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Cultivating Talent: Insights From the 2022 National Study Examining Pathways to Increase the Presence of Hispanic Teachers and Leaders in Catholic Schools

Hosffman Ospino¹ and Melodie Wyttenbach¹

Abstract: This article draws extensively on data from *Cultivating Talent: A National Study Examining Pathways to Increase the Presence of Hispanic Teachers and Leaders in Catholic Schools*, conducted by Boston College researchers and released in January 2022. The report looks to understand and appreciate the various ways in which Hispanics educators are transforming the American Catholic school experience. Our findings clearly show that Catholic schools in the United States are and will be further enriched by the presence and contributions of Hispanic teachers and leaders. The report encourages stakeholders of Catholic education and pastoral leaders at all levels, across the nation, to make a renewed commitment to investing and cultivating talent within the Hispanic community.

Keywords: Catholic schools, Hispanic teachers, Hispanic leaders, Latinos, Hispanic ministry, pastoral leadership

The present and future of Catholicism in the United States in the 21st century is intimately linked to the fast-growing presence of the Hispanic community. The engagement of the Hispanic community offers an opportunity to renew and revitalize the Catholic Church and thus the Catholic education system, which has seen significant enrollment decline over the past five decades. This article draws extensively on data from *Cultivating Talent: A Summary of Findings from the National Study Examining Pathways in Catholic Schools* (hereafter, *Cultivating Talent*;

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[Ospino & Wyttenbach, 2022](#)), which we released in January 2022, and for which we served as principal investigators. The national research study grounding this article provides insights into primary lines of inquiry: What do Hispanic teachers and leaders bring to Catholic schools? What are some of the challenges Hispanic educators face in Catholic schools? Previous research conducted by Boston College—“Catholic Schools in an Increasingly Hispanic Church: A Summary Report of Findings from the National Survey of Catholic Schools Serving Hispanic Families (Catholic Schools in an Increasingly Hispanic Church)” —demonstrated that the creation of a healthy and welcoming school environment for Hispanic families was a necessary, if not major prerequisite for successful recruitment, enrollment, and retention ([Ospino & Weitzel-O’Neill, 2016](#)). The study also highlighted the importance of engaging Hispanic families and leaders in exercises of advocacy, such as promoting legislation that supports school choice options. Expanding on this 2016 study, *Cultivating Talent* brings attention to the need for more reflection on the presence and contributions of Hispanic teachers and leaders in Catholic schools.

Figure 1

Historical Factors Driving Low Hispanic Educator Representation



Today, 29.1 million Hispanic Catholics (about 47% of all Hispanics self-identify as such) constitute about 41.6% of the nearly 70 million Catholics in the United States ([Smith et al., 2019](#)). These numbers suggest that the future of Catholicism in this country will be significantly defined by Hispanics. In 2016, the National Catholic Education Association (NCEA) reported that 7% of all faculty (including full-time and part-time teachers and leaders) in Catholic schools self-identified as Hispanic ([McDonald & Schultz, 2016](#)). That percentage increased to 9% (14,612) in the 2020–2021 academic year ([McDonald & Schultz, 2021](#)). The *Cultivating Talent* report provides a closer look at who Hispanic teachers and leaders are in Catholic schools, how they enrich these institutions with their presence and their work, the challenges they face, and how these schools support their flourishing.

Hispanic teachers and leaders have been working in Catholic schools at various points in the history of the Church in the United States. Based on these historical accounts and the existing quantitative data, the number of Hispanic teachers and leaders in Catholic schools has been dramatically small for at least four reasons. First, Catholic schools were traditionally staffed primarily by vowed religious women and men, the immense majority of whom were White and of European descent. A shift to a mainly lay workforce meant welcoming more racially and ethnically diverse populations. With 86% of the lay workforce being White in Catholic schools (McDonald & Schultz, 2021), this human capital compositional shift to a more racially and ethnically diverse body of educators remains a goal to be achieved.

Second, Catholic schools have focused primarily on the enrollment of Hispanic students rather than the engagement and empowerment of Hispanic educators. Currently, about 2% of Hispanic school-aged children attend Catholic schools (294,947 students) compared to the 13.4 million Hispanic students who attend public schools (Ospino & Weitzel-O'Neill, 2016). The highest Hispanic student enrollment in Catholic schools in a given year was reported in 2017–2018, with 319,650 students (McDonald & Schultz, 2018). Despite the national demographic growth of Hispanic students, and efforts by enrollment coordinators and institutes for Hispanic enrollment, there has been a decline of 25,000 Hispanic students in Catholic schools since 2018.

Third, a majority (about 61%) of Catholic schools are located in the Northeast and Midwest—geographical regions where the Catholic population has been predominantly White, Euro-American, and English-speaking (Ospino & Weitzel-O'Neill, 2016). The Catholic educational infrastructure for the burgeoning Hispanic student population in the Southwest and Southeast is not strong, and employment opportunities for Hispanic teachers and leaders in these schools are few.

