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### Out of School Time (OST) for Latinx Youth: A Qualitative Research Study in Spartanburg, South Carolina

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#### Recommended Citation

Lopez, Sandra; Ortiz, Hector; Gonzalez, Marianna; Lomeli-Garcia, Mayra; Stevens, Jay; Taylor, Naya; Barbas Rhoden, Laura; Dinkins, Christine Sorrell; and Quiñones, Gianella E., "Out of School Time (OST) for Latinx Youth: A Qualitative Research Study in Spartanburg, South Carolina" (2020). *Community Based Research*. 8.

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**Out of School Time (OST) for Latinx Youth:  
A Qualitative Research Study in Spartanburg, South Carolina**

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July 31, 2020



A Wofford College Student-Faculty Collaborative Research project  
made possible with the support of Wofford College

# **Out of School Time (OST) for Latinx Youth: A Qualitative Research Study in Spartanburg, South Carolina**

- 1. Project Background**
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- 3. Methodology**
- 4. Themes**
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## **1. Project Background**

This project was undertaken as a result of conversations initiated by staff members in a variety of organizations with initiatives underway to support and improve outcomes for youth in Spartanburg, South Carolina. These organizations include the Spartanburg Academic Movement (SAM), Mary Black Foundation (MBF), and public schools. Conversations pointed to the desirability of qualitative data to contextualize quantitative data related to both educational outcomes, particularly college access and attainment, and public health, including mental health and teen pregnancy, with a focus on Latinx youth.

Spartanburg is a county of approximately 807 square miles and over 313,000 residents.<sup>1</sup> Seven percent of the population of the county is Hispanic/Latinx; 12% of the population of the county is part of a household in which Spanish is spoken at home; and 50% of the foreign-born population is of Latin American origin.<sup>2</sup> Distribution of Race by Age, in 2017, according to data presented in the Racial Equity Index, points to the youthfulness of the Hispanic/Latinx populations: 10.8% of individuals aged 0-14 identify as Hispanic/Latinx; 7.5% of the population aged 15-24; and 9.9% of those aged 25-35.<sup>3</sup>

The community-engaged qualitative research conducted by our team in 2019 offers contextualization of existing quantitative data about Latinx residents in the county. While census data and the other quantitative data available give a sense of community demographics, this large-scale picture does not reveal why the data looks the way it does; how community members experience opportunities and disparities; and how community members express their needs and aspirations. Organizations working to co-create solutions to challenges do not have the capacity to elicit qualitative data that highlights individual situations and narratives, particularly at the zip code or county level. In combination with quantitative data, the qualitative research in this report is intended to: a) help community partners and researchers develop better, more informed next steps, shaped by voices within identified communities; and b) provide better cultural context for community organizations to be able to do their work inclusively and effectively. Because the interest of at least one community partner was in Latinx youth residing in the 29303 zip code

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<sup>1</sup> <https://censusreporter.org/profiles/05000US45083-spartanburg-county-sc/>

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.strategicspartanburg.org/data/Spartanburg-Racial-Equity-Index.pdf>

(which includes properties located in both the City of Spartanburg and outside of City limits), data related to the 29303 zip code retains a zip code reference when possible.

## **2. Top-Line Analysis**

Intersectionality is a key concept that illuminates the data.<sup>4</sup> Particular combinations of intersectional forces, each of which is anchored in histories (sometimes multiple histories, including those of the place of family origin and those of the receiving community), shape lives. Intersectional harms may accrue to particular individuals according to dimensions of their positionality, including but not limited to language, place of birth, place of residence, race and ethnicity, gender identity, sexual orientation, and/or religious affiliation, because of policies or practices that perpetuate systemic inequalities. An example will serve as an illustration. Consider an Indigenous Guatemalan parent, with limited proficiency in Spanish and no proficiency in English, who has sought asylum in the United States with her school-aged child. She awaits her hearing while living with extended family in South Carolina. Under current immigration protocols, because of the lack of interpreters proficient in Indigenous languages, she may experience a wait time of years for immigration proceedings; challenges in accessing legal aid; difficulty understanding services available to her daughter; and prejudices on the part of fellow immigrants from her country of origin who are not Indigenous. In aggregating all ethnic identities in the category “Hispanic/Latino,” the U.S. government does not account for the multi-ethnic and multi-racial realities of the Americas, and we wish to draw attention to the multiple factors, including race and ethnicity, that shape Latinx experiences differentially in the United States. Latinx youth who are the children of first-generation immigrants may find themselves navigating particular dynamics and expectations at home, which are the products of intersectional forces in the parents’ country (or culture) of origin, and different dynamics and expectations outside of the home, in groups of peers of diverse identities and in institutional settings like school.

Several major themes consistently emerged from the observation and interview data, and these themes serve as the organizing structure of this report. We also include a section of data that was important but not repeated in enough respondents to constitute the inclusion of an additional theme. The lens of intersectionality will be helpful in considering these experiences shared by respondents.

## **3. Methodology**

There were two primary methods for gathering data:

1. phenomenological observations by researchers as participant-observers or bystander-observers in community spaces;

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<sup>4</sup> Intersectionality is a term coined in 1989 by legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw. Her article is here: <https://chicagounbound.uchicago.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?referer=&httpsredir=1&article=1052&context=ucf>

2. semi-structured interviews by researchers with community members (primarily ages 18 and older, as research protocols require that youth under 18 have parental consent to participate) to elicit narratives around questions:
  - What is out-of-school time like for you? (for youth)
  - What is out-of-school time like for children and youth in your household?

All observations and the majority of interviews took place in the summer months (June, July, August 2019) when most schools were out of session. Data from observations and interviews were analyzed using established qualitative methods,<sup>5</sup> and this written report was prepared from that analysis. All names of individuals, along with some personal details, have been changed to preserve anonymity. Some of the parents spoke with us in Spanish, and their words have been translated into English for this report. The youth we spoke with were young adults recalling their time as high school students, or students under the age of 18 who spoke with us with consent from their guardians. The report and findings are being shared with community collaborators whose interest sparked the project and will shape further work in community contexts.

#### **4. Major Themes Identified in the Data**

The following themes consistently emerged from the observation and interview data, and these themes serve as the organizing structure of this report.

##### **Social Connectedness and Social Isolation: Family Dynamics**

Intersectional forces affect social connectedness and social isolation for Spartanburg area Latinx youth. These include the following:

- Parenting approaches
- Perceptions of financial stress and the connection to parental expectations of children
- Parents' perceptions of lack of safe spaces
- Work schedules and lack of access to transportation limit youth OST options
- Work schedules limit time to connect as a family
- Barriers to parental involvement in schools and children's healthcare: English proficiency, work schedules, transportation
- Care work commitments of women and girls within the household

##### **Social Connectedness in Institutional Spaces**

- Schools and theater programs at school
- (Catholic) church

##### **Sexual Health, Dating, and Family Expectations**

- Youth discouraged or prohibited from dating
- Parents sometimes uncomfortable discussing sexual health with their children
- Sex education classes in the schools
- Teen pregnancy

##### **Appreciation for Efforts for Greater Inclusion**

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<sup>5</sup> Heideggerian hermeneutic analysis

### **Other Important Topics Mentioned by Participants**

- Grandparents
  - Language proficiency of youth
  - Special needs youth
  - College access
  - Youth in trouble
  - Impact of socio-political context on families and children
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## **Social Connectedness and Social Isolation: Family Dynamics**

### **Parenting approaches**

Our team's interviews with Latinx youth and Latinx parents suggest that youth are growing up in households with varying parenting styles, though the perceptions of our respondents are that Latinx parents are generally stricter than the parents of their peers of other racial and ethnic identities.

Valentina, a mother of teenagers, described her parenting style by saying, "I would not say I am strict. But I do constantly remind my kids of how important it is to stay in school. My husband and I had to go through a lot to get to this country. We miss our Mexico. But we are here so that my kids can have a better life."

Gabriela explained she never had many problems raising her children, most of whom are young adults now, partly because they knew she was keeping a close eye on them.

Gabriela: They were much more better [behaved than other children] because I didn't have any business with anyone else, mine were better because they didn't do any bad things. Mine weren't in problems with the school or other students. Though one of my friends did have problems.

Interviewer: Why was that?

Gabriela: Because they didn't care about their children.

Interviewer: You mentioned you went to church with your children. Did those families also go to church?

Gabriela: Yeah, they did which is why going to church doesn't really mean anything nowadays. In the church, the children of my friends would just bother and cry. Mine would not because they knew that a good pinch would be waiting on them. They would just see my fingers and get quiet [laughs]. Meanwhile the other children just run around the pews and throw their toys and food.

The youth we spoke with told us about their parents' approaches to raising them. Martina told us, "My parents were always strict. My friend Diego's too." Sebastian told us that his parents were very strict:

In middle school I kinda just went to school and just went straight home. I had really strict parents so I didn't really have time to do anything else. And in high school it was

the same until around sophomore year because I was able to drive and I started working. Then after work I would go to a friend's house. That was pretty much it.

Nicole talked less about how strict her parents are and more about how stressful she finds her home environment because of her parents:

I feel so much freer outside of home. Once I was just sitting on the couch at home and my parents started arguing. They kept raising their voice at each other and I was just there as a spectator. This is why I always get up and leave the living room and go into my room... This is why I am always locked up in my room, because I want to be away from all those problems. It causes me a lot of stress and it really affects me. My parents never realize. And my older siblings just laugh at me and always make fun of me at how I am always at the house.

In talking with Sebastian and Paula, an interviewer asked, "As you were growing up did you go to parties as a family or even on your own?" They responded:

Sebastian: My parents were very strict, like I couldn't even go to quinceañeras. And they wouldn't even go unless it was family.

Paula: Yeah, we went to family parties a lot. I grew up with a lot of cousins and it felt like every month like somebody was having some sort of party or whatever, and that's what it's like in the summer, too. I mean, I'm older now so it's fine, but since I was 14 or 15 there were parties like almost every weekend, it felt. But my parents were strict in the sense as a family but we weren't allowed to wander around. 'Cause like other girls, it felt like they got there by themselves and they were my age and they were just hovering around boys or whatever.

Interviewer: Would your parents let you date at all?

Sebastian: Nooooo. Hell no, not even like. No.

Paula: I think they wouldn't let me date. But I had some things on the side, you know. But they didn't officially let me date until I was like 18. I graduated high school and they were just like alright you're getting ready to leave, I suppose we should recognize it or whatever. The only difference was when we would go to family events, [my boyfriend] would come along too. But I mean, they would let me go out on weekends and go out to parties on my own so. But they wouldn't like to make it official.

Victoria talked about how her strict upbringing and responsibilities in her youth affected her once she went away to college:

When I started college, I lived in the dorms. I had all that freedom, all that time to do whatever, but since I am so used to being under [my parents'] roof and being restricted from certain things and certain experiences, I did not know what to do with all that freedom. I had a hard time trying to figure out what I like to do. Since my friends' parents have always been more liberal with them, they try to get me to go out. And because I am so used to having some sort of responsibility I don't know how to have fun. They'd take me out to clubs, and parties. That's when I started seeing a lot of people smoking, being around the smell of weed and stuff like that. So it was a new environment for me. I would enjoy going out because I love to dance and I would have fun. So it felt nice to be able to be like, "I'm hungry," no matter what time it was and you could just go out without



having to be asking your parents, and them say no, it's too late. So it felt nice not necessarily needing to give any sort of explanation of where you're going and just doing whatever you wanted to do. Because, you are so used to asking them and them saying no, or giving you a certain time to be back home. Therefore, all of that was a new experience for me.

