

THE CHILDREN OF MEXICAN IMMIGRANTS IN U.S. SCHOOLS:
EXPLORING THEIR PARENTS' AND TEACHERS'
PERCEPTION AND KNOWLEDGE GAPS

by

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ABSTRACT

THE CHILDREN OF MEXICAN IMMIGRANTS IN U.S. PUBLIC SCHOOLS: EXPLORING THEIR PARENTS' AND TEACHERS' PERCEPTION AND KNOWLEDGE GAPS

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The influx of Mexican immigrants has posed enormous challenges to the nation's public school systems where migration is rapidly increasing. The high Hispanic dropout rate points to a failure in educating Latinos and has received ample attention from researchers, educators, and policymakers; but the achievement disparities persist. Using the lens of critical theory to investigate the presence of a "hidden curriculum" that promotes the dominant ideology in our public school system, this study explores perception gaps between Mexican immigrant parents and the American teachers of their children in a suburban Texas school district where Latinos are in the minority. The project applies a mixed method analysis using parallel survey items and qualitative input to address the following questions: (1) What perceptions and knowledge about education do Mexican immigrant families possess? (2) What perceptions of the culture and educational background of Mexican immigrants do U.S. teachers of Mexican-origin children possess? (3) What are the gaps in these perceptions and knowledge? (4) How do the immigrant

families' perceptions and knowledge of the host culture affect their efforts to access U.S. educational opportunities? (5) What potential do these gaps have to affect the education of Mexican immigrant children in U.S. schools? The analysis uncovered the following perception, knowledge, and institutional gaps: (a) the inadequacy of preservice and inservice training for American teachers that serve Mexican-origin students and their families; (b) communication gaps between immigrant parents and teachers, especially secondary and general education teachers; (c) an undervaluation by teachers of immigrant parents' cultural and educational background and parents' capabilities to help their children academically; (d) a disregard for the previous studies of students transferring from Mexican schools; and (e) a failure on the part of the campuses to adequately provide parent involvement activities in the Spanish language. The findings of this study imply that Mexican immigrant families' experiences in this Texas suburban district affect their efforts to fully participate in U.S. educational opportunities because their communication with teachers, school staff and administrators is impeded by cultural and institutional barriers. The findings also indicate narrow prospects for immigrant parents' participation in the traditional campus parent involvement activities.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction to the Study

The influx of Mexican immigrants has posed enormous challenges to the nation's public school systems as they work to manage the rapidly increasing number of immigrant pupils. By 2050, the Hispanic population will top 132 million, or 30 percent of the nation's total population (U.S. Census, 2010). Mexicans comprise the largest group of immigrants within the diverse U.S. Latino population with the roughly 30 million of the estimated 46 million Latinos living in the United States reporting their country of origin as Mexico. The Pew Hispanic Research Center reports that 63 percent of the Hispanic population in the U.S. are of Mexican origin (p. 2).¹ In Texas, the 2010 reported state percentage of Latinos is 37.6 percent, up 41.8 percent from the 2000 Census. In addition, more than a quarter of all children younger than five years old in the US in 2009 were Hispanic suggesting that this population is poised to continue impacting classrooms across the U.S.

For the first time in modern Texas history, Hispanic students now make up a majority of those enrolled in Texas public schools. Newly released enrollment statistics for the 2010-2011 school year show there are 2,480,000 Hispanic students in the public schools, representing 50.2 percent of the total enrollment, which is 4,933,617.²

¹ Pew Hispanic Center. (2011). *U.S. Hispanic country-of-origin counts for nation: Top 30 metropolitan areas*.

² Texas Education Agency (March 24, 2011). *Hispanics are the majority in public schools*. Retrieved from http://www.tea.state.tx.us/index.aspx?id=2147495413&menu_id=680&menu_id2=797&cid=2147483656

1.2 Statement of the problem

The National Center for Educational Statistics indicates that the dropout rate for Hispanics has consistently been much higher than for Whites and Blacks. Even with a decline in dropout rates across all the major racial/ethnic categories, the dropout rate for Hispanics is still more than three times that of Whites and almost twice that of Blacks. Despite all the interest in addressing the Hispanic dropout dilemma, a solution continues to elude policymakers and practitioners.

Table 1.1 Dropout Rates for 16-24 Year-olds by Race/Ethnicity

		Race/Ethnicity		
Year	Total	White	Black	Percent
1980	14.1	11.4	19.1	35.2
1981	13.9	11.4	18.4	33.2
1982	13.9	11.4	18.4	31.7
1983	13.7	11.2	18	31.6
1984	13.1	11	15.5	29.8
1985	12.6	10.4	15.2	27.6
1986	12.2	9.7	14.2	30.1
1987	12.7	10.4	14.1	28.6
1988	12.9	9.6	14.5	35.8
1989	12.6	9.4	13.9	33
1990	12.1	9	13.2	32.4
1991	12.5	8.9	13.6	35.3
1992	11	7.7	13.7	29.4

Table 1.1 - *Continued*

1993	11	7.9	13.6	27.5
1994	11.5	7.7	12.6	30
1995	12	8.6	12.1	30
1996	11.1	7.3	13	29.4
1997	11	7.6	13.4	25.3
1998	11.8	7.7	13.8	29.5
1999	11.2	7.3	12.6	28.6
2000	10.9	6.9	13.1	27.8
2001	10.72	7.322915	10.891908	26.961112
2002	10.48	6.51611	11.29128	25.68986
2003	9.9	6.34319	10.94074	23.54459
2004	10.32	6.75185	11.76956	23.78805
2005	9.41	5.96	10.44	22.4
2006	9.345	5.8485	10.7367	22.0675
2007	8.745	5.271771	8.4112034	21.437308
2008	8.011	4.806404	9.9345124	18.328027
2009	8.1	5.2	9.3	17.6
<i>SOURCE: U.S. Department of Commerce, Census Bureau, Current Population Survey (CPS), October Supplement, 1980–2009.</i>				

Although the Latino dropout rate has fallen from a high of 35.2 percent in 1980 to 17.6 percent in 2009, this rate still means that thousands of students are leaving school without the credentials needed to obtain jobs that can support themselves and their families.

Researchers have pointed out that the losses in educational achievement of Latinos are not only unacceptable for reasons of equity in public education; but also because of the disastrous implications for society due to foregone income, tax revenues, increased welfare, job training, unemployment, and criminal justice costs that result from the undereducation of our youth (Montecel, Cortez, & Cortez, 2004). If the numbers of Latinos continue to increase as predicted, their undereducation and resultant underemployment will become a crisis for the nation as a whole due to a drop in per capita income. Using California as an example, the Center for Public Policy and Higher Education has projected that if the state "does not immediately begin preparing for underrepresented students for higher education, by 2020 the state will experience an 11 percent drop in per capita income, resulting in serious economic hardship for the state's population (p.4)." ³

The high Hispanic dropout rate has received ample attention from researchers, educators, and policymakers; but the achievement gap continues to exceed that of White and African American students (Chavez, Belkin, Hornback, 1991; Secada et.al., 1998; Fry, 2003; Ladson-Billings, 2006; DiPaula, 2008). State education commissions, school districts and campuses across the nation have instituted a number of changes to improve the education of Latino children in the United States, but there is little agreement on the best way to accomplish this task. Heated debates over the education of non-English speakers continue at the local, state and federal level without consensus as to policy and practice (Crawford, 1991; Paulston, 1997; Macedo, Dendrinos, & Gounari, 2003; Macedo, 2006). Individual jurisdictions have applied a variety of educational strategies from an English immersion approach to a mass importation of Spanish-speaking teachers from other countries (Hakuta, 1974; Hamann, 2011). The implementation of policies that will answer the current failure to educate Latinos and find ways to accommodate for both the linguistic and cultural needs of this growing population is

³ Gándara, P. & Contreras, F. (2009). *The Latino education crisis: The consequences of failed social policies*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

becoming more urgent as the "browning" of public schools becomes evident. This challenge will be especially important in Texas.

Pedagogical strategies aimed at improving the underachievement of Latinos have not been effective in reducing the problem. However, much scholarly literature has been focused on parent involvement as a positive effect on children's educational outcomes (Christenson, Rounds, & Gorney, 1992; Fehrmann, Keith, & Reimers, 1987; Izzo, Weissberg, Kasprow, & Fendrich, 1999; Keith, Keith, Quirk, Cohen- Rosenthal, & Franzese, 1996; Keith et al., 1998; Miedel & Reynolds, 1999; Shaver & Walls, 1998; Stevenson & Baker, 1987; Englund, et al., 2004). Despite strong empirical evidence linking parent involvement to student academic success, the potential to impact the educational outcomes of Latino students using this approach is lacking a careful analysis of the gaps in the knowledge and perceptions of Latino immigrants with children in the public schools and the American teachers of those children.

1.3 Purpose of the Study

This study contributes to the literature on Latino parent involvement by uncovering the perception and knowledge gaps of Mexican immigrant parents and the American teachers of their children. Through an analysis of these gaps, barriers to the full participation of immigrant families in the education of their children in U.S. schools become evident. Collecting and analyzing valid and reliable data regarding these disparities provides the building blocks for developing targeted interventions to enhance the collaboration between teachers and parents and thus improve the quality of education for Mexican-origin students. The research questions for this study are:

1. What perceptions and knowledge about education do Mexican immigrant families possess?
2. What perceptions and knowledge of the culture and educational background of Mexican immigrants do U.S. teachers of Mexican-origin children possess?
3. What are the gaps in these perceptions and knowledge?

4. How do the immigrant families' perceptions and knowledge of the host culture affect their efforts to access U.S. educational opportunities?
5. What potential do these gaps in perception and knowledge have to affect the education of Mexican-origin children in U.S. schools?

1.4 Theoretical Framework

The theories that attempt to explain the root causes of the failure to educate Latinos equitably in the U.S. is the topic of this next section. There are key social theories that have explanatory significance for the practices of educational social structures. These theories include concepts about the social functions of institutions, the notion that a dominant ideology impedes the social mobility of the working class, and the idea that public schools are active agents that reproduce the dominant ideology.

Early social theory proposed a view of people groups as an organic body, borrowing terms from the biological sciences. Auguste Comte, who is considered by some as the founder of sociology, made analogies between biological concepts and particular types of social structures.⁴ "I shall treat the Social Organism as definitely composed of the families which are the true elements or cells, next the Classes or Castes which are its proper tissues, and lastly, of the cities and Communes which are its real organs (p. 241)."⁵

Subsequent philosophers elaborated on Comte's analogy, most notably Herbert Spencer and Émile Durkheim. Spencer used an analogy of the human body to explain society, highlighting the idea that the specific structures of the body—organs, limbs, etc. — although mutually dependent, have distinctive functions for supporting the life of the whole organism. As Spencer continued to analogize the points of similarity between organicism and societies, he began to develop what can be termed *requisite functionalism*. That is, organic and superorganic bodies reveal certain universal requisites that must be fulfilled for these bodies to adapt to an environment (Turner, 2003, p. 25).

⁴ Turner, J. H. (2003). *The structure of sociological theory*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth/Thompson Learning.

⁵ Comte, A. (1875). *System of positive polity or treatise on sociology*. London: Burt Franklin.

The conceptual framework of social structures as organic bodies is useful in understanding the interrelatedness of individual human behaviors in a group setting, such as in public institutions like schools. The theory that arose from Spencer's analogy, along with the contributions of others was termed "structural functionalism," or "functionalism" because it explained society in terms of the different "functions" of its elements — institutions, values, individuals, etc.

Émile Durkheim focused on the positive effects of individual functions on the whole of society. Durkheim purported that "functions are not an end in themselves, but only a means to an end; that they are one of the organs of social life and that social life is above all a harmonious community of endeavors, when minds and will come together to work for the same aim" (p. 16).⁶ He wrote a great deal about education and teaching practices from the standpoint of the organismic metaphor, viewing the system parts, such as education fulfilling certain needs or functions that serve society as the whole body. Durkheim's aim was

to explain human action in society, and he observed that people often acted as if compelled by some force outside them . . . but he repeatedly points out that the social forces of society, expressed by its rules and habits, become internalized in individual consciences, so that society, is 'inside' the individual as well as 'outside' him.⁷

This view of the collective power of individuals has great relevance to the function of education in society. The education system is a powerful institution that has control over individuals, especially children, who do not get to select their own mode of education, nor the content thereof. "The man which education is obliged to make of us is not the man as nature has made him but as society wishes him to be; and it wishes him to be such as its internal economy calls for" (p. 122).⁸ Although Durkheim perceived the power of the educational system to shape children into adults who would serve the needs of the whole community, he also saw

⁶ Durkheim, É. (translated by C. Brookfield). (1992). *Professional ethics and civic morals*. London and New York: Routledge.

⁷ Ottaway, A. K. C. (1968). Durkheim on education. *British Journal of Educational Studies*, 16(1), 5-16.

⁸ Durkheim, É. (translated by. S. D. Fox). (1961). *Education and sociology*, New York: The Free Press.

education as a force for transformation; as a means for individuals to learn to adjust to an ever-changing society. Thus, Durkheim identified two basic functions of a system of education — indoctrination into the culture's dominant value system *and* training for the future.

An extension of the functionalists' organic analogy that has become pervasive in sociology is derived from the science of geology. The study of class relationships in a society is sometimes referred to as "stratification," as in "strata," or layers of rock formations. The chief theorists recognized for their analyses of class structures in society are Karl Marx and Max Weber. The theory of stratification has become very useful in investigating patterns of unequal educational opportunities. Marx's distinction between classes of people emanated from his notion that the unequal distribution of material goods is characteristic of capitalist societies. In Marxist theory, two major classes of people emerge — the bourgeoisie and the proletariat; or the haves and the have-nots; the owners of the means of production, and the workers who supply their labor. The economic relationship between these two major social classes translates into power relationships, with the bourgeoisie becoming a dominant force in society.

The key to understanding Marx is his class definition. A class is defined by the ownership of property. Such ownership vests a person with the power to exclude others from the property and to use it for personal purposes. . . . Class thus is determined by property, not by income or status. These are determined by distribution and consumption, which itself ultimately reflects the production and power relations of classes. The social conditions of bourgeoisie production are defined by bourgeois property. Class is therefore a theoretical and formal relationship among individuals.⁹

In their *Manifesto of the Communist Party* (1848), Marx and Engels describe how the "proletariat goes through various stages of development" as a response to their exploitation by the bourgeoisie. Eventually, they form collectives such as labor unions in order to protect their economic interests. But "the proletarian is without property . . . modern industry labour, modern

⁹ Rummel, R. J. (1977). *Understanding conflict and war*. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publications.
<http://www.hawaii.edu/powerkills/CIP.CHAP5.HTM>

subjection to capital . . . has stripped him of every trace of national character. Law, morality, religion, are to him so many bourgeois prejudices, behind which lurk in ambush just as many bourgeois interests" (para. 46).¹⁰

Marx's theory plays out a scenario of inevitable struggle between classes until the proletariat develop their social consciousness to the point that they recognize their common oppression, leading to a revolution and an eventual breakdown of the capitalist structure.

In depicting the most general phases of the development of the proletariat, we traced the more or less veiled civil war, raging within existing society, up to the point where that war breaks out into open revolution, and where the violent overthrow of the bourgeoisie lays the foundation for the sway of the proletariat. (Ibid., para. 50).

In Marx's view, education is used by the bourgeoisie to spread moral principles and perpetuate the capitalist system (Cole, 2008). Marx's close friend and intellectual partner Friedrich Engels was more optimistic than Marx. He believed that "an educated proletariat will not be disposed to remain in the oppressed condition in which our present proletariat finds itself."¹¹ Thus, in classic Marxist theory, education is recognized as both having the power to dominate and the liberating power to overcome class strata. In either case, however, there is class conflict.

The domination theme is also present in the work of Max Weber; but in contrast to Marx, Weber saw more than economic reasons for class domination. Weber's application of class theory went beyond Marx's focus on capitalism to other type of societies. His theories of "social closure" outline a process by which power status groups "attempt to improve their lot by restricting access to rewards and privileges to a restricted circle, "securing for themselves "certain resources and advantages at the expense of other groups."¹² Weber even categorized types of domination -- charismatic, traditional, rational-legal — and characterized the

¹⁰ Marx & Engels Internet Archive. (1987). <http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1848/communist-manifesto/ch01.htm#007>

¹¹ Cole, M. (2008). *Marxism and educational theory: Origins and issues*. New York, NY: Routledge.

¹² Parkin, F. (1982). *Max Weber*. New York, NY: Tavistock Publications and Ellis Horwood Limited.

educational ends, processes, content, and evaluation for each type. For example, a *traditional* orientation to dominance might cultivate the student for a particular style of life, as in Confucian China. A *rational-legal* authority may be more concerned with the practical aspect of training for specialization.¹³ Weber had a guarded attitude towards the specialization and certification process, claiming that professional examinations perpetuate a stratum of privilege.

When we hear from all sides the demand for an introduction of regular curricula and special examinations, the reason behind it is not of course a sudden awakened 'thirst for education' but the desire for restricting the supply of these positions and their monopolization by the owners of educational certificates.¹⁴

A good example of this restrictive practice is the admissions limits by medical schools and law schools through the rigor of entrance exams.

Other stratification theorists are not as fatalistic as Marx, Engels, and Weber, but they also use the explanation of power relationships and underlying domination forces within a society to help shed light on social inequalities. Functional stratification theorists such as Talcott Parsons considered inequality "as a necessary feature of any properly functioning human society" (p. 100).¹⁵ Parsons believed that the shared values of a society are ranked, and that the individuals with the talent and skills to uphold those values are inevitably rewarded more than those who do not have the requisite talent and skills. In other words, stratification/inequality is justifiable if it advances and supports the values of the whole society. Parsons saw the education system as vital in maintaining this function.

Talcott Parsons considers functions of schools that help hold society together. In focusing on the school class, he looks at the school as an agency of socialization,

¹³ Persell, C. H. (1977). *Education and inequality: A theoretical and empirical synthesis*. New York, NY: Free Press.

¹⁴ Gerth, H. H. & Mills, C. W. (translators, editors). (1946). *From Max Weber: Essays in sociology*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

¹⁵ Lenski, G. E. (1966). *Power and privilege: A theory of social stratification*. New York, NY: McGraw-Hill.

preparing the young members of society for their adult roles. Schools sort students into college and non-college groups early in the student's career (p. 80).¹⁶

Although the functionalist paradigm laid the foundation for considering the different working parts of a society, the optimism and hope for education in theorists such as Spencer, Durkheim, and Parsons would not survive the turbulence of the sixties. With a new awareness of the social rights of minorities in the 1960s, a new generation of social theorists took up the Marxist premise that education systems serve as agents of structural dominance of one class over another. Feinberg and Soltis (2009) explain how social transformation can be hindered by the "hegemony" of the dominant class.

The development of class consciousness may be blocked by society, and progressive social change may be impeded. Marxists use the concepts of false consciousness and hegemony to explain how this can happen. Members of the subordinate class who express the point of view and share the values of the dominant class exhibit false consciousness. True consciousness of your own class is impeded by your acceptance of the values of the dominant class. When the dominant class is successful in establishing its own mode of thinking among most members of the subordinate class, it is said to have established hegemony over the subordinate class. Hegemony means having a preponderance of influence and authority over others. This influence is expressed both in the concepts and the institutional arrangements of the social structure (p. 50).¹⁷

Later in the twentieth century, Marxist philosopher Louis Althusser expanded Marx's theories about inequalities in capitalist systems and claimed that educational institutions were not only important for perpetuating the hegemony, but that they are the *principal* force of

¹⁶ Ballantine, J. H., & Spade, J. Z. (2008). *Schools and society: A Sociological approach to education*. Los Angeles, CA: Pine Forge Press.

¹⁷ Feinberg, W. & Soltis, J. F. (2009). *School and society*. New York and London: Teachers College Press.

domination in advanced capitalist societies (p. 80).¹⁸ Althusser recognized "functions" of society much the same as the early functionalists, referring to the various institutions as "apparatuses" instead of functions. He differentiated between the types of societal and cultural apparatuses, depending on their style of exacting compliance from the populace to maintain the capitalist status quo. The "repressive" apparatuses include institutions such as army, police, prisons, and the courts. They operate through intimidation and outward force. Other societal institutions like family, politics, law, and education fall under the "ideological" apparatus, which influence through ideology, and not external force. But Althusser did not think that the ideological apparatuses were free from coercion:

State apparatuses function massively and predominately *by ideology*, but they also function secondarily by repression, even if ultimately, but only ultimately, this is very attenuated and concealed, even symbolic. (There is no such thing as purely ideological apparatus.) Thus Schools and Churches use suitable means of punishment, expulsion, selection, etc. to 'discipline' not only their shepherds, but also their flocks.¹⁹

Althusser refers to the Marxist concept of consciousness in discussing the devices used by educational institutions to instill compliance by the working class –[extort loyalty to the dominant class.] He contends that ideology produces a system of images in the unconscious that imposes itself on people "in a process that escapes them," suggesting that "schools are not to be viewed as social sites marked by the interplay of domination, accommodation, and struggle, but rather as sites that function smoothly to reproduce a docile labor force" (Giroux, 2001, p. 82). In other words, the working class takes on the values of the ruling class without realizing it. They may see themselves as their masters/rulers see them, and perceive this self-image as the truth. Nowhere is the environment more fertile for breeding this false consciousness than in schools. Paulo Freire (1985) adds:

¹⁸ Giroux, H. A. (2001). *Theory and resistance in education: towards a pedagogy for the opposition*. Westport, CT: Bergin & Garvey.

¹⁹ Althusser, L. (1971). 'Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses' in *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*. London: New Left Books. Available online at <http://www.marx2mao.com/Other/LPOE70ii.html#s5>.

For cultural invasion to succeed, it is essential that those invaded become convinced of their intrinsic inferiority. . . . The more invasion is accentuated and those invaded are alienated from their own culture and from themselves, the more the latter want to be like the invaders: to walk like them, talk like them.²⁰

In light of the failure of functionalism to explain the unrelenting inequalities in education, and against the backdrop of Marxist theory and its offshoots, one has to ask if the education system is the best place to advocate for "equal opportunity." For radical American economists Samuel Bowles and Herbert Gintis, the answer to this question is a categorical "no." At the time of the publication of their groundbreaking book, *Schooling in Capitalist Societies* (1976), Bowles and Gintis were in accord with Althusser's assessment of schools as devoid of democratic cooperation and the healthy interpersonal struggles that promote personal development. They proposed that the education system "neither adds to nor subtracts" from inequality, it only replicates the existing class pattern and stratifies the labor force. "Through the educational encounter, individuals are induced to accept the degree of powerlessness with which they will be faced as mature workers" (p. 42).²¹ How is this anesthetization accomplished? "The heart of the process is to be found not in the content of the educational encounter -- or the process of information transfer -- but in the form: the social relations of the educational encounter" (Ibid., p. 41).

These social encounters for students include behaviors as waiting in line, maintaining a routinized schedule, navigating the reward system of the school, working independently; all of these behaviors indirectly teach concepts of work, authority, rules, and ownership (Feinberg & Soltis, 2009, p. 57). Many theorists such as Michael Apple refer to this incidental instruction as

²⁰ Freire, P. (1985). *The politics of education: Culture, power, and liberation* /translated by Donaldo Macedo. South Hadley, MA: Bergin & Garvey.

²¹ Bowles, S. & Gintis, H. (2008). Schooling in capitalist America: Educational reform and the contradictions of economic life. In J. H. Ballantine, & J. Z. Spade (Eds.), *Schools and society: A sociological approach to education*. Los Angeles, CA: Pine Forge Press.

"the hidden curriculum." Apple (1990) reminds us that at the outset of our developing education system, the "hidden" curriculum was not hidden at all.

The founders of American education believed that the schools should inculcate the nation's values in their children in order to bring together people from diverse cultural and social structures to produce a "standard nationalized character" -- one true American way of life (p. 49).

In the course of the education system's journey through changing national needs, the curriculum of conformity became hidden, but did not go away. It is deeply entrenched in the educational system. American cultural critic, Henry Giroux argues that the "hidden curriculum functions not simply as a vehicle of socialization but also as an agency of social control, one that functions to provide differential forms of schooling to different classes of students" (Giroux, 2001, p. 47). Macedo, Dendrinos, & Gounari (2003) apply this notion of social control specifically to the way schools use language as a proxy for social status, a relevant concept to the study at hand.

Schools as sites of struggle and contestation that reproduce the dominant culture and ideology, as well as what is perceived as legitimate language/knowledge, make use of their institutional power to either affirm or deny a learner's language, and thus his or her lived experiences and culture. Additionally, schools are not merely static institutions that mirror the social order or reproduce the dominant ideology. They are active agents in the very construction of the social order and the dominant ideology.²²

Giroux acknowledges the power of the education system but laments the lack of understanding that even theorists have on how society constructs some oppressive forms of schooling. "More specifically, there is little or no concern with the ways in which powerful institutions and groups influence the knowledge, social relations, and modes of evaluation that

²² Macedo, D., Dendrinos, B., & Gounari, P. (2003). *The Hegemony of English*. Boulder, CO: Paradigm Publishers.

characterize the ideological texture of school life" (Giroux, 2001, p. 55). His charge to committed educators is to ask important questions about why schools fail, and how their failures can be understood "within a broader set of political, economic, spiritual, and cultural relations." It is the objective of this study to ask such questions regarding the failure to adequately educate Latinos within the "broader set" of the sociocultural relations of U.S. teachers and Mexican immigrant families and the politics of immigration in contemporary economy. Also important to note is that Giroux, Freire and other critical theorists focus on the "other half" of the interaction between school and student—mainly, the school as a structure. The focus in much of the policy arena has been on how to "fix" the student or the family without consideration for the ways the structures are aligned with the dominant culture. The inquiries posed to teachers and parents in this study have the potential to expose practices in the public schools that promote the dominant ideology and undervalue the culture of Latino immigrants.

1.5 Research Questions

Against the backdrop of critical theories and because hard evidence indicates that our equal educational opportunity principles have not produced for minorities the democratic and economic outcomes our nation subscribes to, this study explores the perceptual and knowledge gaps of Mexican immigrant families in public schools and of the teachers of their children, and analyzes how these gaps may contribute to the educational underachievement of Mexican-origin students. Specifically, the investigation focuses on the hidden curriculum that undermines the educational equity of these students. "The hidden curriculum is an underlying agenda that affects students of low socioeconomic status, particularly language-minority students. It is based on the attitude that non-English-speaking students are not capable of the same academic achievement as native speakers." ²³

The research questions for this study are:

1. What perceptions and knowledge about education do Mexican immigrant families possess?

²³ Vang, C. T. (2006). Minority parents should know more about school culture and its impact on their children's education. *Multicultural Education*, Summer, 20-26.

2. What perceptions and knowledge of the culture and educational background of Mexican immigrants do U.S. teachers of Mexican origin children possess?
3. What are the gaps in these perceptions and knowledge?
4. How do the immigrant families' perceptions and knowledge of the host culture affect their efforts to access U.S. educational opportunities?
5. What potential do these gaps in perception and knowledge have to affect the education of Mexican immigrant children in U.S. schools?

The specific areas of inquiry include teachers' and parents' knowledge and perceptions about (a) teacher competency in meeting the educational needs of minority language learners; (b) cultural knowledge; (c) U.S. school competence for serving immigrant populations; (e) parent involvement opportunities for immigrant families; and (d) recommendations for improvement.

1.6 Importance of the Study

The existing research on the perceptions of Mexican immigrant parents of U.S. public schools is based largely on qualitative designs using personal interviews and ethnographic research (Hill & Torres, 2010). Although the interview techniques of qualitative studies are important for depth of understanding, they do not provide the measurement capability of quantitative analysis. No study to date has administered quantitative surveys to a random sample of *both* teachers and parents to analyze their perceptions and knowledge. This project breaks new ground by applying a mixed method analysis using parallel survey items for Mexican immigrant parents of school-aged children and U.S. teachers, and an open-ended component for qualitative input. Much of the parent involvement literature examines minority, low income, or Latino families from a mix of countries of origin. The current project focuses on Mexican immigrant parents only, as they constitute the majority of the ever-increasing Latino population of our public schools.

This is an important contribution to the literature but also to the policy implications of addressing the education of a booming segment of the population in the U.S., particularly in geographical areas that do not have experience with Mexican-origin children in their schools (Wortham et. al., 2002). Policy implications include local efforts to train campus personnel and teachers on the cultural and educational background of Mexican immigrant families. Such valuable knowledge and cultural awareness can help campus staff integrate immigrant families as full educational partners in their child's education. In addition, policies and practices that can help immigrant families know what is expected from them as partners in their children's schooling in the United States are invaluable tools for the academic success of Mexican-origin students. The empirical evidence linking parent involvement with academic achievement is clear, yet few school districts have maximized this opportunity with Mexican immigrant parents (Ramirez, 2010; Jasis & Marriot, 2010; Jasis & Ordoñez-Jasis, 2012).

1.7 Scope of the Study

Because the majority of the immigrant population in the United States being of Mexican origin, this study focuses on Mexican immigrant families. The setting of the study is a small to medium-sized public school district in Texas.

1.8 Definition of Terms

Definitions are presented in order to clarify important terms and concepts used in the study. The term "Mexican-origin" is used by the Pew Hispanic Center and other scholars (Romo, 1984; Stanton-Salazar & Dornbusch, 1995; Galindo & Reardon, 2006) to identify individuals who have emigrated (regardless of legal status) from Mexico and who are residing in the United States, or who are first, second or third generation children of Mexican immigrants. Although Mexican-origin students comprise the greatest share of Hispanic public school students in each generation, the Mexican share of students decreases among the third-and-higher generation. Nearly three-quarters of first- and second-generation Hispanic students (72%

and 74%, respectively) are of Mexican origin. Only 60% of the third-and-higher generation Hispanic students are of Mexican origin.²⁴

It is worth noting that Mexicans consider themselves *americanos*, since they do reside in the Americas. There is a term in Spanish for citizens of the United States (*estadounidenses*), but there is not an equivalent term in English. For the most part, Mexicans refer to U.S. citizens as *norteamericanos*; although geographically speaking, Mexicans are "North Americans," too. Even though the vast majority of Mexican-origin people are considered "White" by race, the term "White" is used in this paper to identify non-Hispanic people who are of European descent, particularly the dominant class in the United States.

It is important to dispel the notion that the Mexican-origin students in our nation's classrooms are mostly Mexican nationals. Unless a teacher of Spanish-speaking students examines a student's academic file to examine the child's certificate of birth, she/he will likely not know whether that Spanish-speaking student was born here in the United States, in Mexico, or in another Latin American country. In my 23 years of educating Latino children and youth, very few of my students were actually born in Mexico. On the average, about two or three students from a class of twenty or so were Mexican nationals. Most years, one student may be from another Spanish-speaking country, like Honduras or El Salvador. The rest of them are children of Mexican immigrants who were born and raised right here in the U.S. They turn up in bilingual classrooms because their parents may not speak English, or speak very little; and they have not learned any or enough English at home to be placed in an English-only instructional setting (Gándara & Rumberger, 2009). Based on 2008 Current Population Survey data, the Pew Hispanic Center reports that only 11 percent of Hispanic children in the U.S. are foreign-born, and that only seven percent of those are unauthorized immigrants.²⁵

²⁴ Fry, R. & Gonzales, F. (2008). *One-in-five and growing fast: A profile of Hispanic public school students*. Retrieved from <http://www.pewhispanic.org/2008/08/26/iii-demographic-characteristics/>

²⁵ Fry, R. & Passel, J. S. (2009). *Latino children: A majority are U.S.-born offspring of immigrants*. Washington, DC: Pew Hispanic Center.

Spanish/English speaking families may enroll their child in a classroom that offers bilingual instruction, even though the child's language placement test may indicate ample proficiency in the English language. In other words, the child is not classified as "limited English proficient." But the maintenance of their bilingualism/biculturalism is an important family value, and some parents choose to place their child in a classroom that supports their linguistic and cultural choices. The Texas education code allows this program option for parents.

Sec. 29.058. ENROLLMENT OF STUDENTS WHO DO NOT HAVE LIMITED ENGLISH PROFICIENCY. With the approval of the school district and a student's parents, a student who does not have limited English proficiency may also participate in a bilingual education program. The number of participating students who do not have limited English proficiency may not exceed 40 percent of the number of students enrolled in the program.²⁶

There are various terms used to describe students who are speakers of other languages and who are learning English. The term most widely used by practitioners in the field of bilingual and ESL education is "ELL," or English language learner. Some researchers simply use "EL," or English learner. The term "LEP" (limited English proficient) is used to refer to those who enter the school system and are not considered fluent in the English language. The term was popularized by the federal government in the 1960s and 70s, and still lingers in the legislature, the schools, and in the literature. There are some objections to the term "LEP," which are founded on its implication that the student has a "deficit" based on the fact that he is not "proficient" in English, an assumption that may not necessarily be accurate (Herrera and Murry, 2005, p.7).²⁷

²⁶ TEXAS EDUCATION CODE: Chapter 29, Subchapter A. Retrieved from <http://www.statutes.legis.state.tx.us/Docs/ED/htm/ED.29.htm#B>

²⁷ Herrera, S. G. and Murry, K. G. (2005). *Mastering ESL and bilingual methods; Differentiated instruction for culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) students*. Boston, MA: Pearson Education, Inc.

The definition of *bilingual education* in U.S. public schools differs dramatically in practice from state to state, and even from classroom to classroom. The National Association for Bilingual Education definition of bilingual education is comprehensive:

Bilingual education refers to approaches in the classroom that use the native languages of English language learners (ELLs) for instruction. Goals include: teaching English; fostering academic achievement; acculturating immigrants to a new society; preserving a minority group's linguistic and cultural heritage; enabling English speakers to learn a second language; developing national language resources, or any combination of the above.²⁸

In Texas, the state education website distinguishes between "early exit" and "late exit" transitional bilingual programs. The distinction is important because the "late exit" model allows the student to attain "high levels of academic achievement" in both Spanish and English, while the early exit model only uses the native language as a "medium" to transition to English quickly.

Transitional Bilingual/Early Exit - Provides instruction in literacy and academic content areas through the medium of the student's first language, along with instruction in English oral and academic language development. The student will remain in the program for a minimum of two to five years before being eligible to exit the bilingual program.

Transitional Bilingual/Late Exit - Academic growth is accelerated through cognitively challenging academic work in the students' first language along with meaningful academic content taught through the students' second language, English. The goal is to promote high levels of academic achievement and full academic language proficiency in the students' first language and English. Students are eligible to exit the

²⁸ National Association for Bilingual Education. *What is bilingual education?* Retrieved from <http://www.nabe.org/bilingualed.html>

program not earlier than six or later than seven years after the students enroll in school.

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"ESL" stands for English as a Second Language, and consists of a set of specialized instructional techniques used to help *any* English language learner (ELL) attain English language proficiency, regardless of their native language. The ESL teacher speaks only English, and does not use the students' native language to teach (Herrera & Murry, 2005).

"General education" refers to instruction without any special accommodations. General education teachers do not have special certification for teaching English language learners. ELL students who exit the bilingual/ESL program in the spring semester proceed to general education classes the following school year. Educators commonly refer to this process as "mainstreaming" the ELL student. For some critical theoreticians, this term reflects the dominant ideology. "When I hear...school officials talking about 'mainstreaming' the Spanish-speaking children in bilingual programs, I feel that the very choice of the terminology connotes the superior power and position of the white Anglo-culture" (Persell, 1977, p. 77). General education classes are sometimes referred to as "regular" classes, and the general education teachers are called "regular" teachers. This term is also used in Texas Education Code.³⁰ It's an unfortunate choice, as it implies that students in alternative educational settings are somehow "irregular."

Although preferences, distinctions, and negative undertones associated with the terms "Latino/a" and "Hispanic" are perceived by some people, the terms will be used interchangeably in this paper. In October 1997 the U.S. Office of Management and Budget (OMB) announced new government-wide standards for the collection of data on race and ethnicity. "The term used should be 'Hispanic or Latino' [and] refers to persons who trace their origin or descent to

²⁹ Texas Education Agency. (2009). Division of NCLB Program Coordination Title III, Part A – English Language Acquisition TITLE III LANGUAGE PROGRAM DEFINITIONS. Retrieved from http://www.tea.state.tx.us/index4.aspx?id=2147486853&menu_id=798

³⁰ Texas Administrative Code, CHAPTER 89, SUBCHAPTER D, RULE §89.63 Instructional Arrangements and Settings. Retrieved from <http://info.sos.state.tx.us/>

Mexico, Puerto Rico, Cuba, Central and South America, and other Spanish cultures." ³¹ These terms will likely be referenced from other sources, such as the Census Bureau; therefore, the respective definitions and the defense of their use will be left to those original sources. An expression that will not be used (unless directly quoted) in this paper is "illegal alien." The label insinuates that the immigrant is some sort of extraterrestrial being. Furthermore, the immigrants are not "illegals." Their method of entry may be, but as persons; they are not. When not quoted from an original source, the term "undocumented workers" or "undocumented immigrants" will be used instead.

1.9 Summary

Hispanic students now make up a majority of students enrolled in Texas public schools, with the majority being of Mexican origin. These numbers are expected to increase, especially the numbers of school-age children. A solution to the high Hispanic dropout rate has continued to elude policymakers and school officials. This is unacceptable because of the impact on society of undereducation -- foregone tax revenues, increased welfare, unemployment, and criminal justice costs.

The empirical evidence that parental involvement has a positive effect on children's educational outcomes is clear, yet the traditional efforts of schools to improve partnerships with Latino families have not helped close the achievement gap for this population. Some social theorists propose that the hegemony of the dominant class presents barriers to the working class, such as immigrant laborers, which prevent them from succeeding in key social institutions like public schools. This study seeks to test for barriers in a public school setting by analyzing U.S. teachers' and immigrant parents' perceptions and knowledge of each others' contributions to the education of the children.

This project breaks new ground by using a mixed method approach to analyze the perceptions and knowledge of Mexican immigrant families who have children in U.S. public

³¹ Office of Management and Budget. *Revisions to the standards for the classification of federal data on race and ethnicity*. Retrieved from http://www.whitehouse.gov/omb/fedreg_1997standards/

schools and the perceptions and cultural knowledge of American teachers who have these children in their classrooms. The study broadens the understanding of the problem by linking it to social theories of stratification and the dominant ideology, and to the political terrain of immigration. It is an important contribution to the literature on the parent involvement of Mexican immigrants in the U.S. public school system. The study has the potential to inform public schools on the perceptions and attitudes of their teaching staff towards immigrant families and on cultural differences that may preclude Mexican immigrant families from becoming full partners in their child's education. Policy recommendations will focus on staff training that can help build a respect and awareness of the linguistic, social, and cultural resources of Mexican immigrant families and on strategies that can help immigrant families become familiar with schooling practices in the U.S.