Last, a long history of prejudice and discrimination has kept Hispanics from benefitting from Catholic schools. Besides struggling with poverty, which is a major factor to take into consideration given the high costs of Catholic education in many parts of the country, Hispanics are often confronted with negative perceptions about their bilingualism, biculturalism, migratory status (for those who are immigrants), and even the various ways in which they live out their Catholic identity (Desai & Abeita, 2017; Murakami et al., 2016; Ocasio, 2014; Ospino & Weitzel-O'Neill, 2016). All these reasons together culminate in formulas that complicate any possible pathway for Hispanics to serve as teachers and leaders in Catholic schools.

The growth in the number of Hispanic teachers and leaders in Catholic schools has been rather slow compared to the exponential growth of the larger Hispanic Catholic population. Yet, the overall size of the Hispanic Catholic population and a renewed effort to integrate Hispanic traditions and contributions into the larger ecclesial experience suggest that the presence of these teachers and leaders will continue to grow and influence the character and direction of Catholic education.

Hispanic educators are generally underrepresented in educational settings. To understand key realities affecting Hispanic educators across various sectors in U.S. schools, the following comparative analysis is useful. According to 2017–2018 data from the United States Department of Education’s [National Center for Education Statistics \(NCES\)](#), 9% of educators in traditional public schools self-identified as Hispanic. In public charter schools, 16% of educators self-identified as Hispanic, as did 7% of educators in private schools (which includes Catholic schools; [Hussar et al., 2020](#)). Though charter schools recruit and retain a higher percentage of Hispanic educators, when taking into consideration the number of Hispanic students enrolled in these schools, the actual teacher-to-student ratio is smaller compared to other types of schools. The mismatch becomes evident when comparing the number of Hispanic educators to that of Hispanic students across sectors. Fall 2018 data indicate that 27% of all public school students self-identified as Hispanic ([Hussar et al., 2020](#)). Fall 2017 data indicate that 11% of all private school students self-identified as Hispanic: 16% in all Catholic schools ([Hussar et al., 2020](#)). In 2020–2021, the NCEA reported that 18% of all Catholic school students were Hispanic ([McDonald & Schultz, 2021](#)).

While the Hispanic educator–Hispanic student mismatch is greatest in the public sector, it is still a critical gap in the private sector, including in Catholic schools. In response to the public sector mismatch, public school leaders and policy makers have been striving to close the gap by pursuing a number of innovative strategies and opportunities, including the creation of new educator preparation programs and pathways; scholarships and other funding supports; loan forgiveness programs; teacher residencies; “Grow Your Own” programs; mentoring and induction programs; and other initiatives ([Carver-Thomas, 2018](#)). Catholic schools have the opportunity to learn from these attempts, including conducting empirical research on attempted interventions, to inform their own efforts to recruit and retain Hispanic educators in a research-informed, mission-driven manner. Additionally, a stronger commitment to this goal means investing in educator preparation and formation programs specifically targeting underrepresented educators, providing intentional mentoring and induction for beginning educators, and examining school culture and practices to create environments that welcome and support underrepresented educators ([Bristol, 2020](#); [Noonan & Bristol, 2020](#); [The New Teacher Project \[TNTTP\], 2020](#)).

As Catholic schools look to recruit and retain underrepresented teachers, much can be learned from public sector peers who have explored and invested in multiple strategies and initiatives. Prior to considering new strategies and initiatives that lead to a greater diversification of talent, it is important to first capture what the experience of teaching and leading is for Hispanic educators in Catholic schools and document existing programs. This article summarizes the set of initial findings from *Cultivating Talent: A Summary of Findings from the National Study Examining Pathways to Increase the Presence of Hispanic Teachers and Leaders in Catholic Schools*.

Methodology

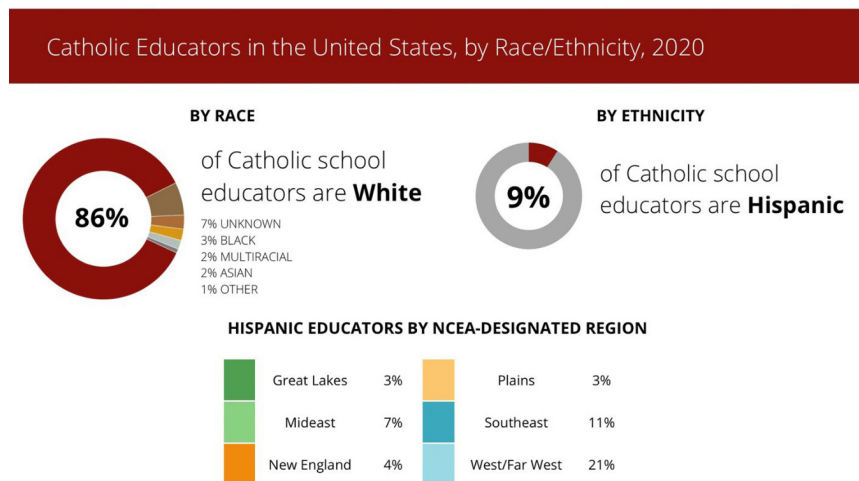
Data sources for this study included a national survey, focus groups, interviews, and a review of existing literature on areas such as discernment and retention of underrepresented teachers. The survey was designed by the authors of this article, who served as the principal investigators, and hosted by Boston College on a secure site using Qualtrics. The Boston College Institutional Review Board approved all materials and research activity.