Luis's comments indicated he perceives his parents as less strict than the parents of his Latinx friends. But even with less strict parents, his sisters are not allowed to date:

Interviewer: Sometimes, are your sisters free to do other things in their free time?

Luis: Yeah really. They always go to the mall and out to eat. My parents are not as strict as other Hispanic parents.

Interviewer: How so?

Luis: Well like, my friends always tell me that their parents make them stay home most of the time. Unless they are working with their parents. My friends can't like stay over at someone's house or go out past dark. And it's just my Hispanic friends because my white friends can do almost anything. My sisters are not allowed to have boyfriends. But they have had a few. And my sisters have sneaked out for them. But they haven't done it in a while now. Mostly they just go out shopping.

### **Perceptions of financial stress and the connection to parental expectations of children**

In our conversations, we heard both youth and adults express perceptions of financial stress in their families, along with parental expectations of children to do the work needed for a better life, more free from financial stress, instability, or insecurity.

Two of the young women we spoke with talked about wanting to avoid costing their parents money when it could be avoided. Victoria, who recently started college, said, "Sometimes, I would hear that the uniforms [for an after-school sport] cost a bit much and my parents have always struggled with money, so I did not want to be a burden." Luciana expressed similar sentiments about not wanting to cost her parents money when she could help it: "In high school, my last three years I worked [in a fast food restaurant] to get some money, not because I really needed to but because I could, and I wanted some extra money. Because I didn't want my parents to buy my stuff. I just worked and stayed at home sometimes."

Gabriela, a mother of five, spoke about how important it was to her to instill in her children values of responsibility and working toward success:

Interviewer: What were the priorities that you instilled in your children when they were growing up?

Gabriela: For them to keep studying and studying the most they could and to show them how to be responsible in all forms.

Interviewer: How would you try to do that?

Gabriela: Sometimes with some whoppings for real. Because they wouldn't listen.

Valentina, a mother of three, even made a point of trying to instill these values in a (Latino) member of our research team (with whom she did not have a familial relation):

Stay in school son, you are already in college, don't mess up. Always keep in mind their sacrifices for you. Don't get married. Getting yourself in trouble could bring your future down. I remind my kids of that all the time. My son is trying to save up to go to community school. And I think my oldest daughter is smart enough to get into college.

Abril, also a mother of three, in a separate interview, made a very similar statement to the same researcher: "Good. Stay that way [unmarried]. Once you get married everything is different. You do not need to get married. Just keep studying and get a good job. Getting married would only make you so much busier and you would only have to work."

Three of the youth with whom we spoke talked about their parents' wishes for a better life for them, and the pressures they felt from those expectations and from their own desire not to let their parents down. Sofia said, "My parents always wanted me to go to college, so they pushed academics before anything else."

Victoria told us:

I don't want my parents to feel like I failed them. It's like an overwhelming pressure I have at times. I have to do this because if I don't I'm going to fail them or I am not going to be what they want me to be. Even though there are times where I feel like I can't do it, I always have to do my best because if I don't I'm going to let them down. The moment you start getting older, the more responsibilities they place on your shoulders. You have to do this, to be this, to be better than this. Don't drop out of school, do this, stay out of this. Unless you want to struggle like we did. So in my head, I can't do this or that. You don't want to lose I guess a sense of control, because you've always grown up with that in the back of your head. You have to do it for them, and it's like you don't think about yourself sometimes... I also think that with that, too, if you ever experience [messing up, making a mistake] they get on to you about it. Sometimes without meaning to throw it in your face. I don't know, I guess they just don't want you making a lot of mistakes. Even though I feel like mistakes sometimes shape you into a better person. And it's normal to make mistakes. It's just frustrating because I feel like I have to keep up an image of myself to them.

Victoria directly linked her parents' hard work and their high expectations of her:

I don't know why they think we don't see how hard they work. I guess maybe it's because we don't say it sometimes, I guess sometimes we unknowingly do what they wouldn't want us to do and that makes them feel unappreciated. I think that the least they expect from us is to at least do good in school, have high standards, and high morals. It's just hard though, because sometimes you just want that support from your parents, to be able to talk to them about whatever, without having that fear that they are going to judge or shame you for feeling some type of way.

Andrés, currently in college, talked with us about the overlapping topics of financial stress in his family and the expectations on him to succeed and work hard:

[High school] was very busy, you know? I always pushed myself to get excellent grades. I knew that I had to get good grades in order to get somewhere in life. Also, my parents did not bring me to this country so that I would end up working in jobs as they are. I look

up to my parents a lot. They have supported me throughout my time in school. Ever since, like elementary school, they stopped helping me in my work because they did not know the material and could not really help me. But I kept going because the struggles they went through motivate me to become an even better version of myself every day. Even now I try to always be focused on what I can do to make my parents' life easier.

Nicole talked about family friction with overlapping issues of financial stress, her mother's connections to her country of origin, and Nicole's own desire to graduate from her school here in the U.S.:

My parents always argue about small things. Not even big problems. Like car insurance payments. Or like my dad wanted to cancel some sort of service and mom didn't want it. That's why my mom always leaves us and goes to Mexico for short periods of time. She's going, like all the time. It feels like she's the one that's going out. Her mind is set on Mexico because she really wants to go back. But she doesn't because she knows that I really want to finish my education here.

### **Parents' perceptions of lack of safe spaces**

The parents we spoke with expressed a desire for the physical and psychological safety of their children. And youth and parent respondents agreed that it would be desirable to have more places for wholesome, safe social interaction between youth.

During a focus group at the Upstate Family Resource Center devoted to health and the Latinx community, the facilitator asked about what is needed or desired for youth in relationship to mental health, and a teenage boy said, "More events and places for teenagers." He said that there is only the mall and the movies, and that many people no longer go to the mall.

A woman in that focus group said she agreed that there need to be spaces for youth where they can do wholesome things. She said that she would like parents to have good information so that they can help their own kids stay well. This same woman, earlier in the conversation, in response to a specific question from a note taker, had said that her son tells her there is vaping on the bus, and that she has told him, "you know what is good and what is bad to do," to which another woman agreed that "we [Hispanic parents] are strict" but that their children enter environments where they encounter other kids who don't have the same kind of upbringing.

A different woman at this gathering mentioned bullying in schools. The facilitator asked what the adults do if they become aware of bullying. A couple of women said they would talk to people at the school, like the principal. One woman said that the schools are very responsive when the children are young, but when they get older, the schools are not as responsive. She explained that her daughter, who is in high school [*secundaria*, grades 7-12], was taking some additional, optional schooling. "But the kids said things to insult her, just to make her feel bad," and she explained that as a result, she and her husband decided not to keep sending her to school at that time. The facilitator asked what the nature of the insults were, and the woman said that the insults were about the fact that "we are Hispanic [*hispanos*]."

The teenage boy who had said that more places were needed for youth to go besides the mall and the movies spoke about how summer school did not seem to him to be a helpful learning environment. He said, “In summer school there are a lot of people who just don’t care about school.” He said he knew this because he failed a class and had to take summer school and that attitude was what he encountered.

When we spoke with an area educator about the environment for Latinx youth, he observed that there is reported information about gangs:

I know that there is a lot of gang activity. How much I couldn’t tell you, I try not to follow up on that always. I have heard some principals talk about it. There was the Latin Kings, I did hear that there was an impromptu fight club in one of the bathrooms [at a public high school]. I asked if it was true and everyone was like oh, what are you talking about.

When we spoke with Gabriela about her experience raising children, we asked, “How did you make sure that your children wouldn’t get in trouble?” She responded, “When my girls asked to go with friends I would always say no and instead I would tell them that their friends could come over but not the other way around. Same for my sons.” She added, “There is a lot of difference between today and the past because there is much more of a population now in the past 20 years since I’ve been in Spartanburg. So, it’s easier for the kids to get in problems. Back then everything was quiet so the more people, the more problems.” Gabriela also explained that because of the bad environment she had as a child, she was extra careful not to trust her children around anyone besides herself and her husband:

It’s because I grew up in a family full of drunks and so my mom would always cry because my father would come home drunk and hit her and us. So, I grew up in that state and I knew I didn’t want that for my children, understand that. So that’s why I was always vigilant of my children and trying to protect them so that nothing bad happens. I didn’t want anyone to take care of them, not even the neighbors.

Luciana, currently in college and recalling her time growing up in Spartanburg County, explained that she didn’t have a neighborhood to spend time in with peers like some of her friends did. An interviewer asked “So your friends that were not involved in sports or were not working, do you have any idea what they were doing?” Luciana responded:

Playing video games. Some of them were just very lazy. And they were allowed to go to their friends’ houses and stuff. These people that we knew, we knew a lot of people from the Dorman area, Fairforest area. The guys that were my brothers’ friends, which I was good friends with, they could go to their friends’ houses and stuff and they didn’t really have to work either. So yeah, they would just play a bunch of video games and just play with each other. We lived like... it’s not really like a neighborhood ’cause all the houses were spread out. So I didn’t really have friends around me that I could go knocking on their door. But I feel like, since they were in neighborhoods, they could easily go to other people’s houses since their parents were at work. But they just had those extra resources.

In our observations and some of our interviews, we were able to look more closely and specifically at the 29303 zip code area. Some parents, including a 29303 respondent who moved out of the zip code, articulated concerns for the safety and well-being of their children in the

area. Members of our research team also experienced interactions in the 29303 zip code in the vicinity of North Church Street and further north, in locations off of Asheville Highway, that made them uncomfortable. All observations occurred in daylight hours.

Brianna is a mother of three children ranging from 8 to 16. She recently moved out of the 29303 area. We asked her why she moved.

Brianna: Because where we used to live was a trailer park where the landlord would raise the rent and since it is a Hispanic community, I believe that raising the rent was a way of treating Latinos a certain way because for any reason one had to pay for something. To be sincere, the ambiance of the trailer park was not inviting for the youth. It was not good.

Interviewer: How so?

Brianna: There were always suspicious (*vagos*) people so it wasn't a good place. Sometimes you would see older kids walking around the neighborhood that probably did not attend school. My house was even broken into.

Interviewer: Were other people robbed, too?

Brianna: Yes, a few of my neighbors also had things stolen but the thieves invaded my home.

Interviewer: Were you all inside of the home at the time?

Brianna: No, but from my neighbors they had stolen bikes and other items from their yards. Which is the reason why I had to move because the environment was not good for young ones. You would see adolescents just roaming the streets.

Interviewer: How were the adolescents behaving?

Brianna: My eldest son was once like them, wanting to be outside all the time so when he grew older he began to work. My other son I really didn't let him go outside for those reasons. So that is why we moved. It did not make sense to stay in a place where the rent was so high and not have a good environment for the kids.

When two young, female members of our research team took Spartanburg Bus Route 3, catching the bus on North Church Street, one of them observed, "A total of two times I hear cars honk, and as I turn and look each time it is a male who glances in our direction."

Spending time in a trailer park in the 29303 area, one of our researchers observed:

It is the middle of the day and I drive around the trailer park by myself in my car. The trailer park is located near two Hispanic supermarkets, a few car dealers, insurance place, and money transfer services. The small trailer park is composed of mostly trailers with a few small houses scattered in different corners of the trailer park. The few houses that are present are either abandoned with boarded plywood pieces or they are well kept except for some that have long grown-out grass in their front yard. There are at least three cars that are left in the front of the yards of the trailer homes that have a missing tire or do not seem functional... There is only one other automobile in the street, a truck. It is driving slowly as it approaches the intersection where I am. The man in the truck, who appears to be Hispanic, is staring back at me or my car as he continues to drive slowly down the street.

