2016 CHAMPION OF CHILDREN REPORT
Voices of Latino Boys
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INTRODUCTION

“The increase of Latino youth not only fuels America’s overall growth, but also re-energizes our aging population and stands to revitalize economic growth. As our nation’s future voters, taxpayers, and consumers, today’s Latino children are poised to shape our country’s political and economic landscape. Investing wisely in this vibrant group of youth and nurturing their potential will strengthen our country’s prosperity and global standing.”  

We are at a unique moment in history. Our country is changing at a pace unfamiliar to most of us, as we go through a period of demographic transitioning that will impact our country and communities for the next century.

BY 2035, IT IS PROJECTED THAT ONE IN THREE CHILDREN WILL BE LATINO.

Although many people believe the shift is due to immigration rates, it actually stems from the higher fertility rates of Hispanics coupled with lower fertility rates of Whites. Still, how we respond now to the new challenges of racial and ethnic diversity will determine the future social and economic health of central Ohio. This is a demographic ‘pipeline’ issue that will not go away anytime soon. We can see evidence of this shift in our communities as well. In Ohio’s public schools, 4.6% of the student body was Hispanic in the 2014-2015 school year, up from 2.7% in 2008-2009.

In fact, research is finding that when demographic shifts such as those we are experiencing are made salient, these can give rise to fear and anxiety. However, this transformation can also be seen as an opportunity to take our values of diversity and equality to the next level, to make meaningful, inclusive changes to the way we structure our systems, our communities, and our relationships with one another.

Over the past few years, the Champion of Children reports have been steadily making the case that here in central Ohio, we also need to be considering these changes. We’ve sought to galvanize advocates, officials, parents, and anyone who cares about the health and well-being of our home tomorrow to care about the health and well-being of our children, today. Accordingly, we must pay attention to the disparities that manifest in our communities. In 2015, we looked at boys of color more broadly, exploring how our more nuanced understandings of neighborhoods and stress can explain the racial disparities we see in our community. But we know that the data does not do a very good job of capturing the full experience of local Latino children and their families, and that this is a story that must be told if we are to design effective strategies for lifting all of our children to success.

In last year’s report, we were not able to as fully highlight the disparities facing Latino boys in our community because the data and research wasn’t readily available. This year, we are rectifying those limitations by gaining first-hand accounts of challenges, assets, and strengths of Latino boys and their families. In this year’s report, we share the experiences and commentary from parents, children, and organization leaders on the unique assets and challenges our Latino neighbors face. We engaged with 38 parents and 58 students who ranged in grades from kindergarten through high school. We hope our findings inspire central Ohioans to reach out, to meet the transformation of our community and our country with optimism.

Paying attention to our neighborhoods and conditions

Opportunity-rich neighborhoods support positive child development, while resource-challenged or opportunity-poor neighborhoods inhibit it. Decades of research have shown that neighborhood conditions and child development are intricately intertwined. Neighborhoods play a powerful role in determining children’s peers, the conditions under which their family members live and work, the quality of the air they breathe, the strength of schools they attend, and the environments in which they move and play. A 2008 study shows that Latino children are 12 times more likely than White children to be both poor and living in an impoverished neighborhood.

Paying attention to toxic stress and trauma

Growing up in distressed neighborhoods is not just an issue of poverty. Neighborhoods in distress erect formidable barriers to positive child development, producing stressors that can profoundly impair children’s social and skills growth, psychological and physiological health, and capacity to learn and thrive. Our earliest experiences in life shape our brains for the rest of our lives. Eighty percent of the brain is organized and developed in the first four years of life.
Positive, predictable experiences aid that development, while consistently stress-producing experiences impair it. Childhood environments operate in systemic and reciprocal ways. For example, environmental conditions (e.g., inadequate housing or failing schools) can limit choices, limited choices can create stress, stress can impair health and functioning, impaired functioning can inhibit opportunities to thrive in school, lack of work or a sound educational footing can limit access to health-promoting environments, and on and on. These environments also impact the functioning of primary relationships in children’s lives, in healthy or unhealthy ways.

Sadly, our opportunity analysis of Franklin County reveals that 51% of Latino and 63% of Black children live in distressed neighborhoods (i.e. low opportunity neighborhoods). In contrast, only 14% of Asian children and 26% of White children live in the county’s low opportunity neighborhoods. The evidence of revitalization and growth is all around us in Columbus, and yet, one thing remains clear: many low-income children of color (primarily African American and Latino) are concentrated in the neighborhoods that not only lack basic opportunity structures such as fresh food, quality schools, affordable housing and health care, but also have the potential to literally impair their growth and development.

One clear indication that things are not working in a functional, healthy way is child educational outcomes. While in-school factors are critical, we must also acknowledge the powerful effects that out-of-school factors have on educational success, factors such as family stability, low-stress environments, and economic well-being. Research demonstrates that family and neighborhood factors account for approximately 60% of educational success. We also consistently find that males of color continue to be left behind by our educational systems. Nationally, Latino males have a high school graduation rate of 65%, compared to 80% for White males. Only 12% of Latino males hold a bachelor’s degree, compared to 16% of Black males and 32% of White males. Such startling statistics indicate that a country, we are not doing a good job of creating healthy living and learning environments for our boys of color.