The survey of Hispanic educators consisted of two separate sections—one designated for teachers and another for school leaders. This survey was distributed in July 2021 and closed in November 2021. All questions were categorized utilizing a theoretical framework on discernment developed for this study. This theoretical framework on discernment categorized questions into the following four domains: (a) personal discernment, (b) discernment with(in) the institution, (c) journey from the community into the Catholic school, and (d) journey from the Catholic school back into the community. Respondents’ perceptions regarding the vocational discernment in each of these domains highlighted critical characteristics of the Hispanic educator experience.

All responding Hispanic educators signed a consent form and all survey emails were followed with monthly electronic reminders. Additionally, the team sent some follow-up phone calls or emails to answer participants’ questions regarding the survey. As a follow-up to the survey, a number of focus groups and one-on-one interviews were conducted with teachers, assistant principals, principals, associate superintendents, superintendents, and national advocates for Hispanic ministries. These interviews were audio recorded, transcribed, and coded using NVivo software. Here, we utilized an open-coded approach based on the theoretical framework on discernment as an organizational guide (Miles et al., 2018). These qualitative data provided substantive insights into the experiences of Hispanic teachers and leaders in Catholic schools and added further understanding beyond our survey results.

Figure 2

Catholic Educators in the United States, by Race–Ethnicity, 2020



Per the latest NCEA report in 2020, there are an estimated 146,367 teachers working in Catholic schools throughout the United States (McDonald & Schultz, 2021). Of that workforce, Hispanic educators are estimated to comprise approximately 9%. These educators work in schools across the nation, although not in equal numbers by region.

The predominant regions of the country that employ higher percentages of Hispanic Catholic school educators are the Northeast, the Southeast, and the Southwest, with clusters in major Midwestern cities (e.g., Chicago). In total, 291 Hispanic Catholic educators responded to the survey, representing a 3% response rate and 2% of the estimated 14,612 Hispanic Catholic school educators nationally. Of the 291 respondents, 142 were teachers (49%), 143 were school leaders (49%), and 7 were classified as “other” school personnel (2%).

The sampling was representative across the entire nation. Of the 32 archdioceses and 144 dioceses in the United States, respondents from 71 archdioceses/dioceses participated in the study (40%). The highest response rate stemmed from Florida, particularly in the greater Miami metropolitan area, followed by Los Angeles, Boston, Galveston-Houston, Orlando, and New York.

Results

Here we summarize the findings of the *Cultivating Talent* report, in three main areas: the vocation and identity of a Hispanic teacher/school leader; pathways into Catholic education; and support structures within the Catholic school and across (arch)diocese.

The Vocation and Identity of a Hispanic Teacher/School Leader

The U.S. Hispanic population, now at 62 million people, represents a variety of races, ethnicities, customs, academic trajectories, income levels, cultural traditions, and even languages. Our study sample (i.e., Hispanic PK–12 educators in Catholic schools in the United States) reflects this rich tapestry, with the overwhelming majority of these teachers self-identifying as Catholic (97%) and female (81%). Thirty-seven percent are under 40, 67% are married, a majority (66%) have children, and a handful (15%) have grandchildren, with 42% enrolling their children or grandchildren in the Catholic school where they teach. Survey findings also indicate that Hispanic teachers in U.S. Catholic schools are highly qualified and well educated: They have an average of 13.7 years of teaching experience, 97% earned a bachelor’s degree, 58% received a master’s degree, and 10% have a doctoral degree. Forty percent of the teachers are foreign-born, with Mexico, Colombia, and Cuba cited more frequently as countries of origin.

When looking specifically at Catholic school leaders, only 7% of principals in Catholic schools self-identify as Hispanic (NCES, 2018). Of the 143 school leaders that participated in our study, the vast majority self-identify as Catholic (96%). Two thirds self-identify as female and 65% as

married. The majority of Hispanic Catholic school leaders have children (92%) or grandchildren (20%), with 47% enrolling their children or grandchildren in the Catholic school where they teach. Nearly three quarters of responding leaders were above 40 years of age, with 30% reporting that they were in their 40s.

Findings also indicate that Hispanic leaders in Catholic schools in the United States are highly qualified, highly educated, and deeply committed to Catholic schools. Of the participants surveyed, 99% hold a bachelor's degree, 89% a master's degree, and 33% a doctoral degree; an additional 5% hold other professional degrees (i.e., JD, MD, or DDS). Individuals reported being in their current role on average for 9 years, and have been working in the Catholic school system for an average of 16 years. This tenure demonstrates a deep commitment to the sector of Catholic schools, as well as their individual school communities, with many having served in no more than three Catholic schools. Twenty-seven percent of the leaders are foreign-born, with Mexico cited most frequently as the country of origin.