At the flea market in 29303, a young, Latina, female member of our research team observed: “The old men stare, and I hate it, although I am used to it.”

### **Work Schedules and Lack of Access to Transportation Limit Youth OST options**

We heard from parents and youth about demanding work schedules for parents and problems of access to transportation. Abril, a mother of three children who are all now young adults, told us that her children had limited options for their out-of-school activities due to their time spent working and transportation issues:

My kids never really volunteered or did sports. They almost always worked during the summer. Ever since they were old enough to work, my husband took them to work with him [in landscaping]. I could never take my kids anywhere because we only have one car and we had just arrived in the US eleven years ago. My kids quickly picked up English, but we couldn't make time for them because at the time we were both working.

Brianna, a mother of three who does not currently work for income outside the home, shared with us that she cannot get a driver's license but “I would not mind driving 15-20 minutes especially if it is a place where my kids can be entertained.” When we mentioned some people might be afraid of driving without a license, she said, “Yeah, and really, I'm still fearful of driving but I still do it for my kids.”

Luciana, currently in college, recalled her time in a Spartanburg high school and talked with us about what she did and did not find ways to participate in:

Yeah, and then my freshman year and my other years [of high school] I would spend the first month at sports camps. For like basketball, volleyball, and then the other times I would just stay at home and take care of my little sister. Sometimes my mom would work, but it would vary depending on her employer's scheduling. So she would sometimes be there and sometimes not. But when we were little, she wasn't really there 'cause she was always working and my dad was never there. Like during the day, during the weekends and during the afternoons. So, I had older siblings and up until I was in middle school they were there to take of us, but they also did sports and stuff, so it was basically like us kids taking care of each other at home. We never really went outside 'cause we didn't have a car, and they couldn't drive.

Victoria, who recently started college, talked about how her parents' work schedules and her own commitments at home made her disinclined to participate in after-school sports. She said:

I wanted to play softball at one point. However, I would think about how much time it would take and plus the things I would have to do at home, or like since my parents worked a lot, I didn't want to be in a sport and then them not being able to go see me, or them not having the time, as well as them being tired. I don't know, I guess it's just me.

Paula told us that her own work outside the home ended up limiting her out-of-school-time activities:

For middle school up until I was 15 or 16 when I could work, I played soccer after school. So that's what most of my time revolved around and other academic stuff. Once I

could start working, then I just made the choice to quit soccer and just start working and so that's all I did, just work and school work.

### **Work schedules limit time to connect as a family**

The work schedules of youth and adult income earners in the family were mentioned by parents and youth as factors that leave little time for connection as a family, but we also heard details on how parents, especially the mothers, try to carve out what time they can for their children. The stories we heard indicate that youth are often working with a parent of the same gender or holding a job of their own. Fifteen was the age typically mentioned for when youth begin to work. Older girls who are not working outside the home often care for younger siblings.

Parents are aware of the stresses on the life of the family caused by their work schedules, and they discuss overlapping work schedules by income earners (both adult and youth) that leave little time for connection or the independence of youth. Valentina told us that she and her husband both work seven days a week, and said her “kids are big enough to babysit themselves.” She explained, “My 16-year-old usually stays home with my 13-year-old. My older son works at a [fast-food] restaurant.” She added:

My 16-year-old used to work with me, and we would just bring my 13-year-old to help us too. Now, I sometimes either bring one or the other, [because] my 16-year-old wants to find a job. She insists that joining me in my cleaning work is not for her. I think she has applied to a few fast-food restaurants and she is just now waiting on the call back.”

When we asked Valentina what a typical out-of-school day was like for her and her children, she told us:

When I go to work and leave them at home, they usually wake up by ten to eat breakfast. After that I check back on them at lunch time where maybe they cook themselves something to eat. My son works in the afternoon, so he is also there. Once my son leaves, then my daughters just stay home alone until I get back from work.

In contrast, Brianna, who does not work for income outside the home, described for us a typical after-school time with her children:

Brianna: I go and pick them up after they get out of school and then give them something to eat. After that they go and do homework and my daughter plays soccer, so there are days that I take her to play soccer, but my son doesn't like being outside in the sun so he stays at home.

Interviewer: Do you all go watch her play at her soccer games?

Brianna: Yeah, sometimes it's just me that goes to watch her play.

Still, even though Brianna is able to spend time with her daughter and support her after-school activities, she told us that time with her family being all together is rare, even on weekends:

Well, in reality, it's very rare if we ever spend time together as a family. For example, my son works in a restaurant and usually it's Saturdays and Sundays. My husband mostly works during the weekend and has days off during the week... He doesn't really have a set schedule so he will sometimes leave on Fridays and sometimes won't return until Monday. And my son will sometimes enter work at 8 a.m. and get off at 4 p.m. or even

12 a.m. so no one really has consistent work hours. The majority of the time it's just me and my two younger kids.

Gabriela works for income outside the home and describes balancing that work carefully with time spent with her five children. She said, "You know growing up, my parents were never there at my school programs and stuff so that's why I try to make it to all of their programs. I came from nothing." We asked her to think back to when her (now mostly young-adult) children were younger, and what after school time was like for them then. She told us:

Gabriela: [They would] do homework. Take care of our animals, clean the house, cut the grass and do their homework.

Interviewer: What about the weekends and summer time?

Gabriela: Since they were in daycare, they had to do daycare activities in the summer. I worked nearby so they would just come with me to work when they were growing up. I wouldn't work on the weekends, but we would finish the chores from the weekdays. We would go to the church all of the Sundays, all of them, maybe that's why they don't wanna go anymore because they got tired of it. Well, I would try to take them. There would be some gatherings such as birthdays and quinceañeras that we would go to and that would include people we knew really well.

Gabriela spoke at length about what she sees as a necessary, difficult balance between parents working for income and spending time raising their children.

Interviewer (in follow-up to a statement by Gabriela): So why is it that you think that your neighbors' and friends' children are acting differently from yours even though they are in the same environment?

Gabriela: What happens is that all of us have different priorities. For them, their priority is to get money and to have it. For me it was to educate my children, for my husband and me. So, at the end of the day when my children actually go out and do something they can say thank you mom and dad. On the contrary, those other children won't be able to say anything because they won't do much with their life. So, there is a big difference from parents having kids and not taking care of them and then having kids and taking care of them. For me in my mind when I got married I wanted children.... If your priority is just to have children then, poor children is all I have to say... It's unjust sometimes because the Latino immigrants that come here even have 2-3 jobs, so it's no wonder the children do what they want. They think that by buying everything they want that they are doing good by their children. For me I didn't buy my children phones until they were 18. That's number one. The difference between all families is their priorities. If you have someone that values money the most, then the children will be lost. It's not bad to work, but it's bad to not care for your children. The more money you have then the more you'll waste. Now that my children are all grown up, I now have a new car and all the nice things I wanted.

Interviewer: Without you working as much, how did you make sure that your family had enough?

Gabriela: We didn't, that's the thing, that's why I started my garden, and I would just do things to make up for the money. We had to make sure that my husband's money



could last. We didn't go out to eat. We had to limit ourselves, even when we got a kerosene heater I would have to take care of the kids so that they didn't get burnt. Looking back the hardships were worth it for me... all I have are my children and house. We all have different priorities and I put in my mind to have a family and to care for them.

Brianna, who used to work outside the home but no longer does, also talked about the difficult balance between working for needed income and being able to spend time with her children:

Brianna: I think that being in this country, one gets so absorbed into working that it's hard to pay attention to the kids. When I used to work, I would get home tired and would just want to make dinner and that's it. That was when they were younger, but now my husband is the one who is not home but I am, even if there is less income, I can pay attention a little more to my kids because kids get lost so quickly in this country, and that's actually what I saw in the trailer park that I used to live in, in the 29303 with some of the teens. Their parents would work so much that they wouldn't realize if their kids went to school or not. Because if you leave before they go to school or work way after, how would you know.

Interviewer: Would that happen with people that you knew?

Brianna: Yeah! I had my neighbor that had a son who my son would say, "Yeah mom, I am pretty sure he did not go to school" and his mom worked a lot.

The comments we heard from youth painted a similar picture of families with limited time together due to work commitments. Martina, who lives in the 29303 area and recently graduated from high school, talked about working extensively outside the home:

Like, I guess, my junior or senior year I started working at McDonald's, it was my first job. The one here on Asheville Hwy. I worked a lot especially my junior year. When I started I would work like 30 hours a week and then I was in [theater club, which involved some travel on weekends.] That's really the only thing I did when it came to extracurricular activities after school and then I would work, that's it.

When an interviewer asked Andrés if his parents are strict, he replied, "Not really, but that's just because they are constantly at work all the time." He went on to explain, "Yeah, I could have very easily chosen not to be a good kid and gone out all the time with people. My parents never really asked me about my social life in great detail."

Similarly, Nicole indicated her parents were not at home very much when she was home. In fact when an interviewer asked her, "What does a typical day for you at home look like?" she made no mention of her parents. She replied, "I just typically get on Netflix or something, you know? And it's not like I'm just lying in bed. I get up and clean the house and I also go out with my friends. But it is rare when I go with them. But when we do hang out it's like we go to the movies or the mall, something simple."

Luis told us he sees his father because they work together, but he didn't mention his parents when talking about the time he spends at home:

Luis: My summer has been hectic. It's mostly been just me working with my dad.

Interviewer: And how's that?

Luis: I mean, it's construction and my dad is always making me go with him.

Interviewer: Do you work all week?

Luis: No, I only work with him [four days a week]. My dad only pays me nine dollars an hour and we do work long hours. But then he's very strict. He really doesn't want me to spend all summer in the house.

Interviewer: And how much time do you spend in the house?

Luis: I spend lots of time at home. I usually just play video games all the time.

Interviewer: So how would you usually spend a whole day when you didn't have to go to work?

Luis: Video games really.

After Victoria had mentioned several times how much her parents work, the interviewer asked her, "Could you tell me a bit about after school? Would your parents still be at work?" Victoria replied:

Most of the time, sometimes my mom gets out at seven, sometimes she gets out at four. It just depends on her work days. My dad he'd come home around eight, he works for his own, he does yard work. Recently, he started coming home around six or seven, it just depends. But yeah he used to come home late, by the time he would come home we would all be done eating.

When asked about what her summers were like during her school years, Victoria said:

Nothing. It was just me and my brother. To this day it still is just me and him. My mom goes to work, I wake up, clean the house, get my brother food. And then wait until she comes home, see what she wants to make to eat, sometimes my brother and I do go out to the gym, but other than that we just stay at home. We used to go out as a family, like to the movies or bowling but I guess as we got older it's to the point, since they are always working, and we are so used to being home, we don't really seek out that interaction. In the weekends I try hanging out with friends, but I make sure I get everything done first before I go or at least wait until my mom gets home. So I do try to, but you know most Hispanic parents are really strict and my parents are kind of strict. They've been trying to be more liberal but they still expect me to get home at a certain time. Sometimes, I am just like, I can't do it.

### **Barriers to parental involvement in schools and children's healthcare: English proficiency, work schedules, transportation**

We heard from Spanish-speaking parents about ways in which their language proficiency limited their involvement in the lives of their children, who were often increasingly (or only) proficient in English. Valentina, a mother of three, said, "It is hard coming from another country and not being able to speak any English."