We are not doing so well here in Ohio either. The recent and substantial slide in Ohio’s national educational rankings—from fifth in the nation to 23rd—is a sobering reminder that we must remain ever vigilant and dedicated to how the most innocent and vulnerable among us—our children—are faring. In the 2012-2013 cohort, Ohio had a Latino/White high school graduation gap of 22%, one of the highest in the nation. Ohio also records alarming disparities in out-of-school suspension rates: 8.3% for Latino males compared to 4.4% for White males. Finally in Ohio, NAEP scores show that only 22% of Latino males were at or above 8th grade reading proficiency, compared to 38% of White males. For 8th grade math, 28% of Latino males we at or above.

Remarking on Ohio’s slide in national educational achievement rankings, Senate Education Chairwoman Peggy Lehner noted, “Until we figure out how to educate kids in poverty, it will continue to get worse.” But for our schools, it’s not just issues of poverty, severe as they are in some cases, but many educators are also faced with educating children from immigrant households where English may not be the first language spoken at home, and parents struggle to help their children navigate school problems, as described in stories shared here. In Ohio, more than 26% of current Hispanic students have limited English proficiency.

Why focus on Latino boys?

A small but growing body of research is exploring the differential outcomes for Latino males in our educational system to better understand why Latino males are “vanishing from higher education.” For example, in 2004, 28% of Latinos 16 to 24 years old were high school dropouts, compared with 18.5% of Latinas, 7% of White males, and 13.5% of Black males. Latino males are more highly concentrated in low-wage, low-skill positions, such as construction, manufacturing or retail. And a 2007 report documents that 20% of Latino males between the ages of 18 and 34 years, prime college years, are incarcerated.
Early educational experiences may, in part, explain such dismal outcomes as Latino boys progress through the system. Research shows that a child has established a pattern of learning that influences the course of his school career as early as the third grade. But Latino boys are more likely to experience disconnection from school at a young age, as a result of a mismatch between learning styles and instruction, teacher misperceptions of “boy code” behavior, and disproportionate disciplinary sanctions. Latino boys in our focus groups spoke about being pressured and penalized for speaking Spanish, or making English language mistakes, in the classroom. One boy stated “…kids assume that a kid from another country can’t speak English, isn’t intelligent…” Others further voiced concerns about the way other classmates treated them because of their appearance or ability to speak English. This insecurity about speaking English trickled into the households, where many Latino boys in the focus groups expressed the need for them to be able to teach their families English.

When asked about additional challenges faced because they are Latino, one boy responded “…you have to learn to translate for your family” whereas another one stated “learning two languages at the same time is really hard for us.” It also matters whether boys are born in the US to immigrant parents, or are immigrants themselves. For those who immigrated, some studies show that the age at which Latino teens migrate to the US and the country that initially educated the teen are factors strongly linked to the foreign-born school dropout rate. On the other hand, foreign-born teens who arrive as younger children have improved chances of matriculating through the US education system by comparison. Other research notes that Latino adolescents possess unique developmental patterns that establish resiliency, strength and good mental health as they become adults.

In addition to structural barriers to Latino male educational achievement, research suggests there may be added demands or expectations reflective of Latino patriarchal and cultural norms. For example, studies document how young Latino males “are raised with the expectations that they are to be family-oriented, strong, brave, hardworking and family contributors. The expectations to work and, contribute to the family, and assume traditional gender roles remain a predominant characteristic of the young Latino male experience.” These expectations may place pressure on Latino males to join the workforce earlier than their Latina female counterparts, and bypass going on to college. However, in our focus groups, the emphasis by parents and boys alike was on continuing education and career pathways. Some boys did note, though, a desire to get a job to help their struggling families, especially those in single-parent households.

Taking account of the full experience of our Latino community

Too many of our Latino families live in the shadows, cobbling together what limited resources they can find in an effort to provide more opportunity to their children, withstand discrimination or exploitation, as political rhetoric is increasingly vitriolic. As one organization leaders point out, “Some families fear trying to access public assistance and resources for fear of deportation or legal trouble. They are also less likely to advocate for themselves when they are being treated unfairly due to fear of legal trouble or deportation.” Our focus groups suggest this occurs regardless of legal status.

We must remedy this lack of knowledge because change is at our doorstep. Nationally, half of babies born today are non-White; change is happening from within the country.

In 1990, the Hispanic population represented only 1% of the share of population in Franklin County; in 2011, that share was 5%. By 2025, the Latino population in Ohio is expected to increase by 74%. We cannot afford to wait and play ‘catch up’ or we risk marginalizing an entire generation of Americans. We must understand how today’s fertility patterns can automatically drive tomorrow’s poverty and economic inequality, if we do not do things differently and provide more opportunities to all. Today, nearly 40% of American babies are born to a mother with two or more disadvantages (low-income, unmarried, low education) but for babies of color, 55% are born to a mother with multiple disadvantages. Here in our community, nearly 40% of Latino boys under the age of 5 are living in poverty in Franklin County (see Table 1). We must ensure that our systems—from political to education to health care to employment—are equipped to effectively and appropriately handle an increasingly diverse population. In our survey of organization leaders, one pointed out that “demographics have social and economic implications. This increase in growth will challenge communities and businesses to understand this segment of the population. To better serve them from education, social service, and health industries, or to engage and retain them as employees or product and service customers.”

