

The Barriers and Opportunities for
Latino Students, Parents, and Staff within Denver Public Schools
Latino Families and Denver Public Schools:
At the Crossroads



Final Report, by the Multicultural Leadership Center, LLC, December 2023

Littleton CO 80123

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Research Questions

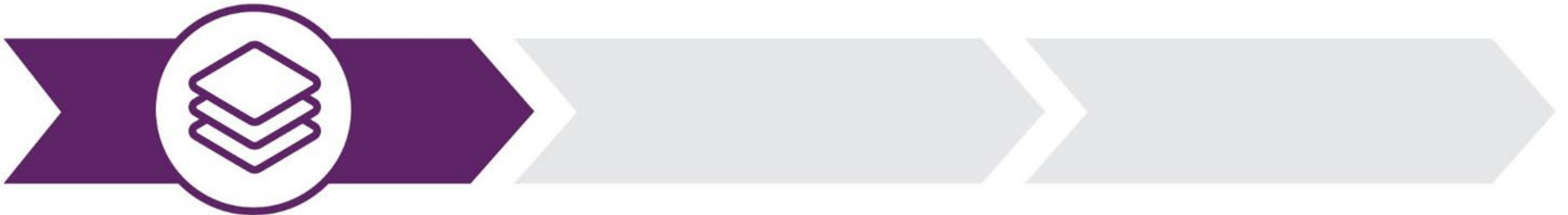
- 1.0 What are the current barriers faced by Latino students, families, and staff within Denver Public Schools (DPS)?
- 2.0 What is the impact of these barriers on Latino students, families, and staff within Denver Public Schools (DPS)?
- 3.0 What are the current opportunities for Latino students, families, and staff within Denver Public Schools (DPS)?
- 4.0 What is the impact of the opportunities for Latino students, families, and staff within Denver Public Schools (DPS)?

Introduction

- The Latino community story covers a century (ten decades) of historically significant events relating to the Latino Education History in Denver
- Historical events illustrate the abiding faith that the Latino community has had in the Denver Public Schools and the historical struggles to gain full access to education in the district
- DPS history is replete with advocacy and activism by families and employees inside and outside of the system to increase access and opportunity
- Currently, Denver Public Schools and Latino families are at a *Crossroads*—a decision for the stakeholders to stay in place or move forward.

PROJECT TIMELINE

Phase 1: Infrastructure



Nov. 2022 - Jan. 2023

PROJECT TIMELINE

Phase 2: Data Collection & Analysis



Feb. - Sep. 2023

Types of Research



Historical analysis and literature review.

Researchers studied historical events and trends like redlining and segregation and their educational impact.