Gabriela spoke with us about the language barrier between parents and children:

[Letting there be a language barrier between parents and children] is the worst error for a family, being a Latino. The parents are Spanish speaking, but they don't even bother teaching their children because they want them to blend in with the English-speaking culture. How are they supposed to understand each other? I'll tell you another story, there

was a mother that went to the doctor because her son was not feeling well and when she took him to the doctor, the doctor asked what was wrong and the mother had no idea because the boy doesn't tell her anything. When the doctor talked to them separately he found out that they spoke different languages. The mom only spoke Spanish and the child only spoke English. So, the doctor asked how they communicate with each other and she shrugged and said that the boy just points at things. He was just 11 years old. And you are gonna find a lot of families like that... Today there is much more help [with translation], so now it's much easier for a person to just not want to learn because there is more help. If the parents don't try to understand the children then that's when the rebellion starts because no one is listening to each other.

Brianna, a mother of three, spoke of how a lack of transportation prevents her and her husband from giving their children the support they would like to in school:

If we had the opportunity to have a license, we would be able to drive our kids to school and support them. The school buses too are overpacked and they get all squished together. Some mornings that they would come late, they would fit four kids in one seat, saying oh you guys are small enough to sit together and have them squish into one seat. So I would take them to school instead, otherwise knowing the routes would have helped, too.

Victoria, who just recently started college, recalled her school years and how she was often responsible for getting herself and her brother to school:

Interviewer: So, when you woke up for school were your parents still at home, or would they be gone for work?

Victoria: My mom would already be gone for work. My dad, he'd still be at home for a bit, but after I woke up he would leave. Sometimes, he would wake up extra early just so he could wake up my brother for school, since I would still be sleeping and I guess he didn't want me to wake up that early. There was a point where I had to wake both of us to ride the early bus, but eventually my dad would like wake up at around 7:00 am and wake us up as well. But when I was younger, he would wake me up and go straight to work. And I guess hope for me not to fall back asleep, make it on the school bus and make it to class.

Victoria spoke about how her parents were rarely there for school events because they were working long hours. She spoke of this absence in terms of lack of support for her:

I knew deep down they weren't going to be able to go. Because when I was younger in elementary school there would be mother and father day events, or bring this person or that person, and you know most of the time they couldn't go. So, it's like I did not feel that support from the beginning, therefore, as I got older I was like, there is no point in me trying to tell them to come to this event... I guess at that young age, you don't realize until you start seeing other people being able to be around their parents or have that relationship with their parents where their parents can come to those events and show support like that, and it's like you don't have it. So, it comes to a point where as you get older, it's like, why even try to ask? When you know they are going to be tired or get out late from work. You get used to it, so you don't even ask anymore. It kind of sucks sometimes, but also at the same time it helped me out in a way. It has helped me try to

find more support in myself, instead of having them to fall back on. Although it is hard at times.

Luciana and her siblings did participate quite a bit in sports, but their parents were unable to attend much due to their work schedules:

I'm just going to use my brother as an example, so he would work Monday through Saturday, during the summer and up until he was a sophomore... 'cause he did football, too, until he was a freshman. And then he did soccer. So, football would take over the summers and during the school year in the afternoons, we would always pick him up after games and stuff. And my sister did track. And so, my family in particular, we were always doing sports. And we were always the last ones there. 'Cause my parents would come from work and stuff. And they never picked us up on time.

### **Care work commitments of women and girls within the household**

From parents and youth, we heard consistently that women and girls had heavy care work commitments within the home. Girls are expected to help with household chores and caring for their younger siblings, and mothers often work outside the home in addition to cooking, cleaning, and childcare in the home. The dynamics we heard described are inflected in cases by traditional gender roles: adolescent boys leave the house to work with fathers, and adolescent girls remain at home to help a mother or to care for siblings.

Luis, who works outside the home with his father, talked with us about the expectations his sisters have for work at home: "I have one sister in 4<sup>th</sup> grade, one in 9<sup>th</sup>, and one in 12<sup>th</sup>. They make the one in 12<sup>th</sup> grade help with like, the kitchen. The one in 9<sup>th</sup> grade helps clean. The one in 4<sup>th</sup> grade is pretty lazy, but she sometimes helps."

Nicole asked to be interviewed at a restaurant near her home, explaining, "I chose this place for a reason. I will take any opportunity to get outside... Yeah, that's basically my life. I have to be back soon to babysit again for my sister." Nicole talked about bartering household chores to earn her phone bill and time out of the house:

But yeah, I need a job soon. I want to get out of the house. I had to wash my mom's car today, so that I could come here and meet you. And I always have to do chores or something so that my siblings could also help me out with stuff. So, they almost kind of blackmail me. They will make me babysit or take them lunch in exchange to pay for my phone bill.

Sofia, now in college and reflecting on her school years, painted a similar picture. She had opportunities to get outside the house, but she also had significant in-home responsibilities: "There was a lot of cleaning going on. We would play outside, occasionally going out shopping and going to places. Like the mall just so we could get out of the house." When we asked her for more detail, Sofia talked about being home a lot, and mentioned her older sister sometimes being responsible for picking her up after sports practice:

Interviewer: So, what did out of school time look like for you, whether it was in the summer or after school?

Sofia: I mean I was just going home.

Interviewer: Then let's start with primary school and work our way up to high school.

Sofia: Well I would just wait with my siblings for our mom to pick me up. I didn't do anything as far as after school activities... I tried out for [an arts program] and was in that, Tuesdays and Fridays from whenever we got out of school to about 4:45. It was me and my brother who were in that program. Then the other days I would just go home. Actually, lemme go back... in primary school my mom would pick us up and we would go to Day Care.

Interviewer: And what about the weekends?

Sofia: We would just stay home; my mom didn't work but my dad did. We'd see him after he got out of work which would be around six or seven... My brother played football and my older sister would come pick us up after practice when my mom was working because she worked afternoons too and so did my dad, they would get out late.

Luciana also talked about being mostly home during her teen years, and not getting to see her friends much outside of sports or church. She told us:

I didn't really have a lot of Hispanic friends growing up but there were families that we knew... the kids... wait, actually yeah it was pretty similar they just wouldn't go to sports stuff. And until they got of age, like the boys especially, one of them works at an outdoor market, well, the dad works at the market, but like they drive deliveries in trucks to different places and that's what the boys would do. They would just work with their dads during the summer. My brother did that too, he'd work. And the girls, we would just stay home. Most of my friends would play sports or like the ones I knew, we would always go to church, that's how I could talk to them.

Victoria talked about her responsibilities doing chores at home and looking out for her younger brother:

Victoria: I'd get to [high] school like around 8:00, because classes usually start around 8:20... I'd go to class, do whatever work they told us to do. You know the usual. I am usually not the person that talks to a lot of people, so I really just hung out with the two people I knew. Sometimes I would go with a friend or if I saw a group of them, but usually it would be me and [male name] or whoever and after that I would get home. I would do my homework or sometimes I would do my homework at school since at home I had to do other stuff, like chores and all that. So clean the house, and back when my brother was younger I had to care for him because my parents both work. Although now since he is older, I really don't have to do much for him and my parents still work. That's pretty much it, just school, homework, and chores. I didn't do anything at school such as sports.

Interviewer: So you would come back from school on the bus, you would get home and your brother would already be there?

Victoria: Yes, he would get out earlier than me because sometimes my bus would be late. So I'd come home around 4:45-ish and he'd already be there and if my mom wasn't there yet he'd be there by himself. So I would be responsible to cook for him. I wouldn't really have free time to go out with friends and such because I would have to take care of my little brother.

The descriptions we heard from parents gave this same impression of women and girls being responsible for care work in the home. Abril, a parent of two boys and one girl, all young adults now, mentioned her oldest son helping her with his little brother, but now that the children are all grown, her daughter still spends time at home to help with household duties:

Abril: My first son had the option to become involved in soccer, but he chose to help me out with his little brother. During the first few months, he was the one that took care of the baby because both my husband and I worked.

Interviewer: So what did a typical day look like for you and your family [when your kids were growing up]?

Abril: Well now, it's more of the same [as it was then]. My husband takes my younger son to work with him since he doesn't go to school anymore. My daughter stays home with me and helps me do household stuff. But four years ago, back when all of my children were attending high school, it was different. The bus would pick up my children in the morning. My husband would go to work in the morning as well. I would usually cook breakfast for them then do things like wash clothes, make food, you know, clean the house. I would usually keep doing my chores when my kids would arrive home from school. My older child worked in a [fast-food restaurant] for a few hours and then returned home. My daughter and my other son would just wait until dinner to start their homework. My husband would return and then we would all have dinner. That's about it really.

Interviewer: And what about a typical day during the summer?

Abril: A typical summer day was more of the same. Only everyone would work. I picked up a job for a while during the night shift. Which worked with the schedule of everyone because I would usually work from 6 p.m.-6 a.m. My two sons would wake up and work with my husband early, almost around the same time I would get back from work. At the time my husband did [outdoor] work, so he took my kids with him. My daughter had it differently. She worked part time at a restaurant nearby. But she would only work in the afternoons. In the mornings she would cook and clean the house. My husband and kids would get back around six. My husband would then just stay home while my kids would sometimes just stay home or go out with their friends.

Gabriela also spoke of her husband and son working outside the home while she and her daughter were responsible for childcare, in addition to work outside the home:

My son started [working] maybe when he was a junior in high school and then was with me at the [the building where I worked] in the summer because I worked in maintenance. Then he worked at a local outdoor market and this was always during the summer. He would sometimes go with his father and work in landscaping when he was younger too. He also played football until his freshman year and then did soccer his sophomore through senior year. He was a smart boy so I almost never saw him read or any of that and it got him through college. My oldest daughter never worked or did any sports because she was always helping me take care of her siblings. My other ones did sports and activities with the school.

## **Social Connectedness in Institutional Spaces**

In our talks with Latinx youth, they mentioned difficulties they had connecting with other teens. Their main points of connection with other youth tended to be school and church, and both of these types of institutions, for some of those we interviewed, were also a place of disconnection. Latinx youth are not always socially connected to other Latinx youth because of the level of representation in their schools or because they do not have shared connections in their family's country of origin or do not fit a certain mold. And they can feel disconnected from their non-Latinx peers because they perceive that the level of involvement of their parents – and their own ability to be involved – is less than that of others. Theater surfaced as an area of positive social interaction for two youth from 29303 and was also highlighted by an educator in a district serving 29303 students.

### **Schools and theater programs at school**

We spoke with David, an educator who works with schools including those in the 29303 area, and asked him, “Seeing the Latinx students in the schools where you were, did you see these students spending time together or were they more separated from each other?” David’s response emphasized that the answer to that question partly depended on language usage:

I would say together more so. It depended more so on language usage, that was a big thing. One student, she wasn’t really involved in much but she was involved in JROTC. We did have several take part in JROTC. There were several involved in art some, and in music, but not a ton... Athletics-wise we’ve had a few students who were on boys’ soccer. It also depended on whether they were English speaking or Spanish speaking. About what they would get involved with, there were some in theater. They were also part of other clubs like a foreign language club. We’ve had another involved in medical society because she wanted to be a nurse.