But we also need these stories because we are missing out on incredible resources within the Latino community—we are missing out on their passion and resilience and care. We heard from families who left everything behind to come to the United States with the single objective of giving their children opportunities they could not get anywhere else in the world. Many struggle to navigate daunting and unfamiliar systems, work multiple jobs that may be dangerous or low-wage and low opportunity, and face daily discrimination and misconceptions about who they are and where they are from, and yet, they keep going. This determination and ethic, the unfailing belief in their aspirations and hopes for their children—these are not things to fear. These are things to build from, to grow stronger in, as a community. Indeed, parents in our focus groups noted that they are a community that cares, a community that has a lot to offer but they are not engaged with or invited to participate. Instead, parents noted that it is assumed that they don’t have anything to offer or share.

TABLE 1: BREAKDOWN OF MALE CHILDREN OF LATINO OR HISPANIC ORIGIN IN HOUSEHOLDS WITH INCOME BELOW THE POVERTY LEVEL

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Group</th>
<th>United States</th>
<th>Ohio</th>
<th>Franklin County</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total Male: 5 years</td>
<td>515,746</td>
<td>748,786</td>
<td>1,283</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Male: 10 years</td>
<td>2,945,964</td>
<td>3,890</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Male: 15 years</td>
<td>4,047,965</td>
<td>5,187</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Male: 20 years</td>
<td>9,181,126</td>
<td>8,866</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage in Poverty Male: 5 years</td>
<td>35.0%</td>
<td>39.6%</td>
<td>34.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage in Poverty Male: 10 years</td>
<td>32.2%</td>
<td>36.0%</td>
<td>35.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage in Poverty Male: 15 years</td>
<td>29.8%</td>
<td>29.1%</td>
<td>30.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage in Poverty Male: 20 years</td>
<td>29.0%</td>
<td>30.5%</td>
<td>27.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage in Poverty Male: 25 years</td>
<td>27.6%</td>
<td>27.6%</td>
<td>19.1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: U.S. Census Bureau’s 2014 5-year estimate from the American Community Survey.
UNLOCKING THE ASSETS AND ASPIRATIONS OF OUR LATINO COMMUNITY

Latino parents are no different than other parents: they want more for their children than they themselves had. As one parent remarked, “If something is beneficial for our kids and for their future, we will be there!” And yet, the stakes may be higher, as parents have to deal with things many families, in particular White, more affluent families, take for granted. For example, Latino families may also have to re-establish their families in a new country, struggling to translate migration into opportunity, navigating not just systems (school systems, health care systems, etc.) but doing this with the additional complexities of legalization and documentation; or while dealing with the biases and assumptions people may make about their legal status, whether or not they are in fact immigrants. And these biases and assumptions can have real world impact; parents spoke about having to wait hours to be seen by a doctor because staff assumed they did not speak English and would need translation.

Many parents in the groups spoke of their sole focus on getting their children into college and into professional careers. Parents shared that, although jobs are very important, preparation is also very important and education comes first, “it leaves the door open for the future.” One parent noted, “I paint shirts at work and look at how I’m coming here [shows stains on arms]. I don’t want this for them. I want them to be a teacher, or doctor.”

Indeed, parents were laser-focused on ensuring as many opportunities for their children as possible, including taking multiple jobs, some of which are dangerous, usually with low pay or lower skilled than what they are actually qualified for. For example, several parents shared that they were forced to work minimum wage jobs due to their low English language proficiency, and that they are not able to work at the same level of expertise nor earn the same level of wages in Ohio as they would in their home country because of language challenges.

Parents also noted that Latinos are hard workers who contribute meaningfully to central Ohio and the economy. Even those who are not documented pay taxes and give back. Many parents spoke of being grateful for whatever they have—“We just want to work and make money and we are satisfied with what we get. We work hard and don’t complain even when we’re making minimum wage.” In fact, Latinos have historically had some of the highest labor force participation rates in the country; unfortunately, they are too often concentrated in low wage jobs, that offer little protection, benefits, or upward mobility.32

There is a larger sense of and commitment to “community” within the Latino community as well. Many parents spoke of a moral imperative for their children, wanting them to grow into moral, responsible, caring adults, parents want to see their children prosper such that they are role models for other kids and people. The strength of social ties—family, friends, and faith—within the Latino community was also noted by organization leaders. Research shows how the value of familismo in the Latino community—the strong identification and attachment to immediate and extended family—can serve as a “strong social network and form of social capital that can facilitate lifelong learning” and educational achievement.33 The familismo can function as a buffer against otherwise demoralizing systems. The Latino community is one rich in social capital (that is, relationships based in trust, reciprocity, and understanding).

The value of such ties is often underestimated. But research shows that increasing our social capital and our capacity for social empathy are keys to living a healthy and happy life, leading to more prosocial behaviors.34 And yet, too often parents felt disengaged by the broader community. Parents noted “We are passionate, that is our nature. We get involved with our heart. We get involved as a community. Sometimes we are ignored. We want to be listened to as a community.” One parent shared an experience with a sport booster meeting—“Why don’t you reach out to the community? Why didn’t you mention it? Donations? We are a community that helps out. The booster coordinator ignored me.” Another shared that “When we are asked and feel welcome, we support the schools and contribute.”