Our data highlight some important commonalities among the Catholic educators who participated, specifically around (a) the vocational call to Catholic education, (b) the motivational factors for working in Catholic schools, and (c) the evolution of professional identity.

A significant number of respondents (88%) indicated they “mostly” or “absolutely agreed” that they “have been called to [their] current line of work” and 82% “mostly” or “absolutely agreed” that they want a “career that ultimately makes the world a better place.” Further, the overwhelming majority of survey respondents (98%) felt that being a Catholic educator allowed them to contribute to the common good, with 94% “mostly” or “absolutely agreeing” that “making a difference for others is the primary motivation in [their] career.” Their work as Hispanic Catholic school educators allows them to “live out [their] life’s purpose” (88.7%) and bring “dignity and meaning to one’s life” (82%).

Growing up, nearly 58% of the educators surveyed knew that they would become teachers or have a career in education. Of these individuals, three quarters indicated that they were encouraged by others to be a teacher, with family members being a primary influence in entering the teaching force (64%), followed by teachers, friends, principals, and pastors. Many participating Hispanic Catholic school leaders indicated that they would not have considered applying for a leadership role if not for the encouragement and “gentle nudging” of supervisors and fellow educators.

Understanding what motivates individuals to enter educational careers and remain in these positions long term is important for improving schools and helping to support top-quality educators as teachers and leaders. It is clear from the survey data that the motivation to teach and lead in Catholic schools among Hispanic teachers and leaders is driven by faith and values. When considering why Hispanic educators choose to teach and lead in Catholic schools, one must consider whether compensation is a motivating force. With salary schedules lower than what public school

counterparts normally offer, it can be easy to assume that many Catholic educators would leave the sector. Interestingly, research has found that salary and benefits are usually ranked lower in a review of motivations for Catholic educators (Convey, 2014). The condition of salary has been found to influence the decision-making process of newly hired teachers, suggesting that early career teachers may be swayed by pay. However, teacher mobility is much more strongly related to characteristics of the teacher (e.g., background, training, and environment) than to salary (Murnane et al., 1989). Thus, salary seems to serve as a complex motivator for Hispanic educators. When asked “to what extent does your salary motivate your work,” 42% of respondents claimed this was “not” or “only slightly influential” and about 25% said it was “very” or “extremely influential.” These data seem to indicate that some Hispanic teachers are not primarily motivated by salary; however, when asked about their reasons for considering not teaching or leading, 73% of all Hispanic Catholic school educators noted salary and benefits as the reason—far and away the most common reason. This rises to 81% when just considering teachers. Although there are a number of conditions that impact educator turnover and retention, the importance of salary should not be discounted.

Finally, professional identities are multifaceted, with different components interwoven (e.g., familial, ethnic, academic, and occupational; Murakami et al., 2016). Research on how Hispanics define identity has found that this population is inevitably influenced by two major paradigms: (a) identity as influenced by political and racial discrimination; and (b) identity as influenced by family, community/class, and religion (Murakami et al., 2016).

Much of the research about underrepresented teachers and leaders in the field of education highlights that many enter the field with the motivation to work with underrepresented students (Turner et al., 2017). However, our study paints a more nuanced view. Less than one third (29%) of respondents said that the opportunity to work with Hispanic children drew them to work in a Catholic school. However, it is worth observing that during the interviews and focus groups, the overwhelming majority of participants actually spoke about the importance of working with Hispanic students and families. In these conversations, participants spoke of their Hispanic identity as a fundamental reason to persevere in their careers. They expressed a belief that their cultural background and ethnicity creates a strong connection with the underrepresented students and families they serve and that they offered perspectives that are different from those of non-Hispanic teachers and leaders. These educators see their professional identity as an essential part of their lives, having the potential to influence the identity of Hispanic youth, who often see a reflection of themselves in the leader. Many shared about barriers to their success, commenting on how discrimination, alienation, and tokenism led them to question their identity.

This aligns with research that points toward stigma and identity dissociation as some of the main obstacles faced when working towards success for first and subsequent generations of Hispanics (Cummins et al., 2015). For individuals who feel stigmatized, it can be difficult to see themselves as an essential part of the professional community, and often they begin to question their

purpose (Desai & Abeita, 2017). When Hispanic students are not represented among teachers and administrators, their cultural identity and their struggles are often not addressed (Murakami et al., 2016). Likewise, when Hispanic educators are not represented among teachers and leaders in a system, their cultural identity and their struggles are not addressed. For the strengthening of our Catholic schools, it is imperative to emphatically embrace the identity of our Hispanic educators.