Nicole, a youth from the 29303 area, specifically highlighted the theater program in her school as her way of connecting to her peers, even though her parents did not always support that choice. In response to the question, “How old are your friends?” Nicole replied:

They are my age, 16, I do have some friends that are seniors and going to college. I will miss them dearly. I joined this class, theater. And it was very different from my previous classes, this theater class gives you like, a family, you know, one that is always there for you, and I rarely feel like I am getting support from anyone. Two of my Hispanic friends in theater graduated, others left because they just couldn’t keep theater in their schedules out of class. It is a lot of commitment. My dad is always into me about theater. He thinks I will get nowhere in life with this. He always reminds me about how I quit basketball for theater. I did at first test out how to balance both, but then I realized that that was not going to work. Missing practices for basketball, missing games, and tournaments over theater just did not roll with me. I would much rather someone else have the spot that is actually passionate about the sport rather than having me showing up for half of the practices and still playing games.

Nicole is committed enough to theater that her commitment has forced her to make some difficult choices, including with her academics. She told us: “I am in honors classes, I want to

take AP and dual enrollment next year. But that would take time away from theater so it's hard to make this choice.”

Martina, who recently graduated after attending schools in the 29303 area, also called out theater as a point of connection:

Like, I guess my junior or senior year... I was in Thespian which is this club like a theater club so I did a lot of plays with the drama kids and that's kinda what I did, we did competitions at [nearby colleges], we would go for the weekends and do scenes. That's really the only thing I did when it came to extracurricular activities after school and then I would work, that's it.

Martina, who grew up in the 29303 area, told us that she predominantly spent time with fellow Latinx youth, in a way that she saw as the opposite of doing school-centered activities or having “school spirit”:

Me and [my gay friend] Diego have been friends since like, kindergarten almost... He has really been my friend my whole life. What we would do is like, go eat, that was like, our thing, go to restaurants as friends I guess. Sometimes we wouldn't go to class. We would just go out and eat. That's, like, the thing we would do. We would go to the mall. Kinda the same stuff we do all the time and go out to the movies. We'd, like, sometimes go to parties and sometimes we would hang out at each other's houses. 'Cause that's really the only friends I've had is just Latino friends, 'cause I can just relate to them the most. And my parents are really strict and I guess all of our parents are kinda strict. Since they know us, I mean they've known Diego all my life they are, like, cool with me hanging out with Diego, I guess that's why. That's really all, we really wouldn't be those kids to go to football games, we would never do that, we never had any school spirit. Some people would be like oh “I'd go muddin, I'd go to the football games,” that wasn't us at all. We'd like leave early during pep rallies and go somewhere else.

Even though she spent time mostly with other Latinx youth, Martina's connections with her Latinx peers were not always easy, as she indicated later in our interview with her. When we asked her, “Other than church on weekends would you and your family ever go out to family gatherings or quinceañeras?” Martina responded:

No, well, my family, I feel we are very different from other Latinos. I mean we're super – I guess my family is not the type to go out like that. Especially because we're from a certain part of Mexico, and I feel like everyone knew each other. Like everyone here is from the same area in Mexico. They all know each other and are like family. And I guess my parents, we just don't have any relatives or anything.

Paula, who went to school in an area just outside Spartanburg County, felt she didn't fit in with her Latinx peers even though she knew a lot of them through her parents and through the church she attended. She told us:

Most of my grade school life I was kinda like the nerdy kid, you know, most of the Hispanic group didn't really love me because I was, like, the weird one. I guess I grew up with a large group of Hispanics and I knew them because my parents tend to know everybody and we went to the same church, a large Catholic church. So, we knew each other.



## **(Catholic) Church**

Because we heard several of the youth and parents talk about the connections youth made with their peers at church, we went to a large Catholic church in the 29303 area to gather more information. A member of our research team reported:

I ask one of the church staff what the church population usually consists of during Saturdays and she tells me that Saturday mornings are full of quinceañeras and wedding ceremonies but more so quinceañeras. I ask if she can tell me roughly how many attends each and she tells me they all vary but on average about 50 or so people attend each. I ask her about the sacramental classes during the school year that the youth attend and what those demographics look like. She tells me that for the most part they start from very young like kindergarten and up to freshmen in high school. The populations are about 60% White & 40% Latinx for the most part.

Sofia, who recently graduated from a high school in Spartanburg County, spoke of church as one of the main social activities she participated in outside the home: “Yeah, we went to church, not all the time but most of the time. Mostly Sundays, growing up and in the Catholic religion you have to do certain sacraments so we would have to go to church to do our first communion and then confirmation.”

Interestingly, Martina spoke with us about participating in evening classes at church and how she felt that time at the church exposed her to a less safe group of peers than she usually spent time with:

Martina: And then sometimes we would go to the [church], and then I remember when I was a sophomore in high school, my parents would make me go to these church classes on Friday nights, it was like a youth group but it was like a youth group for troubled teens, but I wasn't even a troubled teen. I wasn't a troubled teen, right Diego?

Diego: No, they literally just made her go 'cause she wouldn't go out or anything but they thought she would do stuff.

Martina: Yeah, I mean it was like a whole thing and I would go and those kids were crazy, they were like into drugs, I was like, “oh my god why am I here.” That's like the only church thing I did. It was like a help service for troubled teens and it was like a youth group. But like, all of them were crazy, like, they would be into drugs and alcohol, like, they were actually troubled teens.

## **Sexual Health, Dating, and Family Expectations**

In our conversations about sexual health and dating, several specific themes emerged. Latinx youth and especially Latina girls are often restricted from dating by their parents. Parents and youth across genders told us that Latinx parents are not comfortable talking with their children about sexual health. The stories we heard about sex education classes in schools indicated inconsistency in quality, approaches, and effectiveness. When asked specifically about teen pregnancy, our participants responded with a variety of perspectives on what they see as the causes and consequences of teen pregnancy.

## Youth discouraged or prohibited from dating

Martina, who recently graduated high school in the 29303 area, told us she had only some experience with dating, partly because her parents were strict on the issue as a whole, and partly because she was unsure how they would react to non-Latino boyfriends:

I guess I've never had like a boyfriend, a serious one. It was never like, oh I wanna introduce him to my parents. They really barely started letting me [date] senior year, but the boyfriends I would have weren't Mexican and they weren't cool with that. So, I dated this Black guy and I guess since that's just how we grew up, my parents are super traditional, super Mexican, super religious and so they would let me, but it would be like, I don't wanna meet him thing and be kinda strict. I guess like now, 'cause I'm in a relationship now and my boyfriend is from Mexico and so they are more accepting. Which it's just different cultures, which I'm not mad at them. Maybe if I took it more serious but now it's fine 'cause they like my boyfriend now.

Luciana indicated she grew up with even more strict rules about dating. She did not have a boyfriend during high school, and even now says she doesn't need a boyfriend because it's "just something extra to worry about." Luciana also mentioned that she knew Latina girls who sneaked out to be with boys:

Luciana: I never really go out of town unless it's with my parents. But also I think it's important to know... to go back to the high school stuff... we were not allowed to date. We weren't. So a lot of kids would have their boyfriends and they would go, you know, like, you asked what would the guys do when they're not working, they would get their girlfriends and they would take them out to places. They would even go to beaches but we weren't allowed to do that. My parents were really strict. They would always be like, "your studies are everything" and so even now I don't have a boyfriend. Well, first of all I don't need one. And I feel like it's something extra to worry about and I don't really need that. And I really don't have time to worry about something else... I think this may be a common thing among Hispanic parents. I think that a little bit in me was like I want a boyfriend and I was trying to get with boys on Instagram, but that was it. I never snuck out or anything, but I do remember that at church, me and the Hispanic girls would get together and the conversation came up and they would be like "you've never snuck out?" and I was like no, and they would be like "we do it all the time." And those were the girls that go to Dorman and Byrnes. And so that's when I was like, dang I am a little different. I mean I could've, but I did not want to, that's just me.

Interviewer: Were they also not allowed to have boyfriends?

Luciana: Right. They had them and they were not allowed. And talking with [my Latina peers in college], we were similar in the sayings that our family would teach us. We were told basically the same things. That we always needed to prioritize our education.

Andrés and Daniel both indicated they were allowed to date. Andrés said his parents were fine with him dating, but much like Luciana's sentiments, he chose not to date because he did not

want the distraction from his studies: “My parents were okay with [me having a girlfriend]. I mean, they never really restricted me from dating anyone. I restricted myself because I knew that having a girlfriend would have been a huge distraction. Especially since I was going to college, you know.” Daniel said he was allowed to have a girlfriend but his sisters were not: “Because I am a guy, they never told me to not have a girlfriend, but they were always strict with me and girls and relationships, and now that I have sisters, they always tell them to not have a boyfriend.”

Gabriela, a mother, when asked if she allowed her children to date, responded, “Oh no, I told them not until they live on their own and not by my rules anymore. School always comes first and I didn’t want them to get distracted.”

### **Parents sometimes uncomfortable discussing sexual health with their children**

Valentina, a mother, in discussing in general the difficulties of being a parent, brought up her discomfort with discussions about sexual health and framed her thoughts on refraining from sexual activity in terms of prioritizing education:

Valentina: Yeah, it’s not an easy thing to be a parent. Once you get a child, everything changes. It’s hard to talk to my kids about this doctor’s stuff. Things that they may not need to know until later.

Interviewer: What do you mean by doctors’ stuff?

Valentina: Well, like the sexual health and other topics. Part of it is time, my husband comes home from work looking to rest from long days at work. I usually have to cook dinner. Having a family is all about commitment. My kids are too young to begin their own family. That’s why I always stress to them about how education comes first.

Brianna, in telling us about how the Girlology program offered locally had helped her become more comfortable and informed talking with her children about sex, explained she had thought it was important to talk with her children about sex so that they wouldn’t become parents at too young an age:

My husband is more reserved than I am, and I tell him that he has to talk to our sons about sex, but since he was not doing his job then I started to talk to them myself when they turned 12. To the older one, I would tell him, I don’t want you to go and have sex, but I just want you to be informed and I don’t want you to be a father at such a young age. I came here when I was 14 years old and I couldn’t go to school so I tell them to take the opportunity of school and if they don’t get into a career, I don’t want them to become delinquent. I tell them that they should become a father once they know how to be one. I tell them how I was never educated by my parents on staying safe. I did not want my daughter to not be informed so I began to talk to her, too, maybe not as open and I also wouldn’t know how to explain the changes of her body that she was going through as she was experiencing before we went to the [Girlology] talk. So I would talk to her about how it’s normal for her body to go through changes and how things are personal that she doesn’t have to share about her body to people she was not close with. I may not have talked to her using proper terms, but I would at least try to explain things in a way that she would understand. And now I tell them things with their proper names after attending

the class like talking about her period. So I don't want them to become a young parent like me and that everything has its right age and moment. One of my sons was shy about listening to it but all my kids are different. My oldest asks me if I regret it, having kids so young but I don't because, thanks to God, I have a good life with my kids and husband. I tell my daughter, when you find someone, make sure that they support you and not just leave you as a single mother. I tell my sons, you can't raise a son when it's just you paying child support and you're not actually there raising your own, it's not enough. I tell them, I don't obligate you to get married, but I do need you to become a responsible person.

Victoria told us her parents were not comfortable or open with her in talking about issues of sexual health:

Even when I got [my period], I did not know what it was because my parents, they are not open to talk about sex. They're not open to talk about anything like that. They thought that if I took those classes, I was going to go out there and try to do those things or be curious and try it. However, I never really saw it that way. I always saw it like I'd rather be informed first than go out there and not know anything and be curious about it since I do not know about it. So my mom never told me anything about menstrual cycles, she never told me about protection or anything like that. So when I had my menstrual cycle, I did not know what to do. I was like, "What is this?" I thought it wasn't normal, but then my mom told me it was normal.

