LATINO EDUCATION IN BALTIMORE:
REACHING CHILDREN THROUGH THEIR PARENTS
"El futuro de sus hijos está en sus manos, que no se le olvide." a

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a “Your children’s future is in your hands; do not forget.” This is the sign off of Denver’s Educa program. Read more at [http://www.denverpost.com/griego/ci_15968506#ixzz1m2KJNRTX](http://www.denverpost.com/griego/ci_15968506#ixzz1m2KJNRTX)
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Executive Summary

In the past decade, the Latino population in Baltimore City became the city’s fastest-growing racial or ethnic group, now representing about 4 percent of all residents. Latino student enrollment in Baltimore City Public Schools (BCPS) reflects this trend as well, with a 199 percent increase in the last five years. Although national indicators show an achievement gap between Latino students and other racial or ethnic groups, the city’s Latino student performance does not always mirror the national narrative. In particular, Baltimore’s Latino students are competitive in the math section of the Maryland School Assessment (MSA) and have a higher graduation rate than their White or Black peers. Since BCPS began administering the MSA in 2004, Latino student performance on the statewide standardized test has improved at a greater rate than other demographic groups, shrinking the achievement gap between Latino and White students. Despite this encouraging trend, there remains a sizeable difference between Latino and White student in the percentage of students meeting the state's proficiency standards across grades and subjects.

Existing administrative data and interviews indicate that BCPS does not yet have system-wide policies or guidelines in place to accommodate the increasing number of Latino students and their families; instead it gives discretion to individual schools, resulting in varying approaches and levels of intensity when communicating with parents. The manner in which schools communicate with parents is important because many of the city’s Latino adults have low levels of educational attainment and limited English proficiency. Many schools distribute information in Spanish online and by mail, but prior research suggests such one-way communication through written materials is not as effective as in-person interaction. Schools and parents have access to a system-wide telephonic interpreter service, but administrative data and interviews suggest
parents rarely use it. Of the six schools that responded to our inquiries, all had hired bilingual staff, even though the district does not require it.

Latino parents who immigrated to the U.S. face cultural and linguistic barriers that inhibit parent involvement, according to prior research and interviews with Latino service providers. Addressing those barriers and increasing parent involvement should be a priority for the district, but the literature also provides strong evidence that parental involvement plays a critical role in improving students’ academic performance; inhibiting that involvement might hinder Latino students’ educational outcomes. Historically, Latino students have lagged their peers across national performance measures, from dropout rates to test scores, and researchers attribute lack of parental involvement as a contributing factor. It is plausible that by engaging Latino parents, the achievement gap on state standardized tests between Latino and White students might decrease as well.

We recommend five actions the Baltimore City Public Schools could take to increase channels of communication with their Latino parents: 1) survey schools with high Latino enrollment to identify best practices for Latino engagement, 2) start an interpreters bank, where schools would contract with Spanish-speaking interpreters, 3) educate new Latino parents each school year about school resources and appropriate ways to help their child succeed, 4) increase the frequency of parent-school functions centered in the Latino community and held entirely in Spanish, and 5) start an education-oriented radio show in Spanish.
Problem Definition

In the past decade, the Latino population in Baltimore City increased to about 4 percent of all residents and became the city’s fastest-growing racial or ethnic group. Existing administrative data and interviews indicate that BCPS does not yet have system-wide policies or guidelines in place to accommodate the increasing number of Latino students and their families.

Baltimore City Public Schools CEO Dr. Andrés Alonso and nonprofit service providers who serve the Baltimore Latino community have expressed concern about the language barrier and how it hinders Latino parental involvement in children’s education. Do parents know about school events? Do parents have the means to communicate effectively with school staff? Are teachers equipped to address the specific needs of Latino students and their families? These questions are essential since recent demographic data show that many of the city’s Latino residents have low levels of educational attainment and limited English proficiency, two barriers to becoming involved in a student’s education. Meanwhile, past research draws a strong link between parental involvement and a child’s academic performance.

BCPS is acting to make changes in response to its growing Latino student population: 1) it hired 30 new teachers related to Latino education in the past academic year, 2) it hired a bilingual ombudsman in Dr. Alonso's office who focuses on parent engagement, especially in the Latino community, and 3) it initiated community forums with Latino parents after Dr. Alonso became superintendent in 2007. However, the district offers limited resources to address the needs of Latino families, and those that they do offer are underutilized, according to

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Throughout this paper the term “Latino” and “Hispanic” will be used interchangeably. Throughout this paper “parental involvement” will be used to describe a set of actions taken by parents; these include, among others: choosing the appropriate school for their child, attending school functions, responding to school obligations, helping children improve their school work, providing encouragement, arranging for appropriate study time and space, modeling desired behavior, monitoring homework, and actively tutoring children at home.