Central to one's identity is one's linguistic assets. Bilingualism—particularly cultivated in U.S. schools with dual language programs, where students learn content in English and their home language—is a gift: It benefits academic achievement (Ocasio, 2014) and leads to cultural and linguistic identity affirmation (Cummins et al., 2015). This latter has been linked to students' and educators' academic and professional success (Marian et al., 2013).

As Catholicism in the United States embraces its pluralistic and multilingual identity in the 21st century, Catholic schools are uniquely positioned to foster multilingualism. One way to give life to such a commitment is by affirming the numerous gifts bilingual educators bring to our schools, and to call for their just compensation and support. Bilingual educators are the foundation of dual language programs; without them, dual language education would remain an ideal—a dream for many, and an opportunity for few, as less than 2% of Hispanic children in the United States have the opportunity to participate in dual language programs (Center for Applied Linguistics, 2016).

Increased representation and centering the Spanish language in the classroom and community leads to an affirming educational experience for Hispanic students, uplifting and embracing their cultural and linguistic backgrounds and identities.

Pathways into Catholic Education

Hispanic educators in Catholic schools enter their roles through a variety of pathways and programs. In general, few educator preparation programs in the United States dedicate strategies and resources explicitly to recruiting underrepresented educators from diverse backgrounds, including Hispanic educators (TNTP, 2020). Our study revealed that the majority of Hispanic teachers working in Catholic schools did not attend a Catholic college or university at the undergraduate or graduate level. Only 27% attended undergraduate programs and 19% graduate programs at Catholic colleges or universities. Barely 7% of Hispanic teachers were trained through alternative preparation and certification programs, including those specifically designed for Catholic school educators via the University Consortium for Catholic Education (UCCE). Post-baccalaureate programs typically function as alternative training or certification initiatives. Hispanic Catholic school leaders, however, are more likely to have attended a Catholic college or university, with 42% attending undergraduate programs and 53% graduate programs. Some Catholic colleges and universities, such as Boston College, the University of Notre Dame, and Loyola Marymount

University, have developed Catholic-school-specific leadership degree and pathway programs. The existence of such programs may be a reason for the larger numbers of educators in our study who have undergone graduate-level formation.

When exploring pathways into teaching and leading in Catholic schools, it is important to realize that a significant number of Hispanic teachers received training and formation outside of the United States—especially those who are immigrants. Our study indicates that 20% of teachers and 8% of school leaders in Catholic schools hold degrees from institutions of higher education not located in the United States. Establishing degree equivalence and transferring educator certifications are difficult processes to navigate. This may be a factor in the relatively low percentage of Hispanic educators in Catholic schools who are not appropriately certified by their state certification offices. However, Catholic schools in general can hire Hispanic educators who are immigrants without regular state certifications, which can provide a temporary pathway into service in Catholic education while they validate their degrees and certifications.

One factor that seems consistently positive and a good indicator of future commitment to Catholic schools is their own experience in or with Catholic education. It is important for current Hispanic teachers and leaders in Catholic schools to acknowledge the influence they have on students, families, and community partners through their everyday interactions. As many educators do, they can intentionally invite or encourage individuals into a vocation to service in Catholic education. Recruiting, supporting, and encouraging Hispanic children and youth in Catholic schools today will have long-term effects and increase the potential of recruiting and retaining more Hispanic educators in Catholic schools tomorrow.

Another pathway into Catholic schools for Hispanic educators is prior involvement, formally or informally, in ministry. Ministry here is defined broadly, ranging from regular lay engagement in church and faith-based activities to formal ministerial commitments, such as ordination, consecration, and full-time lay ecclesial ministry. About 53% of all respondents in the study said that they had been involved in Catholic organizations, associations, or clubs prior to working in their Catholic school. When asked to describe the type of involvement, the majority named parish-based ministries, such as youth and young adult ministry, religious education, prayer groups, apostolic movements, liturgical ministries, and faith-based community organizing. Based on these responses, engagement in parish-based ministries, combined with the desire to give back to one's community, has the potential to fuel discernment towards a career in Catholic education.

Nearly a quarter of participants in the study (22%) have considered a vocational commitment in the Church, such as ordained priesthood or religious life. This signals that many Hispanic educators have a strong sense of ecclesial service and likely see their work as Catholic educators as an actualization of their ministerial vocation. The number of Hispanic Catholic priests and vowed religious women and men in the United States is very small compared to the size of the Hispanic

Catholic population. As of 2018, according to data collected through the Fifth National Encuentro of Hispanic/Latino Ministry process, there were 2,987 Hispanic priests (2,263 [or 76%] of them foreign-born) and 2,293 Hispanic vowed religious women and men in the country ([Fifth National Encuentro of Hispanic/Latino Ministry, 2019](#)). Supporting Hispanic educators in Catholic schools could in turn serve as a pathway to other forms of ecclesial service.