Victoria linked this lack of openness she sees in her parents and the parents of her friends to her perceptions of the causes of teen pregnancy, and she also talked about extra pressure and restrictions in her own life coming from her parents' reactions to other teens' behaviors:

Victoria: I feel like when it comes to teenage girls getting pregnant, it's the simple fact that Hispanic parents especially, are just not open to talking about sex. You can't even ask them a simple question without them thinking or saying "You're doing it? Why are you asking? You are asking for a reason." Like no. I am asking because I want to know. And because they are so strict and they aren't letting you experience things, you find other alternatives or ways to get around that, like you sneaking out without them knowing. They can tell you all they want that you can talk to them about anything, but when you try to it's like talking to a wall. Sometimes they dismiss it. Sometimes they just don't even pay attention to what you are truly saying, other times they twist your words to something that it is not. And so instead you do things without them knowing to try and experience those experiences. My mom has never talked to me about anything like that, and especially my dad. I also think it has to do with what they believe in. Like let's say they find out that this girl lost her virginity or got pregnant, they try to compare you to those girls. And they will say don't be like this, that's wrong. Basically, you get shamed for what other people do and it makes no sense.

Interviewer: So it's like you get the repercussions of what that person did, without you even knowing about it?

Victoria: Exactly, and suddenly they start being harder on you based on what their friends' children have done. Which I think is really messed up because everyone

is their own person. Like you aren't going to automatically be like: "I want to be like her" or "I am going to end up like her."

Paula discussed how her friends' parents do not talk with their children about sex and contraceptives, a point that concerns her quite a bit:

The reason I got prescribed birth control was because I had [a medical condition]. But I feel like a lot of parents and especially moms they aren't gonna talk to their daughters about having that option. They are just gonna expect them to either figure it out on their own or just not have sex at all. Like even now I have plenty of cousins that are my age give or take a year and they're kind of like, "Well, he pulls out" and I'm like, "What are you doing, what are you, 14?" Yeah and it's, you know, I'm having to talk to them like "Hey it's not that hard, you're an adult now, like seriously, it's not that hard and it's not that expensive, even if you don't have like insurance, there are ways to get [birth control]. What do you prefer, \$20 a month or having a child that's way more than that." I think that's a big issue, a lot of parents and mothers aren't ready to talk about contraceptives... They [Latinx parents] kind of expect their daughters to abstain right up until marriage which is very unrealistic. Yeah, and I feel like other cultures, like other ethnic groups, are more ready to accept that that's not always – And would rather take their daughters to a doctor and be like, hey birth control. I mean of course wear condoms 'cause they aren't tryna catch an STD or anything. I just feel like it's really awkward to even have that talk. I don't know what would help that.

When asked whether her own parents talked with her about sex, Paula said, "I never had the talk. Yeah no." She went on to explain:

Paula: My mom never asked and I feel like she's never going to ask. Until I get pregnant or have a child. But she's like, I feel, like, a little awkward and with my little sister, she's around that age. My mom asks me like, "hey I don't feel comfortable giving her the talk and I know I never gave you the talk but you were kinda quicker to catch on to things, but I don't think your sister is so would you give her the talk." So, I had to give her the talk.

Interviewer: That's good, though, because she has that trust with you.

Paula: I don't know, it's for sure a cultural thing.

Sebastian said his parents brought up sex but only to make sure he wasn't engaging in sexual activities: "Sometimes my mom would be like, 'You're not having sex, right?' and I would be like 'yeah no.'" Sebastian said he thought even getting parents to sign a form for sex education class at school could be difficult: "Oh yes especially with immigrants [a language barrier] is so common and a lot of times the kids are the ones translating for them, so what if a kid feels uncomfortable saying, 'Hey mom I'm gonna have sex-ed tomorrow, can you sign this?'"

Several members of our research team observed a meeting of Girlogy, where mothers and daughters were encouraged and guided to talk about sexual health. The atmosphere and tone seemed welcoming and inclusive, designed to make the event as comfortable and fun as possible for the participants:

Four mothers and seven girls that range from 8-13 years old sit on the chairs facing towards Dr. P who then begins by introducing herself and where she is from. She goes

around and asks everyone including the young girls where they are from. She then confirms that the presentation will be spoken in Spanish upon everyone's agreement... Dr. P moves on to talking about puberty, translating the word from Spanish to English as she emphasizes important keywords that should be known especially when it comes to identifying things formally rather than with slang words. Switching from Spanish to English, Dr. P says it's okay to laugh in the beginning as some things that they will address will make them feel uncomfortable but that it should not be uncomfortable, as it is all normal. Dr. P goes around the room after introducing a word and asks what other words are used, which brings some smiles and laughter. Dr. P then says, "One should be okay saying these words, because they are not gross or pornographic." She then passes out pins that say "Don't freak out!" She then moves on to talking about hormones and how they affect body growth, stating that as Latinas, they develop a bit faster and in her experience around nine years old, hit puberty. She goes through vocabulary going into detail about body areas and development. I see a mother scratch her chin and look over at her daughter with a slight smile as the daughter continues to listen to Dr. P. Bras are passed out and each type is identified. When talking about hair, a mother raises her hand and comments that it is the parents' job to make sure that their daughters learn to love their bodies despite the hair. After talking about a series of topics related to puberty such as dealing with odors, skin care, and more physical changes in the body, we move into a break time and people go to the bathroom and then come back to eat pizza. Some light conversation is heard between the mothers and between mothers and their daughters as they eat. Dr. P further explains puberty occurring to prepare the girls' body in becoming capable of reproduction. Then finally, the mothers and daughters are each asked to share what they have learned.

### **Sex education classes in the schools**

In our interviews, we heard mixed reports on the usefulness and content of sex education classes in the schools. Some youth we spoke with said they were not taught about contraceptives and were simply told to abstain from sex.

Victoria said she learned in sex ed class some key information she did not feel she could learn from her parents, including especially an understanding that it is alright not to have sex:

Victoria: Freshman year we took a sex ed class. They taught us about the reproductive system. They explained the male reproductive system, the different types of STDs/STIs, protection, and even showed us a video of a woman giving birth. Which was weird, but I get it they are trying to teach us. In middle school, it started with a health class. When I was in 5th grade I lived in another town, at that time they were getting us ready to get into those topics. That is when they started teaching us about menstrual cycles, which I did not know what that was until I got it... In sixth grade, the [sex ed classes] started getting more in depth, that is when I started understanding issues in that topic. I realized then that this is going to happen more often. In middle school and high school they did talk about sex but I still didn't understand the concept of sex because like I said my parents never talked about it. So I was still like: "What does it really mean? Does it have to have some meaning or do people just go out there and do it?" That was still stuck in my

mind. It wasn't until I started hearing my friends talk about it like, "Yo, I just had sex." I was like, "What?" They started in middle school and I would be like, is it something that I have to do? I did not understand if there was a time frame. I couldn't even ask my parents about it because what if they think that now I want to do it.

Interviewer: And it was just you wanting to know about it?

Victoria: Yes, and I just wanted to know if it was okay that I didn't want to. Because I had people ask me, "Why don't you do this and that?" I'd be like, "I don't know what this means." Those sex education classes made me realize that you don't have to do it if you don't want to. You don't have to go out there and have sex with people who you don't have to be with. There would be teachers who would tell us that you should do it when you're ready and you be safe about it.

Paula told us she did not have any useful sex ed in middle school or high school, and never had sex ed that discussed contraception:

Ok, so the closest thing to like sex-ed that I had was actually in the 5<sup>th</sup> grade. Yeah progressive, right? I went to public school, too, I wouldn't even really call it sex-ed. They basically just split up the guys and girls into separate classrooms, the guidance counselor was there and she basically just told us about how periods work. They gave us a little bag with pads but no tampons. And they told us how to kinda plan for it once we start and if we have a regular period, how that's supposed to work. They told us that if you start to have your period you are supposed to have it every month. Basically, if you have sex you are gonna get pregnant it was kinda stated, like "do you know what happens if you start to have your period and you have unprotected sex, there's a baby," but nothing about contraception was discussed.

Sebastian had a little more sex education in his schools, but also said he did not learn anything about contraception:

For me [sex ed class] was 5<sup>th</sup> grade, 6<sup>th</sup> grade, and 7<sup>th</sup> grade but they were all the same, they split us up and we mainly talked about periods. They were like, you should just abstain from sex because if you don't you're gonna get AIDS and you're gonna die and that was pretty much it. It was a church, they hired church people to come in. So, it was like just abstain, abstain until you get married. They didn't talk about birth control or condoms, they didn't talk about anything. They were just like don't do it or you'll die.

When we spoke with David, an educator in the area, he explained that "One of the issues of [local district] is that they don't follow the sex ed rules or even use the research [provided to them]. As far as I know they are the only district in Spartanburg that does their own. That's where you are going to have some issues, and if they are not getting it at home then they are probably not getting it at church."

## **Teen pregnancy**

In our conversations with parents and youth about sexual health, the interview participants often brought up pregnancy as a concern, and talked about what they saw as the underlying causes of unplanned pregnancies among Latinx teens. The factors they mentioned included a lack of attention from parents, youth not getting involved in activities, and abstinence being the only option offered. One participant's main concern with teen pregnancy was that if a girl got pregnant, her parents were likely to cut her off from the family.

Sebastian talked about his perceptions that parents do not pay enough attention to their children or are too lenient, and that this lack of attention to the children can lead to pregnancy:

I also think that it's the level of education that the parents have. Like some parents just don't pay attention enough to their child and they just, I mean, my parents were way too strict for one, but I think that that kind of helps sometimes, but other [parents] they are just too lenient or just doing something else. So, they can't focus on their child and so as a result the child gets rebellious. So, they end up pregnant as well.

When we asked Gabriela, a mother, for her thoughts on teen pregnancy, she said:

To be honest it's what I've been saying, because the parents aren't paying attention to the children. The parents, Latinos have priorities to make money instead. They don't supervise their children at least. Because for me when we got to the US all my friends who also immigrated here had the nice cars and they would waste money going out. Not me, I would have my old cars and I would take care of my children. I never went out to the *bailes* (dances, clubs). Why? Because my priority was my children and I never went out to make more money because my priority was my children. I didn't like for other people to take care of them. I wanted to bring my mom to help me, but she wasn't comfortable here so it didn't work out, and I just did it myself.

Sofia talked about some of the girls she knew who got pregnant in middle and high school and how they seemed to be the ones who weren't involved in school and extracurricular activities. She also shared her perception that the frequency of teen pregnancy in the schools had been decreasing:

Sofia: There were some of them, you know actually a handful of the girls got pregnant from middle school to high school. Less than half of the population of Latinos.

Interviewer: Why do you think that was?

Sofia: They just didn't get that involved, they didn't have other activities to do. The ones that didn't do anything.

Interviewer: Did they ever express that they wanted to do something, were there any barriers that limited their involvement?

Sofia: No, but I think probably limited resources like their parents not having enough money or equipment. It was also probably the parents not knowing what they, the kids, wanted to do. If they are always working then they won't be able to talk to them.

Interviewer: Were the girls that got pregnant single moms?

Sofia: I think they were together with the person but eventually they broke off. Most of them did not end up getting married to their baby daddy, I would say. Actually, there were more girls that got pregnant my older sisters' age [in their 20s].

Interviewer: So, you saw a decrease?



Sofia: Yeah, there was less and less of us getting pregnant.