Latino teachers in Baltimore City Public Schools increased from 98 to 128 in the past academic year.
administrative data and interviews. Individual schools have the discretion to hire bilingual staff and offer community outreach activities for Latino parents, but there is no uniform approach to bilingual staffing levels or types of services provided.

Below is a review of demographic changes related to Latinos in Baltimore City and its school system and an assessment of current education outreach to Latino parents. We then recommend several programmatic changes that would better accommodate the needs of the city’s burgeoning Latino community. These recommendations are limited to the language and cultural barriers endemic to the Latino community in Baltimore that may inhibit parent involvement. Although previous literature has identified other barriers to parent involvement, such as a lack of motivation or challenging work schedules among blue-collar families, those issues are beyond the scope of this paper.

Research Methods

As part of our research, we conducted in-person interviews with staff from several Baltimore-based nonprofit Latino service providers, including: Education Based Latino Outreach (EBLO), the Latino Providers Network, Centro de la Comunidad, and La Esperanza Center; we also interviewed an ombudsman from the Baltimore City Public Schools CEO’s office, staff at six city schools with high Latino student enrollment, and English-language acquisition specialists at school districts in Baltimore City and Baltimore County. We attended a forum hosted by the Latino Providers Network where Dr. Alonso discussed education outreach for Latino students. Finally, we met with a focus group of 12 Latino parents at Armistead Gardens Elementary/Middle who make use of EBLO’s afterschool tutoring services.
We compared information gathered in these interviews with data from BCPS, the U.S. Census, the Pew Hispanic Center, the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), the Brookings Metropolitan Policy Program, the Dana Center for Preventive Ophthalmology at Johns Hopkins, the Maryland State Department of Education, and the Baltimore Neighborhood Indicators Alliance (BNIA).

Baltimore City

Since 2000 the Latino population increased by about 135 percent as shown by Appendix Figure 1.1. The Baltimore-Towson Metropolitan Statistical Area was one of 21 places nationwide to experience an influx of more than 100,000 immigrants in the last decade, about a third of which came from Latin American countries. As of the 2010 Census, Latinos represent about 4 percent of the city’s population, although informal estimates suggest the real number might be closer to 6 percent, or 35,000 residents. Growth in the number of Baltimore Latinos contradicts the city’s overall population trend: The number of total residents in the city has steadily declined about 31 percent in six decades – from a high of about 950,000 residents to about 621,000 in 2010.

The juxtaposition of these population trends is significant because Mayor Stephanie Rawlings-Blake has set a goal of increasing Baltimore’s population by 3.5 percent, or 22,000 new residents, in 10 years. The city’s planning director is on record saying that retaining and expanding the city’s immigrant population will be crucial in meeting that policy objective.

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\(^{e}\) Appendix Figure 1.3 shows the consistent growth pattern on the foreign-born population in the Baltimore-Towson MSA.
Latinos in Baltimore City Public Schools

As with the city at large, the school system has experienced a dramatic increase in its Latino population: In the past five school years, Latino student enrollment has risen 199 percent, from 1,291 to 3,857 Latino students. The map below details the rise and concentration of Hispanics in Baltimore City, while Appendix Figure 1.2 charts Latino enrollment within the BCPS over the past nine school years.

Note: The sizable percentages of Hispanics shown above should not be equated with sizable populations. In a Census Tract with a small total population, relatively few Hispanic residents might represent a large percentage of the tract's overall population. The ★ indicates a tract with less than 1,000 individuals (an average tract in 2010 had a total population of 3,105 with 130 Hispanic residents). Each tract with a ★ has fewer than 50 Hispanic residents. Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census (2000, 2010).

In the current 2011-2012 school year, Latinos represent about 4 percent of all students, but the district anticipates that Latinos will represent 10 percent within a decade, exceeding Whites as the largest minority in the school district. While Latinos are a relatively low percentage of the
district’s overall student population, those students are concentrated in a small number of schools: 17 of the district’s 195 schools have Latino-student populations of 10 percent or more. Latinos represent more than a quarter of all students at eight schools in the district, and in two of those schools, Latinos represent more than half of all students. Appendix Figure 1.4 shows the 55 Community Statistical Areas, proxies of city neighborhoods, and the respective percent distribution of Latino students from those areas. Appendix Figure 1.5 shows the distribution of schools throughout the city, highlighting schools with high Latino student enrollment which mirrors the geographic distribution of Latinos in the city.