Strong participation in parish life and ministerial engagement should be seen as sources of nurturing the call to serve as educators in Catholic schools. Forty-six percent of respondents attend the parish connected with their school—a striking number, though not a majority, considering mobility trends in our society. From those in this group, 45% attended that same parish prior to becoming an educator at the Catholic school where they work. Mindful that nearly half (48%) of the participants indicated engagement in parish life as a pathway to working in a Catholic school, parishes and Catholic schools have an opportunity to create “Grow Your Own” programs by strengthening relationships between parishioners and school personnel.

When asked whether they were engaged in activities at their Catholic parishes, an extraordinary 85% of respondents said that they attended church regularly. About 11% have served as catechists in their parishes, about 6% have been involved in Bible study groups, and about 6% have taught the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA). Nearly 29% serve as Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion, about 16% as Lectors, and about 9% are members of a choir.

As of 2020, there were 16,703 Catholic parishes in the United States ([Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate, n.d.](#)); only a little over a quarter of these parishes (26%) offer Hispanic ministry ([Fifth National Encuentro of Hispanic/Latino Ministry, 2019](#)). A very small percentage of respondents in the study (2%) indicated that they were directly involved in Hispanic ministries, and 17% indicated that they collaborated with someone in their (arch)diocese whose work focuses on Hispanic ministry. If more parochial and diocesan offices of Hispanic ministry were to make a stronger effort to collaborate with Catholic schools, it is possible that more Hispanic educators in Catholic schools would be open to collaborating with their projects. Increased collaboration also bears the possibility of unifying and streamlining the messaging and outreach needed to recruit and retain Hispanic children, families, and educators within Catholic school communities.

Parishes can play a major role in identifying, recruiting, and mentoring Catholic school educators. Parish leaders have an opportunity, and perhaps the responsibility, to attract educators from within the parish community. This hope, however, is curtailed by the fact that a large number of parochial Catholic schools have closed or merged, or their viability is in question, especially at the elementary level ([Shirley, 2019](#)). A decade ago, there were nearly 4,253 parochial elementary schools in the United States; today, that number has dropped to 3,138. The number of parochial Catholic schools is getting smaller and the connection of many of these educational institutions to parishes is more fragile than ever before. However, we need fresher models that involve not only

those parishes that sponsor Catholic schools but all parishes in identifying future Catholic school teachers and leaders. A shared focus on Hispanic teachers and leaders may be a welcomed common goal at this time.

A final pathway explored in the report is the immigrant journey. In our study, 40% of Hispanic teachers and 27% of Hispanic school leaders in Catholic schools self-identified as foreign-born. These educators come from 16 Spanish-speaking countries: 33% immigrated from Mexico and 13% from Cuba (the top source countries), followed by Colombia, Peru, and Venezuela.

Foreign-born teachers in the United States tend to be highly educated (Furuya et al., 2019). When examining their educational backgrounds, 95% have a bachelor's degree, 54% a master's degree, and 12% a doctoral degree. Respondents on average have worked for 12 years in the Catholic school system. These data indicate that the majority of immigrant Hispanic Catholic school educators come to their Catholic school communities well-educated, and are deeply committed.

Further, a large percentage of immigrant Hispanic educators in Catholic schools convey a willingness to be involved in the life of their school communities. Sixty-four percent of immigrant respondents noted that they were "very" or "somewhat involved" in cultural diversity matters and programs at their schools, and nearly half indicated that they were involved in advocacy efforts related to the Hispanic community (e.g., food security, access to education, immigration). Such advocacy extends into their community, as 34% of immigrant respondents are involved in advocacy around quality public school education. This demonstrates that immigrant Hispanic educators in Catholic schools see themselves as advocates for other immigrant and Hispanic students and teachers.

There are a variety of pathways that draw Hispanic educators to teach and lead in Catholic schools. Attentiveness to the impact alternative programs, ministries, and life paths provide Hispanic individuals as they consider careers in the Catholic education sector is important.

Support Structures Within the Catholic School and Across the (Arch)Diocese

Support structures (e.g., mentoring, communication with leaders, and feedback on one's performance) in a school and across any given educational system play an important role, influencing retention and development of diverse talent (Ingersoll & May, 2011). For over a decade, empirical research has bolstered the premise that mentoring enhances growth in educators by providing pedagogical as well as emotional and psychological support (Gist et al., 2021). The benefits of mentoring yield positive outcomes for the mentor, mentee, and organization, highlighting the numerous benefits of this practice (Gist et al., 2021). Mentoring may occur at any stage in an educator's career, demonstrating the value of professional guidance across an educator's professional and vocational journey. While one-to-one mentoring is most common, mentoring groups of teachers via small groups utilized across professional learning collaborative designs has been found

to be effective; moreover, it presents an opportunity to widen the network of support among groups of educators within and across schools (Moir et al., 2009).

Of increasing interest is critical mentoring, also known as same-race or affinity-based mentorship, where underrepresented teachers explore the “potential benefits of culturally responsive” mentoring (Gist et al., 2021, p. 34). Culturally responsive mentoring explores “the need to better understand the local contexts in which teachers work and the ways in which those conditions shape the power relations between these teachers and their mentors” (Gist et al., 2021, p. 34). The critical mentorship design allows teachers from underrepresented communities to recognize their racial, cultural, and social identities along with ways to leverage experiential knowledge. It has been found to be an affirmative model of support for these teachers (Gist et al., 2021).