Paula talked about abstinence being emphasized or offered as the only option and how she thought that was not a realistic or helpful approach:

I'm just thinking about all the, in the last few years, there would be girls I went to church with, younger girls like three to five years younger than me and slowly they would get pregnant. I mean most of them became single mothers living with their parents, and it's sad 'cause you went to church with them and I used to volunteer to be in the church services and they were there with you. And there is for sure a religious aspect to it. You know, I feel abstinence is not realistic. Of course, the high school culture too, you're always tryna be involved like who's dating who, trying out the social life.

David, an educator in the area, confirmed the focus on abstinence in many schools and the unwillingness to discuss contraception or more detailed questions of sexual health: "I will say this about [local district], they like to think that sex does not exist. One of the key issues is there is a lot of teen pregnancy just in [same district] alone. I would imagine it's not just the Latinx population or in [area of high concentration of Latinx residents], it's everywhere."

Victoria's main concern about teen pregnancy was how the parents might react and the likelihood of girls losing their parents' support:

I feel like for [Hispanic parents], they take [sex and pregnancy] as a disappointment because they expect better. I feel like since obviously most Hispanic parents come over here to give their kids a better life and education and everything, whenever they see that their kid is out here doing all this stuff, especially if you are a girl, they expect you to do better and I guess them seeing their daughters getting pregnant is a huge disappointment to them. I have heard that for some girls they have gotten kicked out because of them being pregnant. I feel like for girls it's much harder because they have you on this high pedestal. Like, "I want my girl to be this and that" and expect so much from you. And if you do not meet those expectations it's like you failed at whatever they had in mind about you. I feel like if that were ever to happen to me, hopefully not, I feel like [my parents] would probably be very upset. Sometimes, I also feel that they would not talk to me or support me, but I don't know since I am not in that place right now. It is a scary thought just to think about it. In a way you grow up with the fear of messing up around your parents. Because, God forbid you mess up. They want you to be on top of everything. It's tough... But throughout middle school I would see eighth-graders that got pregnant. My middle school was mainly filled with Hispanics but there were still other races. I remember this one time when I saw a girl who was pregnant in the eighth grade, and in my mind I would ask myself, "How did that happen?" When high school came, I just remember getting on the bus and I'd see girls pregnant. That would stick with me because I would be like, "How? Are they doing okay?" Because since they were Hispanic and knowing how that usually affects Hispanic parents, I would wonder, "Are they doing okay? What do their parents think about it?"

Victoria tied a lot of the issues discussed above together in her thoughts about sexual health, mental health, connecting with peers, and relationships between youth and parents, including that

youths' fear of disappointing their parents may paradoxically lead to pregnancy. In order to preserve and respect her voice, we share here a long thread from her interview, uninterrupted:

Victoria: Sometimes I have had friends that have gone out, and had sex with a lot of people or have done drugs because at home, they get abused or they weren't being treated right.

Interviewer: So they use those outlets as a coping mechanism?

Victoria: Yes, as a way to numb the pain some type of way or maybe sometimes they want to punish themselves. And it is sad, because I feel like sometimes, when they don't meet a certain expectation, they start feeling like they failed already. So they start thinking: why does it matter what I do anymore? And I think that during the heat of the moment they don't really think about the consequences and that is why so many people get pregnant, but I also think that it's about your parents not being able to talk about it openly. They are always wanting you to be back at a certain time, they end up calling you repeatedly: "Are you coming? Are you coming?" And it's like "I still have a few minutes left." They are just always on you. Most times you can't even enjoy yourself. It's like they say they trust you but then they act like they don't. It's like "you don't let me be my own person" or they still treat you as if you are a little girl. When in actuality you are in that time frame where you can make your own decisions. I don't think they realize sometimes how it affects you as a person, like socially. I mean since I have always been so closed off to people that is why it makes it so difficult for me to open up. I can't be the one to start a conversation with anybody without being scared or shy and it's because I have never gone out there and been meeting people. So in a way it affected my social skills and it's so weird and uncomfortable. My anxiety had been really all through that time because I had recently come to terms with the fact that I got sexually assaulted when I was younger. So it's like when I hear about it and the topic would come up, I would have a whole anxiety attack most of the times. It came to a point where it got really bad, and after something mostly unrelated happened at school, I just lost it. My dad tried to get me to speak up about it. My mom and him, they both sat down with me about it. I'm over here trying to find a way to tell them because I don't think they understand it. So when I told them that I had been sexually assaulted [when I was a small child], they were just quiet and even though I know it wasn't my fault, I felt that I needed to apologize, that in a way I had let them down. Like this happened because of me. Since they don't like talking about that topic, they just dismissed it. They were like: "But did you get raped?" and I said no. If it had not been for someone walking in, I could have been raped. I hate the fact that I had to apologize to them. Because I really did not know that I wasn't supposed to let somebody do that to me. I was confused, I was like "is this okay?" I feel that as a kid, when you get to a certain age your parents should tell you: "You shouldn't let someone do this" because as a kid you are so easily manipulated. We are naive, we are not experienced enough. So I really did not know what was going on during that time. I guess in some way subconsciously, I always knew about it, but I never fully gave myself the time to process it. So as a child I was confused, and to this day I still suffer from what happened then. So all of this was frustrating to me, therefore with time I detached myself from my parents.

## **Appreciation for Efforts for Greater Inclusion**

Our conversations with our interview participants often included their expressions of appreciation for efforts at greater inclusion, helping them connect with the community, with each other, and trying for good communication in English and Spanish. We heard from youth and parents who found supports outside of the family, found value in community resources, and articulated their aspirations for even more programming and communication that could happen in the community.

In talking about how his parents and their experiences had kept him on track with his studies and his life goals, Andrés mentioned that he also found a key support in a non-Latinx member of his church: “I also had this lady at our church. She is like my white mother. She always reminded me to be on top of things... She was most definitely a person that I trusted throughout my time in school. And she is one of the few I do trust.”

Brianna talked at length about how helpful she found programs to which she connected through PASOs, and how she believed the programs helped her be a better mother:

I had recently found the [Upstate Family Resource] center and was taking parenting classes. If I had found out ten years ago, I would have been a better mother with the things that I have learned, I have now implemented them within my parenting. For example, I would talk to my daughter about puberty before I went to the Girlology class maybe not as open to referring things to their proper name because I was a little reserved. I became a mother when I was 16 and I don't want the same thing to be repeated with them... I did not want my daughter to not be informed so I began to talk to her too maybe not as open and I also wouldn't know how to explain the changes of her body that she was going through as she was experiencing even before we went to the [Girlology] talk. So I would talk to her about how it's normal for her body to go through changes and how things are personal that she doesn't have to share about her body to people she was not close with. I may not have talked to her using proper terms but I would at least try to explain things in a way that she would understand. And now after attending the class I tell them things with their proper names like talking about her period. So I don't want them to become a young parent like me and that everything has its right age and moment.

From both Gabriela and Brianna, we heard that the schools were doing well with translating key materials and communications about school activities for the parents. When we asked Gabriela to compare her experience with schools now with when she came to Spartanburg years ago as a child, she said that back then, “there wasn't as much help. Today there is much more help.”

When we asked Brianna about whether she felt like she was informed about her children's school activities, she said that she was, though she would also welcome more communication from schools about activities and opportunities in the area for out-of-school time:

Yes, where my daughter would go to school and even with the language and being flexible, but they wouldn't really share much about what's available in the area which would be nice being that we are not from here. Knowing what happens during the

summer would be great, too, which I'm sure there are things that they do in the community.

Paula, one of the youth we spoke with, also talked about how the schools have improved communication in Spanish and English, and she linked this improvement with the increase in diversity of school faculty, staff, and greater diversity of parents getting involved with the schools:

[A language barrier] was a bigger issue when I was in grade school and we would get certain paperwork or handouts, it would be in one language, English. Now I feel like they have more diverse faculty and staff so there's people there to translate. So, whenever my younger siblings bring home paperwork there is always, like, you can flip it over and it's in Spanish. So that's really nice. Whenever they have parent-teacher conferences there's always like a little section that says, "Do you need a translator?" Like, we can arrange that for you. I have a couple of friends that work for the district and they translate, too, so a lot of times what they do, too, if there's like a major assembly or parents that come to PTO meetings they will have a translator there too... Sometimes I'll go [to the school to] take the kids lunches and stuff, and I remember when I was there, 'cause we went to the same elementary school, you know [back then] you would always see the white moms baking stuff and helping out and now it's for sure way more diverse. You know the PTO moms will come up to you and there is for sure a Hispanic mom that's like "*hola mijia*" like "*es su hermano*" or whatever and I'm just like yup. But yeah, it's for sure gotten way more diverse and more people have gotten involved.

A member of our research team observed some focus groups taking place at the Upstate Family Resource Center. The groups were conducted in Spanish for two local initiatives. The researcher observed a welcoming demeanor from the hosts and appreciation from participants for the inclusive conversation:

When people begin to arrive, the focus group facilitator introduces herself to them or welcomes them in Spanish, and so does another person assisting with the group, who also speaks to people arriving in Spanish. There are about 15 people, mostly women who appear to be in their 30s and 40s, along with three women who appear to be in their 20s, each with an infant or young toddlers. They hold the babies during the entire focus group. There is one older man and a couple of older women. The facilitator begins the focus group. She conducts an icebreaker exercise in which each person says their first name, what animal they would like to be, and why. She says something she would like to be, and I cannot hear her, but everyone laughs when she says why. Several women say they would like to be eagles or birds to be able to fly; one woman says she would like to be a polar bear so she could sleep a lot and be cool; another woman says she would like to be a tiger so she is not afraid... [Later in the meeting] the older man, who has not spoken until now, says that he appreciates very much what the women around the table have said and what they do. He says he appreciates that this group has been consulted about their experiences. When he is done speaking, another person says that there should be more groups and conversations like these.

Brianna mentioned the library as a place that offers resources and activities for her family, and she said they do a good job of letting people know of upcoming activities:

We go to the library here [branch library in Spartanburg] and I know they do different activities and programs and during the summer they do different things. They give you a list of the things they do each month. They'll do things like paint figures or play with Legos or they'll play a movie so then one knows which days and times they do certain events. We used to not have access to the internet so then I would take the kids to the library so that they could do their homework. I would just walk around on my own, that's when I noticed the programs. My kids are constantly asking to do things so I have to have them doing something. If there was more information on things to do around Spartanburg, then that would be awesome too.

Following up on Brianna's mention of wanting activities for her children, we asked if there were specific kinds of programs she would want her children to have access to when not in school. She said she would welcome chances for her children to play sports and learn how to swim, and she seemed excited at the possibilities that the C. C. Woodson Center might be able to offer:

Brianna: Well, since my boy likes to play basketball I would want maybe a place where he could go play like a church or place for the summer. As well as a place for them to learn to swim that gives affordable classes.

Interviewer: In school do they have programs like that?

Brianna: Besides the school's basketball team, but you have to be pretty good and, well, my son just needs a place where he can simply play. I've tried looking for a place but have not found anything.

Interviewer: There is a recreational center that is 20 minutes away from here called C. C. Woodson that has a pool and possibly they do affordable swimming lessons and there is also a basketball court where he can play.

Brianna: Oh great, I would appreciate if you gave me the address! Since I don't work, it's hard to find an affordable place, and I've seen that other places charge up to \$200 for one week which is too expensive for me. But I will find out more about this place because I spend a lot of time at home with my kids and my daughter is really the only one that goes and plays sports.

## **Other Important Topics Mentioned by Participants**

Before we close this report, we want to share other important topics that came up during our interviews that do not happen to fit in the themes above: grandparents, language proficiency of youth, special needs youth, college access, youth in trouble, and family implications of socio-political context.