Latino educational performance in Baltimore

Because data on Baltimore Latino performance on the NAEP is not available for analysis, we relied on a variety of state standardized tests at the elementary, middle, and high school level, a four-year adjusted cohort dropout rate, and a five-year adjusted cohort graduation rate to comparatively measure student performance. The small sample size of students and inaccessibility of individual test results precluded an econometric approach to determining whether differences in race and ethnicity were statistically significant.

The overall picture of Latino performance in Baltimore is mixed. Students in grades 3-8 have closed, or are on track to close, the remaining achievement gaps in the Maryland School Assessment (MSA); the Hispanic graduation rate is one of the highest in the City and although

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f The Baltimore Neighborhood Indicator Alliance (BNIA) outlines construction and measurement at the CSA level in more detail at [http://www.bniajfi.org/help_center/faqs](http://www.bniajfi.org/help_center/faqs)

g A comparison of performance on the NAEP by Baltimore Latinos and the national average was not possible because neither BCPS nor the National Center for Education Statistics publish this information. The BCPS staff person in charge of publishing local NAEP results, Heather Nolan, said the Latino sample size was too small and could not be reported.
SAT scores should be used with caution, Hispanics score better than the average city student.\textsuperscript{h} Conversely, a significant achievement gap exists between Hispanic high school students and Whites across all subjects, reflected in the percentage of Hispanic students who met graduation requirements in 2011; under the current dropout metric used by BCPS,\textsuperscript{i} Latinos had a higher dropout rate than the citywide average, Whites or Blacks in 2011, but had a lower dropout rate, relative to the citywide average, Whites, or Blacks, in 2010.\textsuperscript{j} A breakdown of each indicator is documented in Appendix Figure 1.6.

\textit{Maryland School Assessment (MSA)}

The state standardized test for grades 3-8, the Maryland School Assessment, is an annual test of proficiency in reading and math, based on the state's reading and math curricula, used to measure annual yearly progress, as mandated by the federal No Child Left Behind Act. In grades 5 and 8, the MSA also tests proficiency in science.

Over the last six years, Latinos have made significant improvements on the MSA: In reading proficiency (grades 3-8 combined), Latinos have experienced a 29.2 percentage-point gain between 2004 and 2011. In math proficiency (grades 3-8 combined), the gain was 44.3 percentage points. In science, the gain was 21.7 percentage points.\textsuperscript{j} Despite these improvements over time, detailed review of student performance on the 2011 MSA shows that White students' proficiency rates are still 5.92 percentage points higher, on average, than their Latino peers. The gap is particularly steep in reading, with an average 7.07 percentage-point difference. By contrast, Latinos outperformed Whites in math in grades 4, 6, and 7, and the average gap, where White students' proficiency rates were still higher, was 1.45 percentage points.

\textsuperscript{h} The test is voluntary and, therefore, is not representative of the overall Hispanic population.
\textsuperscript{i} The current metric is the four-year adjusted cohort rate; see Appendix Figure 1.6 for details on its calculation.
\textsuperscript{j} See Appendix Figure 1.7 – 1.8 for a comparison of MSA test scores in reading and math across years by race and ethnicity.
High School Assessment and Five-Year Adjusted Cohort Graduation Rate

The equivalent to the MSA in high school is the state's High School Assessments (HSA) (grades 10-12), which show an achievement gap, only with a wider average disparity and no examples of Latinos outperforming Whites.\textsuperscript{20} Maryland students must pass the HSA in order to graduate from high school. The HSA tests proficiency in algebra/data analysis, biology, English, and government; the passing rates are presented below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>2011 HSA Percent Pass Rates for Whites and Hispanics</th>
<th>Algebra</th>
<th>Biology</th>
<th>English</th>
<th>Government</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>12th grade</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>82.8</td>
<td>84.6</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latino</td>
<td>68.6</td>
<td>73.3</td>
<td>58.2</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11th grade</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>85.5</td>
<td>85.6</td>
<td>83.1</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latino</td>
<td>67.2</td>
<td>70.6</td>
<td>49.3</td>
<td>70.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10th grade</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>78.5</td>
<td>83.1</td>
<td>74.3</td>
<td>77.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latino</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>49.4</td>
<td>44.3</td>
<td>57.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>83.3</td>
<td>83.8</td>
<td>80.7</td>
<td>85.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latino</td>
<td>61.6</td>
<td>64.4</td>
<td>50.6</td>
<td>66.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Indicates no students or fewer than 10 students in category.