IN FRANKLIN COUNTY, WE HAVE EXPERIENCED A 244% INCREASE IN THE NUMBER OF LATINO SINGLE-PARENT HOUSEHOLDS BETWEEN 2000-2013
**UNIQUE CHALLENGES EXPERIENCED BY THE LATINO COMMUNITY**

The Champion of Children reports from the last three years document the challenges experienced by our communities of color within Franklin County. We noted challenges such as high poverty rates, food insecurity, poor health outcomes, educational disparities, housing instability, among others. Here we share the experiences of Latino parents gleaned from our focus groups. We did not ask for parents or boys to clarify their immigration status, whether they were first or second generation, and so on, in order to keep our focus groups a safe place for sharing. Yet, whether immigrants or U.S. citizens, each of these communities share many of the same challenges (such as poverty and discrimination) while also facing slightly differing opportunities (for example, documentation issues) as a result of immigration status, which is explored below.

**Navigating the future**

Many families can attest to the time and resources needed to merely plan for college, let alone successfully enroll and graduate. But too many Latino families are not afforded the information and time required for such an important milestone. Parents shared that their children would be the first generation to go to college in their families, not only were fiscal resources needed, but also translated information so parents could understand the college enrollment process. This is a need that organization leaders see as well. One leader responded that we need to be “going into communities that are predominately Hispanic/Latino and providing information in Spanish, access to resources, and education on government assistance.” Parents’ overriding hope for their children was to go on to college and secure a successful career, and yet, they spoke of many struggles in accessing the resources needed, such as scholarship information, application assistance, and so on. These challenges in navigating higher education pathways are well-documented in the research as well.26

The barriers are daunting, and yet, parents’ determination is unwavering: “I tell my son, who is undocumented, to keep up with his studies and graduate and go to college. He asks us, but how? You only make minimum wage, so how can you afford to send me to college? We tell him just to do his best in school and graduate, and we’ll do our best to get him further.”

**Language barriers among parents**

One of the biggest challenges parents noted was language barriers, for themselves and for their children. For example, some parents shared that their children struggle with school as they seek to improve their English. At the same time, however, parents’ English-speaking skills are weaker than their children’s skills, and at times parents felt that they were not well-prepared to help their children work through school-related and academic problems. One parent shared that “Most of my kids are struggling because they have really low grades. But there are two problems: I work all the time and I don’t understand English.” Another shared that “I think when they are little they are a little confused with English at school and Spanish at home. We have a hard time helping them in English. We want to learn the language.” At times, parents noted, it may seem there is a barrier between parents and kids because of language.

Some parents also noted how their poor English language skills create limitations for job opportunities, and, in turn, limit their income and their access to resources. For example, a few mentioned that their job options were restricted to warehouses, cleaning houses, and hotel

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positions, all of which were minimum wage jobs. Two mothers shared they had trained skills developed in their native country, but their weak English language proficiency and a lack of a social security card created employment barriers that trapped them into minimum wage jobs.

This sense of being “trapped” was not just an issue of income and resources. Parents shared how low opportunity jobs and the number of hours they must work to make ends meet can trap parents into a lifestyle that is not to their liking, one where they are not able to support their family as desired, where they miss out on family time and can’t be there for their children.

Many parents further noted the translation challenges experienced within educational and health care settings, and that additional and more accurate interpreters are needed. They noted that many organizations do not offer appropriate translations, or that people make assumptions of language spoken based on appearance. Indeed, Spanish is not the universal language of all Latinos and there is not just one dialect. Organization leaders noted the need for more culturally competent organizations serving Latino children and families.

Documentation and the uncertainty and stress that go along with it

Our 2014 report on stress highlighted that one of the most important resources for success for children is parental resilience. We documented how mentally “taxing” poverty is and how “parenting in poverty might be rendered more difficult as a result of the increased cognitive load required of parents who have to juggle many balls at once and put out fire after fire.”36 Within our community, large numbers of Latino boys are growing up in poverty (see table 2).37 Last year we also discussed how single parent households may be even more disadvantaged in terms of resources and time.

In Franklin County, we have experienced a 244% increase in the number of Latino single-parent households between 2000-2013, far outpacing any other group (see table 3).38 In 2013, 37% of Latino children lived with only one parent, compared to 15% of White children.39

Now add to this challenge the stress of not only navigating unfamiliar systems but also a culture and language that are unfamiliar, and, in some cases, the fear of deportation, and we can begin to understand how pervasive stress must be in the daily lives of too many Latino families—an unrelenting hum in the background. As our 2014 report showed, this is the definition of corrosive stress. While we do not know the exact population of undocumented Latinos in central Ohio, the impacts of the challenges faced daily are clear. Indeed, when asked what needs of Latino families are currently not being met, organization leaders noted legal status challenges as equally important as education and wealth-building needs.

The fear of deportation can be subtle but powerful. In 2009, almost 60% of Latino children in the United States lived in families in which at least one parent is an immigrant.40 For children living in such homes, especially if the parent is undocumented, organization leaders noted legal status challenges as equally important as education and wealth-building needs.