### **Grandparents**

When Gabriela talked about the difficulties of balancing work with spending time with the children, we asked her if grandparents are sometimes able to help. She was skeptical about that possibility because of language barriers between grandparents and youth and the difficulty in getting children to mind their grandparents. She said:

Gabriela: Yes, some families bring in the grandparents and they give them their kids and they go on trips and everything.

Interviewer: Does that work?

Gabriela: No, of course not. Because the kids don't pay them any mind. The kids don't even listen to the parents so how are they going to listen to the grandparents? Even less when they don't speak the same language. I'll give you an example, my nephew on my husband's side would bring his mother to come and visit for long periods of times and to take care of his girls. But the girls didn't speak Spanish and barely understood it so they did whatever they wanted. The only thing she understood was when they were hungry because they would open the fridge. We think it doesn't affect a child but it does, the communication part.

### **Language proficiency of youth**

In talking with Andrés about his experiences in school, he mentioned that he had struggled at first because he did not speak English when he first moved to this area. He said:

So I have lived in Spartanburg for a while, ever since I came with my parents. It was tough for a while because at the time, I did not speak English. Slowly in elementary school, I gradually learned to speak English. The Latino community in Spartanburg has grown a lot compared to the size it was back then. When I first started school there were not many Latino children, but as time went on, we grew in size.

### **Special needs youth**

During one of the focus groups at the Upstate Family Resource Center, our researcher that was observing noted mention of concerns about special-needs youth:

Another woman explains that there is a lack of services for special needs youth; she explains that "there is a waiting list of 3,000 people" at the Charles Lea Center for interventions her child needs, and that by the time the child's number is reached, they will be too old to receive the services. She explains this is happening even though the child has coverage through Medicare.

In talking with Paula, when we asked her if she had siblings, her response noted a brother with special needs:

Yeah so, I'm the oldest, there's four of us and I have a brother who's 19 right now but he also has learning disabilities. I mean a lot of time was spent helping him with his school work and that kind of stuff basically throughout most of my childhood too.

### **College access**

During a focus group at the Upstate Family Resource Center, our researcher heard concerns and sadness expressed by a mother whose daughter became depressed when she was unable to continue her studies after high school:

A particular set of prompts asks about what has been easy and what has been difficult about mental and behavioral health as relates to youth in their family or families that they

know. The facilitator gives some examples: depression, anxiety, the autism spectrum a woman has mentioned before. One woman mentions that her daughter had depression because she wanted to continue studying after high school, and she could not. The woman begins to cry quietly as she explains, “She wanted to keep studying, and she could not, and she became depressed.” The woman beside her says something quietly to the woman, and she blinks a couple of times and breathes deeply, visibly, and becomes composed. She continues and explains she knows to take depression seriously and as a mother, she wants to know what to do.

In our interview with Valentina, she mentioned her son not being able to go to college. “My son works at a [fast-food] restaurant. He graduated high school, but we do not have enough money to send him to college.”

### **Youth in trouble**

When we asked David, an educator, about Latinx students in the schools he worked with dropping out of high school, he said:

One case in particular, when some get in trouble they give them a lot of chances, and one in particular got kicked out of school because he never went to class, played around and was disrespectful. Another student had sold drugs and they basically said you cannot come back to school until you do X,Y, and Z. Another had sold drugs and had cognitive issues and he went to an alternative school. His main concern was his future, he worked under the table at one of the restaurants and said this is the only way I am going to get money. He was undocumented and was not DACA. He missed that kind of opportunity and I told him yes, even though the window is closed, they want to see you excelling in school. But he had that constantly weighing on him and it affected the way he performed in school. Because I mean he could have been a pretty good student, pretty good kid, and he just came back and realized there was nothing they could do.

### **Impact of socio-political context on families and children**

In a focus group at the Upstate Family Resource Center, when the facilitator opened up the conversation for anyone to share as they wished, a woman we will call Debora talked about how the situation in the country makes children worried. Our researcher observed:

At the end, the facilitator says she will go around the room for each person to say anything they wish, or nothing, about any of the topics. The first woman she signals, Debora, has her hands crossed in front of her. She is sitting square in her chair, and she looks down and then forward. She references “the situation now in this country” and how the situation makes children worried. She says it is hard for children who have a parent detained because the process is very long and the children ask when their father will be back and the mothers don’t know what to say to them, or how to help them. The woman beside her begins to weep quietly. Debora says this has happened to people she knows. Debora says that “since we depend on our spouses [to go out and work], we worry and the children worry and we don’t know how to help them.” Someone else adds, “or get help for ourselves.” A third woman says, “even kids who are US citizens worry, what if they take one of us away. She says she tells her kids, “if one of us goes, we all go.”

## **5. Preliminary Recommendations:**

The following recommendations are informed by the data in this report. Parents and youth express a desire for safe spaces for social connection, leisure, and learning, and they consistently express appreciation for efforts at communication and inclusion. These recommendations, informed by their voices, suggest opportunities for exploration and design of responsive community supports in Spartanburg. For readability, we have divided the recommendations into subsections.

### **Schools, OST providers, non-profits, agencies, and funders: Programming**

1. Sustain culturally inclusive and responsive programming, in English and in Spanish, according to the language of preference of Latinx participants, in areas that are emergent priorities for populations in Spartanburg. Girlology and Triple P parenting in Spanish were specifically mentioned as valuable by participants in this study.
2. Explore the expansion of Spanish language programming to include programs and supports for parents of adolescents and teens, such as Triple P parenting for caregivers of teens. In communications and marketing of programming, use language that frames learning opportunities with multigenerational inclusivity, in recognition that parents and grandparents may share childrearing responsibilities in many households.
  - Parenting curricula should be culturally sensitive so that they can be delivered to diverse families. Programs for Latinx families should focus on highlighting the strengths and resilience within the multigenerational family and emphasize the importance of communication and shaping discipline strategies to cultural values and traditions of the family.
  - The guide “Culture and Parenting” provides information on how to deliver parenting curricula to diverse families. Importantly, it notes that often “immigrant youth and their families mix and match the approaches of their country of origin and their new country, contributing to changing adaptations across generations.”<sup>6</sup>
3. Explore the implementation of programs used successfully in other parts of the United States, and specifically those designed for Latinx children, youth, and families. When possible, form collaborative efforts among organizations, with participatory inclusion of Latinx caregivers and/or youth, to support the design, launch, implementation, and assessment of effectiveness of such programs for Latinx youth and families. Below are program examples:
  - Culturally relevant co-curricular programs for adolescents and/or youth, such as those developed by the [Young Hawks](#) program, that are anchored in narratives, histories, and artistic forms from Mexico, Central America, and other parts of Latin America well represented by the local student population. The Carver Elite work carried out

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<sup>6</sup> <http://jeffline.jefferson.edu/cfsrp/pdfs/culture-parenting-U-Calif.pdf>



with My Brother's Keeper is an excellent local model of culturally relevant programming designed primarily to serve Black youth. Based on the data showing strong participation in the workforce, we recommend that after-school, co-curricular programs for youth focus on the middle school grades.

- Summer enrichment camps and programming to provide Latinx youth skills to take care of their physical and mental health.
  - Peer-helping programs, such as [Teen Mental Health First Aid](#) and [Natural Helpers](#).
  - The [Familia Adelante program](#), an evidence-based program that focuses on enhancing youth and family life skills and take into consideration the underlying stressors that Latinx communities are experiencing. The Familia Adelante program empowers families, strengthens families and gives credit to culture, focuses on teaching values and positive self-esteem, teaches better ways to cope with stressful situations, assists in building a stronger sense of self and teaches leadership, stability, and fosters care.
4. Sustain and expand supportive community spaces for Latinx families, youth, and young adults to explore their intersectional identities and talk about how broader sociopolitical contexts, such as immigration and other dynamic transnational realities, shape their lives and those of their family members.
- Create safe spaces for Latinx youth to discuss immigration stories and struggles and to express their feelings about their life, immigration status, and their visions for their futures. Both youth-only and parent/caregiver spaces might be opportunities.
  - Organize recurring events that acknowledge and elevate the struggles faced by immigrant youth who are out of status or belong to a mixed-status family. For example, screen films that empower youth and make them feel safe to share their immigration stories and worries with trusted adults and peers.

#### **Schools, OST providers, non-profits, agencies, and funders: Logistics**

5. Sustain and expand high-quality after-school programs for children and adolescents that are low cost or free-to-participants and that provide homework assistance, social interactions, movement, and emotional support. Programs serving Latinx children and youth should include transportation or be linked to the school bus system, i.e., school districts should support the addition of stops in the route to drop off children who will be attending after school programs. For older youth, van or bus systems might transport youth from designated “youth bus stop areas” to community centers (such as the C. C. Woodson Center) and organizations that have after school programs, support groups, and/or youth summer programs.
6. In order to be responsive to the work demands on Latinx families, including youth 14 and over, invest strategically in high quality, after-school and/or summer OST youth development for ages prior to 14 (legal working age in SC) and in flexible (for example, independent and/or remotely and asynchronously accessed) programming for ages 14 and over. In messaging, take work during teen years into account, and help working high

school students understand and articulate how work experience can serve as preparation for higher education.

### **Making Institutional Spaces More Inclusively Supportive: Schools**

7. Build upon efforts for Spanish language inclusion for parent/caregiver communication and work to make all school events as inclusive as possible, with sensitivity to the demands of work on adults and youth in Latinx households. Consider making messaging for events themed by participation of mothers, fathers, or grandparents more inclusive, particularly in primary school, or inviting special guests to participate in such events and to accompany or sit with children whose caregivers or guardians are unable to attend.
8. Ensure that existing training programs for staff include references to Latinx experiences in the curricular materials and training. Individuals identifying with different minoritized groups experience challenges differently, according to their intersectional identities, and it is important that training for staff take these differences into account and help Latinx students (and others) to “be seen.”
9. Offer and incentivize participation in continuing education opportunities for administrators, guidance counselors, teachers, and school-based mental health professionals related to Latinx and BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, People of Color) experiences in schools. These opportunities might include but should not be limited to implicit-bias training, and they should help equip participants to continue to shift systems from deficit and discipline orientations toward supports for learning, coping, conflict resolution, and mental health.
10. Educate teachers and guidance counselors about the realities of living as an immigrant and the impact that immigration has on children in fully out-of-status or mixed-status households, especially with regard to education, including access to post-secondary education, and mental health (e.g., difficulties concentrating on academics due to worry about their family members being deported, externalizing behaviors and engaging in maladaptive behaviors).
11. Partner with nonprofits and teaching clinics to create and facilitate school support groups that can provide emotional support to students that do not meet the criteria for mental health services but that are experiencing challenges.
12. Continue efforts in Spartanburg County to place mental health professionals in proportion to the number of students in the school and with training to support the diverse populations attending schools in the county.

### **Making Institutional Spaces More Inclusively Supportive: Church**

13. Offer youth groups and youth programs that include attention to overall well-being (spiritual, physical, and mental health) and involvement in community.

### **Programming around sexual health**

14. Help equip adult caregivers to respond to disclosures of sexual abuse and/or sexual assault, whether these were experienced in the past or are ongoing.

15. Offer sexual health education programs in Spanish for parents and adolescents, such as Girlology in Spanish. Culturally informed English language programming may be appropriate for older youth, depending on their language of preference.
16. Offer recurring culturally sensitive workshops on healthy relationships and culturally sensitive sex education and pregnancy prevention programs that discuss all aspects of prevention (i.e. abstinence, contraception, etc.) and are centered around youth empowerment.