The average difference across grades and subjects was 22.5 percentage points between Latino and White students. Not surprisingly, the greatest gap appeared in English, with an average difference of 30 percentage points. In the other subjects, the difference ranged from 19 percentage points to 22 percentage points. The graduation metric below shows that Latino students graduated at a higher rate than their White or Black peers in 2010.
Historical trends in Latino student performance: achievement gap at the national level

Baltimore’s civic leaders should be mindful of performance trends among the local Latino community. National data on Latino student performance show Latinos students, like other minority students, fall prey to an achievement gap, which precedes high rates of unemployment and lower earnings in adulthood. Hispanics consistently score below the national average in the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) and earn fewer degrees than their White counterparts. By age nine, Hispanic students lag behind their non-Hispanic peers in reading, mathematics, and science proficiency. Of those who do enroll in higher education, Hispanics earn fewer associate degrees and far fewer bachelor degrees than their White peers. These national statistics are corroborated with survey data: As the Pew Hispanic Center reports, although 89 percent of Latino adults say college education is important, only about half, or 48 percent, plan to obtain a degree. The following table outlines Hispanic performance against four racial groups in 2005. In nearly all categories, Hispanics lag behind.

Percentage Distribution of Adults ages 25 and over According to Highest Level of Educational Attainment, by race/ethnicity (2005)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Less than high school completion</th>
<th>High school completion</th>
<th>Some college</th>
<th>Associates degree</th>
<th>Bachelors degree</th>
<th>Masters degree</th>
<th>Doctorate or professional degree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>9.9</td>
<td>32.9</td>
<td>17.4</td>
<td>9.3</td>
<td>19.7</td>
<td>7.7</td>
<td>3.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>18.5</td>
<td>37.3</td>
<td>18.5</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>12.5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>41.5</td>
<td>27.6</td>
<td>13.3</td>
<td>5.6</td>
<td>8.5</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>1.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian/Pacific Islander</td>
<td>12.3</td>
<td>20.9</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>6.6</td>
<td>31.8</td>
<td>11.5</td>
<td>5.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Indian/Alaska Native</td>
<td>24.2</td>
<td>31.6</td>
<td>19.2</td>
<td>10.6</td>
<td>10.3</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>1.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In addition to lower attainment, Hispanics have traditionally had the highest dropout rates in the country. As the following figures show, from 1989 through 2005, Hispanics consistently graduated at a lower rate than their White or Black peers.\(^26\)

The graph above indicates that the status dropout rate among Hispanics has been higher than among Whites, Blacks, or all students across the U.S for more than a decade. Although the gap

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still existed in 2005, the dropout rate was about 10 percentage points lower than in 1989, suggesting that the difference in dropout rates is shrinking. The high dropout rates among Hispanics are partially attributable to the higher rates among Hispanic immigrants, which are double the rate for those born in the United States, 44 to 21 percent, respectively.\textsuperscript{27}

Past research show Hispanic parents tend to have little education and low involvement in home literacy activities, and their children are the least prepared to attend kindergarten. In 1997 over 90 percent of White parents had earned a high school diploma compared with 45 percent for Hispanics.\textsuperscript{28} In 2007 the NCES released data showing that Hispanic parents were the second\textsuperscript{k} least likely demographic to have a bachelor’s or graduate degree. In almost all measures of the Parental Involvement in Home Literacy Activities—including ‘Reading To,’ ‘Telling a Story,’ and ‘Teaching Letters, Words, or Numbers’—Latino parents were less likely to teach their child than non-Latino White or Black parents. In 2007, 27 percent of Latino families visited a library, compared with 41 percent of White families.\textsuperscript{29}

**Benefits of parent involvement in education**

There is a robust body of research dedicated to examining the relationship between parent involvement and student performance. Parents can become involved in three general ways: (1) direct involvement in school management and choice; (2) participation in special parenting programs; and (3) family resource and support programs.\textsuperscript{30} Others define parental involvement with reference to specific activities such as attending school functions, responding to school obligations, helping children improve their school work, providing encouragement, arranging for appropriate study time and space, modeling desired behavior, monitoring homework, and actively tutoring children at home.\textsuperscript{31} All past studies indicate that the children of parents

\textsuperscript{k} Second only to American Indian/Alaska Native
involved in school activities are more likely to perform well in school—extending, unequivocally, into positive effects on children’s self-esteem, self-confidence, and cognitive development.\textsuperscript{32} Evidence also suggests that parent involvement leads to improvements in student achievement, improved school attendance, and reduced dropout rates.