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The uncertainty surrounding legal status and documentation can translate into actual harm for children and their families. One parent shared, “When we went to the hospital or specialist for appointments to get help, we were told that not much can be done for my son because of his legal status. We were told that he wasn’t a priority.” Another parent shared, “My son was diagnosed with ADD, but because he is undocumented, he never got the services he needed.” Still another shared, “In my family, my son is in accelerated classes. He is doing very well, but is very worried as he was not born in this country. What will his future be? This is one of the realities Hispanics are facing. There are a lot of capable kids – intelligent, have skills and excel in school. But their undocumented status is holding them back.” And it results in a self-perpetuating cycle of disadvantage. “If parents want to get a loan for their kids, if they don’t have credit, they can’t get a loan. And then everything falls behind. If you don’t have legal status, you can’t get credit. And then the cycle continues.”

These stories reveal the sheer force of will and determination required of parents to realize their aspirations for their children. As one parent shared, “We need to know we have a future here in this country so we can take advantage of all it has to offer us.”

Explicit and implicit biases and “looking” illegal

Discrimination against Latinos seems especially pronounced, as evidenced by today’s political climate. It was no surprise that here locally, Latino families and children noted the experiences of discrimination and erroneous assumptions. Racial discrimination was clearly cited as a hindrance to thriving in central Ohio. One parent remarked that Latinos are “working daily against a scenario of prejudice. Not for me, but for my sister, my friends who don’t know the language and don’t know how to express their feelings. Sometimes you go to an office or a store and you face an attitude. It’s everyday stuff.” Many parents remarked on the feeling of being invisible, of being ignored: “We are not acknowledged in offices. We don’t get good treatment at appointments, but we don’t say anything, because we’re humble.” Another parent shared that “because my kids are Hispanic, doors are closed. There are barriers. We need more opportunities—they are difficult to find.”

Some parents noted experiencing discrimination in their work environment due to the perception of their immigration status. One parent felt that other co-workers perceived her to be an “illegal” immigrant, another how “discrimination occurs because of the way I look. I look like an illegal person; people assume that I am an illegal immigrant, and I get treated that way. I realize these views about immigration are wrong, but some people will not change. I cannot change how others see immigrants, it is hard to tell what is in their heads.” These experiences coincide with previous research that demonstrates that almost 50% of all US-born Latino adults experience discrimination on a daily basis.42

Almost 50% of all U.S.-born Latino adults experience discrimination on a daily basis.42

The aforementioned comments were shared by the parents of Latino boys in our community. What is remarkable, as we discovered in our conversations with Latino boys, was how attuned the children are to their parents’ struggles, the sense of responsibility these young shoulders bear, and their commitment to—and pride in—family and community in spite of the discrimination they face.

Aspirations mirror parents’ hopes

Almost entirely, boys shared in their parents’ hopes for them: to go to college, to do better than their parents, and achieve more economic security. Boys’ interests in future careers were varied, including being a teacher, doctor, pilot, architect, professional sports player, lawyer, entrepreneur, and chef. Young men recognized that studying hard and doing well in school was important to their financial futures. One child remarked, “Something you can support yourself with. Not worrying about what you will eat the next day.”

As their parents did, the boys similarly remarked on a kind of moral imperative, to “live a proper life,” to give back and help others. One boy noted that “Latino hopes are simple—a house and a simple car, a better life, opportunity, a chance to work...a peaceful life, a good community.”

Cultural pride is a foundational asset in the Latino community

Often, language was described as a barrier for parents, but in a signal of the potential of the demographic change underway, children noted that being bilingual was an asset that could open up job opportunities for them. They also noted a “language bond” with other Latinos.

There was a strong sense of pride: pride in knowing where they came from, pride in their parents for taking such big risks to immigrate to the U.S. and working so hard for more opportunities for their children, and pride in their community. Boys described how Latinos “support each other, stick together, even in the face of attacks from people like Donald Trump, in the face of prejudice and discrimination.” There was a great sense of cultural appreciation. Children noted that when speaking to Latinos from another country, each are interested in the culture and way of doing things in the other’s country, and how this was different from Americans who tend to look down on others from a different country and want things to be done as in the U.S. Many also mentioned the importance that food plays in celebrating their culture. Other words boys used to describe the Latino community included: open-minded, caring, passionate, honest, multi-taskers, humble—“we know how to be happy without a lot of things.”

If we pause and absorb these insights, what is stunning is that these boys are describing an attitude and openness that we as a larger community must emulate and that is in keeping with American traditions. We must take our cues from this untapped resource to show us how to relate to one another in a way that builds each of us up, that does not barricade people in our community behind walls or relegate families to shadows. This sense of acceptance and inclusion and curiosity should not just activate our relationships with each other, but should also inspire a transformation in our systems and how we provide services, how we organize and revitalize our neighborhoods.

The youth perspective: growing up Latino in central Ohio

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CHALLENGES FROM THE YOUTH PERSPECTIVE

The boys in our focus groups had a lot to share about the challenges of the Latino community as they see them. It is evident that many Latino children are dealing with issues that young people should not have to deal with, including seeing their parents struggle in the face of substantial barriers, withstanding discrimination and misunderstanding at school. Despite these issues, they remain committed to the dreams their parents have for them, and they have for themselves.