CHAPTER 2

A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

2.1 Introduction

On the surface, the topic of this study appears to focus on parent involvement in the public school, especially related to immigrants. While the issue of parent involvement is certainly of relevance to the research, the questions asked on the surveys were primarily intended to uncover gaps of knowledge and perceptions in the principal caretakers of immigrant children in the public schools -- their parents and their teachers. Carefully examined, the presence of gaps has the potential to reveal underlying forces at work within the education system that limit the full participation of Mexican immigrant families in the education process. The ensuing literature review presents key works by scholars who have conducted research that treats the subject matter with depth. Before considering the research, however, it is important to establish the assumption that all children in the United States have the right to a free public education.

2.2 Assumptions

Although the U.S. Constitution does not specifically state that all children have a right to a free, public education; that right is implied in numerous amendments and laws. The policies that govern public education in the United States are rooted in democratic polity, economic factors, and the social structures that serve to perpetuate our Western culture.

Quality public schools are the foundation of a democracy and a free enterprise economic system. The public school concept is fundamentally American: most of the fifty U.S. states have a provision in their state constitution for free, public education. These statutes reflect a commitment to the idea that all children, regardless of their academic readiness, race, socioeconomic status, language proficiency, or special

education needs, have equal access to a quality K-12 education, and a chance to develop to their maximum potential.³²

The founding fathers of our nation considered the universal education of America's youth an obligation to be borne by the general public for the common good of the nation and the healthy perpetuation of the liberties and democratic government fought for at such a great price. "Embodied in the right to education is the right to acquire skills and attitudes necessary for the individual to deliberate in a democratic society" (Fisher, 2004, p.101).³³ But more than equipping our nation's children for personal achievement, "education was a cornerstone of U.S. economic success (Behr, 2009, p. 88)."³⁴ A recent hearing on the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act included an opening remark by Committee Chairman Senator Tom Harkin confirming that the commitment to the education of Americans is *still* at the heart of the country's priorities: "Well-educated Americans are the single most important factor in maintaining our productivity and global leadership, and in preparing our children to contribute to their communities and our Nation at their full potential."

Our national democratic and economic values imply that *every* child in this country should have the same quality education and that *all* of them need to develop skills that contribute to our communal wealth. The Civil Rights Act of 1964 "protect[s] constitutional rights in public facilities and public education" and guarantees "the full and equal enjoyment of the goods, services, facilities, and privileges, advantages, and accommodations of any place of public accommodation, as defined in this section, without discrimination or segregation on the ground of race, color, religion, or national origin." The Equal Educational Opportunity Act of 1974 prohibits the states to "deny equal educational opportunity to an individual on account of

³² U. S. Department of Education. (1997). *What Really Matters in American Education*. White paper prepared for Secretary of Education Richard W. Riley. Washington, DC. Retrieved from <http://www2.ed.gov/Speeches/09-1997/part1.html>

³³ Fisher, A. (2004). *The content of the right to education—Theoretical foundations*. Center for Human Rights and Global Justice Working Paper; Economic, Social and Cultural Rights Series. NYU: New York.

³⁴ Behr, P. (2009). *Outline of the U.S. economy. Bureau of International Information Programs*. Washington, D.C.: United States Department of State.

his or her race, color, sex, or national origin." The provision is not explicit about what discriminatory practices are forbidden and which "appropriate actions" are expected in order to overcome learning barriers such as poverty and language differences, but the mandate to provide "equal educational opportunity" is clear. The Courts have consistently emphasized that educational jurisdictions and Congress are the governmental bodies most qualified to make the determinations as to what constitutes the "appropriate actions" (Berenyi, 2008).

The Fourteenth Amendment of the Constitution is also one of the most prominent federal legislations that has been used in court cases (most notably the 1982 Texas-based *Plyler v. Doe* Case) to ensure a free public education for all who *reside* in a state, including immigrant children.

Section I. No state shall make or enforce any law which shall abridge the privileges or immunities of citizens of the United States; nor shall any state deprive *any person* [emphasis added] of life, liberty, or property, without due process of law; nor deny to *any person* [emphasis added] within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws.

The letter of this law applied "deprivation" to *any person* living within the jurisdiction of a state, not just her citizens. Justice Brennan's ruling on *Plyler v. Doe* specifically supported the education of immigrant children, claiming that

the illegal alien of today may well be the legal alien of tomorrow, and that, without an education, these undocumented children, already disadvantaged as a result of poverty, lack of English-speaking ability, and undeniable racial prejudices, . . . will become permanently locked into the lowest socio-economic class.³⁵

If our country's democratic and economic roots and current laws dictate that all children be educated equitably, why are there unequal educational outcomes for Latinos?

³⁵ *Plyler v. Doe*, Retrieved from http://www.law.cornell.edu/supct/html/historics/USSC_CR_0457_0202_ZO.html

The ensuing literature reviewed encompasses the issues surrounding the presence of Mexican immigrants in the U.S. public school system: the historical impact of Mexican immigration, the social conflict arising from cultural "otherness," the politics of educating second language learners, and the challenges of building family-school relationships with a rapidly growing population that is culturally and linguistically different from the dominant culture. In other words, the literature examined will start broad with the social context and narrow down to the topic of immigrant parent involvement in schools.

2.3 Historical Context

Critical theorists subscribe to the Marxist principle that "events cannot be understood apart from their history, and that the history of noneconomic institutions cannot be understood independently of the history of the forces and relations of production" (Persell, 1977, p. 23). Thus, any discussion about Mexican-origin students in our public classrooms is inherently linked to immigration policy and to national sentiments surrounding the presence of Mexican immigrant laborers in the United States. Hernández-Chavez (1994) traces the history of Mexicans in the United States, especially in the Southwest, where there is historical resentment against Mexicans initially because of the struggle over lands which were formerly Mexican territories. The racist sentiments against Mexicans and Mexican-Americans have never waned; they have merely passed through events that have fueled it for one reason or the other. Throughout the mid-nineteenth century and early twentieth century, the Southwest became the scene for numerous "Anglo-centered" laws concerning the use of the Spanish language, especially in Texas and California.

America historically has had an intolerant climate for multilingualism. After the annexation of Mexico through the [1848] Treaty of Hidalgo, a large influx of American settlers created a Spanish language minority in the region. The Treaty was intended to protect the rights of the population, but the cultural conflict produced a series of laws

which discriminated against Mexican-American language and culture and affects Mexican-Americans to this day.³⁶

"During the latter part of the nineteenth century and the early decades of the present century, the country underwent yet another extended period of nativism and xenophobia. The Civil War, the Indian Wars, and the land struggles with *mexicanas* had engendered deepseated racist attitudes racist attitudes among many whites."³⁷ The ensuing World Wars and the Cold War of the twentieth century "flowered into paranoia toward foreign influences of all kinds. '100 Percent Americanism' demanded absolute loyalty, which was understood to mean absolute conformity, especially in matters of language" (p. 57).³⁸ The current massive and continuous influx of Mexican immigrants has produced a new nativism and "an aggressively defensive posture that is identified with the English language and Anglo values." (Ibid., p. 56)

2.4 Current Social Landscape

Evidence of this defensiveness has been seen recently in a number of state laws that purportedly serve to curb the influx of immigrants. In Arizona, House Bill 1070 was enacted in April 2010. The law was "intended to work together to discourage and deter the unlawful entry and presence of aliens and economic activity by persons unlawfully present in the United States," and permitted any local law enforcement agent to determine the immigration status of any person "where reasonable suspicion exists that the person is an alien and is unlawfully present in the United States." Another measure which has been adopted by some states to limit immigration is the E-Verify system for legal status before public and/or private employers can hire workers. Currently, seventeen states use this system. More recently, the immigrant

³⁶ Milroy, L. (2001). The social categories of race and class: Language ideology and sociolinguistics. In N. Coupland, S. Sarangi, & C. Candlin (Eds.), *Sociolinguistics and social theory*. Edinburg Gate, Essex, England: Pearson Education Limited.

³⁷ Hernández-Chavez, E. (1994). Language policy in the United States: A history of cultural genocide. In T. Skutnabb-Kangas & M. Rannut. (Eds.), *Linguistic human rights: Overcoming linguistic discrimination*. Berlin, New York: Mouton de Gruyter.

³⁸ Crawford, J. (1992). *Hold your tongue: Bilingualism and the politics of "English only."* Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company.

paranoia has reached the public school system. In Alabama, a new legislation ³⁹ permits local authorities to check students' school records for immigration status, allegedly aimed at mitigating the high unemployment rate by ridding the state of undocumented workers who "take jobs away from Americans" (Esses, Brochu, & Dickson, 2011; Diaz, Saenz, & Kwan, 2011).

In addition to claims that immigrant laborers take away jobs from American workers, "many Americans believe that undocumented workers pay few or no taxes and burden the nation's social service systems, including the schools" (Gándara & Contreras, 2009, p.10). Gándara and Contreras (2009) contend that there is evidence that immigrants pay *more* in taxes than they take out in services, possibly because they are younger and healthier than the general population, and because their contributions to the economy outweigh the costs of government subsidized services. The net impact of immigration is hotly debated issue among economists (Borjas, 1989,1994; Hanson, 2009; Luthra and Waldinger, 2010; Androff, et al., 2011; Caponi, 2011), but American perceptions about immigrants' consumption of public services often do not take into consideration immigrants' contributions to the advancement of the U.S. economy.

The labor supplied by millions of Mexican labor migrants is essential to billion dollar American corporations, industries, and work sectors such as agricultural farm work, fishing and forestry jobs, day labor, construction, landscaping and gardening, meat packing and poultry production, domestic cleaning, child and elderly care, hotel and office building janitorial services, and the vast and expanding service sector. ⁴⁰

Because they have "been exploited and depreciated systematically over generations," noted anthropologist John Ogbu characterizes Mexican immigrants as "castelike" or involuntary

³⁹ Alabama State Legislature. *Beason-Hammon Alabama Taxpayer and Citizen Protection Act, HB56*. Retrieved from <http://alisondb.legislature.state.al.us/acas/searchableinstruments/2011rs/bills/hb56.htm>

⁴⁰ Organista, K. C. (2007). Mexican migration for dummies: What social workers and the public need to know. *Journal of Ethnic & Cultural Diversity in Social Work*, 16 (3/4), 189-198.

minorities.⁴¹ Ogbu contends that, like Blacks, Mexican immigrants are subject to inferior education as children and to the job ceiling in adult life. Since immigrant minorities are speakers of other languages, "their castelike status makes it more difficult for them to overcome any problems created by cultural and language differences (p. 237)." ⁴²

The United States offers immigrants an ambiguous social contract. It reads, more or less, as follows: "In order to participate in a non-marginal way in the U.S. economy, you must become an American by giving up your loyalty to your home country and language, and you must learn the language of the American elite. In order to become an American, you must meet certain standards. This country is in the process of raising its standards but, unfortunately, there are already too many Americans. If you aren't allowed to become an American, there's still plenty of room for you in this country — at the bottom." ⁴³

In order to prevail over these barriers, immigrants must acquire skills that are valued by American employers, such as learning English and gaining knowledge of the protocols of the American workplace. They may even have to move away from their ethnic enclaves to areas with a more vibrant economy. These adaptations have a downside for the immigrant. Each of these steps helps weaken the link between the immigrants foreign past and his or her American future. Many immigrants, therefore, face an important trade-off: they may have to discard some of their native attributes, habits, and cultural characteristics and pick up new ones that enhance their chances of success in the American economy (p. 57). ⁴⁴

⁴¹ Suarez-Orozco, M. M. (1991). Immigrant adaptation to schooling: A Hispanic case. In M. A. Gibson & J. Ogbu (Eds.), *Minority status and schooling: A comparative study of immigrant and involuntary minorities*. New York & London: Garland Publishing, Inc.

⁴² Ogbu, J. (1978). *Minority education and caste: The American system in cross-cultural perspective*. New York, NY: Academic Press.

⁴³ Spener, D. (1988). Transitional bilingual education and the socialization of immigrants. *Harvard Educational Review*, 58(2), 133-153.

⁴⁴ Borjas, G. J. (2006). Making it in America: Social mobility in the immigrant population. *The Future of Children*, 16(2), 55-71.

Their castelike status and the absence of cultural and material capital play an important role in the social destinies of Mexican-origin children raised in the United States. This includes "expectations based on historically rooted stereotypes and institutional treatments that are more complex than white attitudes and social practices toward African Americans and Asians but no less consequential (p. 62)." ⁴⁵

2.5 Mexican-origin Children in U.S. Public Schools

The "institutional treatments" towards Spanish-speaking immigrant children in U.S. public schools are steeped in "historically rooted stereotypes." In order to succeed in the American school system, the children of Mexican immigrants must face the same trade-offs as their parents have to in order to adjust to the American workplace — learn English; learn the norms of the institutions they become a part of; and discard some of their cultural characteristics.

Schools are places where fundamental values and assumptions about cultural difference get played out in varying policies and practices, and where school actors — teachers, administrators, students, and their parents — develop strategies in response to one another and . . . often crystallize the kinds of conflicts and accommodations around cultural differences occurring in other spheres of local and national society. ⁴⁶

Moll and Ruiz (2009) provide an overview of the education of Mexican-origin people in the United States in its sociohistorical context, referencing their history of "displacement of not only lands and property, but also of language and culture." Mexicans were subject to the same ideology as American Indian and African American children, one of control and segregation for the purpose of Americanizing them and ridding them of their native language (p. 364)." ⁴⁷ Moll

⁴⁵ López, D. E. and Stanton-Salazar, R. D. (2001). Mexican Americans. In R. G. Rumbaut & A. Portes (Eds.), *Ethnicities: Children of immigrants in America*. Berkley, CA: University of California Press.

⁴⁶ Wortham, S.; Murillo, E. G., Jr; & Hamann, E. T. (2002). *Education in the new Latino Diaspora: Policy and the politics of identity*. Westport, CT: Ablex Publishing.

⁴⁷ Moll, L. C. & Ruiz, R. (2009). The Schooling of Latino Children. In M. M. Suárez-Orozco & M. M. Páez (Eds.), *Latinos remaking America*. Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press.

and Ruiz (2009) reiterate Valenzuela's (1999) notion of "subtractive schooling" as a major drawback in the education of Latino students in the U.S., suggesting that it "results in disdain for what one knows and what one is," creating "the impression that someone else possesses great knowledge and expertise . . . that one's language and knowledge are inadequate because they are not privileged (formalized and awarded special status) by the school" (p. 365). As an alternative approach, Moll and Ruiz call for a challenge to the dominant policies, practices, and ideologies that typify Latino education. Instead, they emphasize the "type of agency that considers the schooling of Latinos within a larger education ecology and that respects and responds to the values of education possessed by Latino families . . . including their social relationships and cultural resources found in local households and other community settings" (p. 369).

As an example of the subtractive schooling that Spanish-speaking immigrants have endured, James Crawford (1992) gives an historical account of the development of the "English-only" movement. He recounts the humiliation that Hispanic students endured before the introduction of bilingual education in Texas. Schools practiced "English-only" policies with Hispanic children while they were at recess in order to encourage the children to "practice" their English as much as possible, to the point of paddling or punishing them if they casually lapsed into Spanish on the playground. Crawford goes on to say that during that time when "victim-blaming attitudes and practices were pervasive in Texas . . . Hispanics generally accepted the blame." Crawford quotes veteran Texas educator, José Cardenas's reaction to the indignity: "It's the crowning touch when a society gets the victimized population to agree to their guilt for having been victimized" (p. 80). Even though such severe practices to assure language compliance have been discontinued, immigrant children still understand that they are expected to learn the language of the new land to which their families have brought them.

Some students even appropriate the ideology that that learning English at all costs is the way to guarantee success in life. The result is the great illusion of American

education: that to learn English (and have academic success), it is necessary to shed Spanish and the intimate social relations created through that language (Moll and Ruiz, 2009, p. 365).

2.5.1 Language Policy/Politics

The current federal policies certainly support the idea of "Americanizing" Latinos by "ridding them of their native language." A radical shift in language policy took place during President George Bush's first term in office. His No Child Left Behind educational initiative did away with the over thirty-year old Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) and its recommendation to use students' native language as a means to help Spanish speakers understand academic instruction. The No Child Left Behind Act eliminated the 1968 ESEA directive to provide bilingual education. Bush's reform has only mandated progress in *English*, with no endorsement of native-language instruction nor cultural accommodations as a means to help ELL students master the host language/culture. In fact, the word "bilingual" was removed entirely from federal programs that had been established to support language minority students. Critical theorist Donaldo Macedo (2003) understands this type of move to focus on English as evidence of "power relations."

[T]he role of English must be seen as a medium that constitutes and affirms the historical and existential moments of lived experience which produce a subordinate or a lived culture. It is an eminently political phenomenon, and it must be analyzed in the context of a theory of power relations and with an understanding of social and cultural reproduction and production (p. 14).

As a further assault to bilingualism, the name of the "Office for Bilingual Education and Minority Language Affairs" was changed to the "Office of English Language Acquisition, Language Enhancement, and Academic Achievement for Limited English Proficient Students," and the "National Clearinghouse for Bilingual Education" was changed to the "National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition and Language Instruction Educational

Programs" (Wright, 2005, p. 20). NCLB gives the state agencies "the flexibility to implement language instruction educational programs, based on scientifically based research on teaching limited English proficient children, that the agencies believe to be the most effective for teaching English" [Sec. 3102 (9)].

President Bush's reform emphasis is on accountability for yearly progress by schools as measured by standardized tests, but the accommodations allowed ELLs are minimal. While the NCLB goal to assure that *all* students perform well on standard measures of achievement sounds commendable, the 2001 law has received sharp criticism from experts in the field of bilingual education because the stringent testing outcomes measures do not take into consideration the length of time it takes for ELLs to acquire academic language proficiency in English language acquisition experts estimate that it takes five to seven years for students to acquire the fluency needed for academic success (Crawford, 1992; Menken, 2008). Thus, the language and cultural needs of language minority students have taken a back seat to testing outcomes and the rapid acquisition of English.

During his two terms in office, President Bush's education mandates created a panic among state education entities, school districts, and campuses to meet annual progress as measured by standardized testing outcomes, particularly since failing to meet AYP could possibly mean removal of staff, restructuring the internal organization of the school, the appointing of "outside experts," etc. The literature on the effects of NCLB is massive, with some mixed reviews on whether or not the prescriptions of the law improved student outcomes. But a cogent defense for boiling down student achievement to a number based on one test is hardly defensible, even through simple logic. "Everything we know from learning theories, not to mention experiential knowledge and common sense, tells us that students learn and demonstrate what they know in different ways, for different reasons and at different rates." ⁴⁸

⁴⁸ Gay, G. (2007). The rhetoric and reality of NCLB. *Race Ethnicity and Education*, 10(3) September, 279–293.

"Many concerns remain regarding the efficacy and ethics of subjecting children to high-stakes tests in English when they have not been given sufficient time, or in many cases, appropriate educational opportunities to be compared to students for whom English is their primary language" (p. 160).⁴⁹

Numbers on standardized tests seem to satisfy the public thirst for the simple and the chartable. No need to follow the messy and complicated developmental changes that children undergo nor, for that matter, attend to their creative, artistic and emotional growth, when there are standardized test scores which can be aggregated, disaggregated, archived and published on a graph in a newspaper.⁵⁰

With hope for a change in administration in the Oval Office in 2008, critics of No Child Left behind were optimistic. Barack Obama's campaign promises included rhetoric about education that gave hope to proponents of bilingual education, although the references to it were vague: "Obama and Biden support transitional bilingual education and will help Limited English Proficient students get ahead by holding schools accountable for making sure these students complete school." The term "*transitional* bilingual education" worried some experts in the field, as the expression tends to imply that the use of the native language should serve only to move the student to English language as quickly as possible. "Mr. Obama favors 'transitional bilingual education,' meaning that he believes teachers should transition children to English as quickly as possible, building-up from students' knowledge of their native language."⁵¹

Although President Obama had committed to giving educators relief from the restrictions of the decade-old NCLB, a significant move to alter its English language emphasis for ELLs has not materialized. Only recently (September 2011) has President Obama set forth a prescription to improve the education of our nation's children and youth. His stated priorities are

⁴⁹ Wiley, T. G. & Wright, W. E. (2004). Against the undertow: Language-minority education policy and politics in the "Age of Accountability." *Educational Policy*, 18(1), 142-168.

⁵⁰ Dodge, A. (2009). Heuristics and NCLB standardized tests: A convenient lie. *International Journal of Progressive Education*, 5(2), 1-19.

⁵¹ Fuller, B. (2008, September 28). The bilingual debate: Transitional classrooms. *The New York Times*.

focused on college and career readiness and giving states the flexibility to make improvements as they see fit.⁵² There is no specific mention of minority language accommodations or endorsement of bilingual instructional techniques in President Obama's educational agenda. It remains to be seen how state education agencies will interpret the Obama goals in terms of successfully educating language minority students.

Meanwhile, school districts must report their AYP (annual yearly progress) to satisfy the NCLB requirements yet in place. Kate Menken (2008) suggests that since there is no official national language or federal language policy in place in the United States, the *de facto* policies created in local jurisdictions are vulnerable to the political climate and to power dynamics. "Individuals at every layer of the educational system are involved in language policy making, from the federal government to the state commissioner and into classrooms, as federal policies are interpreted, negotiated, and localized. Teachers are the final arbiters of language education policy implementation" (Menken, 2008, p. 180).⁵³ Corson (1999) frames the school's role from a critical perspective. "The language issues that administrators and teachers meet are always connected with inequalities and injustices that can easily escape their notice. When school language policies are put into action, they are linked with power and with social justice in a range of ways" (p. 6).⁵⁴ Greathouse (2001) proposes that

These policies create biases and reinforce existing racism in the guise of 'assistance.' Currently, in the United States, there are dozens of language policy issues centring around immigrant and refugee groups. The perception of these groups by many Americans range from feelings of guilt, kindness, and patronage; however, they are

⁵² White House Press Release. (September 23, 2011). *Obama Administration Sets High Bar for Flexibility from No Child Left Behind in Order to Advance Equity and Support Reform*. Retrieved from <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2011/09/23/obama-administration-sets-high-bar-flexibility-no-child-left-behind-orde>

⁵³ Menken, K. (2008). *English language learners left behind: Standardized testing as language policy*. Clevedon, Buffalo, Toronto: Multilingual Matters, Ltd.

⁵⁴ Corson, D. (1999). *Language policy in schools: A resource for teachers and administrators*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

also viewed as enemies of the state, of the working classes, and threats against the moral fibre of the nation. Language policy in the United States is a volatile mixture of nationalist movements and anti-immigrant sentiment, with a large measure of xenophobia.⁵⁵

2.5.2 Equal Educational Opportunity

Burton (1989) examines the history of reform movements designed to increase educational opportunity for minority students. Historically, immigrants and minority groups have been expected – and even shamed into – assimilating into the dominant culture. "Equality has been viewed only in the context of the Anglo-American culture. Schools have operated exclusively from the Anglo-American conformity perspective and reforms have, until very recently, left this aspect of the school culture unquestioned" (p. 3).

The Cultural Deficit Theory posits that minority children do not begin schooling with the same preparation as white students and are therefore at a disadvantage; shifting the blame for inequality onto the students and their families rather than the educational institutions. The concept of multicultural education transfers the burden of reform from the student to the institution. However, all of these movements are grounded on some basic assumptions. First, that educational equality directly correlates with economic equality, and second, that the American educational system is a meritocracy where the most talented and motivated students will succeed. Burton asserts that reliance on these assumptions has largely led to the failure of reform efforts to achieve equality for minority students. He points to the work of Samuel Bowles and Herbert Gintis, Michael Apple, and Pierre Bourdieu as offering insight as to why this inequality has occurred:

Essentially, this alternative argument sets forth three main propositions: first, that American Society is fundamentally unequal and this inequality is perpetuated by limiting

⁵⁵ Greathouse, L. D. (2001). Policy versus practice: The Hidden curriculum of racism in an ESOL context. In G. Walford (Ed.), *Ethnography and education policy*. Bingley, UK: Emerald Group Publishing.

the access of subordinate groups to political, economic, and social power; second, that the content and structure of schooling are not neutral, but actively reproduce this societal inequality through the knowledge and cultural mode which have been designated as a high status and through mechanisms by which groups are sorted and treated differentially; and third, that schools are but a part of the larger societal dynamic which functions to perpetuate structural cultural inequality (Burton, 1989, p. 14).⁵⁶

Gibson and Ogbu (1991) credit social scientists for promoting the "cultural deficit" notion that the educational problems of "at risk" children are attributable to their social class, but they refute this claim by explaining how it is lacking.

First, they [social scientists] ignore the historical and wider societal forces that can encourage or discourage the minorities from striving for school success. Second, they do not consider a group's collective orientation toward schooling and striving for school success as a factor in academic achievement. They assume that school success is a matter of family background and individual ability and effort. And third, the theories fail to consider the minorities' own notions of the meaning of and the "how-to" of schooling in the context of their own social reality (Gibson & Ogbu, 1991, p.5).⁵⁷

2.6 Adaptation of Immigrant Families

There is a large volume of literature that addresses the "social realities" of Mexican immigrants, and their "how-to's" of schooling, particularly Mexican immigrant youth in America's secondary schools, where the dropout rate for this population is unrelenting. It is worth reviewing some of these studies in order to understand immigrant families' efforts to access equitable education in the United States. Social scientists and educators have examined the psychosocial dynamics of immigrant children in their adjustment to U.S. schools. There are

⁵⁶ Burton, W. H. (1989). *Perspectives on equal educational opportunities: Something for thought – What is the answer?* Olympia, WA: Washington Office of the State Superintendent of Public Instruction.

⁵⁷ Gibson, M. A. and Ogbu, J. (1991). *Minority status and schooling: a Comparative study of immigrant and involuntary minorities*. New York & London: Garland Publishing, Inc.

varied approaches to analyzing the motivations and the mechanisms used by immigrants to negotiate the demands of public schooling.

Portes and Rivas (2011) review three different structuralist theories that explain immigrant adaption to the host society. The "racialized" structuralist view is pessimistic, and contrasts Hispanic immigrants and their descendants to the easily assimilated European immigrants of the past. These structuralists see Latino immigrants as isolated from the opportunities for mobility because they belong to heavily disadvantaged ethnic and racial groups. "These children will not join an all-inclusive American 'mainstream,' but rather settle into their place in a segmented and racially divided society (p. 224)." ⁵⁸ Another structuralist view is more optimistic. This perspective sees children of immigrants benefitting from tapping into immigrant social networks as well as resources and institutions created to help native minorities achieve upward mobility. The authors recognize a third perspective that is situated between the pessimism and the optimism of the first two: "segmented assimilation." According to this approach, "the life trajectories of the second generation are predicted by the racial, labor, and socioeconomic sectors of the host society into which their parents were incorporated and by the resources at their parents' disposal to aid their offspring" (p. 224). Thus students can be grounded in their native culture and language while assimilating key elements of the host society. Portes and Rivas call for school policies that preserve those resources of the parental culture and resist an uncritical acceptance of all features of the host nation.

One of the key aspects of the parental culture of Mexican immigrants that benefits their children attending U.S. schools is bilingualism /biculturalism. Angela Valenzuela (1999) uses a grounded theory approach based on participant observation and open-ended interviews to investigate the underlying conditions that explain the difference in the academic achievement of Mexican immigrant youth and Mexican American youth. Her study confirms the importance of

⁵⁸ Portes, A. & Rivas, A. (2011). The adaptation of migrant children. *The Future of Children*, 21(1) Spring, 219-246.

academic proficiency in one's native language as a foundation for mastery in a second language. The stripping of one's native language amounts to "cultural subtraction," which takes away valuable resources from the Mexican-origin student such as their social capital. (Valenzuela, 1999, P. 21) Lindholm (1994) corroborates Valenzuela's emphasis on retention of the home language.

Subtractive bilingualism is associated with lower levels of second-language attainment, scholastic underachievement, and psychosocial disorders. The reasoning behind these negative consequences is tied to the relationship between language and thought. When children are pressured to learn English as quickly as possible and to set aside the home language, they lose the critical linguistic foundation upon which their early conceptual development is based, and their psychosocial competence may be diminished (Lindholm, 1994, p. 189).⁵⁹

In her study, Lindholm evaluated two different school sites that had been implementing bilingual/immersion instruction (classroom composed of part native English speakers and part native Spanish speakers) to detect cross-cultural attitudes. She asserts that "positive cross-cultural attitudes are important for harmonious functioning in society" (p. 191). Her research found that the validation of the Spanish language for the Latino participants in the program produced psychosocial competence in both the native English speakers and the native Spanish speakers with "few differences between Spanish and English speakers" in terms of the students' perceived level of academic and social competence, their ratings of their appearance, and their perceptions of self-worth. The second part of her study examined the students' cross-cultural language attitudes. Her results indicated that the "students held very positive attitudes toward other languages, people speaking other languages, and other students, regardless of skin or

⁵⁹ Lindholm, K. J. (1994). Promoting positive cross-cultural attitudes and perceived competence in culturally and diverse classrooms. In R. Devillar, C. Faltis, & J. Cummins (Eds.), *Cultural diversity in schools: From rhetoric to practice*. 189-206. New York, NY: Suny Press.

hair color" (p. 203). Thus, the fostering of bilingualism yielded important social competencies for both immigrant and native students.

In addition to bilingualism, Valenzuela (1999) underscores the notion that "loyalty to one's homeland culture provides important social, cultural, and emotional resources that help youth navigate through the educational system" (p. 11).⁶⁰ Children from Mexico and other parts of Latin America are strongly driven to succeed when they adhere to traditional enabling values like familism, respect for teachers, and a strong work ethic in their quest for upward mobility. Valenzuela's recognition of the importance of the "homeland culture" is what Portes and Rivas (2011) alluded to in their reference to "the resources at their parents' disposal."

Poorly endowed immigrant families can overcome their situation through "selective acculturation." Their children can learn the language and culture of the host society while preserving their home country language, values, and customs—simultaneously gaining a solid foothold in the host society and maintaining a bond with their parents' culture. These children are thus in a better position to overcome the disadvantages suffered by their parents because they are protected from the negative effects of discrimination and the lure of gangs and street life (Portes & Rivas, 2011, p. 225).

Other authors agree with Valenzuela about the strong motivation to succeed among Mexican-origin students (Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2001; López & Stanton-Salazar, 200). Patthey-Chávez (1993) asserts that "Latino adolescents are highly motivated," but she adds that at some point "their expectations of success are colored by experiences of hostility and discrimination from the society at large. They question whether the school is working in their interest . . . and they do find it difficult to cooperate in the educational enterprise. Many of them simply leave it altogether."⁶¹ Patthey-Chávez's qualitative study examined the cultural

⁶⁰ Valenzuela, A. (1999). *Subtractive schooling: U.S.-Mexican youth and the politics of caring*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.

⁶¹ Patthey-Chavez G. G. (1993). High school as an arena for cultural conflict and acculturation for Latino Angelinos. *Anthropology & Education Quarterly*, 24(1), 33-60.

dynamics in an inner city high school with a majority Latino student population and a predominantly mainstream teaching staff. She found communication gaps between the teachers and students; and concluded that these problems could not be reduced to a language barrier, but more to one of intercultural understanding. Nonetheless, she saw hope for resolving this conflict through a renegotiated discourse.

As long as educators see themselves as assimilating Latino immigrants into the American mainstream, they will continue to meet with less enthusiasm from their students than they anticipate. They will also continue to have trouble "reaching" their Latino students, and they will continue to feel threatened by the explosive alien landscape students bring with them to class. If the educational needs of Latino students are really going to be served, schools need to become less mainstream, less well defined, more open to negotiation (Patthey-Chavez, 1993, p. 57).

Suárez-Orozco and Suárez-Orozco (1995) advise educators working with immigrant families to take into consideration the family's stresses involved in the loss and psychosocial effects of moving to a new land and adapting to a new culture. In addition to Ogbu's (1978) "instrumental exploitation" of castelike minorities, Suárez-Orozco and Suárez-Orozco propose that Mexican immigrants also suffer "psychological exploitation," meaning that they may also be targets of stereotyping, which helps the dominant class rationalize its mistreatment of these "innately inferior" groups. To add yet more stressors to immigrants' efforts at adaptation, they also found that "school personnel are often indifferent, or even hostile, to the linguistic and other cultural needs, as well as circumstances, of immigrant Latino families" (p. 167).⁶²

Cheng (1996) recommends that teachers ease the immigrants' tension of cross-cultural adjustments by examining "the intricate relationship between language and culture, and with

⁶² Suárez-Orozco, M. M. & Suárez-Orozco, C. E. (1995). The cultural patterning of achievement motivation: A comparison of Mexican, Mexican immigrant, Mexican American, and non-Latino White American students. In R. G. Rumbaut & W.A. Cornelius (Eds.), *California's immigrant children: Theory, research, and implication for educational policy*. San Diego, CA: Center for U.S.-Mexican Studies, University of California.

their LEP students, acknowledge differences and similarities between their cultures and those of the diverse student population." ⁶³ In her study of "difficult discourse" through an examination of research data and a case study, Cheng explored the communication nuances of different cultures and how they might be overlooked or misinterpreted by teachers of ELL students. She also acknowledged the presence of the "hidden curriculum" in classroom discourse and in the oral/written rules inside and outside the classroom, an agenda that immigrant students must master in order to be cross-culturally competent. Because LEP students "must adjust their world views, values, beliefs, habits, and learning and cognitive styles to accommodate school culture," Cheng suggests that teachers also accommodate immigrant students by developing an understanding of "how teachers and schools use certain English language discourse patterns," and by "expand[ing] their knowledge of immigrant cultures" (p. 350).

2.7 Parent Involvement in Schools

"It is important to keep in mind that adaptation is not a process that happens to a child alone. Rather, it entails constant interaction with others. Language and cultural learning, for example, involve not just the individual but the family. . ." (Portes and Rivas, 2011, p. 221). The involvement of families in acculturation is especially applicable to Mexican immigrants, given the "collectivistic" values characteristic of immigrant families (Quiroz et al., 1999; Trumbull et. al., 1998, Trumbull, 2011; Greenfield et. al., 1998). The collectivism of Mexican immigrant families is indeed a foreign concept in the American mainstream school system, which values competition and individual effort. "While the dominant U.S. culture is very individualistic, many immigrant cultures are heavily collectivistic. These two orientations guide rather different developmental

⁶³ Cheng, L. L. (1996). Enhancing communication: Toward optimal language learning for limited English proficient students. *Language, Speech, and Hearing Services in Schools*, 27(4), October, 347-354.

scripts for children — and for schooling — and conflicts between them can be seen daily in U.S. classrooms" (p. 17).⁶⁴

Parents from Mexico and El Salvador who arrive with little education do not necessarily realize that they and their children will be asked to give up collectivistic values in pursuit of educational achievement. In the interdependent perspective of Latino immigrant parents, education is a tool, not for developing the individual potential of each child, but for enabling each child to develop the family as a whole (Quiroz, et al., 1999, p. 68).⁶⁵

The notion of collectivism, or the emphasis on "being part of a group, particularly the family, through encouraging social behavior that respects hierarchical and normative standards,"⁶⁶ is one of the parent involvement forms that is not recognized by the schools. The Mexican parents' exhortations to their children to do well in school and have high aspirations *do* support their children's education, but this home-based encouragement is not one of the strategies teachers think of when they judge whether a parent is "involved" with their child's schooling.

Because teachers place a high premium on school-based involvement and lower SES African American and Latino parents are less likely to come to the school than middle-class White parents, teachers often assume that the former groups do not care about their children's schooling. Such assumptions, rooted in deficit thinking and the discourse on "at risk"-ness, perpetuate the myth of uninvolved minority parents (p. 252).

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⁶⁴ Trumbull, E.; Rothstein-Fisch, C. G.; & Quiroz, B. (1998). *Bridging cultures between home and school: A handbook with special focus on Latino families*. Washington, DC: Office of Educational Research and Improvement.

⁶⁵ Quiroz, B.; Greenfield, P. M. & Altchech, M. (1999). Bridging cultures with a parent-teacher conference. *Educational Leadership*, 57(7) April, 68-70.

⁶⁶ Greenfield, P. M.; Raeff, C.; & Quiroz, B. (1998). Cross-cultural conflict in the social construction of the child. *Aztlán*, 23(1), Spring, 115-125.

⁶⁷ Auerbach, S. (2007). From moral supporters to struggling advocates: Reconceptualizing parent roles in education through the experience of working-class families of color. *Urban Education*, 42(3), May, 250-283.

In his "counter-story" of a Mexican immigrant family whose children were highly successful in their South Texas school, López (2001) conducted observations and interviews with family members to examine what he termed their "marginalized," or unconventional involvement strategies with their children's education. Instead of trying to pinpoint parent involvement activities that "work" for minorities, or attempt to "improve" their participation, López "aims to highlight how marginalized groups from immigrant backgrounds are *already* involved in the lives of their children, though they may not be 'involved' in traditionally sanctioned ways." ⁶⁸ Even though to a casual observer, López's highlighted family would not have appeared to be involved in their children's schooling, the family employed strategies to motivate their children to succeed. The children were exposed to the hardships of the migratory labor of their parents, and were constantly given *consejos* (advice) about their choice to either work hard in school, or work hard in the fields. And by example and exhortation, the family demonstrated to their children the ethic of hard work and perseverance.

Using the data on Mexican American families and youths from the National Education Longitudinal Survey, Altschul (2011) examined six forms of parental involvement in education to determine which forms of involvement have the strongest relationships with youths' academic outcomes. Findings show that positive effects among Mexican American parents occur through involvement in the home, whereas parental involvement in school organizations is not associated with youths' achievement. Altschul concurs with López about the "invisible" ways immigrant families contribute to their children's schooling and suggests that

. . . the current national focus on getting parents involved at school may not be effective at improving achievement for Mexican American youths. Instead, policies and programs should emphasize parental involvement in academics at home and should acknowledge and encourage the many ways in which Mexican American parents *are* involved in

⁶⁸ López, G. R. (2001). The value of hard work: Lessons on parent involvement from an (im)migrant household. *Harvard Educational Review*, 71(3), Fall, 416-437.

children's education. In addition, cultural, economic, and language barriers must be carefully considered when engaging Mexican American parents (p. 169).⁶⁹

In the Sixth Annual Brown Lecture in Education Research, Luis Moll (2010) presented his research with working-class Latino students and families that sought to identify the families' "funds of knowledge" — "knowledge and other resources found in households and other settings that result from the families' lived experiences and practices" (p. 454). His project challenged teachers to establish trusting relationships with the families of their students through "ethnographic-style" home visits. The follow-up study groups gave teachers a venue to reconsider the "stagnant notions of culture," and explore how they could reshape classroom practices based on what they learned about the families. Moll then reviewed four promising practices for mediating the "negative constraints of the system currently in place (p. 455)."⁷⁰

The first strategy that Moll recommends for producing positive outcomes for Latinos is biliteracy development through a dual-language program. Moll cites the important work of other scholars on the many benefits of fluent bilingualism. "Our students are missing out on these benefits unless we challenge restrictive policies that portray languages other than English—Spanish, in this case—as pariah languages. We should cultivate such languages as resources for enhanced learning and development" (p. 456). Another benefit of biliteracy development is the "validation of [students'] culture and language, hence of themselves, within the educational process. When they 'see themselves' in their schooling, they combine their home or community identities with an academic identity" (p. 456). Two other school-based projects referenced by Moll engage students in conducting critical analysis research in their communities and schools with a view to bringing social change and developing community resources. The final example of a best practice with Latino families was a university's college awareness program aimed at

⁶⁹ Altschul, Inna. (2011). Parental involvement and the academic achievement of Mexican American youths: What kinds of involvement in youths' education matter most? *Social Work Research*, 35(3) September, 159-170.