Distinct to Catholic schools, mentoring has been found to contribute to the mission of a Catholic school and individuals’ positive spirituality, promote development and learning, foster self-direction and autonomy, and cultivate a collaborative workplace culture grounded in continuous learning (English, 2013). While researchers have widely promoted mentorship as a promising practice for professional learning and development in Catholic schools, there is little evidence that formalized mentorship programs have been embraced by Catholic school leaders or that the effectiveness of existing programs has been sufficiently investigated (Vierstraete, 2005). Efforts to mentor Hispanic teachers and leaders (and other underrepresented educators) in Catholic schools are even rarer.

Despite the evidence on the impact of mentoring, our study revealed that a little over half of respondents were not assigned a mentor during their first year of teaching. For those educators who did receive a mentor their first year, more than half met monthly with their assigned mentor, a quarter met once or twice a month, and some met a few times a year or never. For the majority of respondents who had a mentor during their first year, three quarters of the mentors taught in a similar subject area or grade level as the mentee. Participants in interviews and focus groups shared that the design of first-year mentorship was more likely to be one-on-one.

When reflecting on mentorship provided by another educator of Hispanic background, examination of a school’s faculty composition can provide insights into whether affinity-based mentorship is possible within a given school community. The overwhelming majority of respondents (90%) indicated that there were other Hispanic faculty or staff employed at their school. While two thirds indicated that they purposefully sought support from Hispanic colleagues, only 29% indicated that they were mentored by someone who self-identified as Hispanic. Nearly two-thirds of survey respondents indicated that there were Hispanic Catholic school leaders in their school community, the majority (66%) of whom indicated an openness to professional mentorship by these Hispanic Catholic school leaders. Despite the representation of Hispanic teachers and leaders, critical mentoring within Catholic schools is not common.

Survey respondents indicated that Hispanic-to-Hispanic educator mentoring across the (arch)diocese was rarely common (6%) when compared to general or first-year mentoring opportunities. A handful of participants commented during interviews that they sought support from Hispanic mentors independent of their school or (arch)diocese. Expanding and improving current mentoring opportunities will likely have a significant and transformative impact on the retention of Hispanic Catholic teachers and leaders across the United States.

For educators to feel supported not only during their first year, but throughout their career, an emphasis on relationships within a school community across the (arch)diocese and across educational sectors is critical. Investing in the expansion of an educator's social network is necessary to support educators in their personal and professional growth. Doing this for Hispanic educators in Catholic schools creates opportunities for connection, increasing the potential to impact their retention in Catholic educational institutions.

Additionally, the study found that Hispanic Catholic educators serve as a critical source of support for other Hispanic educators in a variety of ways. A cherished category, *gente puente*—bridge builders, in the Hispanic worldview—illustrates well the role of Hispanic educators recruiting and retaining other Hispanic educators in Catholic schools. *Gente puente* connect realities, possibilities, and dreams. They mediate, curate, and broker. This form of agency positions Hispanic educational professionals as influencers and leaders who understand both the Hispanic and non-Hispanic worlds. Hispanic teachers as *gente puente* function as architects of communion in the Catholic schools where they serve, as well as in the larger Church and society.

Gente puente not only share beliefs, but also foster potential and expand knowledge in others. This sharing of skills and knowledge leads to dreams solidly built over time (Holland et al., 1998). Three out of four Hispanic teachers in our study see themselves as *gente puente* for other Hispanic families, students, and fellow teachers. Among Hispanic school leaders, this percentage is even higher, as they see themselves as bridge builders for Hispanic families (91%), students (85%), and fellow teachers (65%). As Hispanic leaders embrace their identity as *gente puente*, they realize the impact they have on future generations of Hispanic teachers and leaders.

Affirming their Hispanic and professional identities, grounded in a profound sense of mission, Hispanic leaders are instrumental in creating thriving school environments where Hispanic students, families, and educators feel at home. Hispanic teachers in the classroom exercise their calling to be *gente puente* by serving as mentors and increasing the possibilities of achievement for underrepresented students (Ocasio, 2014). Their presence allows them to serve as role models, teacher encouragers, and mentors to other educators and underrepresented students. Their presence and contributions can counteract unfortunate and harmful stigmas imposed upon Hispanics and other minoritized communities in the United States (Martinez, 2015).

Recommendations

Cultivating diverse talent in an increasingly Hispanic church requires the existence of an ecosystem of collaborations working together to ensure the cultivation, mentorship, and support of Hispanic teachers and leaders. It takes a village to achieve this goal. Within such an ecosystem of collaborations, we want to highlight at least five crucial areas of partnership. The main goal of naming them together here is to explore strategies that increase dialogue, sharing of resources, and a concerted effort to challenge silo mentalities that thrive in isolation or uncompromising competition.