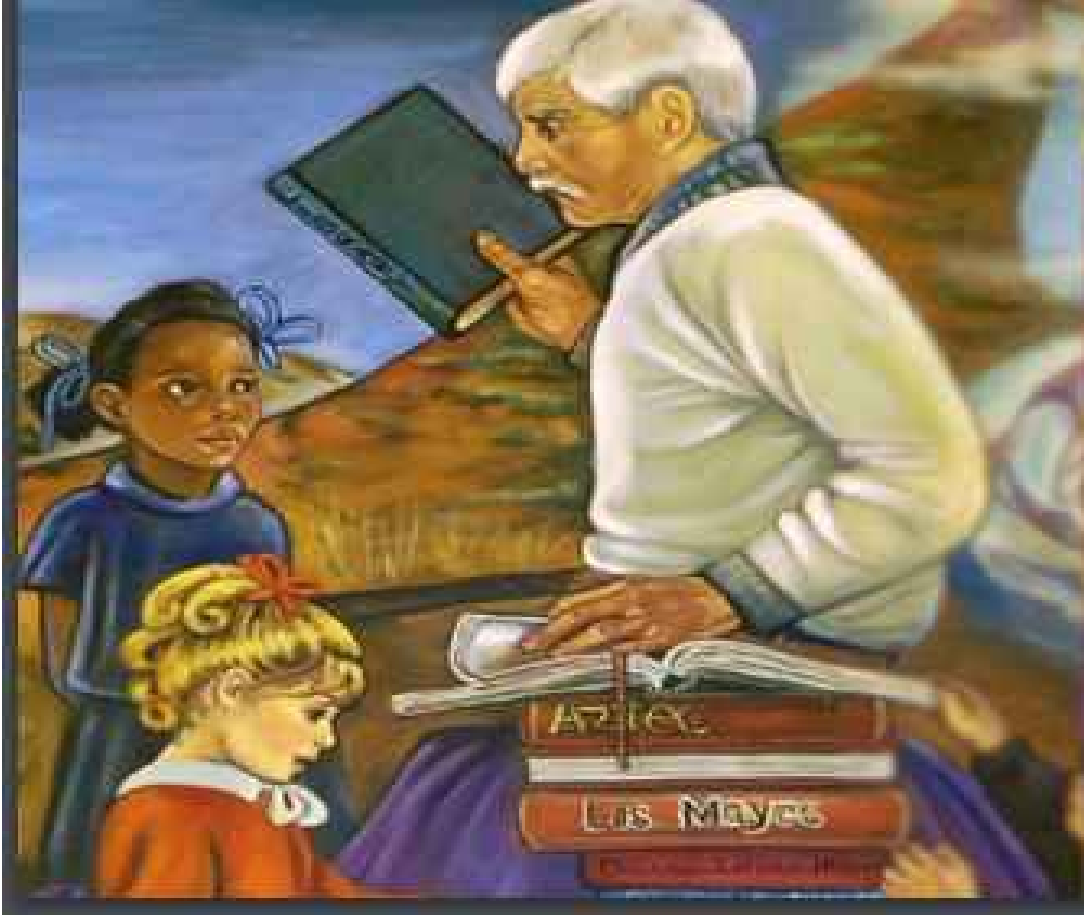
Quantitative component. Researchers analyzed various data sets about our students' achievements.



Qualitative component. Researchers implemented surveys and focus groups with key stakeholders.

Research Methods

Historical Analysis & Literature Review:



- A historical analysis of Denver was conducted to provide a timeline of events and practices affecting the Latino community over the past ten decades.
- The timeline examined the impact of discriminatory practices such as redlining and racial segregation in the community and schools on the Latino Community.
- The literature review provided the academic and scholarly documentation to amplify the personal and social impact of the discriminatory practices on the Latino community and to demonstrate the longstanding and chronic nature of these issues.

Historical Timelines

- 1920's: Klu Klux Klan; segregation of the Latino communities
- 1930's: Redlining through federal legislation (Federal Housing Administration)
Denver Title Companies
- 1940's: World War II (Return of Veterans of Color)
- 1950's: U.S. Supreme Court De-Segregation Ruling: Brown vs. Board of Education
- 1960's: Civil Rights Movement (Denver based civil rights); Federal legislation
- 1970's SCOTUS Ruling- Keyes vs. DPS; Beginning of DPS Busing; Designation of Denver 74 Neighborhoods; Poundstone Amendment; CO Bilingual Education Act
- 1980's Immigration Reform & Control Act (IRCA)
- 1990's End of DPS Busing; School Choice Act
- 2000's Start of contemporary Gentrification