⁷⁰ Moll, L. C. (2011). Mobilizing culture, language, and educational practices: Fulfilling the promises of Mendez and Brown. *Educational Researcher*, 39(6), 451–460.

increasing the college participation rate of underrepresented youth. The program was integrated as part of the high school's social science and history curriculum.

Researcher Delgado-Gaitan (1991) undertook a four-year study to observe parent involvement activities in three elementary schools that included Spanish-speaking parents. The activities included traditional ones such as parent-teacher conferences and school-site councils, as well as less conventional activities such as the federally funded Preschool Program and the Migrant Program, both of which require parent involvement. Interviews were conducted with parents in each of the activities observed and also with parents who had been invited to the various meetings but did not attend. Teachers and administrators in the elementary schools who worked with Mexican American Spanish-speaking children and their parents were also interviewed. The school staff reported very high Latino parent attendance rates at the school's annual open house and at the biannual parent-teacher conferences. But both of these conventional parent contact meetings offered a very limited time frame to talk with the teacher.

They were not, by any means, appropriate occasions for teaching parents how the school operates or skills to help their children at home. The goals for these activities were incongruent between the home and the school . . . Schools receive no rewards from the school district or the state for involving parents in the schools, except for specially funded programs. While teachers and administrators express the need to have parents in the schools, the reality is that they need parents only when it is convenient for them to help with a difficult child (p. 30).⁷¹

On the other hand, the consistent and systematic parent training and involvement efforts of the federally funded Preschool Program yielded more participation and was more congruent with the home culture. It allowed parents to feel a part of their child's education. The author then presented a unique parent outreach program initiated by a preschooler's parent

⁷¹ Delgado-Gaitan, C. (1991). Involving parents in the schools: A process of empowerment. *American Journal of Education*, 100(1), 20-46.

who wanted to mobilize the active parents to help the less active parents become more informed about the educational system. A key goal of the organization was for "parents to learn from each other ways to help their children progress through school and to become a support system for each other. In addition to organizing conference workshops, parents shared their experience, which led to improved educational conditions for their children" (p. 33). As this organization gained momentum, it became an empowerment tool for the Spanish-speaking parents, who were able to confront issues of their unequal treatment with administrators.

Delgado-Gaitan (1991) contends that the traditional activities offered by the school are those which are "convenient" for them and "have been institutionalized to involve parents in limited ways tend to relegate all the power to the institution and have usually ignored the needs of groups, particularly those with a different language who are unfamiliar with the school's expectations" (p. 43).

In their qualitative study to explore the factors inhibiting the involvement of Hispanic parents in schools, Smith, Stern, & Shatrova (2008) found that parents perceived language as a primary obstacle for their full participation in the education of their children. The researchers conducted individual interviews with Hispanic families with children enrolled in a rural Midwestern school district. Focus groups were then assembled using questions formulated from the interviews. Their findings confirmed inhibiting factors previously identified in other studies: a low level of school receptivity; the lack of effective communication channels between parents and the school; the low level of support training and encouragement to enlist parents in greater participation; low English proficiency of the parents; lack of child care; economic and transportation issues; and parental aspiration for their children's success.

Latino parents expressed a high regard for teachers and felt that it is the school's responsibility to teach academics. They view their role as providing encouragement and teaching their children to respect others and be socially responsible. "If Hispanic parents are asked to assume more responsibilities that they view as the schools, they may be reluctant, in

part, because they believe they are overstepping their own boundaries" (p. 9). In addition to language, Smith, et al. discovered other factors that inhibit Hispanic parents from school involvement.

Parents expressed a reluctance to question authority or advocate for the rights of their children. Parental expectation of what a child should be taught in school varied greatly with the only subject of agreement being English. Participants were unanimous in the opinion that their role in helping the children to succeed was to supervise the completion of homework (p. 12).⁷²

Aside from the large volume of research literature that addresses the importance of parent participation in their children's education, the increasing of parental involvement is one of the goals of the No Child Left Behind Act. The Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) defines parental involvement:

The participation of parents in regular, two-way, and meaningful communication involving student academic learning and other school activities including: 1) Assisting their child's learning; 2) Being actively involved in their child's education at school; 3) Serving as full partners in their child's education and being included, as appropriate, in decision-making and on advisory committees to assist in the education of their child; and 4) The carrying out of other activities such as those described in section 1118 of the ESEA.⁷³

The "other activities" mentioned in the above section of the law specifically charges the schools to include immigrant parents in the involvement activities, and to do so in a way that assures the participation of all marginalized populations. Specific mandates are enumerated in the lengthy section 1118, which include , but are not limited to, jointly developing with parents a written parent involvement policy, annual evaluations of the school's parent involvement

⁷² Smith, J.; Stern, K., & Shatrova, Z. (2008). Factors inhibiting Hispanic parents' school involvement. *The Rural Educator*, Winter, 8-13.

⁷³ NCLB Action Brief. (2004). Retrieved from http://www.ncpie.org/nclbaction/parent_involvement.html

program, allocation of funds for parent activities, the development of a school compact, and access to the school staff and to opportunities for observing and volunteering in their child's classroom.

1118. (E) . . . including identifying barriers to greater participation by parents in activities authorized by this section (with particular attention to parents who are economically disadvantaged, are disabled, have limited English proficiency, have limited literacy, or are of any racial or ethnic minority background). . .

(f) ACCESSIBILITY– In carrying out the parental involvement requirements of this part, local educational agencies and schools, to the extent practicable, shall provide full opportunities for the participation of parents with limited English proficiency, parents with disabilities, and parents of migratory children, including providing information and school reports required under section 1111 in a format and, to the extent practicable, in a language such parents understand.

Unfortunately, "the parental involvement component of NCLB is not generally enforced" (Shah, 2009). Unlike the students' standardized testing outcomes reported in the AYP (annual yearly progress), there are no "numbers" required to validate the parent involvement provisions of this federal statute, and no consequences attached to the failure to abide by the statutes.

2. 8 Teachers of ELLs

Based on his experiences with negative comments that were made about parents when he was a high school teacher, A.Y. Ramirez (2002) explored why teacher education programs fail to promote meaningful studies on parental involvement. He observed that the teacher educators at the university where he pursued graduate studies seemed to have entrenched attitudes regarding parents and parental involvement. Ramirez conducted a two-year study of respected education journals and found that they often depicted school-home relationships as

"strained or even antagonistic" (p.53).⁷⁴ He suggests that if the editors of educational journals depict these attitudes, then it also seems likely that many higher education personnel, who comprise the majority of the journals' contributors and readership, convey these anti-parent and parental involvement messages to pre- and in-service teachers.

Rooted in the notion that communication is the key to successful parent involvement, teacher preparation professors DeCastro-Ambrosetti & Cho (2005) surveyed 160 secondary preservice and inservice teachers to determine how they perceive diverse cultural groups and the value that parents from these groups place on education. Additional open-ended questions were asked as a means to more deeply understand the participants' perceptions.

The data indicated that both preservice and in-service teachers had pessimistic attitudes toward parents of ethnic minority groups. The teachers reported negative perceptions toward the value ethnic minority parents place on education. The participants blamed the parents' lack of value on education as contributing to their children's underachievement.

For example, 73% of the respondents disagreed with the survey item 'Minority parents from low socio-economic backgrounds tend to place great value on education.' In addition, 83% of the participants disagreed with the survey item, 'A major reason for the pattern of low academic achievement among poor minorities is the structure and values of schools, *not* the home.'⁷⁵

Bollin (2007) reported on a college of education 's "Multicultural Tutoring Project" that required all preservice students enrolled in a multicultural education course to tutor Hispanic elementary school children whose families had recently immigrated to the United States. The education students participating in the tutoring project have been primarily White, middle-class students. The parents of the children spoke little English and were not familiar with the norms of

⁷⁴ Ramirez, A. Y. (2002). How parents are portrayed among educators. *The School Community Journal*, 12(2), 51-62.

⁷⁵ DeCastro-Ambrosetti, D. & Cho, G. (2005). Do parents value education? Teachers' perceptions of minority parents. *Multicultural Education*, 13(2)Winter, 44-46.

the U.S. school system. "The families were all from low socioeconomic backgrounds. The tutoring took place within the child's home, giving the students an opportunity to be the minority person in a diverse context. It also placed the students in a position to experience another culture firsthand (p. 179). " ⁷⁶

Although the tutoring project was designed to address a specific need for the children in the community,

another goal of the project was to make students cognizant of social inequities based on membership in an ethnic group, in this case Hispanics primarily from Mexico. .

.Sixty-six percent of the students acknowledged that they had had stereotypes about the children and their families that proved to be unfounded (p. 184).

The teachers gained an understanding and appreciation of the culture of the families that would hopefully develop them into "truly multicultural educators."

Moll, Amanti, Neff, & González (2011) developed a qualitative research approach that used ethnography, open-ended interviews, life histories, and case studies. The research team's goal was to accurately portray the "complex functions of households within their socio-historical contexts" that can reveal the families' cultural and intellectual resources. The researchers use the term "funds of knowledge" to refer to the "historically accumulated and culturally developed bodies of knowledge and skills essential for household and individual functioning and well-being" (p. 133). They engaged the collaboration of classroom teachers in the research effort, who took on the role of the learner as they gathered information on the social history of the households, their origins and development, and the labor history of the families. The teachers would later use the information they gathered to develop learning modules for their classrooms. An important aspect of the teachers' participation in the household research became the more sophisticated understanding they developed about the children and their experiences. There is

⁷⁶ Bollin, G. G. (2007). Preparing teachers for Hispanic immigrant children: A service learning approach. *Journal of Latinos and Education*, 6(2), 177–189.

much teachers do not know about their students or families that could be immediately helpful in the classroom (p. 136).⁷⁷

The research concept for the current study builds on the work of scholars such as A. Y. Fred Ramirez (2003), who has contributed significant scholarship to the understanding of the involvement of immigrant families in U.S. schools.

The research being conducted in the United States has contributed to an increased awareness of parental participation in schools. Although much of this research supports increasing levels of parental involvement, future studies need to address teacher attitudes and how teachers interact with parents. Specifically, researchers need to look at how schools interact with immigrant families and the issue of parental involvement (p. 96).⁷⁸

Ramirez had previously (1999) conducted this type of research with seventy teachers from two high schools in a small Midwestern university town, although the setting did not involve Latino populations. He reported that 95 percent of the school population was "Euro-American." Ramirez distributed a teacher attitude survey developed by Joyce Epstein for a family and community center out of Johns Hopkins University. The questions asked teachers for their perceptions on parent involvement, school improvement activities, the quality of parenting observed in their families, the teacher's role in fostering parent involvement and the effectiveness of teacher training to improve it, and their perceptions of the community in which they teach. The survey also contained an open-ended option for teachers to write in other comments. The results of the survey revealed a lack of communication with parents which "may result in negative attitudes between parents and teachers (p. 38)." Although the teachers believed that parent involvement was valuable, they considered it the school's responsibility to

⁷⁷ Moll, L. C.; Amanti, C.; Neff, D.; & Gonzalez, N. (1992). Funds of knowledge for teaching: Using a qualitative approach to connect homes and classrooms. *Theory into Practice*, 32(2), Spring, 132-141.

⁷⁸ A. Y. "Fred" Ramirez. (2003). Dismay and disappointment: parental involvement of Latino immigrant parents. *The Urban Review*, 35(2) June, 93-110.

implement a plan to promote parent participation. They also felt that the involvement of parents in school-wide issues was not important.

The design for this current research is modeled after the Ramirez (1999) study, but targets a school district's interaction with "immigrant families and the issue of parental involvement," as Ramirez (2003) called for in his later called work. It also adds a parallel parent survey in order to allow for comparisons between the perceptions and knowledge of the teachers and immigrant parents.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODS

3.1 Description of the Unit of Study

The Texas school district selected for this study is a small to medium-sized suburban district near a large North Texas city, and will hereafter be referred to as "the District." The District is well-suited for the investigation of gaps because the ELL and Hispanic student and faculty population are in the minority. The Mexican immigrant families do not have the advantage of a large community of other Spanish speaking immigrants, nor the cultural support of a large number of Latino staff in the District. The responsibility to execute the mandates of the parent requirements of NCLB and the obligation to offer "equal educational opportunities" to language minority students lies in the policies and the institutional practices of the District. It is these policies and practices that are analyzed through a careful examination of the knowledge and perceptions of the District's teachers of Mexican-origin students and the knowledge and perceptions of the Mexican immigrant parents.

There are six elementary schools in the District (grades prekindergarten - 5th), three middle schools (grades 6-8), one ninth grade school, and one high school. The reported enrollment at the time of the research (Fall 2010) was 9,165 students. The District is majority African American (79.3 percent); with whites comprising 4.5 percent of the student population. The total Hispanic population is 15.5 percent. This figure includes 6.4 percent who were identified as LEP, former bilingual or ESL students who have exited the program, and Hispanic students who were never identified as LEP. The District reports that 68 percent of the student population is identified as "low SES" (socio-economic status), which means that the family income meets the requirements for free or reduced meals in the District's child nutrition program. It is important to note that the by legal definition, *all* LEP students are considered "at

risk," along with students who have been retained, incarcerated, pregnant, expelled, placed in alternative school settings, on probation, or homeless.⁷⁹ Thus, even an LEP kindergartner who is placed in an ESL or bilingual setting, is labeled as an "at risk" student before they even have a chance to prove themselves. The U.S. Census Bureau also categorizes English language learners as "at risk," citing their lack of English language skills as only one of three "personal" conditions that can gain a child that label.⁸⁰

Of the total 644 teachers in the District, 59 had LEP students in their classrooms. Thirteen of these 59 were bilingual teachers. The remaining 46 teachers had a few ESL students in their general education classrooms. TEA reports the 2010-2011 ethnic/racial composition of the District faculty was 50.6 percent African American, 39.5 percent White, and 6.8 percent Hispanic. The District has a Texas Education Agency academic performance rating of "recognized," which is in the upper half of the state rating scale that includes "Exemplary" - "Recognized" - "Academically Acceptable" - "Academically Unacceptable."

The District's bilingual program is one of the few in the state with a "late-exit," or developmental model, which is the approach that is supported by the major theorists in the field in terms of educating children who are speakers of other languages (Cummins & McNeely, 1987; Krashen & Biber, 1988; Medina & Escamilla, 1992; Ogbu, 1994; Thomas & Collier, 2002; Rolstad, Mahoney, & Glass, 2005). The ultimate goal of a bilingual late-exit model is to foster academic competence in both languages. In their five-year research study (1996-2001) of 210,054 immigrant students receiving various program services in U.S. schools, Collier & Thomas (2002) found that the use of the native language in developmental late-exit bilingual programs through 4th and 5th grade yields the greatest academic achievement levels (p. 3).

Bilingual classes are offered from prekindergarten through the fifth grade. Only two elementary campuses in the District offer bilingual classes. Each of those two campuses usually has one

⁷⁹ Texas Education Code. Sec. 29.081 (d). COMPENSATORY, INTENSIVE, AND ACCELERATED INSTRUCTION. Retrieved from <http://www.statutes.legis.state.tx.us/Docs/ED/htm/ED.29.htm#29.081>

⁸⁰ Kominski, R.; Jamieson, A.; & Martinez, G. (2001). *At-risk conditions of U.S. school-age children*. Retrieved from <http://www.census.gov/population/www/documentation/twps0052/twps0052.html>

section each of bilingual kindergarten through fourth grade. One of the campuses houses the only bilingual prekindergarten program, while the other has the one fifth grade bilingual class in the District. Any student qualifying for bilingual education is bussed to one of those two "bilingual" schools, regardless of what campus their residence assigns them to. All of the elementary schools, the three middle schools, and the high school have an ESL program to accommodate those LEP students whose English language proficiency placement test indicates that they are not ready to be in general education studies, but have enough knowledge to be good candidates for the modified English language instruction of ESL classrooms.

Table 3.1 illustrates the academic success of the Spanish-speaking students who went through the District's developmental bilingual program. The numbers shown are the percentages of students who passed the English language State of Texas 2011 achievement test disaggregated by student categories and compared with State, District, and campus passing rates. For grades 3 - 5, the percent passing rates shown are for one of the bilingual campuses; for grades 6 - 8, the percent passing rates shown are for the middle school campus that the students from the bilingual campus feed into; and the high school rates are for the one high school in the District.

Table 3.1 District State Testing Outcomes by Race/Ethnicity and LEP Status

Percent of Students that Met State Testing Standard in English Reading & Math - 2011							
3RD GRADE	STATE	DISTRICT	CAMPUS	AFRICAN AMER.	HISPANIC	WHITE	LEP
READING	90	86	91	85	96	*	99
MATH	88	84	80	76	87	*	99
4TH GRADE	STATE	DISTRICT	CAMPUS	AFRICAN AMER.	HISPANIC	WHITE	LEP
READING	86	87	94	92	95	99	99
MATH	89	87	98	96	99	99	99
5TH GRADE	STATE	DISTRICT	CAMPUS	AFRICAN AMER.	HISPANIC	WHITE	LEP
READING	90	88	90	89	90	99	85
MATH	84	78	88	87	91	91	87

Table 3.1 - *Continued*

6TH GRADE	STATE	DISTRICT	CAMPUS	AFRICAN AMER.	HISPANIC	WHITE	LEP
READING	85	85	85	84	85	99	75
MATH	83	76	77	73	87	99	75
7TH GRADE	STATE	DISTRICT	CAMPUS	AFRICAN AMER.	HISPANIC	WHITE	LEP
READING	86	82	82	83	77	60	33
MATH	81	70	75	73	82	80	50
8TH GRADE	STATE	DISTRICT	CAMPUS	AFRICAN AMER.	HISPANIC	WHITE	LEP
READING	90	88	87	87	83	87	62
MATH	84	78	76	74	83	80	65
9TH GRADE	STATE	DISTRICT	CAMPUS	AFRICAN AMER.	HISPANIC	WHITE	LEP
READING	89	87	87	86	82	95	40
MATH	72	66	66	64	71	89	*
10TH GRADE	STATE	DISTRICT	CAMPUS	AFRICAN AMER.	HISPANIC	WHITE	LEP
ENGLISH	91	87	87	86	91	83	20
MATH	75	61	61	59	66	69	20
11TH GRADE	STATE	DISTRICT	CAMPUS	AFRICAN AMER.	HISPANIC	WHITE	LEP
ENGLISH	94	94	94	94	88	95	40
MATH	90	86	86	86	84	83	33

Note. Counts less than five and greater than zero are masked to comply with FERPA. Information compiled by the author from the Texas Education Agency's 2010-11 Academic Excellence Indicator System⁸¹

Table 3.1 shows that the LEP students scored above all other student categories in the third and fourth grades. These scores are quite remarkable, given that the majority of the LEP students in third and fourth grade are still in bilingual classes — and the tests reflected here were administered in *English*. This means that the children in bilingual instruction out-scored students for whom English is the native language. The LEP passing rate; however, begins to

⁸¹ Texas Education Agency. 2010-11 Academic Excellence Indicator System. Retrieved from <http://ritter.tea.state.tx.us/perfreport/aeis/index.html>

decline in the fifth grade, where there are no bilingual classes offered at this campus. The LEP passing rates continue to tumble as the students progress through middle and high school, where there is no native language support. This decline in academic performance is consistent with the findings in the Suárez-Orozco, Suárez-Orozco, & Todovora (2008) *Longitudinal Immigrant Student Adaptation Study*.⁸² However; the passing rate for Hispanic students, many of whom were originally in the developmental bilingual classes, remain comparable with other student categories throughout their school trajectory.

The District's Hispanic and LEP dropout and graduation rates displayed in Table 3.2 illustrate a failure to maintain the level of academic success in the Hispanic and LEP population that was achieved in elementary school. The dropout rate for Hispanic students (15.8 percent) is slightly below the national average for the latest (2009) CPS figures from the Census Bureau (17.6 percent), but the LEP dropout rate (57.1 percent) is far above that national average for Hispanic students. For the District, the Hispanic and LEP dropout rates are considerably higher than any other reported category; and the graduation rate is considerably lower.

Table 3.2 District Dropout Rates by Race/Ethnicity and LEP status for 7th through 12th Grade

DROPOUT RATES - 2009-2010						
	STATE	DISTRICT	AFRICAN AMER.	HISPANIC	WHITE	LEP
GRADES 7-12	1.7%	1.6%	1.3%	2.7%	3.1%	5.1%
GRADES 9-12	2.4%	2.5%	2.0%	4.2%	4.6%	8.3%
CLASS OF 2010	7.3%	7.0%	5.5%	15.8%	13.8%	57.1%
GRADUATION RATE - 2009-2010						
	STATE	DISTRICT	AFRICAN AMER.	HISPANIC	WHITE	LEP
	84.3%	83.3%	86.2%	68.4%	65.5%	42.9%

⁸² Suárez-Orozco, C.; Suárez-Orozco, M. M.; & Todorova, I. (2008). *Learning a new land: Immigrant students in American society*. Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press.

Research on the nativity of LEP students on the bilingual campus with the highest number of LEP students was conducted to ascertain how many of these students are foreign born, and how many are native born. Of the 175 students identified as LEP on this campus, only 17 (9.7 percent) of them were born in another country. The remainder were born in the United States. This statistic is worth mentioning in the light of popular complaint that our tax dollars are being spent on "illegal immigrants."

One in five children in the United States lives in an immigrant family: 80 percent of these children are born in this country and legally are entitled to the same support as all U.S. citizen children (Kids Count, 2007). Although entitled to resources, children in immigrant families are disproportionately poor, more likely to have parents without a high school diploma, and often live in linguistically isolated households.⁸³

In addition to "linguistically isolated households," the majority of the District's immigrant families reside in "linguistically isolated" *neighborhoods*. The majority of the immigrant families can only afford to live in one of three low-rent mobile home parks in the outer boundaries of the District's service area. The largest of the three parks has approximately 300 mobile homes, while the other has around 150. The prefabricated homes are small and close together. The children often talk about knowing each other's families well and playing together after school, but the living conditions are markedly different from the mostly three-plus bedroom brick suburban homes in the school district service area. Some of the immigrant parents have reported that the mobile home park landlord has strict rules for them, and does not permit them to have outdoor activities such as cookouts with their families. Just recently, many of the bilingual families had to relocate because the landlord of one of the parks was in default of his property taxes, even though the tenants had faithfully paid their monthly rent for several years and had raised their children in the District's schools. The affected families could not afford to

⁸³ Androff, D. K.; Ayón, C.; Becerra, D.; Gurrola, M.; Salas, L.; Krysik, J.; Gerdes, K.; Segal, E. (2011). U.S. immigration policy and immigrant children's well-being: The impact of policy shifts. *Journal of Sociology & Social Welfare*, 38(1), March, 77-98.

rent anything else in the District attendance area, so they had to withdraw their children and move to another school district with affordable housing.

The central office administrators are majority African American, including the District director of the bilingual/ESL program, who is not bilingual, nor has a background/certification for teaching English language learners. The principal for one of the two elementary bilingual campuses is White, while the other bilingual campus has an African American principal; neither of whom speaks Spanish. The assistant principals at both bilingual campuses are African American, neither of whom speaks Spanish. Both bilingual campuses have reading specialists who provide intensive reading instruction to children that read below grade level. None of the reading specialists are bilingual, thus, they cannot offer this service to a struggling Spanish reader. None of the campuses has a bilingual counselor, nor any bilingual special education teachers. If a bilingual student qualifies for speech therapy or special education support, the service will not be offered in their native language. Also, because there are no bilingual "gifted and talented" teachers, bilingual students cannot be included in the program unless they can pass a battery of rigorous tests in English.

Both bilingual campuses have a paraprofessional designated as a "bilingual liaison" who serves as a translator for parent meetings with the principal and with teachers who do not speak Spanish. This person also performs other tasks that require Spanish language skills, such as the ongoing assessment of bilingual students and the translation of notices and documents that go home to parents. Sometimes, the other campuses that do not have Spanish speaking personnel will call for help from the bilingual liaisons if needed. One of the bilingual elementary schools also has a Spanish-speaking receptionist in the front office. If this person is not available during school hours for some reason, the other office personnel are not able to communicate with Spanish-speaking parents, either in person, or on the telephone. Neither the other bilingual campus nor any of the other campuses has a bilingual receptionist.

All monthly PTA meetings and parent activities are conducted in English. There are occasional "math" or "science" nights that offer parent-student workshops on ways to help their children with these subjects; however, these workshops are conducted in English, with occasional translation if a translator is available. Parent-teacher conferences are scheduled twice a year; once in the fall, and once in the spring. The teacher is allotted approximately six hours to schedule conferences with all the parents of his/her students; which only allows for about fifteen minutes per conference. In recent years, the conferences were scheduled during working hours -- from 9:00 AM to 4:00 PM, or from 1:00 PM to 6:30 PM.

The schools have started the tradition of having a family picnic early in the fall. It is a casual get-together for families with no agenda, except to have social time with the school families and staff. This event is very popular, and is well-attended by staff and families alike, even the Latino families. The only parent event that is translated or held in Spanish is the yearly *Cinco de Mayo* celebration where the bilingual students perform culturally based programs such as Mexican regional dances, songs in Spanish, or other tributes to Mexican culture. The event is held only on the bilingual campuses, and is entirely organized by the bilingual teachers. It is extremely well-attended by the parents of the bilingual students.

All student enrollment documents are offered in Spanish, as are most notes that go home from the school office. However, other vital communication is not offered in Spanish. The District makes courtesy calls that are pre-recorded to alert the town's residents of important events taking place in the schools, like school closings, parent-teacher conference nights, town hall meetings, etc. These recordings are only transmitted in English. Other items that are only in English are lunch menus, the school calendar, school board meetings, online board policies, and the online parent portal for viewing students' grades.

From the onset of bilingual programming, the District has struggled to provide adequate Spanish and English language curriculum materials required by state law for bilingual students.

The law is stated loosely,⁸⁴ but the yearly requests by bilingual teachers to provide full sets of Spanish *and* English textbooks is regularly unfulfilled for unstated reasons. The complaints about this deficiency of materials for bilingual classes is a constant theme brought up by the bilingual teachers in the bilingual/ESL meetings, but the situation has remained unaddressed. The lack of availability of Spanish language materials is sometimes the fault of the textbook providers. Spanish versions of the material available in English are sometimes not offered in Spanish, even by the textbook companies who advertize special "Texas" editions of their products.

The District's middle schools and the high school do not have bilingual programs, but they do have ESL programs. Secondary ESL classes often have "newcomers" — immigrant children who enroll in a U.S. public school for the first time at the middle or high school level. The state does not require districts to offer bilingual instruction past the eighth grade, and most districts do not offer it past the sixth grade; consequently, the secondary ESL classes are the only option for newcomers who do not speak English. Many of the larger districts in Texas with a high ELL population have special newcomer programs that give extra language support to recent immigrant students and help the families adjust to the school culture. The District for this study does not offer such programs.

In addition to the newcomers, the LEP students in the District's secondary ESL classes come from the elementary schools that feed into them. They could be former bilingual students who immigrated in the late elementary school years, and did not have the recommended years of bilingual instruction to produce enough academic proficiency in English to be able to exit the program. Or, they are LEP students who cannot pass the English language exit tests for other academic reasons.

Most bilingual or ESL students who have attended the District since prekindergarten or kindergarten will be ready to exit the program by the third or fourth grade. According to the

⁸⁴ Texas Education Code. Sec.A31.029. BILINGUAL TEXTBOOKS. The board shall purchase or otherwise acquire textbooks for use in bilingual education classes.

Texas Education Agency's guidelines for exiting the bilingual/ESL program, the exiting LEP student must score at or above the state's designated minimum standards in the English-language proficiency tests in listening, speaking, reading, and writing. The LEP students who have exited the bilingual or ESL program will henceforth belong to another student category for academic reporting purposes. Unless they can be tracked by some other formal means such as a longitudinal study, the benefits they received from the developmental bilingual or ESL programs will not be known through regular reporting means because they are no longer LEPs. They will now be considered a part of the "mainstream," and will have "regular" classes like everyone else.

3.2 Limitations of the Study

The population of analysis is Mexican immigrant families with children in a Texas public school district and the American teachers of those students. The results are not intended to be applied to all Latinos in general. Although the research tools can be considered "reliable" for measuring perceptions and knowledge, the results are not intended to establish causal relationships.

3.3 Research Design

This single "representative" case study (Yin, 2003) uses a mixed methods approach to determine U.S. teachers' perception and knowledge of Mexican immigrant culture and educational background and Mexican immigrant parents' perceptions and knowledge of their experiences in U.S. public schools. Yin (2003) remarked that a case study is "the preferred strategy when 'how' or 'why' questions are being posed; when the investigator has little control over events; and when the focus is on a contemporary phenomenon within some real-life context" (p. 1).

The unit of analysis is a small to medium-sized suburban Texas school district where Latinos, mostly Mexican immigrants, are in the minority. A survey was administered to a random sample of Mexican immigrant parents and teachers of Mexican-origin students to determine

what cultural and background knowledge gaps in perception and knowledge exist in the two groups. Most of the items in the questionnaires were designed to be parallel in content in order to quantitatively compare the responses from teachers and immigrant parents. Other items included in the surveys were designed to capture the level of cultural knowledge of the participants, both parents and teachers. Gaps in these items are explored as well, in order to ascertain what knowledge is lacking that affects the equal educational access of Mexican-origin students. The answer options were organized in scale format in order to quantify the data and measure any gaps uncovered. An open-ended question was included in the surveys to allow for unrestricted comments from parents and teachers and to offer qualitative depth to the research. It was anticipated that the responses on the open-ended item would bring to light topics that were not covered in the survey questions.

3.3 Participants

The pool of potential teachers of LEP students in the District was 59; however, an undetermined number of general education teachers also have Mexican-origin students in their classrooms. The survey was open to them as well. The survey flyer specifically elicited participation from parents who were born in Mexico and had children enrolled in a U.S. school. Because each member of the potential population pool of parents of the 1,423 Hispanic students in the District had an opportunity to participate with no restrictions or parameters, the resultant collection of respondents constituted a simple random sample.

The rationale for targeting the input of teachers and not campus or District administrators for this study is grounded in the reality that teachers make the day-to-day decisions about what to teach children and about their relationships with students and their families based on their own perceptions, professional training, and experiences in the classroom. When education policies are not clearly delineated, the education of children is

ultimately in the hands of their classroom teachers⁸⁵ (Perkins, 1995). A well-used teacher's mantra applies – "When you close the classroom door behind you, do what you know is best for the children." This phrase is especially used among seasoned teachers when they feel the pressure to institute politically motivated educational reforms (Sarason, 1971; Huberman and Miles, 1984; Gitlin and Margonis, 1995). The lack of policy definition is particularly critical in language instruction for speakers of minority languages. Because of the current NCLB standardized test compliance mandates, "high-stakes tests have become *de facto* language education policy . . . with teachers and school administrators becoming the primary language policymakers" (Menken, 2008, p. 118).

3.4 Development of the Instrument

The concept for the teacher survey was based on observations by the researcher during the past twenty-two years of teaching Mexican-origin children, youth, and adults in a variety of educational settings. The recurring educational themes related to educating English language learners were considered, including strategies for the teaching of diverse learners, techniques to accelerate English language arts acquisition, the integration of culturally relevant curriculum, appropriate assessments for ELLs, and methodology for teaching content-area material in Spanish. More importantly, however, the concerns and comments of parents expressed over the many years of personal contact with immigrant families were taken into consideration in designing the questions for teachers.

For the parent survey, input was sought from a Mexican immigrant mother of three elementary school students in bilingual and ESL programs. She was approached about participating in a personal interview with the understanding that her responses would help lay the groundwork for the parent survey. She readily agreed. A complete report of the interview is contained in Appendix A.

85 Perkins, D. (1995). *Smart schools: Better thinking and learning for every child*. New York, NY: Simon & Schuster.

After the instrument was developed, a copy was presented to two faculty members and one parent for review. They were asked to read the questions to see if they were clear and relevant. They were asked to give feedback about the survey design and the questions. They each read the document and made minor suggestions, which were incorporated into the final product.

3.5 Research Procedures

3.5.1 Introduction

The plan for collecting data was to invite Mexican immigrant parents and the teachers of their children to fill out written confidential surveys that would capture the perceptions of their respective school experiences. The items in the two surveys were designed to parallel each other when possible in order to provide a basis for quantitative comparison of the two targeted groups. An overarching theme of the instrument was the improvement of educational services to Mexican immigrant students and families. Although the questions asked participants to rate their experiences on a Likert-type scale, the surveys also contained one open-ended question that invited both parent and teacher participants to write in suggestions for improving the education of Mexican-origin students.

3.5.2 Research Materials

All research materials for parents — consent forms, surveys, and recruitment flyers were written in Spanish and translated into English. The recruitment flyers for this research called for participation from first generation Mexican immigrants with children in U.S. public schools, and for teachers of Mexican-origin students. There were major challenges for recruiting parent and teacher volunteers for the study, which were well-understood ahead of time.

In my professional and personal experiences with Mexican immigrants, I have noted great reluctance to fill out any type of paperwork with personal information that could fall in the hands of immigration officials. In addition, many concerns have been expressed about the sharing of their opinions, and whether any comments could negatively impact their already precarious

standing in American society. A 2009 study of a large sample (1,138) of immigrants by Public Agenda supports the notion that Mexican immigrants feel that there are biases against them in this country.

The most dramatic difference between Mexican immigrants and other groups, whether in the survey or in focus groups, is in the level of discrimination they perceive around them and against them. Three-quarters of Mexicans say that there is at least some discrimination toward immigrants, 18 points higher than other immigrants. The difference is even more dramatic when asked about discrimination toward people from their birth country. Some 73 percent of Mexicans say that there is at least some discrimination toward people from their birth country, 42 percentage points higher than other immigrants (p. 29).⁸⁶

The fact that the research materials would be available in Spanish did not guarantee participation. The success of the recruitment effort relied on personal contact and my own established relationships of trust with the students' families.

3.5.3 Survey Procurement

As it turned out, the surveys that were ultimately collected were procured through much effort. I included an incentive of entering the participant in a raffle for a chance to win one of three \$100 cash prizes in exchange for filling out a survey. The flyers were distributed to all the bilingual classes (N=10), and to all classes with ESL students (N=10). All of the teachers of these classes received a complete explanation of the importance of the study and of the procedures for participation in the study. The flyer yielded but a handful of responses. I personally visited the classrooms to explain to the students the benefits of their parents' participation and received only a few more completed surveys.

I then decided to hold a reception for parents of the 36 prekindergarten students during the hour of transition between the half-day sessions, complete with a sandwich buffet lunch and

⁸⁶ Bittle, S. & Rochkind, J. (2009). *A place to call home: What immigrants say now about America*. New York, NY: Public Agenda.

additional door prizes for the families and their children. It was my thought that this could target a large number of mothers, since both groups have to come and pick up/drop off their children during that time frame. The reception was advertised through flyers distributed in the classroom and the school front desk, and through word-of-mouth by the prekindergarten teacher and the bilingual receptionist. The hour came and went, and only one mother came to fill out a survey.

Thus, after much failure at recruiting by traditional means, I decided to begin calling the parents whose phone numbers I had in order to personally explain the study and its benefits. The tactic yielded a survey for almost every call I made. Some of the parents I spoke with, however, asked me if they or their children would suffer repercussions for expressing their opinions. When I assured them that they would not; they agreed to fill out a survey. The last few parent surveys were obtained with the unsolicited help of a parent who has several children in the elementary school ESL program. She met with mothers of prekindergarten students during the lunch hour to try to convince them to fill out a survey. Her efforts yielded a few more surveys, although reportedly not without some caution expressed by the parents.

The teacher recruitment effort was just as frustrating, except for different reasons. Because I was certain that teachers would claim to be too busy to fill out a survey, I advertised a cash incentive for them as well. They were quite interested in the three chances to win \$100 cash. I emailed flyers to the teachers of both elementary bilingual campuses and to the ESL lead teachers of all the other schools in the District. I visited many of the schools with teacher and parent flyers in hand. Of course, the best response came from my home campus; but the principal at the ninth grade campus was also very supportive and asked me for flyers to distribute. There was a good response from her campus. The biggest disappointment was the lack of participation from the other bilingual campus. When the teachers did not respond to my emails, I contacted the principal, who told me that her bilingual teachers were too busy to do any extra work. I appealed to the District's bilingual/ESL program director to help encourage participation of the teachers at that elementary school, but she deferred the decision to the

campus principal. I emailed the teachers once again, and managed to obtain but one completed survey from that campus.

3.5.4 *Sample*

A good representation of high school teachers participating in the survey was unexpected but welcomed (N=10; 24.4 percent of the sample). Although approximately half of the participants were general education teachers with no LEPs in their classrooms, they have all taught Mexican-origin students who had been through the District's bilingual or ESL programs in the elementary schools. The final number of respondents totaled 82 — 41 teachers and 41 parents.

3.6 Data Analysis

This section reports the quantitative and qualitative results of the teacher and parent surveys. SPSS software was used to analyze the quantitative data, primarily through descriptive statistics. The frequencies of the parallel item responses from teachers and parents are compared for the purpose of identifying gaps in perceptions and knowledge of school practices and policies between the two groups. Any difference in frequencies in the parallel questions of the two groups of participants are considered "gaps," and are explored for relevance in terms of impact on the immigrant families' access to educational opportunities in the U.S. Some of the survey questions are not parallel, but they do measure the cross-cultural educational knowledge of teachers and parents. The frequencies of these items are analyzed for important disparities that may represent evidence of the "hidden curriculum" in the District's institutional practices. In the case of items without scale descriptors, the means and the median are reported and compared. Percent distributions are used to identify perception and knowledge trends related to certain demographic characteristics of the respondents.

The qualitative responses are grouped into categories that correspond to the survey items, and are interspersed throughout the quantitative analysis to offer depth to the findings, or to explore issues not covered in the scaled questions. The findings of both sets of data are

summarized in the next chapter, followed by a discussion of the results, policy implications, and recommendations for future research.

3.7 Descriptive Statistics for the Parent Sample

3.7.1 Children of Parent Respondents

This section presents descriptive statistics for the responses on the parent survey. All of the parents who participated in the survey (N= 41) identified themselves as Mexican immigrants. The total number of Mexican-origin children based on the parent responses was 110. Of the parents surveyed, 63 percent had more than one child. The mean number of children per parent respondent was 2.1. The 41 parents surveyed represented 97 school-aged children. The respondents were asked to select the child who had had the most recent birthday, enter the grade level of that child, and base the answers to the survey on that "selected child."