Documentation differences can present challenges beyond access

Not surprisingly, the boys we engaged with also realized the many challenges legal status, or lack thereof, presents for those affected in pursuing their dreams, noting concerns about enrolling in college due to undocumented status. Children also noted the barriers that attend not being able to get an ID/driver’s license and drive—you can’t open a bank account, or get to a job, or apply for a loan, for example.

Boys also shared how differences in documentation status might play out within families. As one child explained, for example, because he was born outside of the U.S., he was not able to have the same healthcare coverage as his sister who is a U.S. citizen. In another example, children remarked that it would help if their parents had an ID, social security numbers and passports that would give them equality with their children. They also noted the lack of opportunities for their parents because they lacked these particular documents. It is easy to see how situations like this can lead to chronic stress within the family.

Documentation issues may also lead to more exploitation

On the issue of exploitation, one child explained that some employers make it harder on and have taken advantage of immigrants who lack legal papers. It is interesting that this issue of exploitation was not brought up by parents.

Children see their parents working hard but without many gains to show for it. Boys also noted that tasks differed on work sites, with Latino workers more likely relegated to the harder work, in unfavorable conditions, than White workers. For example, one boy shared that his father is discriminated against at work, that he is a hard worker and is always the one called out in the middle of the night to do dangerous work. Another boy shared how his stepdad had to work more hours than White Americans, and is seen as a “different class.” One child shared that his father worked doing hard labor, knocking down dry wall, while White workers did more technical work like wiring. One shared that during labor summer jobs, he only got called in to work when the weather was extreme or wet, and that White Americans got called in when the weather was fine. Still another pointed out that Latinos have little to fall back on and so must work long hours.

Limited parental support and instability

Boys noted their parents needed supports too. For example, boys wanted somewhere for their parents to go to finish their education, as most didn’t get to finish before coming to the States. They wanted somewhere for Latinos in general to receive financial literacy and support, as many Latino families are not financially stable. Children shared that their parents “can’t find a job, or go to construction and it’s hard and doesn’t pay very well. They go into basic jobs and are gone 2-3 shifts per day.” And when parents are home, they can’t help their kids with things they need, like homework help, because of language barriers.

LATINO BOYS ARE MORE LIKELY TO BE DISCIPLINED THAN THEIR WHITE MALE COUNTERPARTS, RECEIVING 31 DISCIPLINARY ACTIONS PER 100 STUDENTS IN THE 2012-2013 SCHOOL YEAR VERSUS 19 ACTIONS FOR WHITE MALES.48
This translates into a home life that may not feel stable. Many children remarked on being left alone while parents work multiple shifts in a struggle to make ends meet. Parents also worried about leaving their children alone at home. One parent cited the need for more safety in the neighborhood they live in so the kids feel more secure, remarking that it was easy to get drugs in the neighborhood. In this same vein, one boy mentioned the desire for more protection by the police from violence, and in particular, gun violence. The environment outside the home can leave these boys in vulnerable positions and this can be exacerbated when home life is not necessarily stable and parents are unable to be there as often as they would like.

Children also noted they have to learn English so that they can translate for the family, but that learning two languages can be really difficult because Spanish and English are so different. Finally, children noted that learning English can “mess up speaking with your parents.”

In general, boys remarked that there is a lack of respect for the parents who made a big sacrifice leaving their homes to give their children opportunities in the U.S.: “People don’t realize how much has been given up.”

**Discrimination and implicit biases inside the classroom**

Children noted experiencing discrimination in school, from administrators, teachers, and peers related to language (assuming because a person makes a mistake in speaking English they can’t speak the language), skin color, or appearance. One boy shared that people see his dark skin color and assume he is African or African-American, and are surprised when he speaks Spanish, and how he is treated differently because of it. Another boy noted that people assume “we are Mexican automatically when we speak Spanish.” Children noted that other kids assume someone from another country can’t speak English, or isn’t intelligent, and they may be pushed around and bullied.

Boys also noted some negative biases by teachers, especially regarding their lack of English vocabulary. Boys also shared how teachers assume a slow learner needs to be in a special-education class, or assume that a student who has not mastered the English language is a slow learner. They commented that Latinos are less likely to be considered for more advanced classes, and thus Latino children don’t get the same boost to their education. This experience is substantiated by research that shows racial disparities in Advanced Placement (AP) classes, and that Latino students, especially who are low-income, are less likely to attend schools that offer such courses. Nationally, while Blacks and Latinos make up 37% of the high school population, they represent only 27% of students enrolled in AP courses. This differential experience means that Latino students miss out on the opportunities that correlate with taking AP classes, such as improved SAT scores, college admission and receiving college scholarships, and college completion.

Many boys noted not feeling helped by teachers; teachers did not talk about their future, or ignored students. Whether intentional or not, these teachers’ actions contribute to the discrimination faced by these boys throughout their adolescence. This is important considering “adolescence may be a particularly vulnerable time to the effects of discrimination as this is a developmental period during which forming one’s cultural, ethnic, and racial identities is central.” Boys yearned for more information in school about which schools provide the best education, what educational pathways exist, and what kind of assistance their families could receive for them to go to college.

