and parents is that we change are views of what parental involvement is. By changing our personal views we are allowing society to be more susceptible to viewing Latino parental involvement is one that is exiting in students lives and also an involvement that indeed affects their academic success. My recommendation is to change our views and be more multi-culturally relevant to understand barriers that families face



to comprehend why their parental actions might not correlate with other parents involvement.

### Conclusion

This senior capstone research project examined “*How does Latino parental involvement affect their children’s academics?*” The project analyzed the detail behind Latino parental involvement in their children’s academics through literature review and interviews with teachers, parents and administrators. The findings revealed that parental involvement reflected my experience and connection with many articles and responses of Latino parents from the questionnaire. As a daughter of Latino parents, I understand their point of views in regards to education and whom the role belongs to when it comes to learning about academics. My parents were never able to assist me in homework because of language barriers, they could not help in my class because of their jobs but there was never a day where I questioned the morals they implanted in my siblings and I. Through literature review, I was able to conclude that Latino parents do care but they display that caring in different matters that will continue to go unseen by many unless views on what parental involvement is changes.

Latino parents continue to be viewed as the parents who do not care about their children’s academics but revolves around culture-specific forms of parental involvement that are not being acknowledged. In the Latino culture there are numerous forms of support for education that are not understood by those managing educational systems and that is affecting the view on Latino parents. Educators in the education system need to honor the many ways Latino parents are already involved in their child’s education

because it is for those reasons that these Latino students continue to strive for their education and continue to succeed. Within the parental questionnaire, a parent expressed their personal judgment of not being educated and not knowing how to help their child with their schoolwork was something she had to overcome within the years of parenting to be able to understand that she was helping but in other forms. Those other forms were the forms that American society has not classified as parental involvement because it is almost viewed as “things” that should already be getting done in a home. Moreover, it has become evident that the issue of Latino parental involvement is a complex matter that requires educators to move past the simplistic notion of what they believe parental involvement is and or what it looks like. It is time to become culturally competent and understand children’s norms, which follow parental involvement. Educators need to become more involved themselves in hope to bring forward new ideas for parental involvement in children’s academics. Understanding all forms of parental involvement would create a safe environment for students, parents and teachers to work together in hopes to bring each child closer to their educational goals and dreams. With this in mind we would be able to minimize the misconceptions between Latino parental involvement and educators in the American school system.

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## Appendix A

## Interview Questions for Teachers

1. How many languages do you speak fluently? What are they?
2. How many years have you been teaching?
3. What does parental involvement mean to you?
4. How would you describe the parental involvement in your classroom, if any?  
And what types of parents are involved or not involved?  
(Race/Socioeconomic status)
5. How do you personally promote parental involvement for you classroom?
6. What do you believe are the overall benefits of parental involvement?
7. Approximately how many students in your classroom do you believe come from a Latino background? Of those students how many would you say are native Spanish speakers?
8. Thinking of your students and their native language, what would you say is the dominant language amongst your students' parents?
9. Do you believe there is parental involvement at home with your students? And what would you describe at home parental involvement to be?
10. Do you have any concerns with parental involvement? Why?
11. What do you think should be done to increase parental involvement?
12. Do you believe there are any types of obstacles or disadvantages in increasing parental involvement? Explain.
13. Is there any comments, concerns or questions you have in regards to Parental Involvement?

## Appendix B

## Interview Questions for Parents (English)

1. How many of your children currently attend this school?
2. How many languages do you speak? What are they?
3. How would you describe your relationship and communication with your child's teacher?
4. What do you believe parental involvement means?
5. As a parent do you think you are involved in your child's academics? How?
6. Do you believe the school your child attends promotes parental involvement? How?
7. If you have any type of concerns or questions about your child's academics, do you feel comfortable asking the teacher? Why or why not?
8. Do you feel like your race or socioeconomic status builds a barrier in which you feel like you cannot be an involved parent? Why or why not?
9. If you could change one thing at your child's school to help you become involved or more involved, what would it be?
10. Any further questions or comments you have in regards to Parental involvement?

## Appendix B

## Interview Questions for Parents (Spanish)

1. ¿Cuántos de sus hijos asisten actualmente a esta escuela?
2. ¿Cuántos idiomas hablas? ¿Qué son?
3. ¿Cómo describiría su relación y comunicación con el maestro de su hijo?
4. ¿Qué creé que significa la participación de los padres?
5. Como padre, ¿crees que estás involucrado en los estudios académicos de tu hijo? ¿Cómo?
6. ¿Cree que la escuela a la que asiste su hijo promueve la participación de los padres? ¿Cómo?
7. Si tiene alguna duda o pregunta sobre los aspectos académicos de su hijo, ¿se siente cómodo preguntándole al maestro? ¿Por qué o por qué no?
8. ¿Sientes que tu raza o estatus socioeconómico construye una barrera en la que sientes que no puedes ser un padre involucrado? ¿Por qué o por qué no?
9. Si pudiera cambiar una cosa en la escuela de su hijo para ayudarlo a involucrarse o involucrarse más, ¿cuál sería?
10. ¿Alguna otra pregunta o comentario que tenga con respecto a la participación de los padres?

## Appendix C

## Interview Questions for Administrators

1. How many years have you been in an administrator's role?
2. How would you describe the demographics at your school?
3. How many languages do you speak? What are they?
4. What does parental involvement mean to you?
5. How would you rank the parental involvement at your school? 1 being very low and 10 being extremely involved.
6. As an administrator, what do you do to promote parental involvement on your campus?
7. Is there anything your school district requires you to do to promote parental involvement?
8. Are there any specific barriers that come to mind when you think of low parental involvement in schools? Do you think your students parents experience those barriers?
9. If you could change one thing on your campus to have more involved parents in their children's academics, what would you change?
10. Any other questions or comment you have in regards to parental involvement?