The grade level of the child selected ranged from prekindergarten to college, with 80 percent enrolled in elementary school (N=32 children in prekindergarten through fifth grade) at the time the survey was filled out. Only one child selected was in college. The remaining 17.5 percent (N=7) were enrolled in middle school or high school. The selected children were 56.1 percent male (N=23) and 43.9 percent female (N=18). Parents were asked to report the type of program services this child was receiving; bilingual, ESL, or general education instruction. The majority of the children (61percent; N=25) were receiving bilingual instruction; 17.1 percent (N=7) were in ESL classes, and 22 percent (N=9) in general education classes. The numbers displayed on the pie and bar charts included in this analysis represent percentages of survey respondents.

The descriptive analysis reveals that the selected children of the parent respondents represented all of the grade levels offered by the District, are reflective of the total District population in terms of gender, and represent the three types of instructional programs offered to the children of Mexican immigrants: bilingual, ESL, and general education.

3.7.2 Parent Demographics

Demographic information was collected at the end of the parent survey, including the gender of the participant, number of years living in the United States, level of schooling in Mexico and in the U.S., Mexican state of origin, and self-reported proficiency in the English language. The respondents were overwhelmingly female (87.8 percent; N=36). The range of years living in the United States was <1 to 37 years with a mean of 13.24 years and a mode of 11 years. A cumulative 48.7 percent of Mexican immigrant respondents have lived in the United States 10 years or under.

Reported years of education in Mexico ranged from 0 to 18 years with a mean of 8.68 and a median of 9 years of schooling in Mexico. This mean of schooling for the research sample is slightly above Mexico's national completion rate of 8.6 years.⁸⁷ The largest category of school completion in Mexico on the parent survey was nine years (31.7 percent), the number of years of compulsory education in Mexico, and the equivalent of high school completion in the United States. A total of 53.6 percent of parent participants had completed at least high school studies in Mexico. For reported years of schooling in the United States, the largest category was zero years of education in this country (75.6 percent; N=31) with a mean of 1.4 years of schooling in the United States. Because parents did not attend American schools, they would be at a decided disadvantage in understanding the culture and practices of the schools in the United States, especially for the first child they enroll in this country. This is a critical gap for the parents and their children.

Next, immigrant parents were asked to name their Mexican state of origin. Fourteen of the 32 Mexican states were named in the responses, with two states — Nuevo Leon and San Luis Potosí — tying for the highest number (eight each). Both of these states are located in the central part of the country and boast major metropolitan cities within their boundaries. The state of Guanajuato was just behind these two, with seven respondents reporting it as their home

⁸⁷ Secretaría de Educación Pública. (2010). *Sistema educativo de los Estados Unidos de México: Principales cifras escolar 2009-2010*. México, DF: México.

state. Guanajuato is in the lowest quartile in terms of academic achievement rates in the country with an average of 7.7 years of completed schooling. By contrast, Nuevo Leon has one of the highest rates of achievement with an average of 9.8 years of completed schooling (SEP, 2010, p. 28). The majority (78 percent; N=32) of parent respondents are from Mexico's "central corridor."

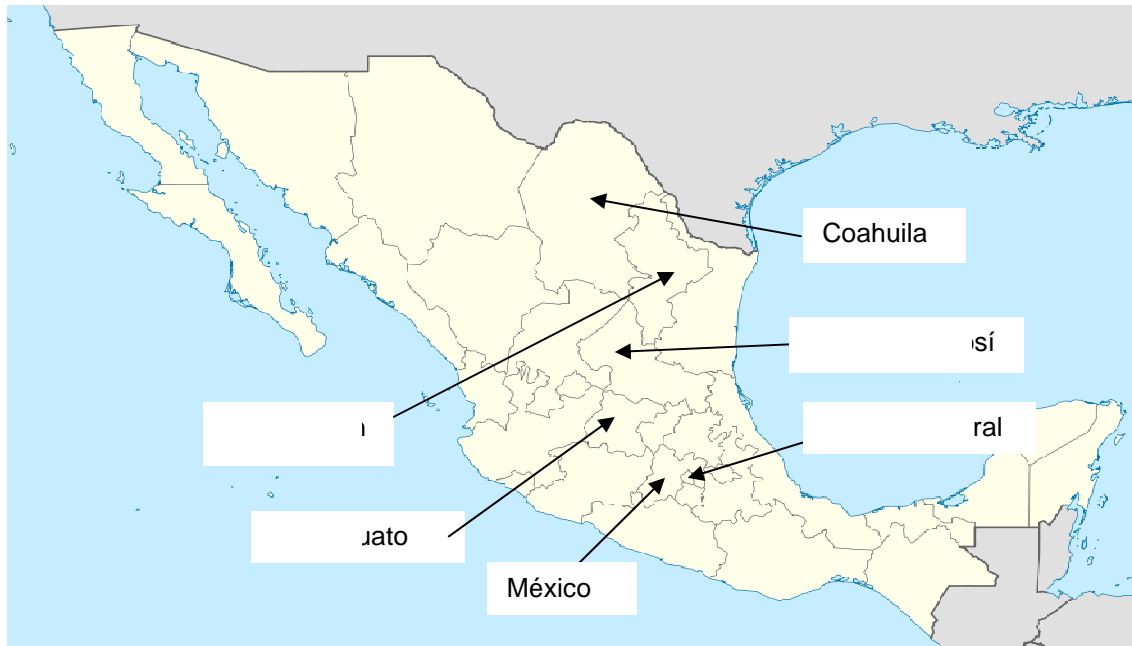


Figure 3.1 Mexican State of Origin of the Survey Participants

Participants were also asked to rate their English language proficiency. Five ratings of proficiency were offered for selection: (1) I don't understand or speak any English; (2) I understand a little English, but don't speak any; (3) I understand a lot, and speak a little English; (4) I understand and speak English well; and (5) I am not interested in learning English. None of the participants selected option 5. The majority of the parents rated themselves in the middle in terms of English language proficiency; 41.5 percent (N=17) at level 2 ("I understand a little, but don't speak any") and 24.4 percent (N=10) at level 3 ("I understand a lot, and speak a little English"). Categories 1 and 4 reported the same frequency at 17.1percent (N=7). A total of 58.6 percent of immigrant parents report an inability to speak English. Another 24.4 percent report that they only speak "a little" English, for a total of 73 percent that do not consider

themselves fluent. As English is the predominant language spoken in the District, this figure would imply a significant gap in the ability to actively participate in most of the school activities and with most of the school and central office personnel.

3.7.3 Summary of Descriptive Statistics for Parent Participants

The parent respondents for the survey comprised a very heterogeneous group, except for gender, as the sample was predominantly female. They represented fourteen Mexican states of origin and immigrated to the United States between one and thirty-seven years ago with a mean of thirteen years living in the U.S. Their education in the native country ranged from zero years of schooling to eighteen, with a mean of eight years which is typical in average schooling attainment in Mexico. The most prominent characteristics of the parent sample are their lack of education in U.S. schools and their lack of ability to communicate fluently in the English language. Both of these characteristics imply a significant cultural adjustment for the families who place their children in public schools in the United States.

3.8 Descriptive Statistics for the Teacher Sample

3.8.1 Teaching Assignment and Years of Teaching

The teachers that responded to the survey reported that they were currently teaching Mexican-origin students in their classrooms. For an N of 41 teacher respondents, 53.7 percent (N=22) surveyed responded that they were in a general education teaching setting; 26.8 percent (N=11) were teaching in an ESL assignment; and 19.5 percent (N=9) were in a bilingual classroom.⁸⁸ Teachers were also asked if they had the required state certification to teach English language learners, either bilingual or ESL certification. An N of 20 stated that they were certified (48.8 percent of the survey respondents), which means that they either have bilingual certification or ESL certification. The bilingual certified faculty teach academic material in both English and Spanish until the student can transition to "mainstream" English classes. ESL

⁸⁸ One of the teachers who reported herself as being in a bilingual classroom is the middle school Spanish teacher. While she is a Spanish/English speaker, she is not a *bilingual* teacher in the same sense as the elementary school teachers who are charged to teach all academic content in two languages and take responsibility for successful outcomes in state tests of basic skills.

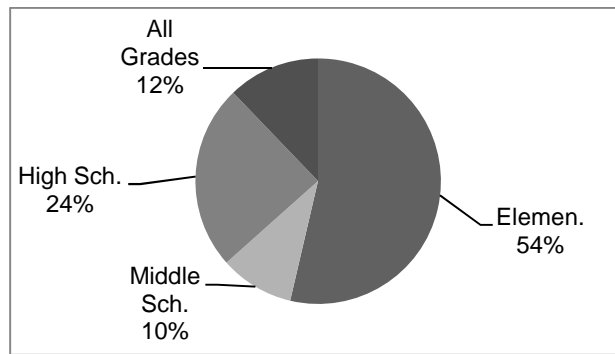
teachers, on the other hand, use only English language instruction, but employ techniques to help English language learners understand what is being taught.

Teachers were asked if they received training and certification to teach English language learners as a part of their undergraduate studies ("original"), or if they were certified in bilingual or ESL *after* they finished their degree. This question is important because it addresses the formal preparation of the teacher to serve the academic and linguistic needs of immigrant children. Of the 20 teachers who said they were certified to teach English language learners, only two of them stated that they received certification as a part of their original bachelor's degree. This would imply that as undergraduates, they had not intended to teach this population. The decision to do so apparently came after they had earned a degree in general education studies, or in some other field.

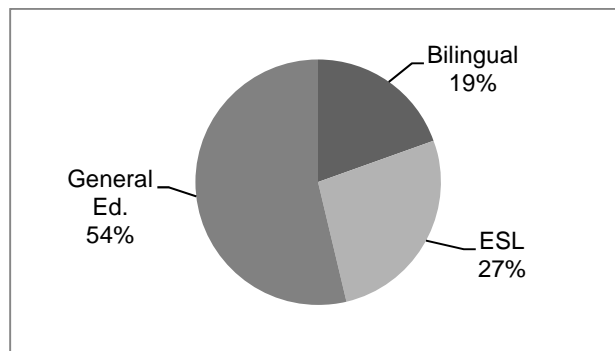
The respondents who selected "other" explained that they held a degree in another area, and became certified to teach through the alternative certification process.⁸⁹ The National Center for Alternative Certification reports that "Nearly half (47 percent) of the people entering teaching through alternate routes were working in a non-education job before they began an alternative teacher certification program; 40 percent were working in a professional occupation outside the field of education" (para. 6).⁹⁰ The national statistics on their website indicate that Texas is the clear leader in employing teachers who received alternative certification.

⁸⁹ The [alternative certification] program has been specifically designed to recruit, prepare and license talented individuals for the teaching profession who already have at least a bachelor's degree. Retrieved from the National Center for Education Information, Washington, D.C. <http://www.ncei.com/Alt-Teacher-Cert.htm>

⁹⁰ National Center for Education Information. *Profile of alternate route teachers*. Retrieved from <http://www.ncei.com/part.html>



(a)



(b)

Figure 3.2 Graphical Representation of Teachers' (a) Grade Level Assignment and (b) Classroom Assignment

The distribution of grade levels represented by teacher respondents was fairly well divided between elementary school (53.7 percent; N=22) and secondary school (46.3percent; N=19). High school teacher respondents totaled 24.4 percent (N=10), and middle school teachers numbered four total (9.8percent).

Teachers were given a range of years to report their number of years teaching Mexican-origin students: (1) teacher intern; (2) 1-5 years; (3) 5-10 years; (4) 10-15 years; (5) 15-20 years; (6) 20-30 years; and (7) 30+ years. The majority of the teachers were in the "10 years and under" category (75.6 percent; N=21). Of these 21 teachers, 37.5 percent (N=15) reported five years or fewer years of experience teaching Mexican-origin students, and 41.5 percent (N=17) fell into the 5-10 year range. For the upper half of years of experience, 17.1

percent (N=7) reported 10 to 15 years of experience, and only one teacher responded in the 15-20 years category.

The final survey question related to teachers' professional preparation to teach Mexican-origin students was a self-rating of Spanish language skills. Teachers who could speak Spanish were asked to rate themselves as (1) Equally proficient in both languages; (2) Proficient in English, less so in Spanish; but adequate for the job; (3) Proficient in Spanish; not adequately proficient in English; or (4) Proficient in English; not adequately proficient in Spanish. Fourteen teachers considered themselves bilingual, with only 2 reporting themselves as "not adequately proficient in Spanish;" five (35.7 percent of the 14) rated themselves as "equally proficient in both languages," and seven (50 percent of the 14) considered themselves as less proficient in Spanish, but "adequate for the job."

3.8.2 Teacher Demographics

Only two demographic items were collected on teacher participants; gender and ethnicity. The female teachers comprised 82.9 percent (N=34) of the group surveyed. The ethnic/racial breakdown was 43.9 percent (N=18) White, 24.4 percent Latino (N=10), and 31.7 percent (N=13) African-American. All of the bilingual teachers who participated in the survey reported their ethnicity as Latino.

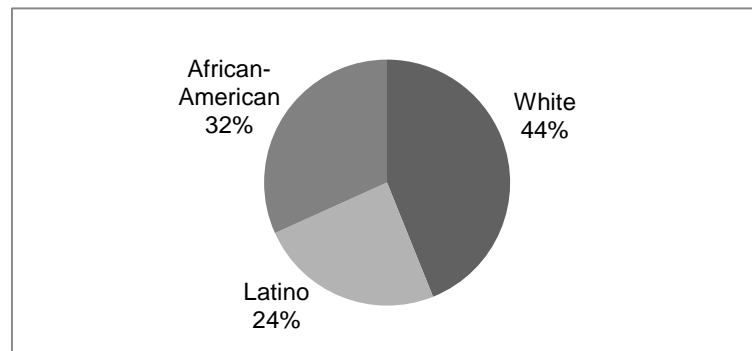


Figure 3.3 Graphical Representation of Teachers' Race and Ethnicity

3.8.3 Summary of Descriptive Statistics for Teacher Participants

Of the 41 teachers surveyed, slightly more than one-half were general education teachers with Mexican-origin students in their classrooms. The other half were bilingual or ESL teachers with specialized training and skills to teach English language learners; however, the majority of these teachers received their specialized certification after they finished a bachelor's degree in general education studies, or in some other field. The ratio of elementary to secondary school teachers represented in the study was well balanced, with only slightly more in the elementary school setting than in the secondary level. Compared to the whole District, the teachers who responded to the survey collectively had slightly more years of experience. Teachers who considered themselves bilingual overwhelmingly judged their proficiency in Spanish as excellent or adequate for the job.

3.9 Exploring the Gaps

3.9.1 Introduction

Many of the survey questions for parents and teachers were designed to ask both categories of participants for the same information so that the responses could be compared to identify gaps in perceptions, attitudes, and cultural knowledge. However, the questions, could not always be worded the same way. For example, parent respondents were asked to finish this sentence: "The most important thing for my child's education is" The options were: (1) For him/her to learn English first, even if he/she does not develop academic skills until after English is mastered; (2) For him/her to develop academic skills in Spanish while also learning a little English even though learning English will take longer; (3) For him/her to develop academic skills in both languages even though both learning the skills and mastering English may take longer; or (4) I don't know.

In this case, the parallel teacher question could not be asked the same way because their relationship with the child is different. Rather, the professional judgment of the teacher was solicited. However, the role that English should play in advancing the student academically was

targeted in the teacher question, just as in the parent question: "Which of the following is the most important educational purpose for bilingual and/or ESL methodology for non-English speaking students?" The answer choices were: (1) To transition the students to the English language as quickly as possible; (2) To insure that the students don't fall behind their English-language peers academically; (3) The first two and are equally important; (4) I do not think we should offer special services to non-English speaking students. In making comparisons between respondent groups, the intent of the question was taken into consideration, even though the item was worded differently. The responses of the participants were compared to determine if knowledge gaps exist between the two groups in terms of their educational priorities for the children.

3.9.2 Quantitative Methods

For the quantitative analysis of the parallel question, a comparison of frequencies and percents between groups of respondents is used to identify gaps in knowledge and perceptions. In other words, parent responses will be compared to teacher responses on similar survey questions to determine to what extent they agree or disagree on a topic and to discover where knowledge is lacking. For example, if 46 percent of teachers perceive that parents meet with the principal two times per year or more, and 20 percent of parents say they meet with the principal two times per year or more, then a gap is implied in perception about meeting with the principal. Percent distributions are used on some items to further explore relationships within both participant groups. The results of these analyses may allow inferences as to what participant characteristics are related to certain perceptions. For example, the parent participants who have been in this country longer may/may not participate more in PTA activities. On those survey items that are not parallel, or suitable for comparison, the participants' responses are reported as frequencies, percentages, and/or means. These reports may allow for generalizations about knowledge and perceptions among the respondent groups, and have the potential to uncover

practices and institutional policies that present barriers to equal educational opportunities for immigrant families.

3.9.3 Description of the Survey

The teacher survey contained thirty items that required a scaled response, one open-ended question, and seven items that collected demographic information. The parent survey had thirty-one scaled response items, one open-ended question, and six items that solicited demographic information. The teacher and parent questions have been organized into six major "perception" categories for comparison purposes: The questions explored the following categories where gaps may exist: (a) teacher competencies in meeting the educational needs of minority language learners; (b) cultural knowledge; (c) U.S. school competence for serving immigrant populations; (d) parent involvement opportunities for immigrant families; and (e) recommendations for improvement. Some survey items could fit into two general categories. For example, teacher respondents were asked to rate the importance of the teacher's role in building cultural pride in the students. This item was placed under the Cultural Knowledge category, and not in the Teacher Competence category in order to compare it to the parent item about the importance of children learning about their cultural heritage. Table 3.3 presents a matrix of parent and teacher survey items placed side-by-side categorized by perception topic. Table 3.4 identifies the items that were designed to be parallel for direct comparison. Table 3.5 lists the non-parallel survey questions intended to capture institutional practices related to immigrant families, or to the immigrants parents' lack of cultural knowledge that may hamper their participation in U.S. schools.

Table 3.3 Categorical Matrix of Survey Items

Category	Parent Items	Teacher Items
<i>Teacher competence to serve the needs of Mexican immigrant families</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rate teacher's knowledge about Mexican culture • Rate amount of instructional time devoted to English/Spanish • Rate teacher's Spanish language proficiency 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Effectiveness of college preparation to teach this population • Effectiveness of professional development to teach this population • Rate self on pre-assessment of

Table 3.3 - *Continued*

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teacher explained curriculum • Teacher explained grading policies/procedures • Rate comfort level in talking with teacher • Frequency of meetings with teacher 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • student to help drive instruction • Frequency of requests for transcripts • from Mexico • Frequency of requests for textbooks from Mexico • Rate comfort level of parent in talking with you
<i>Cultural Knowledge</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rate importance of teacher role in developing students' cultural pride • Rate priority and pacing for their child's education (learn English first, academics in Spanish, both) • Should immigrant families assimilate or acculturate? • Rate importance of the children learning about their Mexican heritage • Rate ability to help children with homework • Compare access to education • Compare quality of education 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rate importance of teacher role in students' cultural pride • Priority for teaching ELLs (learn English, master academics, both) • Rate importance of students' academic proficiency in Spanish • Should immigrant families assimilate or acculturate? • Compare U.S./immigrant students' motivation to succeed • Compare U.S./immigrant knowledge of curriculum, state testing, grading procedures • Compare U.S./immigrant ability to help with homework • Compare access to education • Compare quality of education
<i>U.S. School Competence to serve the needs of Mexican-origin families</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rate school's explanation of enrollment procedures • Availability of Spanish-speaking staff • Rate campus orientation to school procedures, rules • Rate level of comfort in talking with school the principal • Frequency of meetings with principal 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Compare U.S./immigrant understanding of campus procedures • Availability of Spanish-speaking staff • Rate appropriateness of campus assessment procedures • Rate comfort level of parent in talking with the principal • Campus requests Mexican transcripts • Campus requests free textbooks from Mexico • Rate campus investment in resources to help ELLs succeed
<i>Parent involvement opportunities for Mexican immigrants</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Compare opportunities for parent involvement • Involvement level with PTA • Availability of Spanish translation at PTA • Other parent involvement opportunities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Compare U.S./immigrant participation level in PTA • Frequency of Spanish translation at PTA

Table 3.3 - Continued

<i>Recommended areas of improvement for teachers and campuses in serving the needs of Mexican immigrant families</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rate importance of Spanish language workshops for parents • Rate importance of U.S. teacher knowledge of education in Mexico • Rate importance of partnerships between U.S./Mexican teachers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Need for more/better professional development to teach this population • Train teachers on Mexican education system • Improve pre-assessment methods for proper course placement • Teachers should include Mexican history and culture lessons • U.S. teachers should participate in partnerships with Mexican teachers
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Table 3.4 Parallel Survey Items

Parent	Teacher
How welcomed do you feel to talk with your child's teacher(s)?	Do you sense that the parents of immigrant Mexican students feel as comfortable speaking to you about any issues with their children as US native parents?
How important do you believe it is that your child study and learn about his/her Mexican heritage – the country's history, national heroes, Mexican cultural celebrations, etc?	Teachers of Mexican immigrant children should include some study of Mexican history and culture in their classrooms.
The most important thing for my child's education is	Which of the following is the most important educational purpose for bilingual and/or ESL methodology for non-English speaking students?
Would you say that the opportunities to get a primary school education are the same in both countries, better in Mexico, or better in the U.S.?	Would you say that students from Mexico have the same access to education in their own country as students in the U.S., or better in one country than in the other?
How important do you think it is for U. S. teachers of Mexican-origin children to help their students develop pride in their cultural roots?	How important do you think it is that teachers of Mexican immigrant students take a role in helping students learn about and take pride in their cultural roots?
How does a preparatoria education in Mexico compare with a U.S. high school education?	Would you say that immigrant students who have had previous schooling in Mexico have had the same quality of academic instruction as students who have had all of their schooling in the U.S.?
Which statement best describes your opinion about immigrant families with children in U.S. schools?	Which statement best represents your opinion about Mexican immigrant families living in the United States?
How able was the school staff to communicate with you in Spanish?	Does your campus provide personnel who can communicate with Spanish-speaking parents?

Table 3.4 - *Continued*

How well did the school staff orient you in important procedures such as your child's schedule, how to make an appointment to talk to your child's teacher or the principal, how to contact school district personnel, etc.?	Would you say that the parents of Mexican immigrant students understand campus procedures such as school hours and rules and how to make an appointment to speak to me or the principal as well as U.S. native parents?
How welcomed do you feel to talk your child's school principal?	Do you sense that the parents of Mexican immigrant students feel as comfortable speaking to the principal about any issues with their children as US native parents?
How important do you think it is for U. S. teachers of Mexican-origin children to be familiar with the Mexican education system?	Teachers with Mexican immigrant students should be given training on the Mexican education system.
How helpful do you think it would be for U. S. teachers of Mexican-origin students to form educational partnerships with Mexican educators?	It would be beneficial for U.S. educators of Mexican immigrant students to participate in educational partnerships with Mexican educators.
Which statement best represents your involvement with your child's school PTA (Parent-Teacher Association)?	Do you see the parents of Mexican immigrant students participating in the PTA and other parent activities as much as U.S. native parents?
How often is Spanish translation offered at the PTA meetings?	How often is Spanish translation offered at PTA meetings and parent workshops in your school?
How able do you feel helping your child with his/her homework?	Would you say that the parents of Mexican immigrant students appear to know how to help their child with homework as well as US native parents do?

Table 3.5 Non-Parallel Survey Items

Teachers
Select the option that best describes your certification status.
How well did your college courses prepare you to effectively teach Mexican immigrant students?
How well have the professional development courses you have taken since college helped prepare you to effectively teach Mexican immigrant students?
How interested would you be in taking professional development courses designed to help you teach Mexican immigrant students more effectively?
How important do you believe it is that students who speak Spanish develop academic proficiency in Spanish as well as in English?
Compared to US native-born students, do Mexico immigrant students have more, less, or the same level of motivation to succeed?

Table 3.5 - *Continued*

How well do the intake procedures on your campus assess the immigrant student's prior academic attainment level before placing him/her in courses?
How often does your campus request Mexican immigrant students' school transcripts from the local Mexican consulate?
How often does your school order free student textbooks available from the Mexican Secretariat of Education for any Mexican national studying in another country?
How would you rate your campus in terms of its investments in resources to assure the academic success of immigrant students?
How well do you think you assess the immigrant student's prior academic knowledge in order to plan appropriate instruction?
How often do you request Mexican students' school transcripts through the local Mexican consulate?
How often do you order free student textbooks from the Mexican Secretariat of Education for your Mexican immigrant students?
Districts and campuses should improve the assessment methods used for placing Mexican immigrant students in classes.
Parents
My child's teacher seems to be knowledgeable about Mexican culture.
Would you say that your child's teacher spends . . . (Balance between the use of Spanish and English for instruction)
My child's teacher speaks Spanish . . . (Level of Spanish language fluency)
How well did the school staff explain the enrollment process?
How well did your child's teacher(s) explain what the students would be learning throughout the year?
How well did this child's teacher explain to you about how your child's academic progress would be graded?
How often do you meet with your child's teacher(s)?
How often do you meet with your child's school principal?
How often does the school provide other parent involvement activities besides PTA in which you can participate?
How important do you think it is for schools to provide workshops for parents in Spanish that would help immigrant parents become more involved in their children's education?

3.9.4 Qualitative Methods

The open-ended question of the surveys provides qualitative input to offer depth of understanding and explanations that could not be captured through quantitative analysis. The item for parents read: "Please share your ideas for improving the education of your children." The teachers were invited to: "Please share any other ideas for improving the education of Mexican-origin students in the United States."

The value of this type of input is that it is not dependent on the respondent's interpretation or understanding of a question, and it allows the subject to address self-selected issues. It was expected that the participant input in this item would shed light on topics not covered in the quantitative data. Of the 41 parent respondents, 68.3 percent (N=28) chose to contribute comments on the open-ended question. Of the 41 teacher respondents, 58.5 percent (N=24) contributed comments on the open-ended item. Responses have been categorized according to the themes in the above categorical matrix. Parent and teacher responses have been arranged side-by-side in keeping with the comparison approach employed to identify gaps. The open-ended responses that are pertinent to the survey results will be integrated into the quantitative analysis. A complete script of the responses for the open-ended question is contained in Appendix B.

3.10 Teacher Competence to Serve the Needs of Mexican-origin Families

An item in this category that lent itself to direct comparison of frequencies was the question that asked both types of respondents whether the immigrant parent felt comfortable interacting with the teacher. Parents were given options on a 5-point scale with descriptors: (1) I feel very comfortable; (2) somewhat comfortable; (3) only a little comfortable; (4) not comfortable at all; or (5) It doesn't matter because I do not want to meet with my child's teacher(s). The majority (68.3 percent; N=28) of the parents selected option 1. Another 26.8 percent (N=11) chose option 2. Only two parents chose option 3, and no one selected options 4 and 5. The percentages in Table 3.6 indicate that the majority of those respondents who feel

comfortable talking to their child's teacher come from (a) bilingual and (b) elementary classrooms.

Table 3.6 Percent Distributions: Parents Feel Comfortable Talking with Teacher

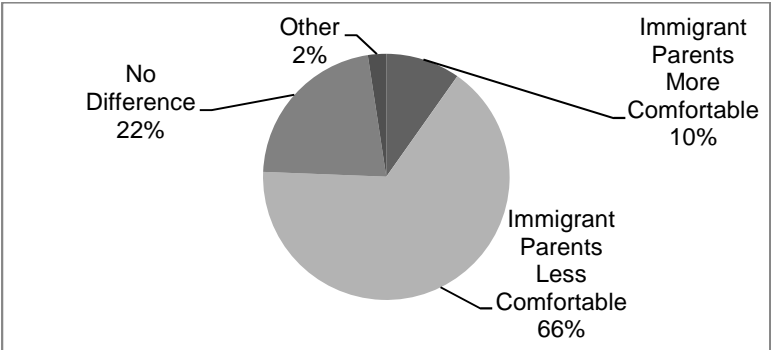
	Very Comfortable	Somewhat Comfortable	A Little Comfortable
General Education	33.3	55.5	11
ESL	57.1	42.9	0
Bilingual	84	14.7	0.4
Elementary	78.8	15.1	6
Secondary	25	75	0

Several of the parents' written comments expressed the desire to have more scheduled conferences, a more "collaborative relationship" and "better communication" with their child's teacher for the purpose of learning how their child is doing in class and letting them know how they can help improve their child's education. Other parents thought the teachers could improve by "spending more time with students one-on-one, "by being patient with the children," and by "not show[ing] favoritism to only the children that are more advanced than the others." One parent suggested that teachers

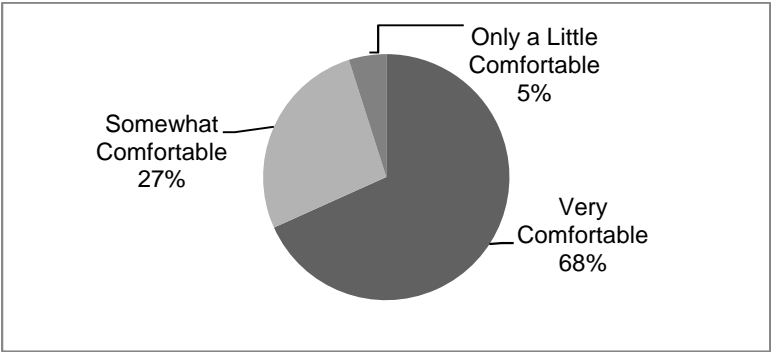
. . . be friendlier with the parents and also that they would explain the schoolwork better to their students, and they would not be racist. Just because we are Mexicans, or we don't understand English, doesn't mean that we don't deserve respect. I think we deserve the same respect as whites and blacks.

The teachers were asked to *compare* immigrant parents to native U.S. parents on a 3-point scale in terms of the level of comfort in talking to them: (1) Immigrant parents seem to feel more comfortable than U.S. native parents; (2) Immigrant parents seem to feel less comfortable than US native parents; or (3) I do not notice any difference between immigrant and native parents. The majority of the teachers selected "less comfortable" at 65.9 percent (N=27), with

another 22 percent (N=9) selecting "no difference." Although the comparison aspect of the item gave the question a slightly different interpretation, if teachers thought that immigrant parents felt "very comfortable" talking to them, they could have selected option 3 (no difference). Thus, a comparison of the responses suggests a gap in parents' and teachers' perceptions about how comfortable immigrant parents feel in talking to their child's teacher, with teachers perceiving less comfort than parents. Compared to bilingual teachers, percent distributions suggest that the majority of general education teachers and ESL teachers perceive that immigrant parents are less comfortable in talking with them.



(a)



(b)

Figure 3.4 Graphical Representation of (a) Teachers' Perceptions of How Comfortable Immigrant Parents are in Talking to Them and (b) How Comfortable Parents Feel in Talking to the Teacher

Table 3.7 Percent Distributions: Teachers' Comparison of Immigrant vs. Native Parents' Level of Comfort in Talking to Them

	Immigrant Parents More Comfortable	Immigrant Parents Less Comfortable	No Difference
Bilingual Teachers	37.5	25	37.5
ESL Teachers	0	32	68
General Education Teachers	4.7	80.9	19
Elementary PK-5	18.2	50	31.8
Secondary 6-12	0	84.2	15.8

Elementary school teachers perceived that parents were more comfortable talking with them. These two results concur with the parent perceptions about which teachers are deemed as more approachable.

Teachers' written comments suggest that they accept the responsibility to help students succeed and "reach out to the parent." They agreed with parents that they should be more "understanding and patient," adding that they wish they "could find a way to focus on all students' strengths and showcase them somehow . . . building confidence, self-esteem, and bonds between teachers and students [that] makes a huge difference in academic success (or failure)."

Other non-parallel questions included in this category asked teachers to evaluate their professional preparation and abilities to teach the children of immigrants. Teachers were asked about their pre-service training and subsequent professional preparation to teach this population of students. They were also asked to rate their individual classroom practices that attempt to address the needs of Mexican-origin students.

On the question of whether their preservice college courses prepared them well to teach English language learners, teachers responded with a cumulative percent of 46.3 percent (N=19) that their college prepared them "very well" or "somewhat well," but 53.6 percent (N=22)

stated that their preparation was "not very well," or "not well at all." It is possible that the lower ratings on effectiveness of college preparation were due to the fact that under 50 percent of the teachers surveyed hold a state certification to teach English language learners. However, the general education teachers that do not teach with special language accommodations still have immigrant students in their classrooms. On the other hand, teachers were satisfied with the training they have received since college, rating it with a cumulative 85.4 percent (N=35) with 24.4 percent (N=10) selecting "very well," and 61 percent (N=25) selecting "somewhat well." When asked if they would be interested in taking workshops to learn how to more effectively teach Mexican-origin children, 70.7 percent (N=29) responded that they would be "very interested," and 19.5 percent (N=8) responded that they would be "somewhat interested."

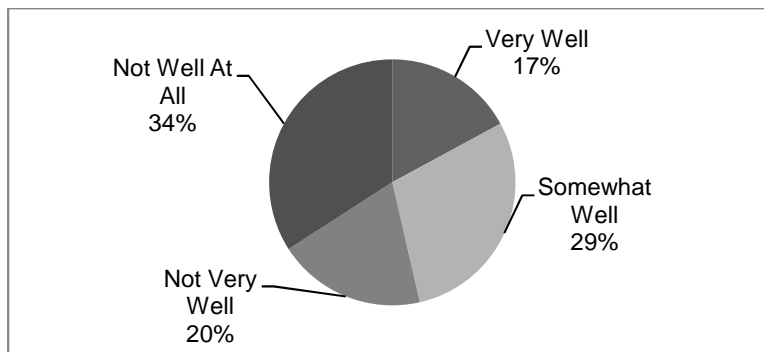


Figure 3.5 Graphical Representation of Teachers' Perception on How Well College Courses Prepared Them to Teach Mexican-origin Students

Percent distributions provide evidence that teachers not certified to teach English language learners believe that their college courses did not prepare them well to teach Mexican-origin students. The cumulative percent of teachers in each category who felt that their undergraduate studies did not prepare them well points to a gap in universities' preservice preparation for educating a growing segment of our school population. On the other hand, teachers report that staff development received after they got their degree has prepared them "somewhat well" to teach Mexican origin students.

Table 3.8 Percent Distributions: College Courses Prepared to Teach Mexican-origin Students

	Very Well	Somewhat Well	Not Very Well	Not Well at All
Bilingual	25	37.5	25	12.5
ESL	9	45.5	27.2	18.2
General Education	18.2	18.2	13.6	50

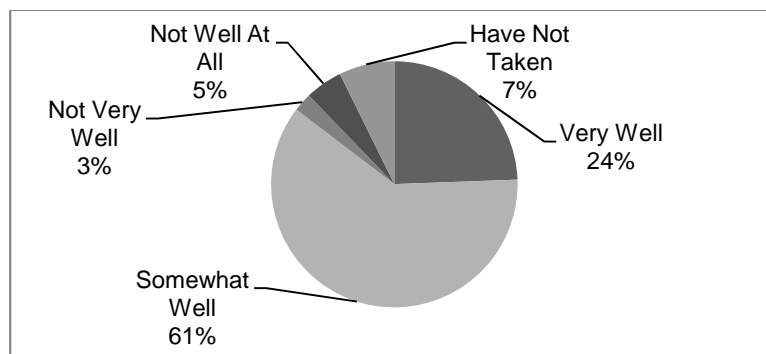


Figure 3.6 Graphical Representation of Teachers' Perception of whether Staff Development is Effective for Teaching Mexican-origin Students

Table 3.9 Percent Distributions: Professional Development Since College Has Prepared to Teach Mexican Immigrant Students

	Very Well	Somewhat Well	Not Very Well	Not Well At All	Have Not Taken
Bilingual	12.5	37.5	0	25	25
ESL	27.3	72.7	0	0	0
General Education	27.3	63.6	4.5	0	4.5
ELL Certified	20	65	0	10	5
Not ELL Certified	28.6	57.1	4.8	0	9.5

The teacher written comments on this topic were focused on "meaningful professional development" on "how to teach immigrant students" and training that would help teachers "meet

the educational needs of the [immigrant] students." Two respondents recommended that training in ESL methods should be a required part of *any* teacher certification program in universities, not just for ESL teachers. Others thought that more professional development could be offered that would help veteran teachers give this population a quality education.

Other comments by teachers were more specific: "I think that American educators should have available of how the Mexican education system works and how Mexican laws work" and "I think having more knowledge of students' educational backgrounds in Mexico, and having more resources to bridge the gap they might have is key." Other teachers felt that there should be summer workshops in the Spanish language for teachers and "workshops on campus for cultural background."

Teachers generally rated themselves as competent when it came to assessing the prior knowledge of their ELL students in order to plan instruction for them. They were asked the question: "How well do you think you assess the immigrant student's prior academic knowledge in order to plan appropriate instruction?" with the following options: (1) Very well, I assess the immigrant student appropriately and plan instruction accordingly; (2) I assess the immigrant student the same way I assess U.S. native students, but I occasionally have to make adjustments; (3) Not very well, I seem to be making adjustments constantly; and (4) I don't know how to assess what the student previously learned in Mexican schools. Twenty-two percent (N=9) of teachers judged themselves as doing this "very well," and 63.4 percent (N=26) stated that they do the "same as for U.S. students, but with adjustments." Only 2 respondents answered that they did not know how to previously assess what the student learned in Mexican schools, and 9.8 percent (N=4) responded that they did not know how to assess and plan instruction very well for this population. The teachers' self-confidence in assessing prior academic knowledge learned in Mexican schools was consistent across classroom teaching assignments.

Percent distributions by teacher groups suggest that teachers in grades 1 - 3 and ESL teachers are the most confident in their competency to plan instruction based on the assessment of student prior knowledge. General education and high school teachers are the ones most likely to assess Mexican-origin students the same way they do U.S. students, but with "adjustments."

Table 3.10 Percent Distributions: Teachers' Self-Rating in Assessment of Mexican Immigrant Student

	Very Well	Same as for Native Student	Not Very Well	Don't Know How
Bilingual	0	75	2	0
ESL	45.5	54.5	0	0
General Education	18.2	63.6	9	9

Two items on the teacher survey asked teachers if they knew that student transcripts and Mexican textbooks could be obtained for any Mexican national in their classroom.⁹¹ Although not required by the receiving school districts in the United States, a transcript of prior studies may help place the student in appropriate coursework. For example, students in Mexican schools are required to take algebra in grades earlier than in the United States. If the receiving school is not aware of this, they may require the transferring student to repeat the course as a part of the U.S. high school plan. Textbooks in Spanish may be helpful for older immigrant students, who do not have access to bilingual education in U.S. secondary schools. Most teachers did not know about these two available resources; 53.7 percent (N=22) reported that they did not know that a transcript could be obtained, and 39 percent (N=16) said they never take this action. Similarly, 65.9 percent of teachers (N=27) did not know they could order grade-relevant textbooks, and another 31.7 percent (N=13) reported that they never had

⁹¹ Secretaría de Educación Pública. *Educación Para Mexicanos en el Exterior. Programa de donación de libros para niños Mexicanos en Estados Unidos*. Retrieved from http://www.mexterior.sep.gob.mx/2_pdlm.htm

ordered Mexican textbooks. At least one teacher was intrigued by the knowledge that transcripts and textbooks were available and wrote that she would like "details about how books and transcripts can be requested from Mexico."