Boys pointed out that “other kids get away with things, Latinos don’t” and that there is a lack of respect and trust, that administrators believe teachers over students. These shared experiences are troubling in light of our 2015 report that documents how implicit racial biases held by educators can translate into poor educational experiences for boys of color. Nationally, Latino students are 1.5 times more likely to be suspended and twice more likely to be expelled than their White peers, for similar behavior. Analysis for Ohio shows that Latino boys are more likely to be disciplined than their White male counterparts, receiving 31 disciplinary actions per 100 students in the 2012-2013 school year versus 19 actions for White males. For Latino boys, a disconnection from school can lead to elevated rates of depression and suicide attempts.
**POSITIONING LATINO BOYS AND FAMILIES FOR SUCCESS**

As a community, we have barely begun to tap the enormous assets present in the central Ohio Latino community. Not only is our understanding of the rich diversity limited, but our systems are ill-equipped to handle the vast diversity within the Latino community, which includes generational, geographic, and cultural differences.

This limited understanding must change. It is our hope that this year’s Champion of Children report has begun to widen our community’s understanding, expanding our minds and our hearts. As humans, we are naturally prone to empathy and other desires to act virtuously, or in socially positive and responsible ways. However, as is evident it seems in many news cycles, stereotypes or fears of difference or change can be powerful mediators of our natural empathy, leading to behaviors that are not socially beneficial. Yet, as a community, we can harness our diversity and move towards inclusion by building our collective social capital, the dividends can be substantial. Research shows that diverse neighborhoods with high levels of cultural engagement have been linked to economic revitalization in urban neighborhoods. Over 30 years of economic research documents not only increased financial “returns” from social capital development, but also increased trust in community governance and legitimate market activity, including increased support for local businesses and reductions in crime.

However, we cannot move towards inclusion if we do not hear our Latino neighbors. Many of the experiences shared were about Latino boys and their families having no voice, no way to engage with the systems on which they rely. Thus, any efforts to fully engage our Latino community in their neighborhoods, services, livelihoods, safety, and well-being. Part of this effort will require ensuring all residents have a voice in local affairs by making it easy for low-income people and minorities to register and cast their vote.

Below, we document additional practical steps shared by our participants that we as a community can take towards positioning Latino boys and their families for success.

1. **Creating a diverse teacher pipeline to match the children demographic pipeline**

Research shows that students of color do better when taught by teachers of color. As we noted in the opening pages, the increasing diversity of our children is a demographic pipeline issue that is not going away; in fact, it will only become more pronounced—and soon—as today’s babies of color enter the classroom. We also know that the majority of teachers do not reflect this demographic reality. In Ohio, 93% of teachers are White compared to a student body that is 16% of color. And in fact, all students fare better—building more social capital, trust and a wider, more inclusive sense of community—when they are taught by more diverse teachers.

Several years of research support the conclusion that interracial contact through schools not only improves intergroup relations and reduces racial prejudices, it also improves critical thinking skills and academic achievement for all students.

As we seek solutions to increasing teacher diversity, we can begin to take steps today to ensure that our classrooms, curriculum, and student-teacher interactions are sensitive to the needs of culturally diverse students.

2. **Promoting emotionally and culturally intelligent (EQ and CQ) practices within the classroom**

Numerous stories of experiencing negative biases (implicit or explicit) within the classroom—by teachers and peers—were shared in our focus groups. This must change. Not only because it is morally wrong, but research shows that empathy and caring shown by teachers are linked with higher academic achievement, especially for culturally diverse students. A growing body of evidence shows that empathy is derived from emotional intelligence (i.e. emotional awareness), that is, the ability to perceive, control, and evaluate emotions. In fact, research in varied fields is showing that “emotionally intelligent behavior is a pre-requisite for building bridges of understanding and trust in the space between people.” In other words, social capital is not likely to exist where there is not emotional intelligence. Emotionally intelligent behaviors include deep listening, self-other awareness, flexibility, and openness to change.

As critical as emotional intelligence is for fostering empathetic interactions, given our demographic transitioning, we must also explicitly engage in deepening our “cultural intelligence” (CQ). CQ is “an individual’s capability to function and manage effectively in culturally diverse settings.” Possessing cultural intelligence (CQ) allows people to successfully thrive with diversity and operate in different cultural settings. CQ is a multidimensional idea that incorporates behavioral, metacognitive, cognitive, and motivational components. These pieces come together to form an individual’s understanding of how to interact with diversity (behavioral), his or her mental capacity to comprehend cultural knowledge (metacognitive), the general knowledge he or she possesses about culture (cognitive), and his or her ability to devote time and effort in learning about and participating in diverse situations (motivational). It differs from cultural competence in that it is more about an individual’s abilities.

Cultural competence focuses on the capacity of a system to function in manners that are respectful and inviting of diverse culture, whereas cultural intelligence is an individual’s capability to conceptualize and behave in a manner that is respectful of diverse people. Cultural Intelligence and cultural competence are both critical for ensuring the success of Latino boys in our education system, but we know systems can be slow to change, and thus, we can begin the work as individuals on CQ while we promote systems change.
In many of the conversations with these boys, we discovered that teachers and classmates are assets to help further their understandings of complex subjects, such as math, and the boys valued these interactions. The boys also voiced desire for more activities within schools to foster safe environments where they can socialize and learn. One boy responded that to do great in school he would want “smaller classes, so there are less kids and so I could talk to the teacher more.” Recognizing the desire these boys have to learn and be in the school setting is important and when teachers, administration, and others in education can master the skills associated with cultural intelligence, everyone can succeed. From the conversations, it is clear that they want to succeed in school and beyond so having the proper support is essential for them to achieve their goals.