First, there is an urgent need to understand well the possibilities and challenges of advancing the mission of Catholic schools in a diverse Church, especially as we witness the rapid growth of Hispanic families who can benefit from these institutions. Such understanding needs to be grounded in solid research about Hispanic children, families, and educators in Catholic schools. The *Cultivating Talent* report is a resource that illustrates Boston College's commitment to advancing research to generate creative and informed conversations, and the special issue of the *Journal of Catholic Education* in which this article appears demonstrates a commitment by a wide range of universities working to meet this need.

Secondly, university-based teacher/leader formation programs play an important role in recruiting and forming teachers and leaders at the service of Catholic educational institutions. As noted, the UCCE is an excellent example of recruiting and forming educators. While not all UCCE member programs have developed specific initiatives to recruit and form Hispanic teachers and leaders, several have done so—and more are in development. Further, Catholic educational institutions might consider financial incentives and other ways of making Catholic teacher and leadership programs more attractive to prospective Hispanic educators. A most necessary step is to expand collaborations with teacher/leader formation programs beyond Catholic institutions of higher education, particularly education programs in public institutions of higher education. After all, most Hispanic teachers and leaders working in Catholic schools have been trained in non-Catholic settings.

Third, (arch)dioceses and parishes can play a major role in fostering discernment among Hispanics to consider a vocation to serve as teachers and leaders in Catholic schools. The majority of Hispanic educational leaders in Catholic schools are actively involved in parish life. Beyond such natural exercise of vocational accompaniment, many (arch)dioceses do not have local programs to support teachers and leaders in Catholic schools in such a process of discernment. The work of superintendents of Catholic schools in (arch)dioceses, as well as that of principals at the local level, is crucial in this regard. Not every non-Hispanic superintendent and principal, however, has developed the intercultural competencies to work with Hispanic teachers and leaders, not all treat the development of Hispanic leadership as a top priority, and only a handful are themselves Hispanic. Some may feel at a loss trying to support Hispanic teachers and leaders when these

individuals are present in small numbers in their (arch)dioceses and schools. We need to find ways to work together to support (arch)diocesan-based teacher/leader programs to increase their focus on Hispanic teachers and leaders while creating regular spaces for dialogue and formation about this important area of Catholic education across the United States.

Fourth, there are a growing number of conversations in the United States about how current Catholic ministerial and educational structures can better meet the needs of the Hispanic Catholic community. Such is the case of the Fifth National Encuentro of Hispanic/Latino Ministry, convoked by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB), and the Raíces y Alas convening, convoked by the National Catholic Council for Hispanic Ministry (NCCHM) and the National Association of Catholic Diocesan Directors of Hispanic Ministry (NACDDHM). Yet, these efforts are led mainly by Hispanic Catholic leaders who do not always participate in larger conversations about Catholic life and Catholic education in the country. Also, while much emphasis is placed on the recruitment of Hispanic children and the support of their families in Catholic education research and practice, rarely does the conversation focus on the urgency of mentoring and supporting Hispanic teachers and leaders in Catholic schools. There is a need for more integrated conversations that involve the above efforts in closer collaboration with the NCEA, the USCCB Committee for Catholic Education, the work of Catholic colleges and universities, and the various other ministerial and educational organizations that advocate for a better experience in Catholic schools. Such conversations must bring to the center the cultivation of Hispanic teachers and leaders in Catholic schools.

Finally, there is no doubt that Catholic education in the United States thrives in large part thanks to the generosity of countless individuals, communities, and foundations. One area in which there is more room for philanthropic investment is the formation, support, and mentoring of Hispanic teachers and leaders who are already in Catholic schools or are discerning to serve in this role. Such investment can happen in various ways: scholarships for teacher and leader preparation; grants and programs to boost salaries and compensation to reach increased parity with other sectors; retention programs and efforts (including intentional professional learning and professional development opportunities); the creation and support of diocesan programs to recruit, support, and retain Hispanic teachers and leaders; and further research efforts on Hispanic teachers and leaders in Catholic schools.

Conclusion and Invitation

Much of the analysis and data shared in this article comes from our report *Cultivating Talent: A Summary of Findings from the National Study Examining Pathways to Increase the Presence of Hispanic Teachers and Leaders in Catholic Schools* (Ospino and Wyttenbach, 2022). We invite scholars and practitioners to read the full report. The national research study grounding this report

has allowed us to get a glimpse of what Hispanic teachers and leaders bring to Catholic schools, giving us hope. It also identifies and documents some of the challenges that Hispanic teachers and leaders face as they take the baton. We as a Church cannot afford to ignore the contributions and the challenges of Hispanic teachers and leaders and, for that matter, those of any other group. Our invitation is simple: Pay attention, start talking, and take action. We want to invite all Catholics in the United States to engage in synodal discernment about how to cultivate Hispanic talent in Catholic schools using this report as a resource.

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