Parents were asked to evaluate U.S. teachers on a number of competencies related to their ability to interface with the family culture. They were posed the question of whether their child's teacher had an adequate knowledge of Mexican culture. Parents gave teachers a mean rating of 3.32 based on a 7-point Likert scale, with a cumulative 48.8 percent (N=20) assigning a "0" or "1" rating, and 29.3 percent (N=12) assigning a "7." Eleven of those 12 teachers receiving a rating of "7" are bilingual teachers. Some comments written by parents addressed this issue. For example, " I would like for them [teachers] to teach the children more about Mexican culture like Christmas celebrations and the most important celebrations in Mexico – and the name of Mexico's president." Another parent expressed a broader vision for cultural awareness:

Involve parents in activities that are aimed at students where the parents can share experiences and knowledge about Mexican culture and also be involved in learning about North American culture. This would create an intercultural exchange which I think would be beneficial to all – teachers, students and parents. A barrier which sometimes impedes us from being 100% involved in the school is language. If you don't speak English, you feel inhibited. We should improve this situation as well.

Parents were also asked to rate their child's teacher's Spanish language proficiency with the options: (1) Fluently in conversation and seems able to teach school subjects in Spanish; (2) Adequately in conversations, but NOT fluently enough to teach school subjects in Spanish; (3) Only enough for very simple conversations; or (4) None at all.

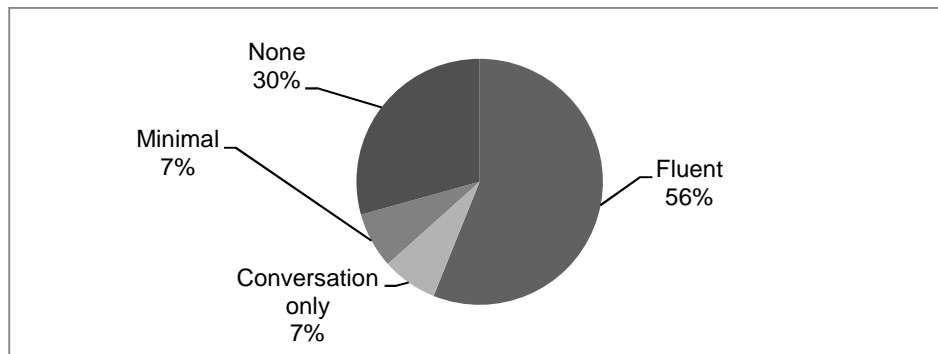


Figure 3.7 Graphical representation of Parents' Rating of Teachers' Spanish Language Proficiency

As an extension to the fluency question, parents were asked if their child's bilingual teacher balanced the use of English and Spanish for instruction. Their answer choices were: (1) Too much time teaching in Spanish and not enough time teaching in English; (2) Too much time teaching in English and not enough time teaching in Spanish; (3) The right amount of time teaching in both languages; (4) My child does not receive bilingual instruction; or (5) I don't know. Of the 71.1 percent (N=27) of parents whose children were in a bilingual classroom, 70.4 percent (N=19) answered that the teacher maintained a good balance of instruction in the two languages. No participant selected option 1; and 29.6 percent (N=8) thought that the teacher spoke too much English (option 2). A parent who "speaks a little English" commented that she is: "content with the way the bilingual program has helped my child and me." Another parent agreed that "the education and the teaching are very good," but lamented that "there is too much homework in English."

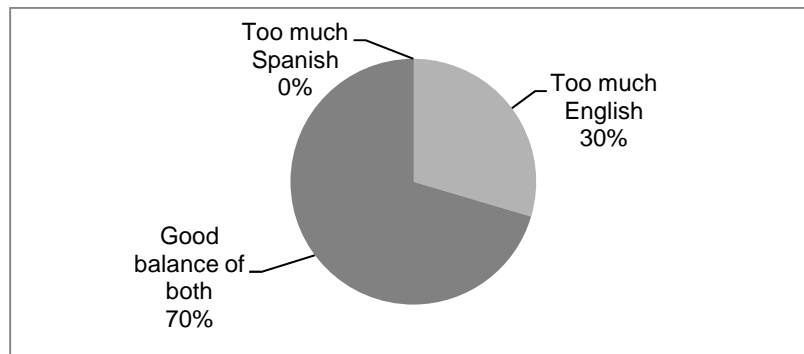


Figure 3.8 Graphical Representation of Parents' Perception of English/Spanish Use in Bilingual Class

The last three items that solicited teacher effectiveness ratings from parents had to do with how well the instructor explained to the parent the academic material the child would be studying throughout the year; how the student's work would be assessed/graded; and how often the parent was met with the teacher. Overall, the parents reported satisfaction with the information imparted by the teacher, rating them at a cumulative 82.9 percent — "very well," (N=26) and "somewhat well" (N=8) for communicating the particulars about the curriculum, and at a cumulative 85.4 percent for explaining grading policies and procedures, using the same rating scale — "very well" (N=31) and "somewhat well" (N=4). Even though the majority of the surveyed parents felt that the teacher explained the curriculum "very well," the remaining 36 percent (N=15) still had knowledge gaps about the what their child would be studying. For understanding the teacher's grading policy, the knowledge gap was a cumulative 24.4 percent (N=10). Percent distributions in Tables 3.11 and 3.12 indicate that the parents rated the bilingual teacher the highest in terms of explaining the curriculum and the grading system, with the ESL teacher in second place. These tables also confirm that elementary school teachers explain the curriculum and grading system better than secondary teachers.

Table 3.11 Percent Distributions: Teacher Explained the Curriculum

	Very Well	Somewhat Well	A Little	Not At All	Didn't Meet with Teacher
Bilingual	76	16	0	4	4
ESL	57.1	0	14.3	14.3	14.3
General Education	33.3	44.4	0	11.1	11.1
Elementary PK-5	69.7	15.2	0	6	9
Secondary 6-12	37.5	37.5	12.5	12.5	0

Table 3.12 Percent Distributions: Teacher Explained the Grading System

	Very Well	Somewhat well	Not Very Well	Not At All	Didn't Meet Teacher
Bilingual	88	4.5	4.5	0	4.5
ESL	71.4	14.3	14.3	0	0
General Education	44.4	22.2	0	22.2	11.1
Elementary PK-5	82	6	3	3	6
Secondary 6-12	50	25	12.5	12.5	0

The response options for frequency of meetings with the classroom teacher were: (1) one or two times a year; (2) three to six times a year; (3) more than six times a year; or (4) never. A cumulative 61 percent (N=25) reported that they met with their child's teacher three to more than six times a year. Another 36.6 percent (N=15) stated that they met with the teacher one to two times a year.

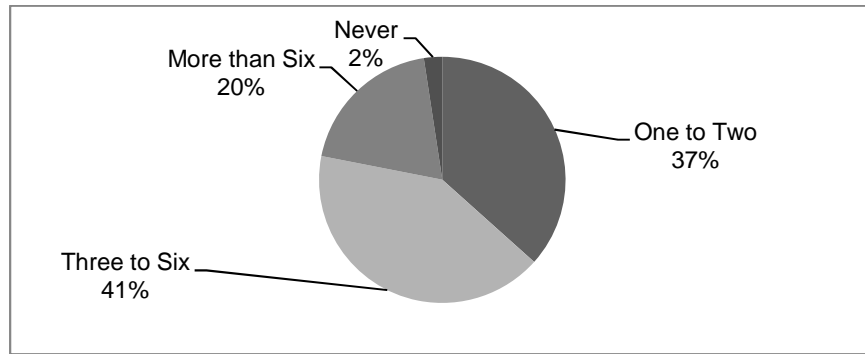


Figure 3.9 Graphical Representation of Times Per Year Parents Report Meeting with Teacher

Considering that the formal parent-teacher conferences are only held twice a year, these are very positive results. Table 3,13 illustrates that parents with children in the bilingual program meet more frequently with the teacher, but frequency of meetings related to grade level averaged about the same.

Table 3.13 Percent Distributions: Times Per Year Parent Reports Meeting with Teacher

	One to Two	Three to Six	More than Six	Never
Bilingual	28	56	12	4
ESL	57.1	14.3	28.5	0
General Education	44.4	22.2	33.3	0
Elementary PK-5	39.4	45.5	12.1	3
Secondary 6-12	25	25	50	0

3.10.1 Summary for Teacher Competence

Overall, parents were pleased with their child's teacher. They feel fairly comfortable talking with the teacher, especially the Spanish-speaking teacher and elementary school teachers. In the case of children in a bilingual classroom, parents judge that the teachers' Spanish language skills are adequate for the job, and are used in good balance with English in

the classroom. Some parents thought that the bilingual teacher devoted too much time teaching in English, but none thought that too much time was spent on Spanish academic skills. They also reported that they met several times a year with the teacher and received sufficient information about their child's educational path, especially those with children in a bilingual classroom.

The teachers indicated that they considered themselves well equipped to teach the children of immigrant families, but not necessarily because of their pre-service training. A large majority of teachers from all three categories responded that they did not do anything special to assess children who had previous studies in Mexico in order to plan instruction based on their prior academic knowledge. They reported not knowing much about the Mexican education system, but were open to learning more about it. The majority of the teachers did not know about the resources offered by the Mexican Education Agency in support of their citizens studying abroad. Teachers were also open to receiving more training on teaching of ELL students.

3.11 Cultural Knowledge

The *Cultural Knowledge* category contained several items suitable for comparison. Both parents and teachers were asked to rate the top priority for their child's education in the United States. Parents were given the following options: (1) To learn English first, even if he/she does not develop academic skills until after English is mastered; (2) To develop academic skills in Spanish while also learning a little English even though learning English will take longer; (3) To develop academic skills in both languages even though both learning the skills and mastering English may take longer; or (4) I don't know. Option 3 was the most selected option (61 percent; N=25), option 1 was the least selected (12.2 percent; N=5). Option 2 was selected by seven respondents (17.1 percent). Only one respondent selected "I don't know."

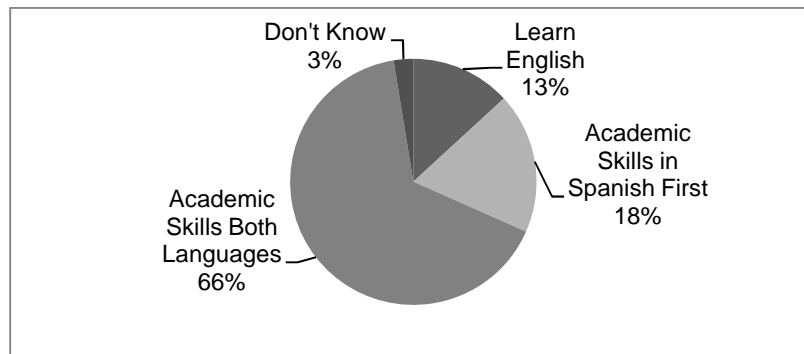


Figure 3.10 Graphical Representation of Parents' Priority for their Child's Education

Table 3.14 Percent Distributions: Parents' Priority for their Child's Education

	Learn English	Academic Skills	Both English & Academic Skills	Don't Know
Bilingual	4.3	26.1	75	4.3
ESL	42.7	14.3	42.7	0
General Education	12.5	0	75	12.5

The State of Texas guidelines for bilingual education specify that the use of the primary language is intended to be a vehicle to "ensure equal educational opportunity" to "students of limited English proficiency" in order to "facilitate their integration into the regular [English] school curriculum." ⁹² This education code states that the ultimate purpose for the use of the primary language is "the mastery of basic English language skills," although the law goes on to state that "a bilingual education program established by a school district shall be a full-time program of dual-language instruction that provides for learning basic skills in the primary language" (Sec.29.055a). The guidelines further stipulate that bilingual (dual language) education must be offered through elementary school; is optional through the eighth grade; and is not offered in ninth grade through the twelfth grade (Sec. 29.053).

⁹² Texas Education Code. Subchapter B. Bilingual Education and Special Language Programs. Sec, 29.051. Retrieved from <http://www.statutes.legis.state.tx.us/Docs/ED/htm/ED.29.htm#B>

Texas Education guidelines notwithstanding, some parents view the bilingual program as a means to cultivate the advantages of knowing two languages and consider it a way to "improve the future of our children." Some parents avail themselves of the opportunity to leave their children in bilingual classes after they are no longer considered limited English proficient and become eligible to exit into mainstream programs. Texas Education Code allows parents this option.⁹³

My idea would be that our children would not forget their Spanish language, that they would maintain their traditions, know their customs, and be able to speak and write in Spanish. All of this would help them have mastery of two languages so they can have a better future.

Other parents may see the bilingual program as an impediment to the assimilation of their children: "As for me, I like the way my daughter is being educated. Her teacher teaches completely in English, which allows for my daughter to achieve the same level of education as U.S. children."

The question of "priority" was intended to determine the level of importance teachers place on ELL students learning English, as opposed to "not falling behind their English-language peers" (educational equity). A teacher's preference for the student to learn English at the expense of academic achievement sends an assimilationist message that there is an urgency to have the child adjust quickly to the culture (Baker, 2001, p. 353). Options for teachers were: (1) to transition the students to the English language as quickly as possible; (2) to insure that the students don't fall behind their English-language peers academically; (3) The first two are equally important; or (4) I do not think we should offer special services to non-English speaking students.

⁹³ Texas Education Code, Sec. 29.058. ENROLLMENT OF STUDENTS WHO DO NOT HAVE LIMITED ENGLISH PROFICIENCY. With the approval of the school district and a student's parents, a student who does not have limited English proficiency may also participate in a bilingual education program.

Option 3 was the most selected response for teachers (65.9 percent; N=27), with option 2 garnering 22 percent (N=9). Five teachers selected option 1 (12.2 percent). Crosstab analysis was applied to teacher demographics and teaching assignment. Results indicate that Latino teachers place the highest priority on learning English. White teachers rate academic equity higher than the other two racial/ethnic groups. In comparing responses based on classroom assignment, there was general agreement on "English and Equity" from the three groups. No ESL teachers placed priority on "learning English as quickly as possible," but slightly more general education teachers than bilingual teachers selected this option.

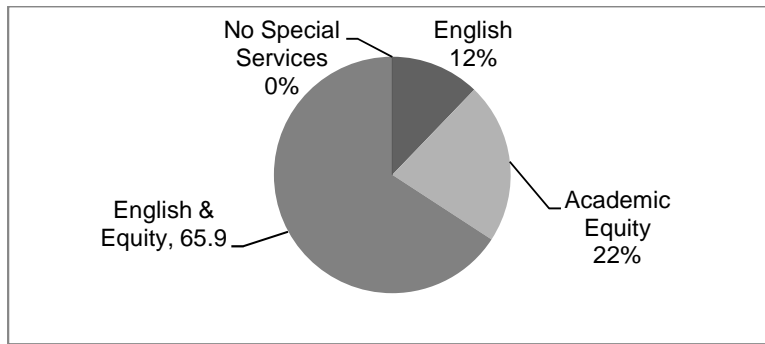


Figure 3.11 Graphical Representation of Teachers' Educational Priority for LEP Students

Table 3.15 Percent Distributions: Teachers' Educational Priority for LEP Students

	English	Academic Equity	English & Equity
White	5	27.8	66.7
African American	7.7	15.4	76.9
Latino	30	20	50
Bilingual	12.5	25	62.5
ESL	0	36.4	63.6
General Education	18.2	13.6	68.2

A related question on the teacher survey asked how important it was for the student who speaks Spanish to develop academic proficiency in Spanish as well as English. The answer options were: (1) Very important; (2) Somewhat important; (3) Not very important; or (4) Not at all important. The respondents shunned options 3 and 4, selecting 1 at 78 percent (N=32) and option 2 at 22 percent (N=9).

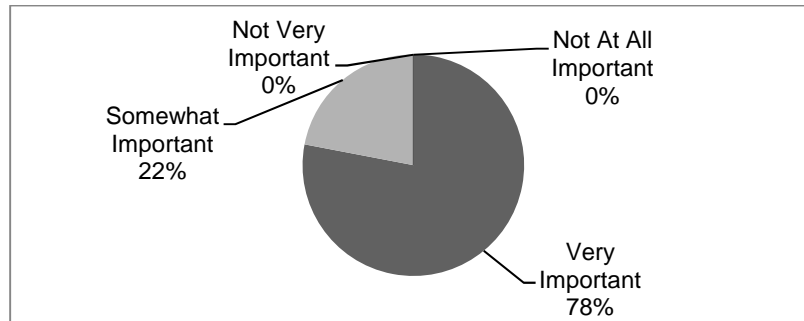


Figure 3.12 Graphical Representation of Importance Teachers Place on Bilingual Students Developing Spanish Proficiency

Percent distribution tables illustrate that ESL and general education teachers are less convinced than bilingual teachers of the value of Spanish-speaking students developing academic skills in their native language. As one teacher put it: "I think the best solution would be intensive English language courses for non-English speaking students. Understanding terminology seems to be one of the biggest barriers." One ESL teacher expressed some feelings of inadequacy in terms of helping her students with language development: "Even with the ESL kids, I think they should have more contact with a teacher that speaks fluent English and Spanish. Even though I am trained to teach them English academics, I have no way of helping them improve any of their Spanish language." By contrast, one enthusiastic bilingual teacher responded: "I love to see students and parents encouraged to keep both languages and cultures! Let the general population know of the success of our bilingual students have with learning!"

Table 3.16 Percent Distributions: Importance of ELLs to Develop Academic Skills in Spanish as well as English

	Very Important	Somewhat Important
Bilingual	100	0
ESL	82	18.2
General Education	68.2	31.8

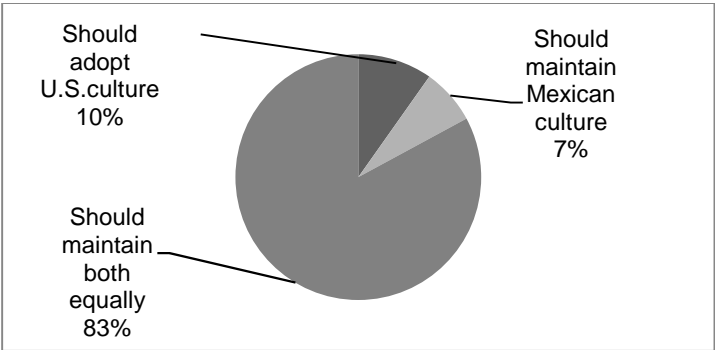
A very small number of teachers selected the "equity" option for ELL students' top educational priority. Moreover, the immigrant parents of ESL students place a greater priority on the acquisition of English than the ESL teachers do. A gap between parents and teachers is evident based on the low importance placed on Spanish academic achievement by non-bilingual teachers.

The next item in the *Cultural Knowledge* category can be clearly compared. Parents and teachers were both asked to give their opinion on Mexican immigrants living in the United States (assimilation/acculturation), with the following same three options for response on both the teacher and parent survey: (1) Mexican immigrant families should adopt U.S. culture and values; (2) Mexican immigrant families should maintain their Mexican culture and values; (3) Mexican immigrant families should support both cultures equally. The teacher survey contained a fourth option: (4) Mexican families should not move to the United States; and the parent fourth option was: (4) I don't have an opinion on this topic. Neither group of respondents selected option 4.

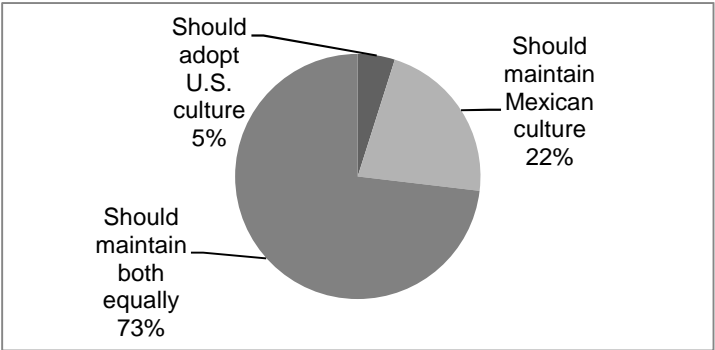
While support for option 3, *maintaining both cultures equally* was prominent (73.2 percent; N=30 for teachers, and 82.9 percent; N=34 for parents), the results of the other options revealed that teachers (22 percent; N=9) were in favor of Mexican families maintaining their Mexican culture and values, compared to only 7.3 percent (N=3) of immigrant families. And

twice as many parents as teachers selected option 1, that immigrant families should adopt U.S. culture and values (9.8 percent; N=4 and 4.9 percent; N=2 , respectively).

Figures 3.13 and 3.14 compare parent and teacher responses about Mexican immigrants living in the United States. While the majority of teachers support the maintenance of both cultures and value systems, percent distribution tables indicate that bilingual and ESL teachers support the maintenance of Mexican culture and values more than general education teachers. The agreement to support both cultures equally remained dominant when race/ethnicity was applied to the responses, but white teachers were the only category where some felt that immigrants should adopt U.S. culture and values. African American and Latino teachers favored the maintenance of Mexican culture more than white teachers.



(a)



(b)

Figure 3.13 Graphical Representation of (a) Parent Response to: "Mexican Immigrants living in the U.S. should . . ." and (b) Teacher Response to: "Mexican immigrants living in the U.S. should . . ."

Table 3.17 Percent Distributions: Teacher Response to "Mexican immigrants living in the U.S. should.. "

	Adopt US Culture & Values	Maintain Mexican Culture & Values	Support Both Equally
Bilingual	0	37.5	62.5
ESL	9	36.4	54.5
General Education	4.5	9	86.4
White	11.1	16.7	72.2
African American	0	23.1	76.9
Latino	0	30	70

A related item asked parents to rate the importance of their children learning about their cultural heritage. A Likert scale provided choices from 1 to 7 with 7 indicating that it was "very important." The mean for the parent responses was 4.93, only slightly past the midpoint. The mode and median were 7 and 5, respectively. Although 39 percent (N=16) of parents respondents selected 7, a cumulative 46.3 percent (N=19) selected 4 or under. Teachers were asked to respond to a similar statement: "Teachers of Mexican immigrant children should include some study of Mexican history and culture in their classrooms" based on the same Likert scale. The teachers' cumulative score was 36.6 percent (N=15) at level 4 or under on a 7-point scale, with a mean of 5.27, slightly higher than the parents' mean of 4.93 for the same question.

In an associated question, teachers and parents were asked if they thought it was an important role for teachers to help students develop cultural pride, with the following options: (1) Very important role for teachers; (2) Somewhat important; (3) Not very important; and (4) Not the role for teachers. Option number four read "Not important at all" on the parent survey. A majority of teachers ranked helping Mexican immigrant students develop cultural pride at the

top of the scale -- very important role for teachers (82.5 percent, N=33). Another 10 percent (N=4) ranked it "somewhat important."

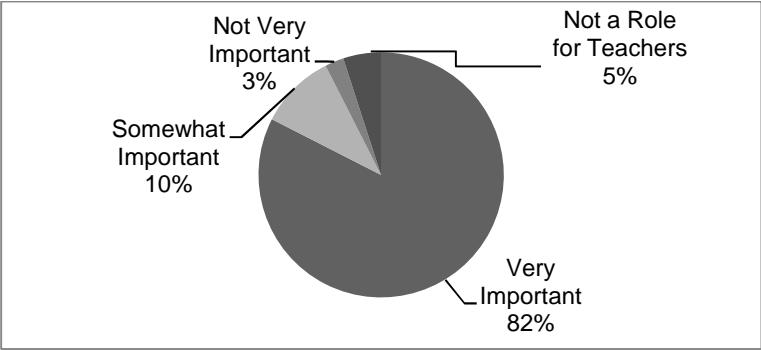


Figure 3.14 Graphical Representation of Teachers' Response to: "Teachers should help develop cultural pride."

A possible reason for this "correct" response by teachers is that State guidelines obligate teachers of ELLs to include cultural aspects of the students in their instructional methods: "A program of bilingual education or of instruction in English as a second language shall be designed to consider the students' learning experiences and shall incorporate the cultural aspects of the students' backgrounds" (Sec. 29.055(b)). Furthermore, at least one of the courses typically required for bilingual/ESL certification addresses theory and strategies for meeting the needs of "culturally different" learners. Percent Distributions indicate that ESL teachers expressed 100 percent commitment to this charge. Disaggregation by race/ethnicity demonstrated teachers' general support for helping immigrant students develop cultural pride.

Table 3.18 Percent Distributions: Teacher Response to "Teacher Should Help Develop Cultural Pride"

	Very Important	Somewhat Important	Not Very Important	Not a Role for Teachers
Bilingual	75	25	0	0
ESL	100	0	0	0
General Education	77.2	9	4.5	9
White	82.4	5.9	5.9	5.9

Table 3.18 - *Continued*

African American	84.6	7.7	0	7.7
Latino	80	20	0	0

Parents' responses to the same question resulted in 78 percent (N=32) for "very important," and 17.1percent (N=7) for "somewhat important." Two parents felt that it was "not very important (4.9 percent). The outcome for this question seems to reiterate the result of the previous question about maintaining Mexican culture and values: teachers appear to be slightly more committed to supporting the immigrant culture than the parents. When disaggregated by their child's program enrollment, the parents of children in general education classrooms ranked this item higher in importance than those with children in language accommodated classes — bilingual or ESL.

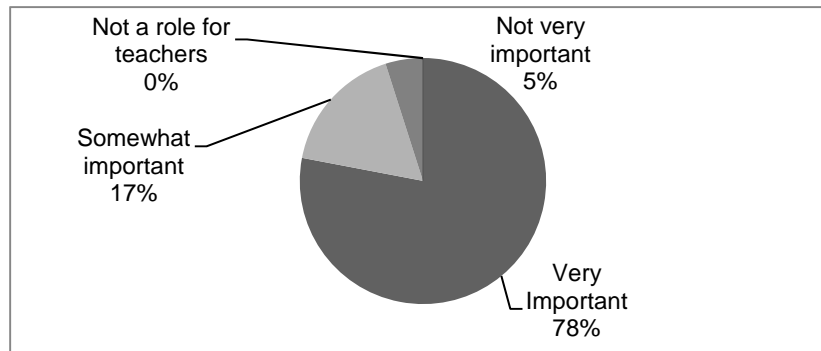


Figure 3.15 Graphical Representation of Parents' Response to "Teacher should help develop cultural pride."

Table 3.19 Percent Distributions: Parent Response to "Teacher Should Help Develop Cultural Pride"

	Very Important	Somewhat Important	Not Very Important
Bilingual	76	16	8
ESL	71.4	28.6	0
General Education	88.9	11.1	0

The final parallel item in the *Cultural Knowledge* category inquired about parents' ability to help their child with their homework. Parents could choose from: (1) I feel very able; (2) Most of the time I am able, but sometimes I feel I can't help; (3) Some of the time I am able, but most of the time I feel I can't help; (4) I never feel able to help; or (5) I do not wish to help my child with homework. The responses came from options 1, 2, and 3 only; with percentages for 1 "very able" (51.2 percent, N=21) and 2 "mostly able" (36.6 percent, N=15). Percent distributions were explored to determine what relationships exist between parents' English language proficiency and level of education. The parents who reported the lowest level of English proficiency reported a higher incidence of lack of capacity to help with their child's homework. But the category of parents who reported the highest level of capability to help with homework were those who *didn't speak English, but could understand a little*. For every level of education except *some college*, parents rated themselves at the top of the scale in terms of ability to help their children with homework.

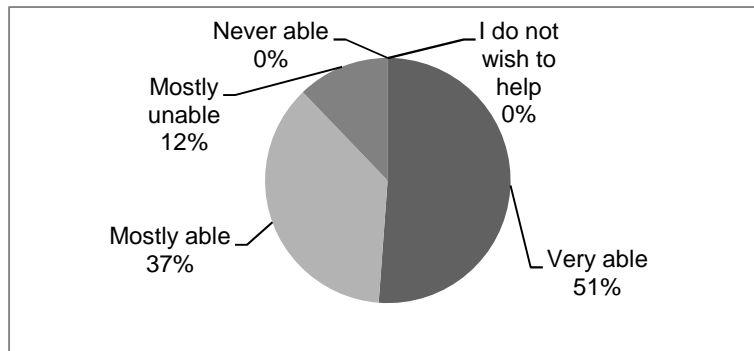


Figure 3.16 Graphical representation of Parents' Perceptions of their Ability to Help their Children with Homework

Table 3.20 Percent Distributions: Parents Feel Capable to Help with Homework

	Very Capable	Usually Capable	Mostly Incapable
No English	9.5	20	40
Don't Speak, Understand Little	38.1	53.3	20
Don't Speak, Understand Lot	23.8	26.7	0

Table 3.20 - *Continued*

Fluent in English	28.6	0	20
0-5 Years	50	33.3	16.7
6-9 Years	42.9	42.9	14.3
10-12 Years	63.6	27.3	9.1
Some College	0	100	0
Degree	66.7	33.3	0
General Education	33.3	56	1.1
ESL	57.1	42.9	0
Bilingual	56	28	16
Elementary PK-5	57.6	30.3	12.1
Secondary 6-12	25	62.5	12.5

There were several written comments from parents about the desire to help their children with their homework and their studies in general. The parents emphasized getting ideas from teachers and the school offering workshops on best practices for helping their children. One parent was willing to take classes in English so she could be better equipped to help her child. Two additional percent distribution representations indicate that (a) Immigrant parents feel capable of helping with homework across programs — general education, ESL, or bilingual; and (b) parents whose children are in elementary classroom feel more capable of helping with homework.

Teachers were asked to compare immigrant parents with native U. S. parents in terms of their ability to help their child with homework: 9.8 percent (N=4) answered that immigrant parents know more than native parents; 41.5 percent (N=17) thought they knew less; 31.7 percent (N=13) responded that they noted no difference; and 17.1 percent (N=7) answered that they did not know. The relevant information gleaned from the responses to this question was that parents consider themselves capable or mostly capable of helping with their child's

homework; and teachers mostly thought that immigrants parents know less or noted no difference between immigrant parents and native parents.

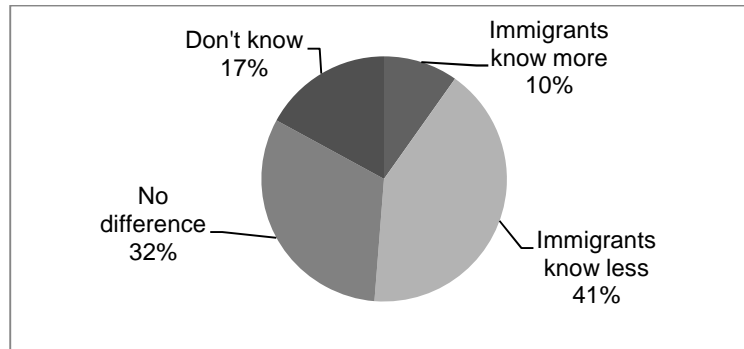


Figure 3.17 Graphical Representation of Teachers' Comparison of Immigrant vs. U.S. Parents' Ability to Help with Homework

A percent distribution with grade levels indicates that the only significant difference between the perceptions of elementary and secondary teachers on whether parents are able to help with homework is that some elementary school teachers felt that the "immigrant parents know more than U.S. parents."

Table 3.21 Percent Distributions: Teacher Compares Immigrant and U.S. Parents' Ability to Help with Homework

	Immigrant Parent More Able	Immigrant Parent Less Able	No Difference	Don't Know
Elementary PK-5	18.2	40.9	27.3	13.6
Secondary 6-12	0	42.1	36.8	21
Bilingual	12.5	50	25	12.5
ESL	18.2	45.4	27.3	9
General Education	4.5	36.4	36.4	22.7

A percent distribution analysis across teaching assignments reveals that bilingual, ESL, and general education teachers are in general agreement on the ability of parents to help with

homework —that immigrant parents either know less than native parents or that there is no difference. Compared to ESL and general education teachers, bilingual teachers feel that parents are less able to help with homework.

Two more questions were asked of teachers that might capture their perceptions of immigrants in our school system. The question about immigrant students' motivation to succeed gave the following options: (1) Mexican immigrant students are more motivated than US native-born students; (2) U.S. native-born students are more motivated than Mexican immigrant students; and (3) There is no difference in the students' level of motivation. A majority of teachers felt that Mexican immigrant students are more motivated to succeed in school than native U.S. students (58.5 percent; N=24), with 31.7 percent (N=13) noting no difference between the two, and only 4.8 percent (N=2) rating U.S. native students as more motivated than immigrant students.

Percent distributions indicate that perceived motivation for Mexican origin students declines slightly in secondary school, but the clear consensus is that teachers perceive Mexican origin students as more motivated than native U.S. students. One teacher commented: "Our bilingual students are very well motivated to learn and seldom present discipline issues. Perhaps they and their parents should talk to the rest of us about how they are motivated to do so well."

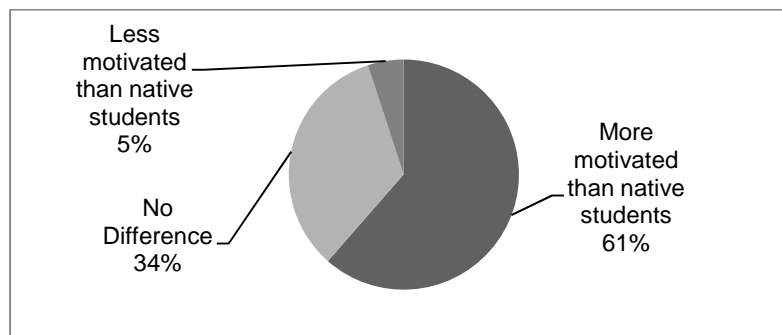


Figure 3.18 Graphical Representation of Teachers' Perception of Mexican-origin Students' Motivation to Succeed

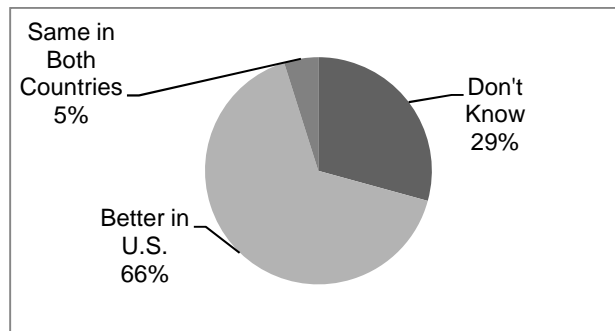
Table 3.22 Percent Distributions: Teacher Perception of Mexican-origin Students' Motivation to Succeed

	Mexican Origin Students More Motivated	Native US Students More Motivated	No Difference	Other Response
Elementary	63.6	4.5	22.7	9
Secondary	52.6	5.3	42.1	0

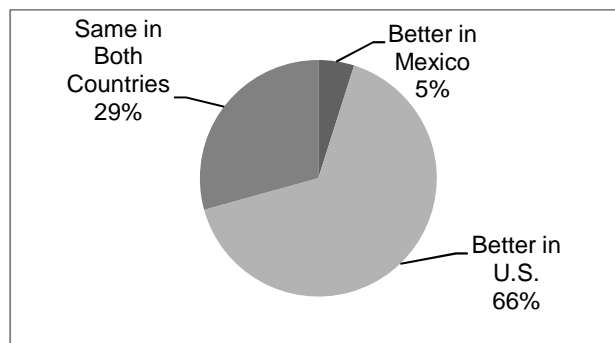
An important question for teachers captured their perception of how well their school has succeeded in transmitting knowledge of U.S. education norms to immigrant parents. The teachers were asked to respond to the question: "Would you say that the parents of Mexican immigrant students have the same knowledge about the school curriculum, state testing expectations, and grading policies as U.S. native-born parents?" The answer choices were: (1) Immigrant parents have more knowledge than native parents; (2) Immigrant parents have less knowledge than native parents; (3) I do not notice any difference in knowledge between immigrant and native parents; and (4) I do not know.

Participants are asked to share their perceptions about the quality and accessibility of Mexican schools compared to U.S. schools. The answer options for both categories of respondents were worded almost the same, except that teachers had an fourth "I don't know" option: (1) better access Mexico; (2) better access in the U.S.; and (3) same in both countries.

For this question, the parents and teachers had identical outcomes for the "better access in the U.S." at 65.9 percent (N=27) each. The prominent gap was in the "same access in both countries" choice: 29.3 percent (N=12) of parents selected that answer versus 4.9 percent (N=2) of teachers. The "I don't know" answer was selected by 29.3 percent (N=12) of teachers, and 4.9 percent (N=2) of parents believe that access to education is better in Mexico. Figures 3.20 and 3.21 reflect the teacher and parent responses to the question about access.



(a)

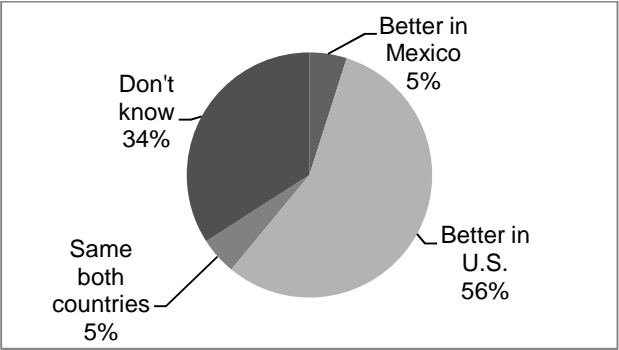


(b)

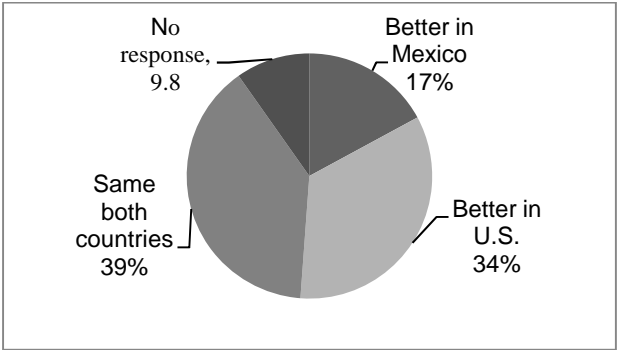
Figure 3.19 Graphical Representation of (a) Teachers' Perception of Access to Educational Opportunities in Mexico and (b) Parents' Perception of Access to Educational Opportunities in Mexico

The question of quality was structured the same way as the access question, with a fourth "I don't know" option for teachers. The question for parents asked them to compare the rigor of a high school education in both countries. There was no majority agreement from parents; 18.9 percent (N=7) selected "more rigorous in Mexico," 37.8 percent (N=14) selected more rigorous in the U.S., and 43.2 percent (N=16) selected "the same in both countries." "Better quality in U.S." was chosen by 56.1 percent (N=23) of teachers; 34.1 percent (N=14) selected "I don't know;" and 4.9 percent (N=2) each selected "better in Mexico" and "the same in both countries." Figures 3.22 and 3.23 illustrate the comparison for the question about quality of education in Mexico versus the U.S. There is a prominent gap between U.S. teachers and

Mexican immigrants perceptions on the access and quality of schooling in Mexico. The teachers had a significantly lower opinion of school quality in Mexico than the immigrant parents.