**Promising Practices of a More Culturally-Responsive School Environment Include:**

- Practicing positive classroom interactions with students and parents through more active listening, patience, and perspective-taking
- Creating supportive classroom environments, where all students feel respected and safe, and cultural differences are explored and celebrated, and different cultural norms taken into account
- Creating curriculum that is more reflective of diverse students and their experiences

**Other Research Documents Multicultural Professional Development Programs for Improving Teacher Education and Practice Through:**

- Providing opportunities for teachers to reflect on their own cultural background, and its influence in their practices
- Offering opportunities for teachers to experience cross-cultural interactions and immersion (however, designed to balance risk with support)

Finally, practitioners are starting to recognize the need for trauma-informed instruction and practices to help address external challenges children may present with in the classroom. As research has noted, and further explored in our 2014 report, growing up in poverty or living in distressed environments can take a toll on child well-being and thwart healthy development. To date, approximately 20,000 child- and family-serving professionals and parents have been trained in basic brain biology to better understand the behaviors of children. Approximately 4,000 of those people are teachers and several Franklin County schools/districts are employing trauma-informed approaches into classrooms and agencies where immigrant children and young people in poverty are served.

**3. Support or dedicated advocates (“ambassadors”) to assist families**

Boys and parents alike shared the challenges of navigating the many different systems with little information on processes, qualifications, or timeframes for applications for programs or financial supports so opportunities are not missed. Parents noted how helpful it would be to have a guide for going to the store, getting a driver’s license, setting up an appointment—things many in our community take for granted. The faith community, social service agencies, neighborhood associations, and schools may offer natural settings for this helpful person-to-person engagement.

Schools are also a natural place to develop or expand upon the creation of liaisons/advocates who work directly with Latino young people and their families to break down barriers and build connections between schools and families. Ambassadors can also take the form of mentors for boys. Mentoring relationships have been shown to have numerous positive outcomes, including: improvements in self-esteem; better relationships with parents and peers; greater school connectedness; improved academic performance; and reductions in substance use, violence and other risk behaviors. As our 2014 report showed, the presence of consistent, nurturing relationships—such as might be developed between a child and a mentor—can have powerful effects on youth, in school and beyond, especially for those youth who might be experiencing high-stress environments.

**4. A dedicated place where affordable resources are available for parents and children**

Parents described a strong desire for an organization that recognizes their children are looking to better themselves. As one parent noted, “My kids are always participating, always looking for more opportunities.” Another parent remarked that without more community support, their children might feel discouraged and give up: “There are so many barriers. No money to continue studying. Kids are facing so many barriers that they... give up and end up working jobs that most Hispanics end up working.” Some parents acknowledged that they spend so much time working, that their children are too often left alone, without safe, educational, and constructive activities to participate in. As one parent remarked, “When we work, we don’t know where to leave our kids.”

**Parents Stated a Need for Organizations That Provide:**

- Educational resources: scholarship information was described as a huge need, especially given the economic insecurity faced by many families; help with classes/homework; internet access for school work; language classes for parents and kids.
- Support also needs to extend to parents who want to advance their education and career. One couple shared they are considering moving to California because of the accessibility of language and educational resources. Support also should include health and nutrition classes.
- Job assistance: including skill-building, search assistance, and transportation assistance
- Legal assistance: information and resources on getting documentation; rules/laws/policies in Ohio
- More intensive training: as one parent noted, “some places offer English language classes twice a week for one hour. This level of training is not enough. Parents are willing to pay more.”
- Improved accessibility: as one parent shared, “When it comes down to locations, there are only a few locations. And when it comes down to times, I can’t.”
- Summer programming that is also educational: another parent shared, “In the summer it’s hard for the kids to find things to do. It’s hard to get them books and get them reading. Then when they go back to school, they don’t do well and their scores are lower.”

Each of those statements points toward ways to better connect with and assist Latino families.
Central Ohio, just as the nation, is transforming. As with any major change, feelings of uncertainty are bound to surface—how do we redesign systems and structures to better serve the needs of our diverse neighbors? How do we improve our outreach and engagement efforts to ensure that all people in our communities have a voice in how we navigate this change? How do we ensure environments that support healthy living and learning for all children in our communities? Given the disparities outlined herein, that may seem daunting, can we really be successful?

The hope, faith, and resilience exhibited by the parents and boys in our focus groups tell us that yes, as a community, we can navigate this change successfully, and come through it more inclusive and enriched. As the boys described in our groups, it begins with an openness and a curiosity to learn more about each other, to relate to each other in new ways, to uncover the unique experiences and perspectives our Latino neighbors hold. It means building from the unique experiences and perspectives our Latino neighbors hold. It means practicing emotional and cultural intelligence and empathy. We begin the journey with the stories shared here inspire each of us to action, to meet our challenges.

CONCLUSION

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