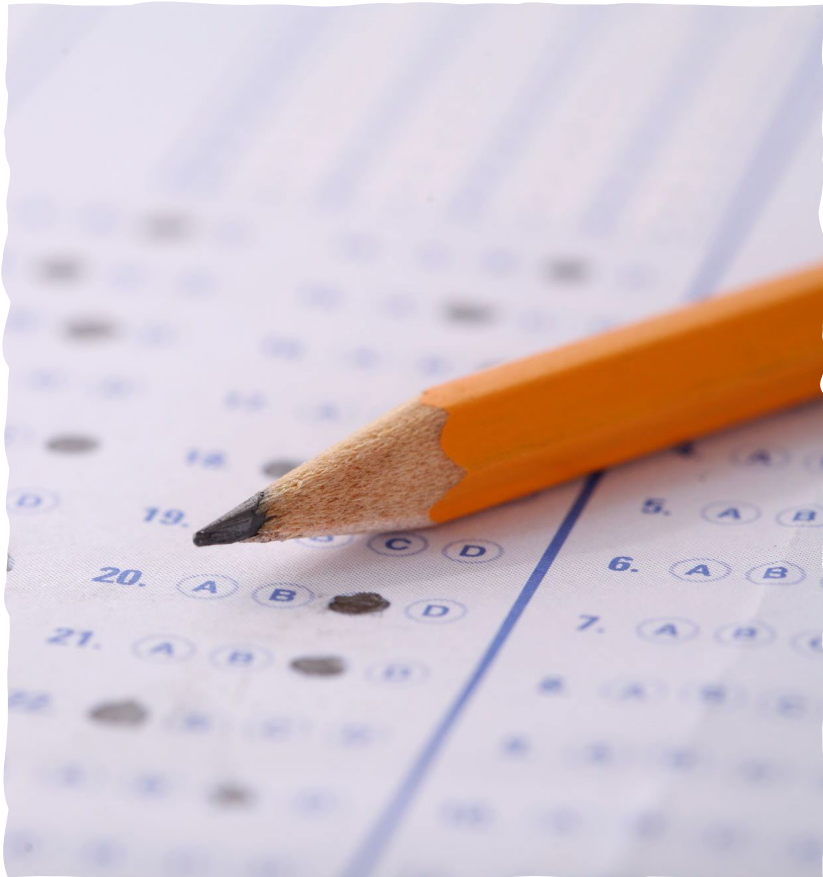
Quantitative Components

Student Enrollment

Student Proficiency

Standardized Results Comparisons

Quantitative Analysis of Latino Demographics and Academic Outcomes from 2008-2022



Results

- Latino student enrollment and changes across time
- Longitudinal Student Academic Outcomes in Language Arts and Math
- Between Group Comparison of Academic Outcomes
- Caveats and Considerations
 - Changes in standardized tests (CSAP, TCAP, CMAS) during this time period required researchers to standardize test results
 - Standardized tests not administered in 2020 (Pandemic), therefore, 14 years of student data

Quantitative Results

- From 2019 to 2022 net loss of approximately 1,000 Latino students in DPS
- Recent immigration of Latin American students has increased the number & percentage of Latino students.
- There has been an increase among all students, including White and Hispanic DPS students, scoring *Below Expectations* in both mathematics and English Arts (Reading) since 2015 in standardized tests.
- There were no statistically significant differences between students in Denver operated schools & DPS charter schools in standardized scores.
- Between 2008 & 2022, there was a major geographic shift of Latino students from the north & west sides of Denver to the Northeast corridor.
- This shift, caused by gentrification and immigration, and its impact on Latino students and their families needs to be studied.

Qualitative Methods

Qualitative Data were Collected via:

Focus Group Interviews (at 15 selected schools)

Electronic Survey (available to district writ large)

.Data were collected from Latino:

Parents

Teachers

Administrators

Middle and High School Students

Central Office Staff

Community Members

- School Selection Criteria
 - Percentage of Latino students
 - Percentage of English Language Learners
 - Percentage of Free & Reduced Lunch students
 - Geographic Distribution