(a)



(b)

Figure 3.20 Graphical Representation of (a) Teachers' Perception of Quality of Schools in Mexico vs. U.S. and (b) Parents' Perception of Quality of Schools in Mexico vs. U.S.

Table 3.23 Percent Distributions: Teacher Perception of Quality of Schools in Mexico v. U.S.

	Better in Mexico	Better in U.S.	Same Both Countries	Don't Know
Bilingual	25	50	12.5	12.5
ESL	0	36.4	9	54.5
General Education	0	68.2	0	31.8

A disaggregation of teachers based on their teaching assignment shows that non-bilingual teachers are least likely to know about the quality of Mexican schools, or they perceive U.S. schools to be better; however, all three categories of teachers generally perceive U.S. schools to be better. Percent distributions for parents' level of completed education in Mexico did not reveal any patterns of perception based on their number of years of schooling.

Table 3.24 Percent Distributions: Parent Perception of Quality of Schools in Mexico v. U.S.

	More Rigorous in Mexico	More Rigorous in U.S.	Same in Both Countries
0-5 Years	18.2	36.4	45.5
6-9 Years	18.2	27.3	54.5
10-12 Years	27.3	36.7	36.7
Some College	0	0	100
Degree	0	100	0

3.11.1 *Summary for Cultural Knowledge*

The results of the Cultural Comparisons category indicated that parents and teachers were generally in agreement that Mexican immigrants should maintain their culture, language, and values while supporting those of the host country; although parents valued the cultural maintenance approach slightly less than teachers. Teachers were overwhelmingly willing to help the students maintain cultural pride as part of their instructional task. Parents considered themselves capable of helping with their child's homework, but teachers were not as confident about parents' ability to accomplish this task. There were two prominent gaps in this section: (a) Teachers feel that immigrant parents know less about the school curriculum, state testing expectations, and grading policies than native U.S. parents, although the parents reported being satisfied with the teachers' thoroughness in explaining the curriculum and (b) Teachers' perceptions about the quality and access to schooling in Mexico is considerably lower than that of the immigrants' perceptions. Finally, teachers' general impression of immigrant students is

that they are more motivated to succeed academically than their native U.S. counterparts, although secondary school teachers' ratings were lower than those of the elementary school teachers.

3.12 U.S. School Competence to Serve the Needs of Mexican-origin Families

The parents and teacher surveys contained items that asked the participants to rate the effectiveness of the school staff to accommodate the needs of immigrant parents. The most obvious accommodation would be to provide Spanish speaking front office personnel to help families with the enrollment process and with communication needs throughout the year. Teachers were asked to comment on whether Spanish speaking personnel was available: (1) Always; (2) Sometimes; (3) Occasionally; (4) Rarely or never; or (5) I don't know. They responded "always" with 75.6 percent (N=31) and "sometimes" at 22 percent (N=9).

Table 3.25 Percent Distributions: Teacher Perception of Availability of Spanish Speaking Personnel

	Always	Sometimes	Don't Know
Elementary PK-5	86.4	9	4.5
Secondary 6-12	63.1	36.8	0

The parent inquiry was worded differently in order to determine if any staff member that spoke Spanish was fluent enough to do the job. The answer options for parents were: (1) At least one staff member was fluent in Spanish; (2) At least one staff member could communicate in Spanish, although not fluently; (3) At least one staff member knew a little Spanish, but not enough to communicate all the information; (4) No staff member could communicate in Spanish; or (5) I was able to communicate with the staff in English.

Option 1 was selected by 75.6 percent (N=31) of parents. "No" was selected by 4 participants (9.8 percent), and 3 parents chose option 5. Percent distributions indicate that a higher percentage of "yes" parent responses were from those whose children are in elementary

school, where there are bilingual liaisons and a bilingual receptionist at one of the two bilingual campuses.

Table 3.26 Percent Distributions: Parent Perception of Availability of Spanish-speaking Personnel

	Yes	Yes, but Limited	Yes, but Insufficient	None	None Needed
Elementary PK-5	78.8	0	6	6	9
Secondary 6-12	62.5	12.5	0	25	0

Parents were asked to rate the extent to which the staff made clear the enrollment procedures, and were given these answers options from which to choose: (1) They explained the process so well, that I had no doubt as to what to do; (2) I received some information, but was not completely sure about the process; (3) I did not receive enough information to know how to begin; (4) I did not receive information; or (5) I already knew what to do. Slightly more than one-half of the respondents selected option one (51.2 percent, N=21); 22 percent (N=9) selected option 2; 12.2 percent responded that they already knew how to proceed; and three each selected options 3 and 4 (7.3 percent each). A cumulative 14.6 percent (N=6) of parents selected "insufficient" and "received none."

Table 3.27 Percent Distributions: Parent Perception of Clarity of Enrollment Procedures

	Very Clear	Somewhat Clear	Insufficient	None	None Needed
Elementary PK-5	54.5	21.2	3	9.1	12.1
Secondary 6-12	37.5	25	25	0	12.5

While a clear understanding of the U.S. public school enrollment process is essential for parent newcomers from another educational environment, it is also important for parents to know how to navigate the school system once their children are matriculated. A follow-up question asked parents to judge how well the school staff oriented them to important school

procedures such as "your child's schedule; how to make an appointment to talk to your child's teacher or the principal; how to contact school district personnel, etc." Parents were given the following options: (1) The orientation was excellent; all my questions were answered; (2) The orientation answered most of my questions; (3) Not enough information was provided in the orientation; (4) I received no orientation about such topics; (5) I already knew the procedures.

Parents rated the orientation by staff as excellent by 43.9 percent (N=18) or good (41.5 percent; N=17). A cumulative 9.7 percent (N=4) responded that it was "poor" or "none." Percent distributions indicate that the quality of school orientations for immigrants was slightly lower in the secondary schools. Elementary parents judge their school's orientation to school procedures as "excellent" (45.5 percent; N=15) or "good" (42.4 percent; N=14) for a cumulative total of 87.9 percent, while secondary school parents judged their orientation as "excellent" (37.5 percent; N=3) or "good" (37.5 percent; N=3) for a total of 75 percent.

Table 3.28 Percent Distributions: Parent Perception of Orientation to School Procedures

	Excellent	Good	Poor	None	None Needed
Elementary PK-5	45.5	42.4	6	3	3
Secondary 6-12	37.5	37.5	12.5	0	12.5

Teachers were asked to assess the parents in terms of their knowledge of these school procedures with this question: "Would you say that the parents of Mexican immigrant students understand campus procedures such as school hours and rules and how to make an appointment to speak to me or the principal as well as U.S. native parents?" Their answer options had the teachers compare immigrant parents to native U.S. parents: (1) Immigrant parents understand procedures more than native parents; (2) Immigrant parents understand procedures less than native parents; (3) I do not notice any difference between immigrant and native parents; or (4) I do not know. The majority of the responses were divided between "immigrant parents understand less" at 48.8 percent (N=20), and "no difference" at 46.3 percent

(N=19). Two respondents thought that immigrant parents knew more. Percent distributions indicate that secondary school teachers have a lower perception of immigrants' knowledge of school procedures than elementary school teachers.

Table 3.29 Percent Distributions: Parents Understand Campus Procedures-Teacher Response

	Immigrant Parents Understand More Than Native Parents	Immigrant Parents Understand Less than Native Parents	No Difference
Elementary PK-5	4.5	36.4	59.1
Secondary 6-12	5.3	63.2	31.5

Written comments from teachers suggested that the school might do more for immigrant parents: "There need to be more classes available to help introduce the parents and students to the educational system in America." Another teacher suggested that all school documents be translated and that Spanish-language workshops should be offered for parents on "the norms of the educational system."

The final parallel item for this section asked both groups of participants if the immigrant parents felt comfortable in talking with the principal. The parent survey gave the options "very," "somewhat," "a little," "not at all," and "It doesn't matter because I do not want to meet with my child's principal." Forty percent (N=16) of parents reported that they felt "very comfortable" talking with the principal, and 30 percent (N=12) reported that they felt "somewhat comfortable." Another 15 percent (N=6) selected "a little;" 12.5 percent (N=5) reported that they do not feel comfortable at all in talking with the principal; and 2.5 percent (N=1) are not interested. An auxiliary question asked parents how many times a year they meet with the principal: (1) one to two times; (2) three to six times; (3) more than six; and (4) never. Option 4 "never" was selected by 61.5 percent (N=24) of the respondents; 33.3 percent (N=13) selected option 1 "one to two times;" options 2 and 3 were selected by one respondent each, and two parents chose not to

answer that question. Percent distributions show that the comfort level increases with number of years living in the U.S.

Table 3.30 Percent Distributions: Parent Feels Comfortable Talking with Principal

Years Living in U.S.	Very Comfortable	Somewhat Comfortable	A Little Comfortable	Not Comfortable At All	Not Interested
0 to 4	0	50	50	0	0
5 to 10	25	25	12.5	31.3	12.5
11 to 15	40	50	10	0	0
16 to 20	80	0	20	0	0
21 to 30	33.3	33.3	33.3	0	0
30+	75	25	0	0	0
Elementary PK-5	37.5	25	18.8	15.6	3.1
Secondary 6-12	50	50	0	0	0

Percent distributions for grade level indicate that parents of children in grades 6-12 are more comfortable talking with the principal. This finding may suggest that immigrants who have had more experience with the U.S. school system become more comfortable over the years. Percent distributions of "times per year" the parent meets with the principal also reflects greater interaction in secondary school.

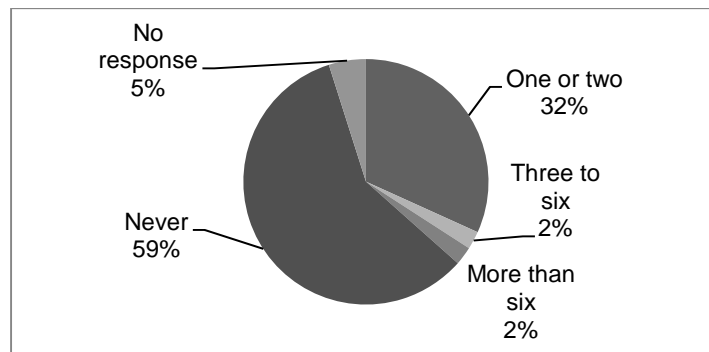


Figure 3.21 Graphical Representation of How Many Times per Year Parents Report Meeting with Principal

Table 3.31 Percent Distributions: Times per Year Parent Reports Meeting with Principal

	One to Two	Three to Six	More than Six	Never
Elementary PK-5	32.2	0	0	67.7
Secondary 6-12	37.5	12.5	12.5	37.5

The teacher survey asked if they perceived that immigrant parents feel "more comfortable than native U.S. parents in talking to the principal," "less comfortable," if there is "no difference," or if the teacher "cannot tell how they feel." The respondents answered that immigrant parents were less comfortable by 53.7 percent (N=22); 29.3 percent (N=9) cannot tell how they feel; and 14.6 percent (N=6) responded that they noticed no difference in the two parent groups. A disaggregation by grade level and teacher ethnicity indicates that secondary teachers and African American teachers noted more than other teacher groups that they cannot tell how the immigrant parents feels about talking to the principal. None of the Latino teachers reported that they cannot tell how the parents feel; but they also rated the immigrant parents less comfortable talking to the principal than White and African American teachers rated them.

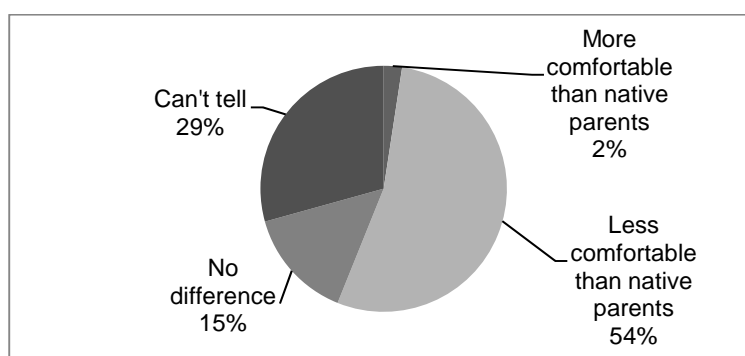


Figure 3.22 Graphical Representation of Teachers' Perception of Parents' Level of Comfort in Talking to Principal

Table 3.32 Percent Distributions: Teacher Perception of Parents' Level of Comfort in Talking to Principal

	Immigrant Parents More Comfortable	Immigrant Parents less Comfortable	No Difference	Can't Tell How they Feel
Elementary PK-5	4.5	59.1	18.2	18.2
Secondary 6-12	0	47.4	10.5	42.1
White	5.5	55.6	5.5	33.3
Latino	0	80	20	0
African Amer.	0	30.8	23.1	46.1

A few additional questions were asked of the teachers in order to allow them to assess the success of their campus in serving the needs of immigrant parents. The two questions that were asked of teachers with regards to their ordering resources from the Mexican government for Mexican national students were asked again about their campus: "How often does your campus request Mexican immigrant students' school transcripts from the local Mexican consulate?" and "How often does your school order free student textbooks available from the Mexican Secretariat of Education for any Mexican national studying in another country?" The answer options were the same for both questions: (1) Always; (2) Sometimes; (3) Never; and (4) I didn't know this was available. Teachers for the most part selected option 4 ("I didn't know this was available") on both questions — 68.3 percent (N=28) for the ordering of school transcripts, and 80.5 percent (N=33) for requesting free textbooks from Mexico. An additional 12.2 percent (N=5) each was selected for options 1 and 2 on the question about ordering student transcripts from Mexico.

Teachers were then asked to rate how well their campus's intake procedures assessed the immigrant student's prior academic attainment level before placing him/her in courses, with these options for responding: (1) Very well, students seem to be placed in appropriate courses at the onset; (2) Somewhat well, most students seem to be placed in appropriate courses; (3) Not very well, many students seem to be placed in courses that do not match their level of prior

academic attainment; (4) Not at all well, the student's prior level of academic attainment is not assessed or considered for placement in courses. "Somewhat well" was the most selected answer at 51.2 percent (N=21); "very well" with 29.3 percent (N=12), "not very well" at 12.2 percent (N=5), and "not at all" with 7.3 percent (N=3).

Finally, the faculty was asked if they thought the campus invested enough resources to assure the academic success of immigrant students. Over one-half of the teachers (61percent; N=25) rated the investment level as "good," 17.1 percent (N=7) rated the expenditure level as "excellent," 19.5 percent (N=8) responded with "poor, not enough," and one respondent thought the school invested "too much" on this population of students. Percent distributions illustrate that there is not much difference in perception between elementary and secondary teachers on this item.

The written responses by teachers on this topic were long and detailed. One teacher suggested that

...we should give students, parents and families everything to make all transitions smoother. Resources for education should be made available and there should be one department devoted to that. This should include "community" help; getting set up with electric, for example, offering assistance on all forms. If ELL families qualify for aid of any kind, we should do all we can to support them in that way.

But not all teachers shared this view. By contrast, another teacher felt that "everything is being done for the education of Mexican immigrant students in the U.S."

3.12.1 Summary for U.S. School Competence

Approximately three-quarters of both parent and teacher respondents perceived that the school staff spoke sufficient Spanish to serve the immigrant parents, although the bulk of those parents responding affirmatively had children in the elementary schools, where there is bilingual personnel. Although most parents indicated that they felt very or somewhat comfortable talking with the principal, teachers perceived them to be less so. Slightly over one-

half of parent respondents reported that the school matriculation process was well-understood, and over eighty percent felt that the staff explanation of school procedures was "excellent" or "good." The campuses with a bilingual liaison had by far the highest percentage of satisfaction with the explanation of school procedures. The vast majority of teachers did not know that transcripts could be ordered for students who had previously attended Mexican schools. Likewise, most of the teachers did not know that the Mexican government would send free textbooks to Mexican nationals attending foreign schools.

Approximately one-half of the teachers perceived that the parents knew less about school procedures than native U.S. parents, and the other half thought that there was no difference between immigrant and native-born parents. The large majority of the parent responses, on the other hand, indicated that they felt their orientation to school procedures was excellent or good. The gap between teachers and parents on this issue could possibly indicate that parents may not be aware of what they do not know and/or that teachers wish the parents knew more about school procedures. Under one-half of the parents indicated that they do not feel comfortable talking to the principal of the school, and the teachers' perceptions supported that outcome.

3.13 Parent Involvement

Parents were asked three questions about involvement opportunities at their child's school. The first item asked them to compare the opportunities for parent involvement in Mexico and the United States. Surprisingly, the parents responded by 70.7 percent (N=29) that the opportunities for "getting involved in their child's school" were better in the U.S. than in Mexico. Only one respondent thought the opportunities were better in Mexico, and 26.8 percent (N=11) responded that the opportunities were the "same in both countries."

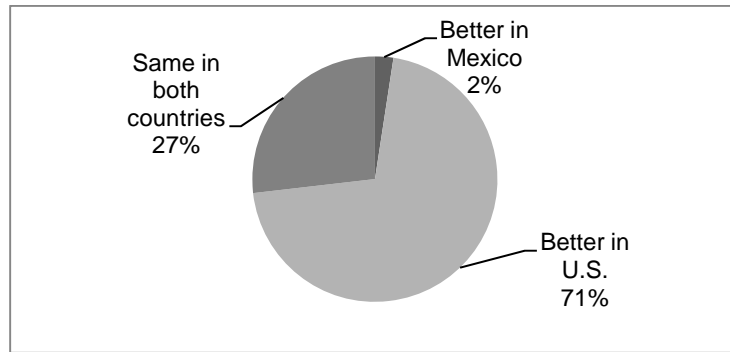


Figure 3.23 Graphical Representation of Parents' Comparison of Involvement Opportunities - Mexico vs. U.S.

A related question asked parents about their involvement level in the PTA, with the following options: (1) I feel comfortable attending meetings, and I attend meetings; (2) I attend meetings even though I do not feel comfortable; (3) I would feel comfortable attending meetings, but I do not attend them; and (4) I'm not interested in attending the meetings, comfortable or not. Option one was selected by 48.7 percent (N=19) of the respondents; 12.8 percent (N=5) chose option two; 28.2 percent (N=11) selected option three; and 10.3 percent of the respondents chose option four. A total of 39 percent (N=17) report that they are uncomfortable attending PTA, whether they go or not. In comparing elementary and secondary PTA attendance, similar percentages report that they attend (61.3 percent; N=19 for elementary and 62.5 percent; N=5 for secondary), but a higher percentage of elementary school parents (51.6 percent) feel comfortable versus secondary school parents (37.5 percent).

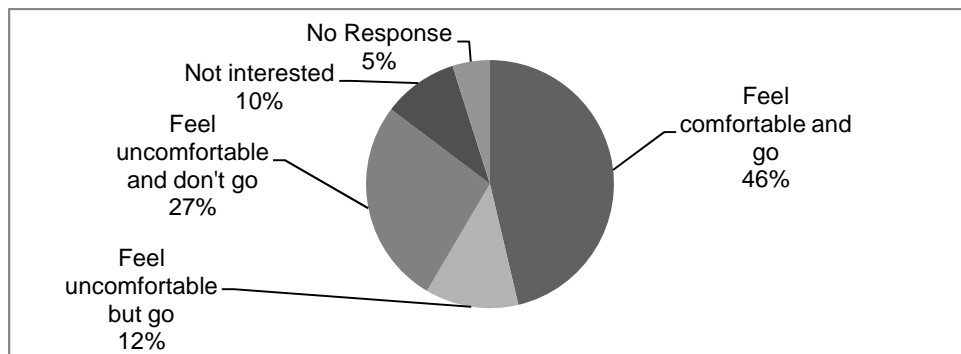


Figure 3.24 Graphical Representation of PTA Attendance Reported by Parents

Table 3.33 Percent Distributions: PTA Attendance Reported by Parents

	Feel Comfortable and Attend	Feel Uncomfortable but Attend	Feel Uncomfortable and Do Not Attend	Not Interested
Elementary PK-5	51.6	9.7	29	9.7
Secondary 6-12	37.5	25	25	12.5

In comparing immigrant parents to native-born U.S. parents, 51.2 percent (N=21) of teachers reported that immigrant parents attend PTA meetings less often than native parents, and 19.6 percent (N=8) stated "I don't know." The remaining two choices: "Immigrant parents attend more than U.S. parents" and "I do not notice any difference between immigrant and native parents" each were selected by 14.6 percent (N=6) of the respondents.

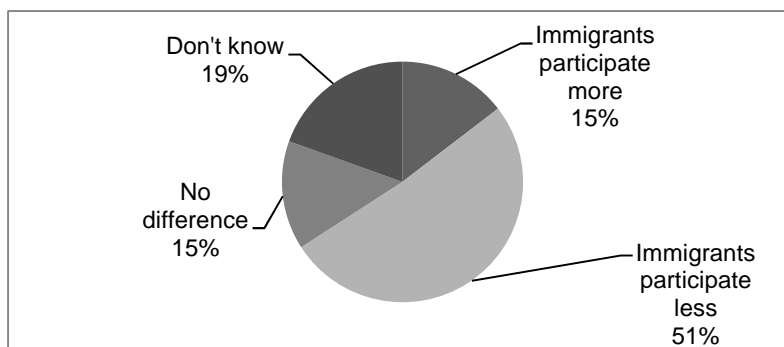
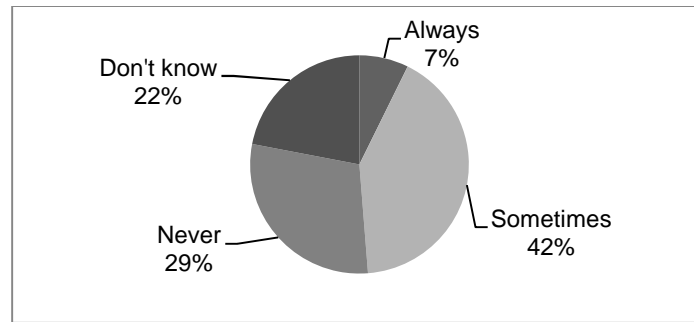


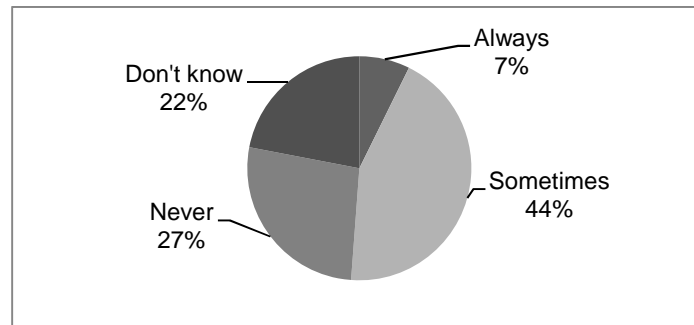
Figure 3.25 Graphical Representation of Teachers' Comparison of Immigrant and Native Parents PTA Attendance

In order to determine if PTA meetings accommodated Spanish-speaking parents, a survey item was included that asked both teachers and parents how often Spanish translation was available at the parent meetings. Both groups of respondents selected "sometimes" at 41.5 percent (N=17); both groups selected "always" at 7.3 percent (N=3). Parents chose "never" at 29.3 percent (N=12); teachers at 26.8 percent (N=11); and both groups selected "I don't know" at 22 percent (N=9). It is not clear what parent meetings the respondents had in mind, but the regular monthly PTA meetings are *never* translated into Spanish at the school sites under study. Some written comments indicated that parents and teachers were aware that Spanish

translation was needed at PTA meetings. For example, one teacher wrote: "When there are PTA meetings, there should be more participation in Spanish, or translators," and a parent wrote "As parents, we should involve ourselves in our children's studies; that there would be a way to hold PTA meetings in Spanish."



(a)



(b)

Figure 3.26 Graphical Representation of (a) Parents' Perception of Spanish Translation at PTA Meetings and (b) Teachers' Perception of Spanish Translation at PTA Meetings

A final question in this category gave the parents an opportunity to comment on the availability and frequency of other family activities in which the parents can participate. They could choose from: (1) At least once a month; (2) several times a year; (3) once a year; (4) never; (5) I don't know; or (6) I'm not interested in participating in other activities. One respondent selected "never;" 19.5 percent (N=8) selected "I don't know;" 17.1 percent (N=7) percent selected "once a year;" 51.2 percent (N=21) selected "several times a year," and 7.3 percent (N=3) chose "at least monthly." Even though the response to this questions implied that

the school held parent activities frequently, the parents' written comments called for "more activities," "more programs for Spanish speaking parents," and "more information" so they can "get more involved in" and "support" the education of their children.

3.13.1 Summary of Parent Involvement

In the wording of the questions in this section, the term "parent involvement" was not defined for the respondents. The assumption was made that the immigrant parents would understand the meaning of "PTA" and "opportunities for parent involvement." Based on the item responses for these questions, the general perception of parents is that activities are available once a year or more and that they are sometimes translated into Spanish. Written comments by parents, however, indicate that more parent activities or different ones are wanted. Fewer than half of the parents reported that they feel comfortable in attending PTA meetings, but some of those that reported feeling comfortable said they do not attend. Teachers perceived to a lesser degree that immigrant parents attend the PTA meetings at their child's school. The gap between parents and teachers in perceptions of PTA participation could possibly be influenced by the differences in basic knowledge of PTAs. For example, teachers would already know that the meetings are held monthly, but immigrant parents would have no way of knowing this unless someone explained it to them. Also, the purpose of membership and dues may not be clear to immigrant parents, or the parents may not see the value of PTA membership.

3.14 Recommendations for Improvement

The final section of the survey gave participants an opportunity to rate some suggestions for improving the education of Mexican-origin students. There was also a large blank area that invited both parents and teachers to write in their suggestions for improvement.

Parents were asked to rate the importance of (a) Spanish language workshops for parents; (b) an increased teacher knowledge of the Mexican education system, and (c) the formation of partnerships between U.S. and Mexican teachers. Each of these items used the same 5-point scale with descriptors: (1) Very important; (2) Somewhat important; (3) Not very

important; and (5) Not at all important. A resounding 97.6 percent (N=40) of parents thought it was "very important" for schools to provide workshops for parents in Spanish that would help immigrant parents become more involved in their children's education: 65.9 percent (N=27) of parents thought it was "very important" for U. S. teachers of Mexican-origin children to be familiar with the Mexican education system; 24.4 percent (N=10) considered it "somewhat important;" and 4.9 percent (N=2) each for "not very" and "not at all" important. The percentages of parents in favor of partnerships between U.S. and Mexican teachers looked very much the same: 63.4 percent (N=26) felt that it was "very important;" 24.4 percent (N=10) selected "somewhat important;" 4.9 percent (N=2) selected "not very important;" and 7.3 percent (N=3) selected "not important at all."

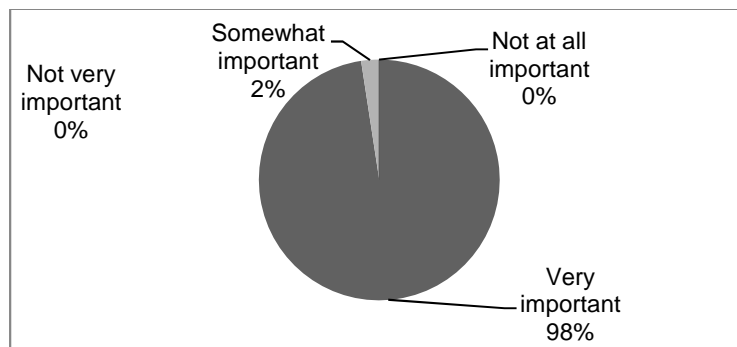


Figure 3.27 Graphical Representation of Importance Parents Place on Spanish Language Workshops

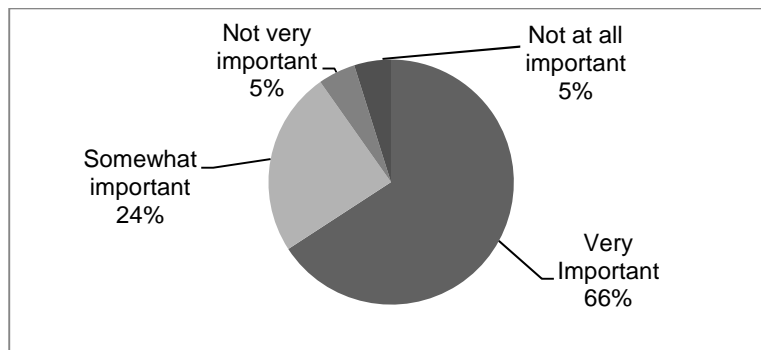


Figure 3.28 Graphical Representation of Importance Parents Place on Teacher Knowledge of Mexican Education System

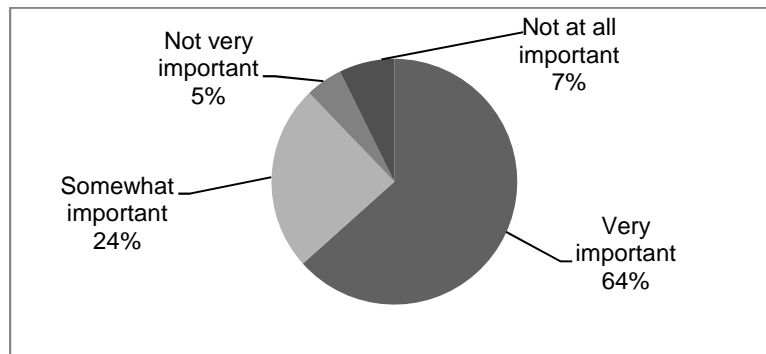


Figure 3.29 Graphical Representation of Importance Parents Place on Partnerships Between U.S. and Mexican Teachers

Teachers were also asked if they thought Mexican/U.S. partnerships were important. They were to rate their responses on a 7-point Likert scale in which 1 = "strongly disagree," and 7 = "strongly agree." The question about forming partnerships registered a mean of 5.41 and a mode of 7 (29.3 percent; N=12 of respondents). An upper grade elementary bilingual teacher wrote these suggestions: "(1) School-to-school partnerships with Mexican and American schools (2) Offering bilingual classes into eighth grade (3) Having community and university level mentors of Mexican or Latin-origin come talk to students on a periodic basis."

Teachers were asked to respond to the statement: "Teachers with Mexican immigrant students should be given training on the Mexican education system." The median response was 4.66 and the mode was 7 (26.8 percent; N=11 of respondents). However, a cumulative 41.5 percent (N=17) ranked its importance at 4 or less. This item triggered a keen response from one elementary ESL teacher:

Yes and no – the reason is this is America. Even though our system may be different, it is our system. If you chose to come to stay here, then you should adapt too. As an educator, I am responsible for locating gaps for all kids. I don't think training on the Mexican education system would be beneficial.

In response to: "Districts and campuses should improve the assessment methods used for placing Mexican immigrant students in classes," the teachers rated at a median of 5.27 and

a mode of 7 (26.8 percent; N=11). Both 6 and 7 totaled a cumulative 51.2 percent; N=21 of teacher rankings. Finally, the suggestion that: "Teachers of Mexican immigrant children should include some study of Mexican history and culture in their classrooms" was rated at a mode of 4 (31.7 percent; N=13) and a median of 5.27 by teachers.

3.14.1 Additional Recommendations for Improvement

Parents availed themselves of the opportunity to address other topics for improvement in the open-ended portion of the survey. Two prominent parent comments focused on discipline issues in the schools. One parent commented:

Give intensive attention to low-achieving students and focus on them and do not allow the problems of other children distract them in school because this can cause the children to not like to come to school. Give problem students more severe punishment; notifying parents as to their behavior, and even charging them fines so that bullies will no longer be a problem in the schools. The school should be a safe place for all children and a place where they can focus on their school work and get good grades.

Another parent comment shared insight about the differences between elementary school and secondary school discipline:

I think that this country is better in terms of educating my children, but it would be much better with the discipline standards of our countries of origin. In my opinion, I think the schools are good from grades prekindergarten to 5, but 6th – 12th grade students often drop out because they cannot overcome the negative influences of their peers. That is where I blame the schools for not having a better discipline plan.

Several other parent comments put responsibility for success on the children:

- I want my son to pay attention in class so he can learn that he has the opportunity to have the best education, and that he would put forth his best effort every day in school, and that he behave with his teachers, etc.

- I think it's very dependent on a student's interest and intelligence that helps him get the most out of his education.
- It would be interesting for our children to have short range as well as long range goals.
- That our children will take advantage of their opportunities and have better jobs and a good future when they grow up.

3.14.2 Summary of Recommendations for Improvement

Parents were almost unanimous in their support for including Spanish language workshops for parents. Slightly over half of the parents were in favor of U.S. teachers forming partnerships with Mexican teachers and learning more about the Mexican education system. Teachers were somewhat open to collaborating with Mexican teachers, but were not much in favor of learning about the Mexican education system. The written comments from parents included a challenge to students to take responsibility for their success. None of the teacher comments addressed student responsibility for learning outcomes.

CHAPTER 4

RESEARCH FINDINGS

4.1 Introduction

The reported findings are organized according to the following potential gaps in specific topics that arose from analysis in the study: parent and teacher perceptions on (a) teacher competence to serve the needs of Mexican immigrant families; (b) cultural knowledge; (c) competence of the U.S. school to accommodate the needs of immigrant families; (d) parent involvement opportunities for Mexican immigrant families in U.S. schools; and (e) recommended areas of improvements for teachers and campuses in serving the needs of Mexican immigrant families. The parallel parent and teacher responses were compared to identify perception gaps. Percent distributions were applied to certain characteristics of the participants in order to detect any relationships between perceptions and respondent attributes such as ethnicity, level of education, teaching assignment, etc. These gaps in parallel items are reported in the first part of this chapter, followed by an analysis of the non-parallel items.

4.2 Perception Gaps in Parallel Questions

4.2.1 Level of Comfort in Talking with Teachers

The majority (68.3 percent) of the parents responded that they were "very comfortable" talking with their child's teacher. Another 26.8 percent reported that they were "somewhat comfortable." However, when percent distributions were explored, the data indicated that the high comfort level was mostly influenced by parents that have a child in elementary school and those who have a bilingual teacher. For the elementary school parents, 78.8 percent selected "very comfortable," and parents whose child has a bilingual teacher, their level of comfort in interacting with these teachers was rated as "very comfortable" by 84 percent. Middle school and high school teachers were rated by parents considerably lower than elementary school

teachers in terms of level of comfort in talking to them. Those teachers received a rating of 25 percent for "very comfortable," and 75 percent for "somewhat comfortable."

The gap in perception of teacher-parent interactions was evident as approximately 70 percent of the teachers selected "immigrants feel less comfortable talking with teacher" compared to the parents "very comfortable" rating of 68.3 percent. The gap is particularly large for general education and secondary teachers' perceptions: 80.9 percent of general education teachers and 84.2 percent of secondary teachers said that immigrant parents were less comfortable talking with them, whereas parents overwhelmingly said they are comfortable talking with their children's elementary school teachers, and a smaller but positive percentage felt positive about approaching their children's secondary school teachers.

4.2.2 Educational Priorities

Sixty-one percent of parents responded that their priority for the education of their child was "for him/her to develop academic skills in both languages even though both learning the skills and mastering English may take longer," while 17.7 percent answered that their children should "develop academic skills in Spanish while also learning a little English even though learning English will take longer." When disaggregated by program placement, prominent gaps were revealed in educational priorities between parents whose children are in ESL classrooms versus those in bilingual and general education classrooms. The parents of children who are in ESL classrooms (42.7 percent) place a greater priority on learning English than parents whose children are in bilingual (4.3 percent) or general education (12.5 percent) programs.

The majority of teachers answering this question (65.9 percent) argued that "transitioning the students to the English language as quickly as possible and insuring that the students don't fall behind their English-language peers academically" (educational equity) were equally important. In comparing teachers' responses based on classroom assignment, there was general agreement on the primary importance of "English and Equity" from the three groups. However, there is a marked difference in responses between parents of ESL students

and their teachers: 42 percent of ESL parents want their children to hurry up and learn English, while zero percent of ESL teachers selected this priority. Because of the wording of the statement ("For him/her to learn English first, even if he/she does not develop academic skills until after English is mastered."), the parents understood that a priority on English meant that their child's academic progress would likely fall behind.

Further illustrating this gap in perceptions of the importance of English language acquisition between teachers and parents was a related question asked of teachers on whether a bilingual student should acquire Spanish as well as English academic skills, a goal which supports the District's late-exit bilingual program. General education teachers saw the least value in developing this skill (68.2 percent rated it as "very important, and 31.8 percent rated it as "somewhat important"), yet bilingual teachers were 100 percent in favor of it. Eighty-two percent of ESL teachers rated it as "very important." Although this question was not asked of parents in the same way, the parents' response to the bilingual teacher's use of English and Spanish in demonstrated that parents were supportive of the use of the native language for academic instruction. Thirty percent of parents whose child was receiving bilingual instruction felt that the teacher was using too much English, and zero percent felt that too much Spanish was being used in class. The remaining parents (70 percent) felt that the teacher balanced the use of both languages for instruction.

4.2.3 Mexican Immigrant Families Maintaining their Culture

Supporting "maintain both cultures equally" was a favored option for the respondents (73.2 percent for teachers, and 82.9 percent for parents), but results for the other statements in this item revealed a critical and surprising gap. Twenty-two percent of teachers thought that Mexican families should maintain their Mexican culture and values, compared to only 7.3 percent of immigrant families. In addition, twice as many parents as teachers said that immigrant families should adopt U.S. culture and values (9.8 percent and 4.9 percent, respectively). In the racial/ethnic disaggregation of teachers for this item, White teachers were

the only category to select the response "Mexican immigrants should adopt U.S. culture and values" (11.1 percent) and had the lowest selection rate for "maintain Mexican culture and values" (16.7 percent). Zero percent of bilingual teachers felt that immigrants should adopt U.S. culture and values. General education teachers were the least in favor of Mexican immigrants maintaining their culture (9 percent.)

4.2.4 Mexican-origin Children Learning About their Cultural Heritage

A related item asked parents to rate the importance of their children learning about their Mexican heritage. A Likert scale provided responses ranging from 1 to 7, with 7 indicating that it was "very important." The mean for the parent responses was 4.93, only slightly past the midpoint. The mode and median were 7 and 5, respectively. Although 39 percent of parents respondents selected 7, a cumulative 46.3 percent selected 4 or under. Teachers were asked to respond to the similar statement: "Teachers of Mexican immigrant children should include some study of Mexican history and culture in their classrooms." The teachers' cumulative score was 36.6 percent at level 4 or under on a 7-point scale, with a mean of 5.27, slightly higher than the parents' mean of 4.93 for the same question.

Possibly fueling this gap in perceptions between parents and teachers is teachers' lack of knowledge about Mexican history and culture. When asked: "How important do you think it is that teachers of Mexican immigrant students take a role in helping students learn about and take pride in their cultural roots?" a majority of teachers ranked helping Mexican immigrant students develop cultural pride at the top of the scale — "very important role for teachers" (82.5 percent), and another 10 percent ranked it "somewhat important" for a cumulative total of 92.5 percent. Yet there is evidence of an inconsistency in teachers' responses to this issue, as their responses to another question about including Mexican history and culture in their lessons was not favored. This discrepancy may indicate contradictions in teachers' commitment to help students "learn about" their cultural roots. Although teachers were highly supportive of helping

students learn and take pride in their cultural roots, they did not indicate a high interest in teaching them about Mexican history and culture as a means to foster that pride.

4.2.5 Ability of Parents to Help with Homework

This item inquired about parents' ability to help their child with their homework. Parents rated themselves at the top of the scale with 51.2 percent for "very able" and 36.6 percent for "mostly able" for a cumulative of 87.8 percent. Teachers, on the other hand, perceived immigrant parents at not being as capable as native parents by 41.5 percent.

4.2.6 Access and Quality of Mexican vs. U.S. Schools

Although teachers and parents were in agreement that there is better access to educational opportunities in U.S. schools than in Mexican schools (65 percent for both groups), there was a gap in the "same access in both countries" answer choice: 29.3 percent of parents selected that answer versus 4.9 percent of teachers. The question about quality revealed a gap in perception as well. Teachers perceive U.S. schools as superior to Mexican schools in terms of rigor. Fifty-six percent of teachers perceive that U.S. schools are better, in contrast to 34 percent of parents. An even greater gap appears in the teachers' and parents' perceptions that schooling quality is the "same [rigor] in both countries" — 4.9 percent for teachers and 39 percent for parents.

4.2.7 Orientation to School Procedures in Secondary Schools

Percent distributions indicate that elementary school parents judge their orientation to school procedures as "excellent" (45.5 percent) or "good" (42.4 percent) for a cumulative total of 87.9 percent; while secondary school parents judged their orientation as "excellent" (37.5 percent) or "good" (37.5 percent) for a cumulative total of 75 percent. Teachers were asked to judge whether immigrant parents knew more, less, or the same about school procedures than native parents. A majority of secondary teachers (63.2 percent) perceive that immigrant parents know less than native parents, a much lower vote of confidence than parents gave themselves. On the other hand, 59.1 percent of elementary school teachers perceive that there is no

difference between immigrant and native parents, but this ranking was also much lower than the ranking the parents gave themselves.

4.2.8 Parents' Comfort Level in Talking with the Principal

A cumulative 70 percent of parents responded that they either felt "very comfortable" (40 percent), or "somewhat comfortable" (30 percent) in talking to the school principal. Yet teachers did not perceive immigrant parents to be as comfortable in talking with the principal as the parents reported themselves to be. Only 14.6 percent of teachers perceived that immigrant parents are as comfortable as native parents in talking with the school's principal. Teachers rated immigrants parents by 53.7 percent as being less comfortable than native parents in talking with the principal. Secondary teachers and African American teachers (46.1 percent) noted more than other teacher groups that they cannot tell how the immigrant parents feels about talking to the principal. Although not a gap between teacher and parent perceptions, a disaggregation of parents responses based on grade level reveal that secondary parents (50 percent for "very comfortable" and 50 percent for "somewhat comfortable") feel more comfortable talking to the principal than elementary school parents (37.5 percent for "very comfortable" and 25 percent for "somewhat comfortable"). In addition, Percent distributions with number of years living in the U.S. indicate that the level of comfort in talking with the principal increases the longer immigrant parents live in the U.S.

4.3 Gaps Identified in Non-Parallel Survey Items

Questions that were not constructed in a parallel manner were asked of the participants. These items have the potential to reveal general institutional gaps and immigrant parents' knowledge gaps which may hinder the full participation of Mexican-origin families in the American educational process. The institutional and knowledge gaps uncovered in these non-parallel items are reported in this section.

4.3.1 Parents' Ability to Speak English

A total of 58.6 percent of parents report an inability to speak English. Another 24.4 percent report that they only speak "a little" English, for a total of 73 percent that do not consider themselves fluent. As English is the predominant language spoken in the District, this figure would imply a significant gap in the parents' ability to communicate with most of the school and central office personnel.

4.3.2 Parents' Lack of Schooling in the U.S.

For reported years of parents' schooling in the United States, the largest category was zero years of education in this country (75.6 percent; N=31) with a mean for the total sample of 1.4 years. The parent sample therefore, would be at a decided disadvantage in understanding the culture and practices of the schools in the United States, especially for the first child they enroll in this country. This is a critical gap for the Spanish-speaking parents with children in a predominantly English-speaking school.

4.3.3 Underpreparation of Teachers

Teachers rated their undergraduate education as inadequate in preparing them to teach English language learners. A cumulative total of 53.6 percent rated their college preparation at the bottom of the scale — "not very well," or "not well at all." The low rating of undergraduate programs was consistent across teaching assignment categories; but was especially low among general education teachers, who rated their college preparation by 63.6 percent at the bottom of the scale. Percent distributions indicate that professional development targeted at teaching Mexican immigrant students has been more effective than the training received in undergraduate school, especially for general education teachers (27.3 for "very effective" and 63.6 percent for "somewhat effective." However, only a small percentage of each teacher group (12.5 percent for bilingual teachers; 27.3 percent for ESL teachers; and 27.3 percent for general education teachers) judged their staff development training as "very effective." The

ineffectiveness of professional development was especially noted by bilingual teachers, who felt that their staff training was "not at all" effective by 25 percent.

4.3.4 Communication about Curriculum

The overall percentages showed that parents were fairly pleased with the information imparted by the teacher, rating them at a cumulative 82.9 percent — "very well," and "somewhat well" for communicating the particulars about the curriculum. However, when the responses were disaggregated according to teaching assignments and grade levels, some communication gaps emerged. Even though the majority of the surveyed parents felt that the teacher explained the curriculum "very well," the remaining 36 percent either did not meet with the teacher (7.3 percent) or still had knowledge gaps about the what their child would be studying. Percent distributions indicate that the bilingual teacher (76 percent) and elementary teachers (69.7 percent) were the most highly rated in terms of explaining the curriculum, with the ESL teacher ranking second in rating (57.1 percent). But the remaining 28.6 percent of parents of ESL students rated their child's teacher at the bottom of the scale. They either did not get an explanation of the curriculum, or did not meet with the teacher. Secondary teachers also received a lower rating than elementary school teachers on this item (69.7 percent "very well-explained" for elementary versus 37.5 percent "very well-explained" for secondary).

4.3.5 Communication about Grading Policy

Overall, the parents gave the teachers a cumulative 85.4 percent ("very well" and "somewhat well") for explaining grading policies, but a disaggregation of program type and grade level revealed gaps. A particularly prominent gap was found in the lack of communication with general education teachers. A total of 33.3 percent of parents with children in general education classrooms did not get an explanation of the grading policies (22 percent "not at all" plus an additional 11 percent that "didn't meet"). Bilingual teachers were rated as explaining grading policies "very well" by 88 percent. Also, secondary teachers were not as highly rated as

elementary teachers in terms of their explanation of the grading system (82 percent "very well" for elementary versus 50 percent "very well" for secondary).

4.3.6 Accessing Immigrant Students' Mexican Transcripts and Textbooks

Most teachers were not aware of the availability of Mexican transcripts and textbooks: 53.7 percent reported that they did not know that a transcript could be obtained, and 39 percent said they never take this action. Similarly, 65.9 percent did not know they could order grade-relevant textbooks, and another 31.7 percent reported that they had never order Mexican textbooks.

4.3.7 Assessing Prior Academic Knowledge

Teachers expressed self-confidence in their ability to assess immigrant students' prior academic knowledge learned in Mexican schools. Twenty-two percent of teachers judged themselves as doing this "very well," and 63.4 percent stating that they do the "same as for U.S. students, but with adjustments." This finding, however, is not consistent with the outcome of the previous item about ordering Mexican transcripts. If a cumulative 92.7 percent of teachers either did not know they could get a transcript, or "never do it," then it is doubtful that they would have much knowledge about what coursework the student has already mastered, or failed to master. In addition, since the school systems are different, there is not much pedagogical defense for assessing the student the "same as U.S. students."

4.3.8 Availability of Spanish-speaking Personnel on the Secondary Level

Parents and teacher surveys contained items that asked the participants to rate the effectiveness of the campus staff to accommodate the needs of immigrant parents. Teachers were asked to comment on whether Spanish speaking personnel was available at their campus. Parents were asked to judge how able school staff is to communicate in Spanish. There was agreement between parents and teachers as to availability of Spanish speaking staff, thus there was no gap in perceptions to report for this parallel item. However, the bulk of the parents and teachers replying that there was availability are from the elementary schools, indicating an

institutional gap for providing Spanish-speaking staff at the secondary level. Eighty-six percent of elementary school teachers reported that there was always availability of Spanish speaking staff, and 78.8 percent of parents of elementary school parents agreed. On the other hand, only 63 percent of secondary school teachers perceived that there was always Spanish speaking staff available and 62.5 percent of parents concurred.

4.3.9 Parent Meetings with Principal

Percent distributions reflecting times per year the parent meets with the principal demonstrate greater interaction in secondary school. This finding concurs with the greater level of comfort secondary parents feel as compared to elementary parents. A possible explanation for this phenomenon could be the increase in disciplinary issues that is often associated with adolescent behavior and that prompts meetings with school administrators. Also, the high school has an assistant principal assigned to each grade level; thus there is greater availability of administrators to talk to parents. In addition, many of the parents who have children in middle and high school may have raised their children in a U.S. school and have gained confidence in talking to school personnel.

4.3.10 Attendance at PTA Meetings on the Secondary Level

A total of 47.8 percent of parents report that they are uncomfortable attending PTA meetings, or are not interested in participating. Teachers' perceptions confirm the lower interest in their rating of immigrant parents' attendance at PTA meetings, reporting 51.7 percent less in attendance at PTA meetings than native parents. Therefore, there was no perception gap to report for this parallel item. However, in comparing elementary and secondary school attendance reported by parents, a higher percentage of elementary school parents (51.6 percent) report feeling comfortable attending PTA meetings versus secondary school parents (37.5 percent).

4.3.11 Spanish Translation at PTA Meetings

While there was agreement between parents and teachers on the availability of Spanish translation at PTA meetings, the percentages of the participants who reported that translation was "never offered" (26.3 percent for teachers and 29.3 percent for parents) suggests a gap in the campus accommodations for Spanish speaking parents. In addition, if some parents perceive that PTA meetings are "never" translated, others perceive that they are "sometimes" translated (41.5 percent), and still others "don't know" (22 percent), then there is an apparent gap in the information that is understood about Spanish translation at PTA meetings.

4.3.12 Parent Workshops in Spanish

The suggestion to have more workshops in Spanish received a "very important" rating of 96.7 percent by parents. This support for "more" workshops possibly indicates that there are none offered or not enough.

Parents also felt that it was very important (66 percent) for U.S. teachers to know about the Mexican education system and that partnerships between Mexican and U.S. teachers would be very beneficial (63.4 percent). Teachers were in favor of partnerships with Mexican teachers, but less so for receiving training on the Mexican education system. The suggestion to improve assessment methods for immigrant students was rated somewhat important by teachers.

4.4 Summary

A number of gaps were discovered in the *Teacher Competency* category. Although collectively, parents reported being comfortable talking with their child's teacher, disaggregation by program type and grade level revealed that the positive rating was related mostly to bilingual and elementary school teachers. Middle and high school teachers were rated much lower by parents in terms of approachability. Teachers rated parents' level of comfort even lower than the parents rated themselves, especially general education and secondary teachers. The parents' perception of a lack of effective communication with secondary and general education teachers carried over into the questions about adequate explanations of the school curriculum and

grading policies. Again, the bilingual and elementary school teachers received more positive ratings by parents. Particularly prominent for these questions about information regarding curriculum and grading policies were the low communication ratings given to general education teachers by parents. Finally, despite teachers' high level of confidence in assessing immigrant students' prior academic knowledge from their studies in Mexican schools, they reported very low access to immigrant students' Mexican transcripts and available resources from the Mexican education department.

In the *Cultural Knowledge* category, gaps were found in six areas of perceptions: (a) priorities for students' education; (b) the development of Spanish academic skills; (c) the assimilation of immigrants; (d) the role of teachers in helping students maintain cultural pride; (e) the capability of immigrant parents to help with homework; and (f) the quality of Mexican schools. When parents were asked to rate the priority for their child's education, a high percentage of immigrant parents with children in an ESL classroom rated the learning of English as their top priority, even though they understood that academic skills acquisition may lag behind by selecting this option. None of the teachers of these students elected this option. The only teacher group 100 percent in favor of Spanish-speaking students developing academic skills in Spanish as well as English were bilingual teachers, with general education teachers the least supportive of this option.

The most surprising outcome in the cultural knowledge category revealed that teachers collectively favored Mexican immigrants' retention of their culture more than the immigrants themselves. Parents, as a group, were not in clear support of their children learning about their cultural heritage in school; and the majority of teachers were not disposed to teach Mexican - origin children about their history and culture, although their responses were slightly more positive than the parents' responses. Interestingly, the teachers' responses to whether they accepted the role of helping immigrant students develop cultural pride was overwhelmingly positive, but it was not clear how the teachers envisioned accomplishing the development of this

cultural pride. Parents judged themselves as capable of helping their children with their homework a great deal more than teachers did. Parents also have a higher opinion of the Mexican school system than U.S. teachers.

The category of *School Competence in Serving the Needs of Immigrants Parents* uncovered institutional gaps in (a) campus availability of Spanish-speaking personnel; (b) campus orientations for immigrant families; and (c) accessibility of the principal. Both parents and teachers perceived less availability of Spanish-speaking staff at the middle and secondary campuses in the District. Likewise, parents and teachers were in general agreement that the orientation to school procedures was less adequate at the secondary level. Teachers rated immigrants parents as being less comfortable than native parents in talking with the principal, but parents' responses were quite positive in terms of feeling comfortable talking to the principal. Secondary parents responded more favorably about being able to talk to the principal than elementary school parents, and also reported meeting with him/her more frequently.

A pair of gaps was detected in the category of *Parent Involvement Opportunities*. Parents reported that they are uncomfortable attending PTA meetings, or they are not interested in participating; but a higher percentage of elementary school parents feel comfortable versus secondary school parents. Teachers perceived immigrant parents as less interested in attending PTA meetings than native parents. There was no clear consensus among the participants as to whether or not Spanish translation was offered at the PTA meetings, with some perceiving that meetings are "never" translated, and others perceiving that they are "sometimes" translated. Since both options cannot be true, there is an apparent gap in the information that is understood about Spanish translation at PTA meetings.

Although not "perception" gaps as such, noteworthy gaps were observed in parent and teacher capacities that could contribute to the accommodation of immigrant families in American public schools. Immigrant parents' lack of English fluency and lack of schooling experiences in the United States implies a disadvantage in participating in English-language school activities

and in adjusting to U.S. education practices. Teachers from all three program types (bilingual, ESL, and general education) reported inadequate undergraduate preparation for addressing the educational needs Mexican-origin students. Despite the fact that teachers rated their professional development training for educating language minority students much more positively than their undergraduate training, only a small percentage rated this professional training as "very effective."

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS, SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

5.1 Discussion

The study to this point has addressed the first three of the five research questions:

1. What perceptions about education do Mexican immigrant families possess?
2. What perceptions and knowledge of the culture and educational background of Mexican immigrants do U.S. teachers of Mexican origin children possess?
3. What are the gaps in these perceptions and knowledge?

Having identified gaps between the perceptions and knowledge of teachers and Mexican immigrant parents, this section elaborates on the gaps and discusses them in order to shed light on last two research questions of this study:

5. How do the immigrant families' perceptions and knowledge of the host culture affect their efforts to access U.S. educational opportunities?
6. What potential do these gaps in perception and knowledge have to affect the education of Mexican immigrant children in U.S. schools?

It was no surprise that immigrant parents rated bilingual teachers as more accessible than ESL and general education teachers, since those teachers have ethnicity and language in common with the parents. All of the District bilingual teachers reported their ethnicity as Latino. Unfortunately, there are too few teachers in the District who are Latino or who speak Spanish. The most recent TEA demographic report on the District reports that only 6.8 percent (N=43.3) of teachers are Latino; and it is not clear whether all of these teachers speak Spanish. The lack of Latino teachers is not a condition peculiar to Texas.

The rapid influx of Latino students has not been met with a concurrent increase in Latino teachers . . . This gap between Latino students and Latino teachers is significant . . . Research

finds that Latino and other minority teachers and administrators serve as cultural brokers between school and home environments, and thereby foster more supportive relations and stronger ties (p. 86).⁹⁴

Some parent comments on the surveys reiterated the need for more teachers to speak their language and implied that the language barrier was an impediment to communication with teachers and to their involvement with the school. Parent responses to the open-ended question illustrate this point.

- That there would be more teachers that speak Spanish in order to better communicate with them with regard to the education of my children.
- That there would be more bilingual teachers.
- A barrier which sometimes impedes us from being 100% involved in the school is language. If you don't speak English, you feel inhibited.

Language differences also impact immigrant parent involvement, particularly when measured by attendance in the PTA. Other gaps uncovered in the study suggested some potentially significant institutional failures. Policy implications are discussed in the last chapter.

The fact that the teachers generally rated the parents as less comfortable in talking with them than the parents rated themselves raises the question of who is actually less comfortable in parent-teacher communications. In their exploration of secondary preservice and inservice teachers' perceptions of diverse cultural groups, DeCastro-Ambrosetti & Cho (2005) found that teachers "stated a fear of being rejected, due to ethnic differences, by minority students and their parents" (p. 45). The District teachers' unfamiliarity with immigrant parents' language and cultural values could possibly be a factor in the discomfort projected onto parents by teachers. Another possible explanation for this perception gap could be that the teachers do not give

⁹⁴ Shah, P. & Marschall, M. (2011). The Latino student-teacher gap in immigrant gateways: Constraints and policy solutions. In D. L. Leal & K. J. Meier (Eds.), *The politics of Latino education*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.

immigrant parents enough credit for their determination to be involved in their children's education despite the language and cultural barriers.

Personnel in local schools and districts often assume that migrant parents' lack of visible involvement, such as attendance at PTA meetings or school–family events, is probably due to a lack of interest in their children's success. A common perception of school personnel regarding migrant families is that because of their lower socioeconomic status, as well as their demanding work schedules, they are “a well-meaning, but hard-to-reach, hard-to-involve community” (Jasis & Marriot, 2010, p. 128). The teachers' perception of parents' comfort level in talking with the principal yielded a similar outcome. Parents expressed more confidence in talking to the principal than the teachers recognized them as having, especially parents of secondary school children.

Despite teachers' high level of confidence in assessing immigrant students' prior academic knowledge from their studies in Mexican schools, teachers reported very low access to immigrant students' Mexican transcripts and available resources from the Mexican education department. A majority of the teachers — bilingual, ESL, and general education teachers — reported assessing immigrant students for prior academic knowledge in order to plan for instruction in the same way they assess native students. This process seems counterintuitive and pedagogically flawed, given that the language and education system of immigrant students and native students is completely different. In her two and a half year study at an urban high school in California with a growing ELL population, Laurie Olsen (1997) found that most of the teachers simply “do not believe that the new population of students requires any changes in teaching approaches or programs” (p. 178).⁹⁵

Goodwin (2002) suggests that there may be many reasons why teachers do not differentiate their instructional practices for immigrant children. Goodwin's examination of

⁹⁵ Olsen, L. (1997). *Made in America: Immigrant students in our public schools*. New York, NY: The New Press.

teacher preparation literature revealed that teachers do not distinguish between immigrant children and other types of "diverse" groups such as children of color, minority children, native-born LEP students, "culturally different" learners, etc.

[M]ost of the literature that focuses on teacher preparation for the success and achievement of children of color fails to explicitly frame immigrant children as a group that exhibits particular issues and needs. As a consequence, immigrant children are rendered invisible when they are subsumed under these broad and inclusive labels (p. 161).⁹⁶

Other scholars blame the lack of instructional differentiation for ELL and immigrant students on the "testing culture" precipitated by the Annual Yearly Progress (AYP) demands of No Child Left Behind. Reyes, Scribner, & Paredes-Scribner (1999) suggest that educators use standardized tests as "a quick and easy way to justify the sorting of students" and as a means to "shift the responsibility for relevant and appropriate teaching away from instructional personnel. Testing relieves the teacher from making instructional adaptations to individual student needs and evaluating student progress within the actual learning situation most familiar to students" (p. 3).⁹⁷

Menken (2008) decries the use of standardized testing for English language learners and argues that testing policy

serves dominant ideology as a whole . . . and has historically been tied to racism and linguisticism, rising in response to record rates of immigration in this country. Tests are presented to the public as objective and their power is largely unquestioned, yet historically they have served to legitimize the marginalization of racial and ethnic minorities (p. 19).

⁹⁶ Goodwin, A. L. (2002). Teacher preparation and the education of immigrant children. *Education and Urban Society*, 34(2), February, 156-172.

⁹⁷ Reyes, P.; Scribner J. D. & Paredes-Scribner, A. (1999). *Lessons from high-performing Hispanic schools: Creating learning communities*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.

With regards to *Cultural Knowledge*, the gaps revealed that many immigrant families were eager to leave behind their language and culture for the sake of finding upward mobility in their adopted country, especially those surveyed parents who chose to enroll their children in ESL classes rather than bilingual classes. The case in this school district is not unique. In a 2009 study conducted by Public Agenda, immigrants cite the belief that knowledge of English is essential to getting ahead in the job market. Consequently, 74 percent of immigrants surveyed say that "it is more important for schools to teach immigrant children English as quickly as possible than it is to teach them other subjects in their native language" (Bittle and Rochkind, 2009, p. 23).

It is understandable that immigrant parents may equate the acquisition of English with success, and that they want to see their children "fit in" as soon as possible, but Suárez-Orozco and Suárez-Orozco (1995) assert that

language has both a symbolic and affective value. To see language as a mere instrumental tool for communication is to miss its deep affective roots. To give up Spanish to acquire English represents a symbolic act of ethnic renunciation: it is giving up the mother tongue for the instrumental tongue of the dominant group (p. 170).

Valenzuela (1999) considers this "subtractive schooling:" "the stripping of one's native language, which takes away valuable resources from the Mexican-origin student such as their social capital."

In the view of some other surveyed parents; however, the development of Spanish language skills was seen as a marketable asset: "My idea would be that our children would not forget their Spanish language, that they would maintain their traditions, know their customs, and be able to speak and write in Spanish. All of this would help them have mastery of two languages so they can have a better future." The words of Mrs. Martinez represent the understanding of some immigrant parents that, even if their children "make it" through the public

school system, they will have to bring a special skills set in order to achieve social mobility beyond the level of their parents. Mrs. Martinez added:

Some immigrant families make the mistake of requesting English-only instruction for their Spanish-speaking children, thinking that their children will be smarter and fit into the mainstream culture more quickly. This is an egregious error for children who speak Spanish at home. A student should receive an education in his native language and maintain it while acquiring the new language and becoming proficient in it as well. Such an education will open doors for them when they enter the job market.

Mrs. Martinez also criticized some Mexican immigrant families for shipwrecking their value systems as they rush to adopt the American lifestyle. She lamented the fact that some families are too quick to take on U.S. culture, with the father expecting the privilege of relaxing when he gets home from work instead of talking to his children and monitoring their school performance; and the mother relinquishing her role as the family's social facilitator in order to work for low wages, "thinking that if she makes a few dollars, she can buy her children some name brand jeans or the latest video games." The Bittle & Rochkind study (2009) also captured this phenomenon.

Among our focus groups, there was a strong sense that American culture is a difficult force to resist. Many immigrants mentioned the materialism often associated with America as a drawback, although how they responded to it depended greatly on their personal beliefs (p. 23).

Because bilingual teachers were the only faculty group 100 percent convinced of the merit of developing academic skills in Spanish, it appears that English-speaking teachers do not understand the value of developing cognitive depth in two languages. Portes and Rivas (2011) summarize what recent scholarship has discovered about the benefits of bilingualism:

. . . recent studies consistently report that students coming from a bilingual and bicultural background have higher test scores, higher probability of high school

graduation, and a higher probability of attending college. In all likelihood, the relationship between cognitive development and bilingualism is mutually reinforcing (p. 232).

Macedo et al. (2003) view the emphasis on English in a critical light. "In view of the lack of criticism in most ESL teacher training programs, due to their emphasis on the technical acquisition of English, most ESL teachers, even those with good intentions, fall prey to a paternalistic zeal to save their students from 'non-English speaker' status." Macedo (2006) relates this attitude to the subtle justification of the power position, as these "zealous" teachers unwittingly "have invested in a system that rewards them for reproducing and not questioning dominant mechanisms designed to produce power asymmetries along the lines of race, gender, class, culture, and ethnicity (p. 12)." Cummins (1994) explains the futility of trying to justify the benefits of bilingual education to the dominant group, since their focus is more on reducing threats to their dominance than to empirical evidence. "In fact, the more empirical evidence is produced that certain types of programs result in personal and academic growth among minority students, the more vehement will be the denial of this evidence and the rejection of these programs by the dominant group" (p. 161).⁹⁸

Two significant outcomes of the surveys revealed that teachers, compared to parents, had a lower perception of immigrant parents' ability to help their children with their homework; and that teachers viewed Mexican schools as inferior to American schools. Delgado-Gaitan (1991) suggests that

Deficit perspectives depict inactive parents in the schools as incompetent and unable to help their children because they have a different language, work long hours away from home, belong to different ethnic groups, or are just not interested. However, when

⁹⁸ Cummins, J. 1994. Bilingual education and language rights in the United States. In T. Skutnabb-Kangas & R. Phillipson (Eds.), *Linguistic human rights: Overcoming linguistic discrimination*. New York, NY: Mouton de Gruyter.

examined more closely, research has shown that Latino families do indeed care about their children and possess the capacity to advocate for them (p. 221).

The teachers' lack of confidence in the immigrant parents' ability to help with their children's homework may be partially attributed to teachers' lack of knowledge about Mexican schooling. The demographic section of the survey revealed that the majority of parents had completed a *secundaria* education (the compulsory years of education in Mexico). This level of course completion does not correspond to a U.S. ninth grade education, however. The completion of *secundaria* includes much of the coursework as the twelve grades required for a U.S. high school diploma. For example, the three years of *secundaria* include science courses that are usually offered in the upper years of U.S. high schools, such as chemistry and physics. Similarly, the required mathematics courses include algebra, geometry, probability, and problem-solving skills. Three years of a foreign language (English) are also required (p. 31).⁹⁹ Thus, the parents who arrive in the United States with their basic education completed in Mexico may be familiar with U.S. high school coursework, and may be well-prepared to help their children with homework through the high school years.

5.2 Conclusions

There are many institutional practices in the District that may give Mexican immigrant parents the message that their ethnicity, language, and culture are not valued. Despite the District's adoption of the late-exit bilingual model, the fact that the "bilingual" schools' administrators and the District director of the bilingual/ESL program are not Latino fail to not only provide role models, but may result in a lack of sensitivity to the cultural and language needs of this growing population. The staff that is in place to help struggling students (reading specialists, counselors, special education teachers, gifted and talented teachers) are neither Latino nor Spanish-speakers, and cannot support the special needs of the students in the

⁹⁹ Secretaría de Educación Pública. (2006). *Educación Básica. Secundaria. Plan de Estudios 2006*. México, D.F. Retrieved from <http://www.reformasecundaria.sep.gob.mx/doc/programas/2006/planestudios2006.pdf>

bilingual program. Latino teachers are underrepresented in the District, and only one school has a bilingual receptionist. Spanish translation is not offered at PTA meetings, nor are all documents that go home translated into Spanish.

The lack of professional training of preservice and inservice teachers to serve language minority students and their immigrant families is a chief concern. The lax ESL credentialing standards in Texas challenge university teacher preparation programs and school district staff development efforts to take the initiative to provide a better understanding of issues relevant to improving partnerships with culturally and linguistically diverse families and to developing more effective approaches to teaching language minority students.

Communication was a prominent issue in the perceptions study. Significant gaps were expressed by parents in communicating with secondary and general education teachers. Parents expressed discomfort in talking with these teachers, especially secondary teachers, and did not receive clear information on what their child would be learning in the classroom, nor what grading policies prevail. The sense of "discomfort" on the part of parents translated to their attendance at school PTA meetings, where a large number of both types of respondents did not know, or were not sure if the meetings were translated into Spanish. Parents expressed more confidence in talking with the secondary school principals than with the elementary school principals. Teachers, however, perceived that immigrant parents were more uncomfortable in communicating with them and the school principals than the parents reported themselves to be. In addition, some teachers reported that they did not know how the parents felt. These gaps signal a critical disengagement between immigrant parents and the District's teachers, especially non-Latino and general education secondary teachers.

Some immigrant parents seemed eager for their children to shed their language and Mexican culture as a means for them to assimilate into the mainstream American culture. This phenomenon is possibly a manifestation of Marxist notion of "false consciousness," whereby the subordinate class takes on the values of the dominant class. Mexican-origin people who

consider themselves to be different from white Americans, but no longer identify with Mexican nationals have frequently developed a consciousness of discrimination and prejudice by the majority group. Valdes (1996) calls these individuals "full members of the caste minority group." Other parents, however, see bilingualism as an asset for social mobility and biculturalism as a desirable quality. Regardless of the parents' stance on language and culture, there was a sense among them that *something* had to be done to assure their children a place in American society. It appears that the immigrants are all too aware of the barriers and "job ceiling" that their children may face, as suggested by Ogbu (1978), for this "castelike" population.

There is a very weak effort among teachers to accommodate instruction for Mexican immigrant students within the District as the evidence suggests. Neither the teachers nor the school sends for students' Mexican transcripts to see what courses they have taken, and how well they did on them; and teachers in every category reported that they assess immigrant students for prior academic knowledge in the same way they assess native students. Although teachers expressed a willingness to foster Mexican-origin students' "cultural pride," they were not very enthusiastic about teaching Mexican history and culture as a means to do that. Teachers had a lower perception of the quality of Mexican schools than the parents who attended them. The teachers also rated the parents considerably less able to help the children with their homework than the parents rated themselves.

In sum, the gaps uncovered in this study demonstrate that U.S. teachers perceived immigrant parents as less adequate educational partners than the parents judged themselves and did not show much interest in accommodating immigrant students' prior academic background, native language abilities, or cultural history. One teacher comment may have captured what some other teachers were thinking, but were too polite to say: "This is America. Even though our system may be different, it is our system. If you chose to come to stay here, then you should adapt too."

The discussion and conclusion of this study addressed research question number five: *How do the immigrant families' perceptions and knowledge of the host culture affect their efforts to access U.S. educational opportunities?* The findings of this study imply that Mexican immigrant families' experiences in this Texas suburban district affect their efforts to fully participate in U.S. educational opportunities because their communication with teachers, school staff and administrators is impeded by language and cultural barriers. The findings also indicate narrow prospects for immigrant parents' participation in the traditional campus parent involvement activities. The schools' practices contribute to these limitations by the District's failure to adequately train their staff to value the immigrant families' linguistic, intellectual, and cultural contributions to the school community; by failing to provide the same comprehensive student and parent support options that "mainstream" children and families receive; and by not making an effort to hire more Latino and bilingual personnel. In other words, the Mexican immigrant families do not have the "equal educational opportunities" mandated by U.S. laws. The perceptions of teachers indicate a marginalized view of immigrant parents' capabilities to be adequate educational partners in their children's schooling.

In light of the historical background of the Mexican immigrant experience in the United States, and the political and social responses to their presence in American society, the Marxist and neo-Marxist theories presented in the theoretical foundations chapter of this study become apparent, especially as presented by those scholars who recognize that a "hidden curriculum" is subtly at work in the institutional behaviors and attitudes toward the immigrant families as "instructional norms and values not openly acknowledged by teachers or school officials" (Vang, 2006, p. 20). Bowles and Gintis elucidate on this concept of "the social relations of the educational encounter."

The educational system, basically, neither adds nor subtracts from the degree of inequality and repression originating in the economic sphere. Rather, it reproduces and legitimates a preexisting pattern in the process of training and stratifying the workforce.

Through the educational encounter, individuals are induced to accept the degree of powerlessness with which they will be faced as mature workers.¹⁰⁰

Valdes (1996) advocates approaching the school failure of the Mexican-origin population from a "binational framework" using theories of social reproduction.

For the most part, the research on this population can be categorized as falling within the cultural deficit-difference paradigm in that it attempts to explain low scholastic achievement by focusing on differences brought to school by the children themselves. What is evident is that single-factor explanations of school failure among the children of first-generation Mexican immigrants are inadequate and cannot account for the complexity of the experience. To attribute to language factors alone, for example, what is inextricably linked to elements such as children's non-mainstream behavior, teacher perceptions, and the assumptions made by the schools about parents, and by parents about schools, is simplistic. In order to account for the academic failure of Mexican-origin students from, for example, the perspective of theories of reproduction, researchers are faced with the challenge of having to account for the elements that lead to this reproduction using a binational framework (p. 28).¹⁰¹

Good, Masewicz, & Vogel (2010)¹⁰² conducted qualitative studies with teachers and Hispanic parents of ELLs in order to probe the question: "What are the barriers to improving the academic achievement of Hispanic ELL students as perceived by parents and teachers?" As a critical inquiry research team, the authors suspected that "the power and influence Hispanic parents can have on their children's education has been ignored by many and underestimated by most" (p. 323). The study was conducted from a "cultural-ecological framework" that

¹⁰⁰ Bowles, S. & Gintis, H. (2008). Schooling in capitalist societies, in J. H. Ballantine & J. Z. Spade (Eds.), *Schools and society: A sociological approach to education*. Los Angeles, CA: Pine Forge Press.

¹⁰¹ Valdés, G. (1996). *Con respeto: Bridging the distances between culturally diverse families and schools*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.

¹⁰² Good, M. E.; Masewicz, S., & Vogel, L. (2010). Latino English language learners: Bridging achievement and cultural gaps between schools and families. *Journal of Latinos and Education*, 9(4), October, 321-339.

investigates "relationships between power, culture, privilege, and oppression" (p. 324). The researchers' thorough critical analysis identified five themes from the responses of both parents and teachers: "communication gaps; culture clashes; lack of a systemic, articulated district ELL plan; lack of teacher preparation in multiculturalism, language acquisition, and ELL instructional strategies; and a lack of support systems for families transitioning to a new environment and new culture" (p. 327)

As with the current study, communication gaps were a concern in the Good et al. study. Language barriers hampered communication between students and teachers and parents and teachers. The parents also felt disconnected from the new culture, disempowered to advocate for their children, and disrespected based on stereotyping by school personnel. "They used the word racism often, especially when asked what gets in the way of student success" (p. 330). Teachers expressed frustration that there was no comprehensive plan for teaching ELLs and no vertical planning with the other schools in order to align teaching strategies for ELL students. The faculty and the parents acknowledged the need for more professional development on ESL strategies and on understanding the way culture influences teaching and learning. The researchers concluded that the parents' descriptions of oppression and marginalization reflected the critical inquiry perspective.

Research question number six asked: *What potential do these gaps in perception and knowledge have to affect the education of Mexican immigrant children in U.S. schools?* School data demonstrate that LEP students in the District excel in the elementary grades, but that their academic success declines sharply in the secondary years, where the study uncovered prominent communication gaps between the students' teachers and their parents. Although the purpose of this study was not meant to establish causation, the evidence of greater perception gaps in the secondary schools versus the elementary schools parallel the relationship between the District's academic profiles of LEP students, including those of Mexican-origin children, in the elementary schools and in the secondary schools. Recent research has demonstrated that

this relationship is more than coincidental. In his statistical meta-analysis of 52 parent involvement studies, Jeynes (2007) found that

the influence of parental involvement overall is significant for secondary school children. Parental involvement as a whole affects all the academic variables under study by about .5 to .55 of a standard deviation unit. The positive effects of parental involvement hold for both White and minority children (p. 82)."¹⁰³

An improved relationship between parents and secondary schools has the potential to mitigate the achievement losses for Mexican-origin students in middle school and high school.

Perhaps the comment of one of the parents revealed an insight that would be valuable for school staff to consider, especially in light of the gaps uncovered between Mexican immigrant parents and secondary teachers:

I think that this country is better in terms of educating my children, but it would be much better with the discipline standards of our country of origin. In my opinion, I think the schools are good from grades PreK to 5, but 6th – 12th grade students often drop out because they cannot overcome the negative influences of their peers. That is where I blame the schools for not having a better discipline plan.

5.3 Suggestions for Further Research

Further research in other schools contexts is needed. This study was limited to one school in a suburban area near a large Texas city. The survey research used for this study could be used in a school setting where Latino students and staff are in the majority in order to ascertain if the dominant ideology is prevalent, or if the presence of faculty with similar cultural values and language contribute to a positive learning environment all the way through the high school years.

¹⁰³ Jeynes, W. H. (2007). The relationship between parental involvement and urban secondary school student academic achievement: A meta-analysis. *Urban Education*, 42(1), 82–110.

Many variables come into play that influence the educational trajectories of students in elementary and secondary schools, such that no one condition can be singled out as *causing* success or failure in students. One of the most effective means of tracking student progress and proving effective instructional practices is the longitudinal study. It may be especially informative to follow students' academic progress and graduation rates that have received special language services in elementary school and have exited to mainstream classes. This type of study could focus on Spanish-speaking children who have had maintenance bilingual studies and compare them with those who had only ESL instruction; and could include the perceptions of their immigrant parents to compare those who have felt like they have had a place in their child's school with those who felt like "outsiders."

The role of the principal in setting the campus atmosphere for parents should be explored, including the reasons parents stated that they are not comfortable talking to him/her. This can be accomplished by conducting interviews with principals to log the type of communications they have with immigrant families, and interviews with parents that involve questions addressing this issue.

CHAPTER 6

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Children have the best chance to succeed when a supportive home and social network is enhanced by their educational experiences. School, as a strategic agent of the larger society, "is in a position to bridge social gaps, deliver skills, and in the process, transmit a message that gives students and families a sense of belonging, value, and worth in the larger society (p. 328)." ¹⁰⁴

6.1 Teacher Training

On a most basic level, the universities' underpreparation of teachers in addressing the needs of the immigrant population is a critical issue. The state requirements for teachers educating this group of students are very relaxed. The Texas State Board for Educator Certification does not require teachers who already hold a valid state certification to take any additional coursework in order to get an ESL endorsement. With no further formal training, any certified teacher can simply register to take the ESL certification test; and if they pass, they can be placed in a classroom teaching students who are English language learners.¹⁰⁵ As noted in the survey results, only two teacher participants out of 20 certified to teach English language learners received their certification as a part of their original undergraduate degree. That means that the rest of the ESL or bilingual certified teachers received their credentials through an alternative means.