Focus Group Participants and Schools

15 DPS Schools

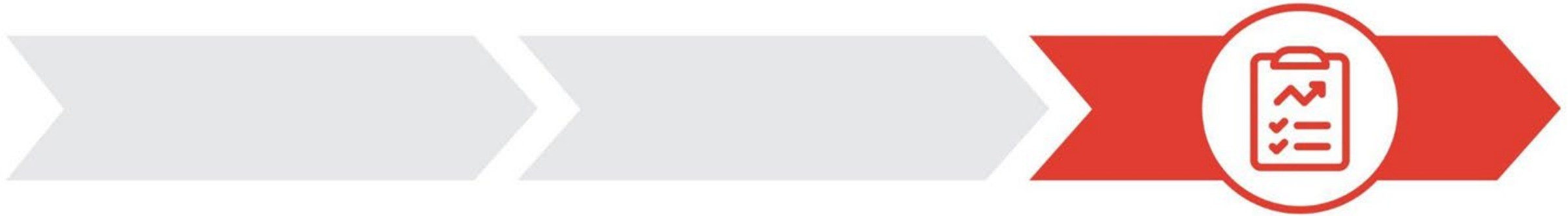
- Five elementary, four middle, and six high schools.
- 11 traditional or collaborative schools, three charter schools and one alternative school.
- Geographic diversity from schools across the city.
- Latinos (range from 30% - 95%)
- Multilingual Learners (range from 5%-80%)
- Students on Free and Reduced Lunch (range from 20% - 80%)

51 Focus Groups

- More than 600 total participants, including students, parents, staff, and community members

PROJECT TIMELINE

Phase 3: Reporting



Sep. - Dec. 2023

Focus Group Results: 10 Themes

Theme 1: Culturally Responsive Curriculum: Being Responsive to the Needs of Latino Students & Families
-Latino parents & students feel their culture is neither recognized nor appreciated

- Mandates: State & District, for DPS Curricula Development
- Colorado HB19-1192 (2019), “Inclusion of American Minorities in Teaching Civil Government”
- DPS School Board’s “Know Justice, Know Peace” resolution (2020)

Theme 2: Need to Increase Resources in Schools

- Parents and students cited differences in resources such as having school librarians and up-to-date sports equipment
- Students in under-resourced schools said there was a stigma attached to the school and its students

Theme 4: Bullying by Various Perpetrators

- Bullying by students, teachers, staff, & administrators had become a pervasive problem
- Drugs are a major problem in the schools
- Parents concerned about potential violence in schools

Theme 3: Safety & Fear of Violence within the Schools

- Parents are worried about the safety of their children while in school
- Parents expressed concerns about the lack of SROs in the schools
- Parents feel they have no voice regarding safety plans

Theme 5: Cultural Dissonance, Latinos with Others

- Cultural Dissonance occurs when policies and staff proclaim cultural appreciation of Latino cultural values but are neither observed nor practiced. This behavior of “not walking your talk” creates confusion & distrust.

Focus Group Results: 10 Themes

Theme 6: Cultural Affirmation is Missing in Schools

-Latino parents & students feel their culture is neither recognized nor appreciated

Theme 7: Language Bilingualism and its Effects

- The district has a court order protecting language rights of students labeled as ML
- The district has a Seal of Biliteracy
- Most heritage language Spanish speakers are not studying Spanish
- Parents want bilingualism/biliteracy

Theme 8: Latino Leadership & Central Office Staff

-Latino staff at all levels provided input

-Latino staff felt unappreciated

-Identified a “brown ceiling” as an issue blocking upward movement

Theme 9: Teaching Latino History, Culture, & Contributions

-Introduction to Ethnic Studies:
9th Grade level, now a requirement for graduation

Theme 10: Authentic Parental Involvement

- Parents do not feel they have an effective role in the school governance & policies
- Interpretation & translation services are lacking or unavailable in many schools
- Parents would like to play a stronger leadership role in the schools

Survey Demographics

558 STUDENTS

2,238 PARENTS (English & Spanish speaking)

63 TEACHERS & CENTRAL OFFICE STAFF

17 ADMINISTRATIVE LEADERS

Stakeholders Survey Results



Students:

- Feedback on three constructs: *School Connectedness, Cultural Learning & Relationship Building*
- Overall, students indicated a significant level of satisfaction and positive feelings about their respective schools.