The prescribed ESL courses required for undergraduate students who are pursuing certification as a part of their bachelor's degree are technically oriented, having to do primarily with linguistics and teaching methods. They do not thoroughly familiarize the preservice teacher

¹⁰⁴ Comer, James P. (1984). Home-school relationships as they affect the academic success of children. *Education and Urban Society*, 16(3), 323-338.

¹⁰⁵ Texas Education Agency. *Additional Certification by Exam Information*. Retrieved from <http://www.tea.state.tx.us/index2.aspx?id=5317>

on the funds of knowledge and the cultural beliefs and practices that immigrant families bring to the educational endeavor, nor to the political and social ideology that frames the orientation of U.S. schools' language policies. For example, The Southern Methodist University Bilingual and ESL Education website lists the following four courses required for their ESL teacher program: (1) Applied Linguistics; (2) Diverse Learners: Language Teaching Research; (3) Theory, and Practice; (4) and Classroom Instruction and Assessment for Language Learners. Even the course on "Diverse Learners" emphasizes teaching "strategies" and "methods" rather than the "learners," as the following excerpt from their graduate catalog reveals:

This course introduces students to different teaching approaches that help create equal educational opportunities for students from diverse racial, ethnic, social-class, and cultural groups. The course will provide strategies to make teaching more effective in increasingly diverse schools. Some sections of this course require Spanish proficiency.

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Critical theorist Donaldo Macedo (2003) disparages this "positivistic zeal that permeates all language education programs," which over-emphasizes "a facile empiricism in their research, and this, in turn, influence[s] program development based on testing and quantification of English-language acquisition." He advocates for

a course on the nature of ideology, which would help [language education] students understand the very ideology that shapes and maintains their often disarticulated approach to language analysis . . . courses in critical theory, which would enable students to make linkages with, for example, the status and prestige accorded to certain dominant languages (the language of the colonizers) and the demonization and devaluation of the so-called uncommon or minority languages (the languages of the colonized) (p. 2).

¹⁰⁶ Southern Methodist University Simmons School of Education & Human Development. *English as a Second Language (ESL) Certification*. Retrieved from <http://smu.edu/education/teachereducation/graduate/bilingual-esl/esl.asp>

In terms of the general education teachers who have Mexican-origin children in their classrooms, there is very little in undergraduate course requirements that would help them understand the language, cultural, and social adjustments facing the immigrant students and their families. This is especially the case for secondary teachers, most of whom specialize in and are certified to teach one subject only. For example, a close examination of the degree plan for a Bachelor of Arts Degree in Interdisciplinary Studies with Middle-Level (Grades 4-8) Teacher Certification (English/Language Arts/Reading/Social Studies) at the University of Texas at Arlington requires only one three-hour course on *Literacy Methods for ESL/bilingual Classrooms*, which is focused on student assessment and teaching methods. The catalog description for this course describes its content.

The rationale and implementation of various instructional methods for English language learners will be discussed. Examination of language instruction for students at different stages of development. Sheltered English instruction for the teaching of content areas will also be presented. Students will be assigned to a special language program to examine methods of instruction and modifications for language minority children.¹⁰⁷

On the other hand, the same bachelor's degree from UTA with Early Childhood - Grade 6 Teacher Certification, requires the undergraduate student to take "twelve hours from courses that focus on children, families, schools and communities, especially those concerned with diversity and learning" from the psychology, sociology, social work, or women's studies departments. This difference in preservice training for elementary and secondary teachers could possibly account for parents consistently rating elementary school teachers more open and approachable than secondary school teachers, as these EC-6 teachers may be more formally trained to understand the challenges faced by immigrant families and the resources they bring to the table.

¹⁰⁷ The University of Texas at Arlington. *Undergraduate Catalog*. Retrieved from http://wwwb.uta.edu/catalog/content/academics/course_catalog.aspx

Most importantly, an overhaul of university undergraduate programs needs to include preparation for teachers to embrace the experience of serving immigrant families — for them to develop an understanding of the challenges the immigrant families face; to cultivate a respect for the families' cultural funds of knowledge; and to gain confidence in their ability to teach linguistically and culturally different children. A part of the preservice teachers' training should incorporate subject matter that deals with the critical issues of racism, hegemony, and class. These types of critical studies should be targeted not only at teachers who are seeking certification to teach ELLs, but also at general education and secondary teachers, since it is likely these teachers will also have Mexican-origin children in their classrooms, especially in Texas. Teacher and administrator preparation programs should include well-articulated training on effective parent involvement models based on a genuine commitment to including *all* parent groups on the school governance, discipline, and curriculum processes.

In order to remediate the lack of training for teachers already in the field, and since many of the inservice teachers surveyed expressed a desire to learn more about educating Mexican origin students, it would be worthwhile to design professional development workshops on Mexican history and culture and on critical analyses of language policy and immigration history and politics in the United States. For those general education teachers or administrators who do not understand the benefits of bilingual education and the importance of families maintaining their cultural norms and ideals, training sessions may help these teachers view their immigrant families as possessing valuable resources. Interestingly, the ESEA provisions for parent involvement mandate such training:

(e) BUILDING CAPACITY FOR INVOLVEMENT- To ensure effective involvement of parents and to support a partnership among the school involved, parents, and the community to improve student academic achievement, each school and local educational agency shall educate teachers, pupil services personnel, principals, and other staff, with the assistance of parents, in the value and utility of contributions of

parents, and in how to reach out to, communicate with, and work with parents as equal partners, implement and coordinate parent programs, and build ties between parents and the school.¹⁰⁸

6.2 Cultural Knowledge

This important knowledge of the "value and utility of contributions of parents" may improve staff communication and relationships with immigrant parents. Valenzuela (1999) presents a lucid example about Mexican families' concept of "education." The term has a different meaning than the one Americans attach to it. It is more comprehensive; and its accumulation does not all have to do with formal schooling.

Educación is a conceptually broader term than its English language cognate. It refers to the family's role of inculcating in children a sense of moral, social, and personal responsibility and serves as the foundation for all other learning. Though inclusive of formal academic training, *educación* additionally refers to competence in the social world, wherein one respects the dignity and individuality of others (p. 23).

Thus, if someone refers to a Mexican child as "not educated," the parents may take the comment as a reflection of their parenting.

It would be beneficial to explore school-wide strategies to foster cultural pride for Mexican-origin students. Perhaps the suggestions of one bilingual teacher to connect Latino students with community and university level mentors of Mexican or Latin-origin and to form school-to-school partnerships with Mexican schools would promote cultural awareness for other ethnic student groups in the schools, and help Mexican-origin students build a positive self-perception.

6.3 Parent Involvement

Equipped with more cultural awareness, the faculty would have vital tools for constructive communication with parents and an appreciation for their culture. They could also

¹⁰⁸ U.S. Department of Education. (2004). *Parental involvement: Title I, Part A non-regulatory guidance*. Retrieved from www2.ed.gov/programs/titleiparta/parentinvguid.doc

use their knowledge to create a clearly delineated campus plan to involve all parent groups (including immigrants) in meaningful ways such as school governance, advocacy for responsible state level education policies, curriculum planning, creating a positive learning environment, making a school discipline plan, and determining the best use of available funds.

The schools should implement Spanish language orientations for immigrant parents that include a thorough explanation of the school's academic expectations, the benefits of bilingual education, District grading policies, state testing requirements, curriculum outlines per grade level, the District's graduation requirements, and high school plans that fulfill college entrance prerequisites . In addition, immigrant parents should know what their legal rights and their children's rights, how to advocate for their children, and how to go through the proper channels to lodge a concern. The campus administrators should take an active role in these orientations, assuring the immigrant parents that their interests and the education of their children are top priorities at their campus.

School leadership and faculty would do well to tap into families' "funds of knowledge." Some schools invite parents to read to students, or to listen to students read; but many parents have skills and abilities that could make significant contributions to the well-being of all students. For example, some parents could be asked to mentor students referred by the counselor as needing encouragement and motivational support, perhaps serving as "surrogate models and moderators for children in school whose parents do not participate directly" (Comer, 1984, p. 336). Finally, teachers should be informed about the unconventional ways Mexican families support their children's schooling — in the encouragement, the *consejos*, and the family solidarity through their collectivistic values.

6.4 Communication

It is essential to ensure that all written materials that go home with students are translated into Spanish — lunch menus, parent portal for viewing grades, board policies, etc; and that translation is offered at all events to which parents are invited. Because parents

expressed a willingness to learn English, schools should offer English language instruction during times that would be convenient for the interested parents to attend.

6.5 Academic Alignment with Prior Studies

The ordering of a student transcript from Mexico may help the teacher design suitable instruction for a new immigrant pupil, or place that student in appropriate coursework. The academic record would also indicate the grades the student earned in their school subjects, and would help teachers target any areas for intervention. Far too often, the American teacher attributes the immigrant student's academic performance to language, and assumes that the U.S. schools' compensatory language program like ESL instruction is all they need to catch up to the native students; but Mexican immigrant students are like any other student. Some of them do better in math, some of them may have special needs in reading, some of them do very well in science, or some may not have done well in any subject. In her two and a half year study at an urban high school that serves LEP students Laurie Olsen (1997) observed this phenomenon.

Schools label and serve students expressly in terms of their English language fluency . . . yet, the adolescent immigrant student population presents a complex array of academic and other needs which go far beyond language . . . There are some immigrant students with excellent previous schooling . . . others with some gaps in their schooling, and still others . . . with little prior schooling who lack basic skills as well as academic content (p. 153).

When students transfer from one U.S. school to another, the academic record is always requested from the sending school so that those records can be part of the student's official record. The practice should be the same for international students. The ordering of the student's school transcript from the local Mexican Consulate should be a regular part of the matriculation process.

6.6 Summary

For the first time in modern Texas history, Hispanic students, especially those of Mexican origin, now make up a majority of those enrolled in Texas public schools and many districts are struggling to help these students succeed academically. Although this issue is the subject of numerous studies and interventions, one area that lacks attention is the effective collaboration between American teachers and immigrant parents. Even though "educational success is valued by Mexican-origin children and their immigrant parents . . . the scarcity of educational resources that parents bring to the table means that in many cases they are not able to translate those values into effective institutional support for their children" (López & Stanton-Salazar, 2001, p. 80). Perception and knowledge gaps about culture and education between Mexican immigrant parents and the American teachers of their children have the potential to present barriers to the full participation of immigrant families in the education of their children in U.S. schools. In addition, there is often little room for the rich resources of the immigrant families in public institutions that support the dominant culture.

The bolstering of Mexican-origin students' success in the U.S. is not just for serving the interests of equal educational opportunity, nor merely for the benefit of the immigrant families. Suárez-Orozco and Suárez-Orozco (2001) "contend that the immigrants' initial positive attitudes are a remarkable resource that must be cultivated. As a society, we would be best served by harnessing those energies" (p. 2).

Schools cannot teach children well if teachers lack an understanding of their students' cultures and lives, and if they lack meaningful relationships with their families. Poor communities face problems associated with concentrated poverty and racism, but too often educators see families only as problems to be "fixed." However, poor communities

represent more than a "bundle of pathologies." They contain rich cultural traditions and social resources that have much to offer the work of schools (p. 134).¹⁰⁹

In addition to the social benefits of harnessing the positive attitudes of immigrants, our society benefits from the human capital brought by Mexican migrants from their schooling in Mexico. These immigrants are able to transfer their skills and intellectual capabilities to their children in U.S. schools (Caponi, 2011). The education of the children of Mexican immigrants in the United States can add to the human capital transferred by their parents. The success of this second generation can also contribute to the economy and social well-being of the whole community.

Properly conceived, education produces a labor force that is more skilled, more adaptable to the needs of a changing economy, and more likely to develop the imaginative ideas, techniques, and products which are critical to the processes of economic expansion and social adaptation to change.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁹ Warren, M. R. (2005). Communities and schools: A new view of urban education reform. *Harvard Educational Review*, 75(2), 133-173.

¹¹⁰ Weisbrod, Burton A. (1966). Investment in human capital. *Journal of Human Resources*, 1(1) Summer.

APPENDIX A
FOUNDATIONAL INTERVIEW WITH IMMIGRANT PARENT

A.1 Introduction

A.1.1 Background of Interviewee

Both Mrs. Martinez (pseudonym) and her husband are from a small town near San Luis Potosi, SLP, Mexico. They have three children all born in the U.S., two of whom attended Mexican schools as well as US schools. All three children are now attending an elementary school in the District. The oldest is 11 years old and will begin 5th grade ESL in the fall, changing program from 4th grade bilingual. When he was a new student in a Texas school, he was placed in an ESL classroom for kindergarten and first grade because the program administrators felt that he could be successful in an English language classroom, but he repeated first grade because he was not successful. The middle child is 8 years old and has attended a bilingual classroom since kindergarten. Her academic record has been outstanding, and she qualified for exiting the bilingual program this year in the 3rd grade by passing the state achievement exams in English with commendation and by passing the four sections of the state test of English language proficiency. However, Mrs. Martinez requested that she be placed in 4th grade bilingual so she can maintain her academic proficiency in both English and Spanish. The youngest is 5 years old and attended a bilingual half-day prekindergarten program this past year. She will be attending bilingual kindergarten in the fall.

The oldest and the middle child both attended school in Mexico for a year because the mother had to return to Mexico suddenly during the school year. The older child attended second grade in Mexico, and the younger finished kindergarten there. When the mother and the three children returned to the U.S. the following year, the older child was placed in bilingual 2nd grade and the younger one in bilingual 1st grade. I have had these two older children in my classrooms. I had the middle child in kindergarten the year they moved to Mexico, then had the older one in second grade when they moved back. I had the middle child again in second grade for the entire year.

A.1.2 Purpose of the Interview

The interview was to be conducted with a Mexican parent who has children participating in a bilingual or ESL program in a Texas school. Mrs. Martinez had the added benefit of having her children in a Mexican school so she could compare experiences in both education systems. The purpose of the interview was to gain insight for designing a survey for Mexican immigrant parents of children in Texas schools to be used in answering the questions: What educational background and school experiences do Mexican families bring with them when they move to the United States? What do Mexican immigrant parents know about the U.S. system of education? What perceptions do Mexican immigrant parents have about their children's education in U.S. schools?

A.1.3 Procedure

The interview was conducted in the family home. The entire family was present, but the father took the three children in another room so Mrs. Martinez and I could talk. My goal for conducting this open-ended interview was to have the participant feel confident and at ease in sharing anything on her mind relating to her experiences with the Texas education system, especially in comparison to her experiences as a participant in the Mexican education system -- her opinions, insights, observations, complaints, or accolades. I felt that because I had been her children's "beloved" teacher, we already had an established relationship of trust and collaboration. I told her that our interview was going to help me design a survey that would help me find out what Mexican immigrant parents think their children's teachers should know about their educational background, and that the survey would be used for my doctoral dissertation. I was careful not to insert my own opinions about the topic. I did not ask structured questions because the interview was exploratory in nature, and I did not want to frame the topic.

At first, Mrs. Martinez was a little reserved because she was not sure what I wanted to know, but loosened up as the conversation progressed. The interview lasted about one hour and fifteen minutes. I feel that there were more things she could have told me, but her children

were demanding her attention, so I excused myself with the understanding that our conversation could continue if she thought of other things she would like to tell me.

A.1.4 Background of the Interviewer

Because I am an educator, my own personal thoughts on the question of what U.S. teachers of Mexican immigrant students should know about their students' educational background center around topics of interest to teachers -- the national education structure, curriculum, pedagogy, and goals of the Mexican education system. For example, my concerns have to do with what subjects Mexican students study in their classrooms, what materials are used, how grades are determined and reported, what teaching styles and practices are familiar to the students, and what expectations the education system places on the children. I felt that if American teachers had knowledge of these academic practices, they could better understand and serve the needs of their Mexican-origin students.

A. 2 The Interview

A.2.1 Interviewee Comments on Mexican Schools

Mrs. Martinez did not direct her comments towards these academic aspects of her experiences with the Mexican education system, rather, she focused mostly on socio-cultural practices and parent involvement in the schools. Her comments are translated by the researcher, and summarized:

The Mexican family has distinct roles for parents. The father is the provider and the leader in the home. The children fear him because he maintains strict standards for the family. He demands responsible performance in school, and sees that the children adhere to the family's moral standards. The mother stays at home to make sure everything runs smoothly. She prepares a home-cooked hot meal; and the family eats together and talks about their day, including what happened at school.

In Mexican schools, the parents are obligated to be very involved. They form task teams and rotate duties to perform critical responsibilities at the school. For example, they must

make sure the school has cleaning supplies and essentials for the students, like toilet paper, as the school does not provide these items. The parent task teams do the cleaning, and children in the 4th grade and above also have cleaning tasks in the school building like washing windows, mopping floors, and cleaning bathrooms. Without the participation of the families, these things would not get done. The parents also take complete charge of school wide celebrations like *Diez y Seis de Septiembre* (Mexican Independence Day) and *Día de Los Niños* (Day of the Child). They also organize any student performances such as dance presentations.

School schedules are different in Mexico. The students attend classes for one-half day only, either in the morning or in the afternoon. The class size is large – 25 to 30 students per session. The teacher therefore has up to 50 – 60 students a day. The half-day session includes a “recess,” and requires the mother to bring a hot meal to her children during that time. Because the school day is short, it is necessary for the children to have a significant amount of homework every day in order to complete their assignments. Parents are charged with helping with homework and making sure it gets done.

All students receive their own free textbooks. These books do not have to be returned at the end of the year. The school curriculum involves a lot of reading, but the reading material comes home with the student every day. The curriculum materials are the same throughout the country. This means, for example, that every 2nd grade student in every part of the country is studying the same thing. The Department of Education even furnishes the same textbooks to private school students.

The attendance standards in Mexico are very relaxed. Families are not pressured to send their child to school every day. Also, classes may be cancelled for various reasons. The teacher may opt to call off classes on her birthday, for example. Special programs and celebration days also warrant taking the day off from instruction.

The schools hold surprise inspections once a month. The students are lined up and their uniforms and appearance are scrutinized to see if they meet standards for cleanliness. For

instance, if their nails are not cut short and clean, or if their hair is not neat and free of lice they are sent home.

In Mexico, parents have the means to get rid of ineffective teachers and administrators. If the parent groups feel that a particular teacher is lazy or cruel to the children, they organize a petition drive to oust the underperforming educator. Poor administrators can be just as easily forced out.

There is a marked distinction between the “good public schools” for the more privileged, and the schools for poor people. Any student can enroll in the “good school,” but the enrollment closes when the classes are full. If a family cannot transport their child to the school, or if they do not enroll quickly enough, the children are relegated to attendance at the poor school. The private schools in Mexico are for the very privileged. They are the most similar to U.S. schools, as they have offerings such as prepared meals, physical education, music, and art. They also offer bilingual (Spanish and English) education.

There is a type of lottery system for getting into universities. There are a fixed number of spots available in the universities. If a student passes the qualifying test to get in, he is still required to get in line for a token to secure one of the available spots. If you do not get a token, you have to wait another year to try your luck again. Mrs. Martinez commented that there a large number of foreign students taking advantage of the world class education offered at some of Mexico’s top universities, implying that those foreign students edge out the native students.

A.2.2 Comments on U.S. Schools

Many Latinos have shipwrecked their value systems as they struggle to adjust to the American lifestyle. The families are too quick to adopt U.S. culture. The father goes to work, then expects the privilege of relaxing when he gets home. He does not talk much to the children or his wife, and has abandoned his role of daily monitoring his children’s school performance. Latino mothers have also relinquished their roles as the family’s social facilitator. Making the family a hot meal and bringing everyone to the table for family time is boring to her. She may

leave her children to forage in the kitchen for a quick appetite killer, or may haphazardly throw together a meal comprised of canned or packaged food. Worse yet, the mother sacrifices her important family role in order to go to work for low wages, thinking that if she makes a few dollars, she can buy her children some name brand jeans or the latest video games. Both parents are tired from working and send the children off to watch TV or get into who knows what on the Internet.

Some immigrant families make the mistake of requesting English-only instruction for their Spanish-speaking children, thinking that their children will be smarter and fit into the mainstream culture more quickly. This is an egregious error for children who speak Spanish at home. A student should receive an education in his native language and maintain it while acquiring the new language and becoming proficient in it as well. Such an education will open doors for them when they enter the job market.

U.S. teachers have very limited knowledge of the historical events that are an important part of the Mexican culture, and that are the basis for a national identity and pride among her people. They celebrate *Cinco de Mayo* here in the United States instead of the REAL Independence Day; September the 16th. There's never a study of Mexican historical heroes such as Benito Juarez, Miguel Hidalgo or the Niños Heroes. The Mexican Revolution is taught differently here, slanted towards U.S. heroism.

Parents who want to help their children with homework sometimes find that the procedures for working out problems such as math computations are different from the way they learned in Mexico. You help out the only way you know how and hope it does not confuse the child. Then you get to a point sometimes where you can no longer help out.

Mexican immigrant parents do not know how to get involved in their child's school. They are constantly encouraged to join the PTA, but they do not know what it does and how it works. Language is a barrier to getting involved. The PTA meetings are conducted in English, so the Spanish-speaking parents do not attend. Even if their child's teacher speaks Spanish, parents

would like to be able to speak directly to the school principal, and sometimes they do not speak Spanish. There should be orientation sessions for parents in Spanish so they can learn about the school's culture, campus procedures, and academic expectations. For example, there is much talk about the state's TAKS testing, but parents do not understand much about it except that there is a lot of pressure for the children to pass it. Teachers may tell you that your child passed or did not pass the test, but do not tell you if their score was "barely" passing, or passing with distinction.

The interview concluded because the children became restless. Mrs. Martinez's parting comment was that if I wanted to do a worthy "experiment" for my dissertation, that I should conduct these orientations for Mexican immigrant parents.

APPENDIX B
SURVEY COMMENTS

B.1 Teacher Survey Comments

Twenty-four of the forty-one teacher subjects who filled out a survey responded to the following optional prompt. The abbreviations at the beginning of each comment indicates the teacher's grade level assignment, the classroom assignment, and the number of years experience that teacher has.

"Please share any other ideas for improving the education of Mexican immigrant students in the United States."

- PK-K – E – 30+ - A translator should be available and OFFERED to the parent. The teacher needs to make a special effort to reach out to the parent because they often feel that it is the teacher's job to teach and they may feel that they cannot help their child effectively.
- HS – E – 10-15 – Getting parents more involved would be a big step. Offering all information sent home in Spanish would help home/school communication.

[The District] has too few recent immigrants to offer a true "Newcomers" Campus," but we need to offer sheltered classes, especially in math, science, and social studies.
- HS – G – 5-10 – I believe a way to improve the education of Mexican immigrant students is to provide teachers professional development on how to teach immigrant students.
- HS – G – 1-5 – I think the best solution would be intensive English language courses for non-English speaking students. Understanding terminology seems to be one of the biggest barriers.
- HS – G – 5-10 – It occurs to me that the biggest struggle Mexican immigrant students have is not based on their immigrant status, but on their economic status. For example, most teachers assume students have access to things like computers, printers, and the Internet. However, that isn't always the case.

6-8 – Span. – 30+ – I think that American educators should have available of how the Mexican education system works and of how Mexican laws work.

- 1-3 – E,G – 15-20 – 1) ESL certifications should be a part of the educational classes taught to become teachers. 2) More workshops and classes on ESL/bilingual. 3) Details about how books and transcripts can be requested from Mexico. 4) How do we find out what city the child is from?
- 1-3 – B – 0 - being understanding and patient with students; providing additional help.
- 1-3 – E,G – 1-5 - I think having more knowledge of students' educational backgrounds in Mexico, and having more resources to bridge the gap they might have is key.
- PK,K – B – 20-30 - I feel that everything is being done for the education of Mexican immigrant students in the U.S. I have always had the materials I need in my classroom. When I feel I need more materials or other materials, I can always request what I need. The fact that school districts make a great effort to hire bilingual certified teachers is a great step in improving the education of immigrant students.
- HS – G – 3 – Translate all documents / have meetings with the parents of Mexican students to inform them about the norms of the educational system – all in Spanish. Have workshops for parents.
- 4-5 – E – 20-30 – I think it would be beneficial for there to be translators at PTA meetings so that parents can be more involved with their child's education. When parents are able to be more involved, then the overall educational needs of children are enhanced.
- PK,K –G – 10-15- Our bilingual students are very well motivated to learn and seldom discipline issues. Perhaps they and their parents should talk to the rest of us about how they are motivated to do so well! Let the general population know of the success of our bilingual students have with learning! I love to see students and parents encouraged to

keep both languages and cultures! We need more resources in Spanish – textbooks, benchmarks, software, etc.

- 4-5 – G – 5-10 – Try to increase parental involvement, encourage parents to enroll students in school as soon as possible, give parents detailed information on programs that are available so they can select the most appropriate for their child.
- 1-3 – G – 5-10 – I believe that we should give students, parents and families everything to make all transitions smoother. Resources for education should be made available and there should be one department devoted to that. This should include “community” help; getting set up with electric, for example, offering assistance on all forms. If ELL families qualify for aid of any kind, we should do all we can to support them in that way.
- PK-5, HS – G – 15-20 – Needed resources: Workshop on campus for cultural background. Language for everyday situations throughout the year or in summer to help us prepare for next year. Many of the other P.E. teachers have no background in the culture/language. Translating, or knowing what to expect, or how to deal with the children or their parents is not known, or difficult. Every teacher should have common Spanish language workshops during the summer to help prepare for the new year.
- 6-8 – G (gifted, Pre-AP) – 20-30 – I don’t have an answer for this – I just wish that we could find a way to focus on all students’ strengths and showcase them somehow. I believe that building confidence, self-esteem, and bonds between teachers and students makes a huge difference in academic success (or failure). Society, as a whole needs to embrace all youth and do what’s best for them.
- 4-5 – G – 5-10 – As an educator, I feel that Mexican students should receive a quality education. Furthermore, meaningful professional development will prepare educators that do not have experience teaching ESL students. Moreover, due to the increasing number of Mexican immigrants entering the U.S., an ESL course should be entered into the graduation requirements at both graduate and the undergraduate levels This

process will lessen the apprehension that some educators feel when entering the classroom with ESL students as a novice.

- 4-5 – B – 10-15 – (1) School-to-school partnerships with Mexican and American schools (2) Offering bilingual classes into 8th grade (3) Having community and University level mentors of Mexican or Latin-origin come talk to students on a periodic basis.
- 4-5 – G – 5-10 - There need to be more classes available to help introduce the parents and students to the educational system in America. Teachers need to be trained and taught on the educational differences, so they can meet the educational needs of the students.
- 1-3 – E – 1-5 – Even with the ESL kids, I think they should have more contact with a teacher that speaks fluent English and Spanish. Even though I am trained to teach them English academics, I have no way of helping them improve any of their Spanish language. *Other comment in response to item # 27 (“Teachers with Mexican immigrant students should be given training on the Mexican education system.”):* Yes and no – The reason is this is America. Even though our system may be different, it is our system. If you chose to come to stay here, then you should adapt too. As an educator, I am responsible for locating gaps for all kids. I don’t think training on the Mexican education system would be beneficial.
- PK,K – B – 10-15 – get rid of standardized tests – send non-bilingual teachers to some bilingual trainings so they understand better why we do some things – also, send parents, school volunteers, and especially politicians who vote on educational issues – have key-pals from Mexico – give teachers more control over curriculum at local school levels – raise teachers’ salaries.
- 1-3 – E,G – 10-15 – Districts should offer more ESL/Bilingual staff developments. Classes should be offered for parents who do not speak English

B.2 Parent Survey Comments

Twenty-eight of the forty-one parent subjects who filled out a survey responded to the following prompt: *“Please share your ideas for improving the education of your children.”* The numbers and letters before each comment indicate the grade their child was in at the time of the survey, and the number of years the parent has lived in the United States.

- 6 – 37 - Teachers should be able to spend more time with students one on one.
- B – 13 - Yo estoy contenta con la forma en que el programa bilingüe ha ayudado a mis hijos y a mí. Claro que hablo un poco de inglés y así se me hace más fácil poder me comunicar con el personal escolar.

I am content with the way the bilingual program has helped my children and me. Of course, I speak a little English, and that makes it easier to communicate with school personnel.

- P – 11 - Que como padres nos envolveremos en los estudios de los hijos; que encuentre maneras de tener el PTA en español. Más conocimiento de cómo se lleva la educación en los Estados Unidos. Que haya clases bilingües para el mejoramiento de niños en el futuro.

That as parents, we would involve ourselves in our children's studies; that there would be a way to hold PTA meetings in Spanish. There should be more knowledge on how the U.S. education system is structured. There should be bilingual classes in order to improve the future of the children.

- 5 – 8 – Me gustaría que tuvieran talleres de arte para crear cosas como cosas que salen de cosas recicladas para que se enseñen a cuidar más nuestro planeta y que sepan la importancia de cuidarla.

I would like for there to be art workshops that would show our children how to create things from recycled materials so they can learn about taking better care of our Earth's resources, and that they would know that importance of taking care of it.

- B – 5 – Que haiga más maestros que hablen español para poder comunicarnos mejor con ellos en cuestión de la educación de los hijos.
That there would be more teachers that speak Spanish in order to better communicate with them with regard to the education of my children.
- 9 – 7 – La educación y enseñanza es muy buena, pero es mucha tarea en inglés que a veces no puedo ayudarle a hacerla y eso me preocupa.
The education and teaching are very good, but there is too much homework in English, and I sometimes cannot help my child; and that concerns me.
- 5 – 8 – Que me den ideas de cómo ayudar a mis hijos para que sean mejor en sus trabajos y para ayudar en sus tareas. Yo les voy a ayudar en lo que pueda y que les tengan paciencia con los niños.
That I would get ideas on how to help my children so they can improve their school work and so I would be able to help with their homework. I am going to help them in any way I can; and that the (teachers) would have patience with the children.
- 6 – 10 Que haiga más maestras bilingües.
That there would be more bilingual teachers.
- 9 – 15 - Que los maestros no sean favoritistas solamente con algunos niños que tienen un nivel más avanzados que otros. Pues también que los padres involucrarnos más en las escuelas de los hijos.
That the teachers would not show favoritism to only the children that are more advanced than the others. Also, that the parents would be more involved in their children's school.
- 9 – 12 – Para mí me gusta la manera que educan a mi hija. Su maestra educa completamente en inglés, ya que mi hija tendrá el mismo nivel que un niño estadounidense.

As for me, I like the way my daughter is being educated. Her teacher teaches completely in English, which allows for my daughter to achieve the same level of education as U.S. children.

- 9 – 8 – Estoy muy satisfecha con el programa de educación del distrito. Creo que depende de mucho del interés del alumno y de su inteligencia para aprovechar de su educación.

I am very satisfied with the District's education program. I think it's very dependent on a student's interest and intelligence that helps him get the most out of his education.

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I am very satisfied with the District's education program. I think it's very dependent on a student's interest and intelligence that helps him get the most out of his education.

- P – 11 – Pienso que la estrategia que usan es la correcta.

I think that the (education) strategy that is being used is the correct one.

- University – 15 – Poner atención extrema a niños con bajo rendimiento académico y enfocarse en ellos y no permitir que los problemas de otros niños los molesten en la escuela porque esto con lleva a que los niños no les guste asistir a la escuela y que los niños que son problema poner castigos más severos para que los papas de ellos tomen cartas en el asunto y hasta fueran multados para que se acaben los niños “bullies” en las escuelas y la escuela sea una área segura para todos los niños y su nivel de atención. Solo este en los estudios y tengan un nivel elevado en sus calificaciones y formar una asociación mas apegada entre padres y maestros.

Give intensive attention to low-achieving students and focus on them and do not allow the problems of other children distract them in school because this can cause the children to not like to come to school. Give problem students more severe punishment;

notifying parents as to their behavior, and even charging them fines so that bullies will no longer be a problem in the schools. The school should be a safe place for all children and a place where they can focus on their school work and get good grades. Create a more collaborative relationship between parents and teachers.

- 9 – 28 – Yo creo que este país es el mejor para la educación de mis hijos pero con la disciplina que existe en los países de origen de uno sería bastante mejor. Para mí, yo creo que de PreK hasta el 5 están bien las escuelas pero de 6 al 12, muchos de los estudiantes se quedan sin terminar por no poder sobrellevar a los compañeros. Y allí es donde yo pienso que es la falta de disciplina en las escuelas.

I think that this country is better in terms of educating my children, but it would be much better with the discipline standards of our countries of origin. In my opinion, I think the schools are good from grades PreK to 5, but 6th – 12th grade students often drop out because they cannot overcome to negative influences of their peers. That is where I blame the schools for not having a better discipline plan.

- 11 – 9 – Que cuando haiga juntas con PTA haiga más participación en español o traductores.

When there are PTA meetings, there should be more participation in Spanish, or translators.

- 3 – 9 – Que hubiera clases de inglés para los padres para así poder ayudar a mis hijos con sus tareas y que hubiera más días en que podamos compartir tiempo mi hija, la maestra, y yo.

That there be English classes for parents so that I can better help my children with their homework and that there be more (conference) days where I can spend some time with my daughter and her teacher.

- 9 – 16 – Me gustaría que les enseñaran mas sobre las culturas mexicanas como las fiestas de Navidad y las festividades más importantes de México, y el nombre del presidente de México.

I would like for them to teach (the children) more about Mexican culture like Christmas celebrations and the most important celebrations in Mexico – and the name of Mexico's president.

- 9 – 2 months – Involucrar a los padres en actividades, en las que se integren al grupo de estudiantes donde los padres puedan aportar conocimientos y experiencias de la cultura mexicana y también se involucren y conozcan la cultura norteamericana. Ya que de esta manera se haría un intercambio cultural, que considero seria complementario para todos – maestros, alumnos, y padres de familia. Una barrera que nos limita a veces a interactuar al 100% en la escuela es el idioma, pues si uno no habla inglés se siente cohibido. Esto también debemos mejorar.

Involve parents in activities that are aimed at students where the parents can share experiences and knowledge about Mexican culture and also be involved in learning about North American culture. This would create an intercultural exchange which I think would be beneficial to all – teachers, students and parents. A barrier which sometimes impedes us from being 100% involved in the school is language. If you don't speak English, you feel inhibited. We should improve this situation as well.

- 8, Graduate School – 24 – (1) Que las escuelas tengan más programas para ayudar a los padres de lengua española para poder apoyar a los estudios de nuestros hijos. (2) Que las escuelas ofrezcan más programas para poder aprender inglés a los padres.
(1) The schools should have more programs for Spanish-speaking parents so they can support the education of their children. (2) The schools should offer more programs for parents to learn English.

- 6 – 17 – Que haya más comunicación, los maestros con los padres de familia para saber cómo trabajan los niños en la clase y nos den a saber cómo se portan en el salón nuestros hijos, y nos den ideas los maestros para poder ayudarlos y apoyarlos a que salgan adelante y continúen con el estudio y no se metan en drogas y sean unos hijos de provecho y tengan un mejor trabajo cuando sean grandes y un buen futuro y que también haiga mas actividades.

That there be more communication between parents and teachers so we can be aware of how our children are performing in class and to let us know how they are behaving; and for the teachers to give us ideas in order to help and support them so they may have success and pursue their studies, and not get involved in drugs. That our children will take advantage of their opportunities and have better jobs and a good future when they grow up. There should also be more activities.

- 4 – H.S. – 32 – Mi idea sería que nuestros hijos no olviden el español, que pudieran seguir sus tradiciones, saber de sus costumbres, poder hablar, escribir el español. Todo esto servirá para dominar los dos idiomas para un mejor futuro.

My idea would be that our children would not forget their Spanish language, that they would maintain their traditions, know their customs, and be able to speak and write in Spanish. All of this would help them have mastery of two languages so they can have a better future.

- 9 – 5 – Que deberían darnos información para involucrarnos un poco más con la educación de nuestros hijos. Darnos ideas para que nuestros hijos trabajen un poco más en la casa sobre temas que vieron en la escuela para que practiquen más.

They should give us more information so we get more involved with the education of our children. Give us ideas so our children can study more at home about the topics covered in school. This would give them more practice.

- 9 – 8 – Yo quiero que mi hijo ponga atención en sus clases para que él aprenda que él tiene la oportunidad de aprender y que tenga sus mejores estudios y que ponga mucho empeño todos los días de clases y que se porte bien con sus maestros, etc.

I want my son to pay attention in class so he can learn that he has the opportunity to have the best education, and that he would put forth his best effort every day in school, and that he behave with his teachers, etc.

- 6 – 8 – Sería interesante que nuestros niños aprendieran a tener metas tanto que a corto plazo como a largo plazo y los talleres de papás para aprender a ayudar a los niños con sus tareas en mi opinión serian muy interesantes aunque me gustaría poderles transmitir la importancia de dichos talleres a mis compañeros padres de familia...

It would be interesting for our children to have short range as well as long range goals, and to have parent workshops so we can help our children with their homework would be, in my opinion, very interesting, although I would like to emphasize the importance of such workshops to my fellow parents...

- 3 – 9 – que hagan lo mejor que sea para los niños.

...that they would do the best for the children

- 6 – 20 – que los maestros sean más amables con los papas y también que expliquen bien sus clases a los alumnos y que no sean racistas no porque seamos mexicanos o no entendamos inglés no merezcamos “respeto” creo que nos merecemos el mismo “respeto” que los blancos o los morenos.

that the teachers would be friendlier with the parents and also that they would explain the schoolwork better to their students, and they would not be racist. Just because we are Mexicans, or we don't understand English, doesn't mean that we don't deserve respect. I think we deserve the same respect as whites and blacks.

- 9 – 15 – Creo que sería bueno enseñar a nuestros compañeros padres a involucrarse en la educación de nuestros niños pues tal parece que aunque tengamos la capacidad de ayudarles y enseñarles, no tomamos el tiempo para hacerlo.

I think we would do well to teach our fellow parents to become involved in the education of our children, as it seems that even though we have the capacity to help them, we don't take the time to do so.

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BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

Uvaldina Montoya Janecek is an educator with experience teaching students of all ages, from prekindergarten to adult. She has been a bilingual early childhood teacher and a college instructor of education courses and ESL classes for adults. In addition to teaching, Uvaldina has a commitment to leading organizations that serve students who have had challenges succeeding in traditional school settings. Serving as an administrator at El Centro College, she was the director a college awareness project of the U.S. Department of Education which sought to increase the college participation rate of secondary public school students whose parents never attended college. Uvaldina also worked as an early childhood specialist in a large urban public school district with a majority of low-income, minority students.

The commitment to the success of children and youth spilled over into community involvement in organizations such as Camp Fire Boys and Girls and World Changers mission trips to high poverty areas. Uvaldina was also involved in efforts to establish some of the first community health clinics in underserved areas of Dallas County.

Uvaldina plans to continue working on behalf of students who need an advocate, either through educational research or through the preparation of professionals who work with these students.