Parents

- Feedback on 4 constructs: *Parental Involvement; Communication; Relationships with the Schools; and Cultural Respect*
- Both English Speaking & Spanish Speaking parents felt positive about their interaction with their respective staff
- While Spanish Speaking parents felt more positive both sets were positive among seven in ten responders

Teachers

- Feedback on four constructs: *Personal & Professional Development; Policies & Impact on Latino students; Culturally Responsive Climate; & Culturally Responsive Supported Through DPS Policies.*
- Generally, teachers felt positive about the support they receive for professional & personal development; felt they are allowed to have a positive impact on Latino students; and felt their school climate is consistent with the Latino community's values

School Leaders

- Feedback on three constructs: *Personal & Professional Development; Organizational Opportunities; and Outreach & Connection to the Community.*
- Generally, leaders scored lower among the 3 constructs listed above.
- Less than half felt they had support to pursue personal & professional goals; felt they had less opportunity to work with students; and little opportunity to work with the external community.,

District Focused Recommendations

- 1) Develop a Latino Student Strategic Initiative to close academic gaps & move towards academic excellence.
- 2) Provide adequate levels of resources to achieve academic goals.
- 3) Coordinate with local foundations and non-profit organizations to establish partnership for student support.
- 4) Coordinate with Denver employers to help fund student tutoring programs.
- 5) Coordinate with City & County of Denver to identify resources for immigrant families.
- 6) Coordinate with City & County of Denver in planning for influx of immigrant families.
- 7) Coordinate with the City & County of Denver to develop a transportation system to meet the needs of students & families—may not be cost effective but is socially just.
- 8) Create accountability through the new office of Executive Director of La Raza Project.

Student Focused Recommendations

- 1) Establish a District Cultural Competence Initiative to deal with cultural conflicts in schools.
- 2) Develop a strategy for increasing recruitment & participation in the Biliteracy Seal program.
- 3) Establish a DPS “Grow Your Own” Latino Development Program for recruiting & retaining Latino teachers.
- 4) Establish a Latino Training and Internship Program to provide experiential opportunities for students.

Parent Focused Recommendations

- 1) Develop a Districtwide Bilingual Parent Leadership Institute focused on leadership development.
- 2) Provide workshops for parents regarding DPS' newly adopted safety plan.
- 3) Develop a parental advisory council as part of the Safety Plan educational process.
- 4) Develop a program for educating parents on the background of the increase in Latin American immigrants.

Teacher Focused Recommendations

- 1) Adopt evidence-based best practices to close the achievement gap between Latino students and their peers.
- 2) Expand the pool of Spanish-speaking teachers from various subject matter areas with the goal of preparing them to teach culturally diverse Spanish speaking students.
- 3) Develop and implement student anti-bullying programs for DPS students.
- 4) Increase and build on concurrent enrollment classes within DPS.

School Leaders (Principals, Assistant Principals, Administrators) Focused Recommendations

- 1) Establish a Latino Leadership Pipeline to provide a viable, comprehensive, and sustainable succession planning program.
- 2) Develop a Latino Leadership Mentorship Program.
- 3) Establish a Leadership Assessment & Development Model that integrates leadership styles, cognitive styles & other factors affecting leadership performance.
- 4) Conduct periodic review of school boundaries to account for shifting populations among DPS neighborhoods.
- 5) Consider re-drawing boundaries for the district.
- 6) Develop a strategy for studying the fairness and balance of resource allocations among all schools.
- 7) Assess the impact of transportation options for West & Lincoln High Schools.

Central Office Staff Focused Recommendations

- 1) Develop a more effective communications system.
- 2) Develop policy & employee manuals for all major departments.
- 3) Develop orientation (On-Boarding) programs for new employees.
- 4) Develop orientation programs to include DPS, the City of Denver, the Multilingual Learner Department for HB-1 visa & J-1 visa teachers.
- 5) Conduct cultural sensitivity & cultural competence training for all central office employees at all levels.
- 6) Develop staff retention plans to minimize what is perceived to be a “perpetual crisis mode.”

Questions/Comments?

Wrap Up

- The Latino community and the Denver Public Schools are at the *Crossroads* with the opportunity to move forward through partnership.
- Please join the Denver Public Schools in this important:

Call To Action for the Latino Community

- THANK YOU FOR YOUR PARTICIPATION!



**The Barriers & Opportunities
for Latino Students, Parents &
Staff in Denver Public Schools:**

*Latino Families & Denver Public
Schools at the Crossroads*