Econometric and empirical studies further support the conclusion that parental involvement positively affects children’s educational outcomes. One econometric analysis using data from nine California schools found a statistically significant positive relationship between parental involvement in school and grade point average (GPA), regardless of demographic or socioeconomic status.\textsuperscript{33} The study, using a sample of 10,000 students from grades 9-12 over the 1987-1988 school year, found that: “Compared with parents who are less involved, parents who are more involved in their adolescents’ schooling, regardless of the parent’s gender or educational level, have offspring who do better in school.”\textsuperscript{34} The analysis concludes that student impressions of their parents’ school involvement may be the determinant factor in achievement. A pre-post empirical study involving limited-English-proficient (LEP) and non-English-proficient (NEP) students found that teaching parents how to become involved in the schooling of their child benefited their child’s performance in school across measures of comprehension, fluency, vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation.\textsuperscript{35}

Other research indicates parental involvement influences teacher’s expectations and standards for students.\textsuperscript{36} In this context, parental involvement affects the behavior of the teacher who sets higher standards and expectations for the student. The teacher is made aware of the various complications of the home life and is thus better able to make accommodations to suit the child’s needs; further, the teacher will not mistakenly assume parents do not care about their child’s
Finally, parental involvement may persuade the teacher to shift curricula towards minority experiences, helping to overcome the misrepresentation of culture.  

Parent involvement sends a message to children that education is important, and these children are more likely to value education as well. As a form of social control, parent involvement allows parents to interact with other parents, teachers, and administrators, who can keep them informed about their children’s performance in school. These parents learn from other parents and administrators about school expectations for student behavior and homework; children that receive the same social message from school and home are more likely to learn those lessons.  

Compared against those parents who were not involved, involved parents develop strategies for working with schools and their children to ensure achievement. Lastly, because involved parents are privy to information about their children’s progress in school, they are in a better position to intervene, if necessary.  

**Overall barriers to Latino parent involvement**

The most immediate obstacle parents face when becoming involved in the community is the language barrier, forcing the student or another agent to play the intermediary between teachers, administrators, and other parents. This “language brokering” extends to filling out applications for employment, disputing credit card charges, and dealing with schools or the legal system. One researcher found children as young as nine often speak for anyone in the family who is not fluent, making life-changing and legally binding decisions. Many adult immigrants speak exclusively Spanish at home while the language of public school is thoroughly English. For social and economic reasons the children need to speak English—but to maintain their family and cultural values, they speak Spanish at home. Each local Latino nonprofit organization and a
dozen parents interviewed noted the persistent obstacle that language plays in the education system, especially in communicating with teachers and helping with homework. Sara Rivera of Centro de la Comunidad said she knew of instances where children acted as the go-between translator for parents and staff during disciplinary meetings; Rivera also noted it was an inherent conflict of interest for the students to interpret in such situations. Although Baltimore City Public Schools resources focus on reducing the language barrier, anecdotal evidence indicated that children still act as intermediaries for their parents in situations when experts agree that they should not.

Beyond language, there are a number of other reasons why parent involvement is limited in the Latino community:

- Among foreign-born Latinos, many do not understand how the teachers expect them to be involved. They may not know they have the right to ask about their child’s education. In some cases, they may perceive involvement in a child’s homework to be synonymous with interference.

- Long hours, multiple jobs, and little flexibility make it difficult for working-class Latino parents to attend school functions, such as town hall meetings and parent-teacher conferences.

- Parent-teacher organizations (PTOs and PTAs) often meet during working hours, when many Latino parents cannot attend. Even if Latino parents can attend, the meeting might not be translated into Spanish for them.

- Few teachers or administrators receive training on how to reach out to Latino parents, and even fewer can speak Spanish. Teachers and administrators who are culturally different

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1 See the ‘Scope of Services: Baltimore City Public Schools’ section for a more complete list of programs currently offered by the school system.
from their students are less likely to know the students and parents and therefore think the parents are disinterested in their child’s education.\textsuperscript{49}

- Schools sometimes rely on online tools to communicate with Spanish-speaking parents, but parents may not own or have access to a computer, including access to library computers due to barriers in obtaining library identification cards.\textsuperscript{50}

- When parents receive school-related information in translated Spanish, it may be written for a higher level of education than the parents can understand. In nearby Prince George’s County, a recent survey of parents from three schools with robust Latino populations found that about 70 percent of parents received their education outside the U.S. and about 87 percent of those parents did not graduate from high school; about 26 percent of non-U.S. educated parents received no more than an elementary school education.\textsuperscript{51}

**Barriers to Latino parent involvement in Baltimore City**

Baltimore’s Latino students, especially those from first-generation immigrant families, face linguistic and cultural barriers that directly inhibit the student’s performance and hamper parents’ ability to help their children succeed. For example, 1,749 students come from households where Spanish is the dominant language spoken at home.\textsuperscript{52} In interviews with Latino parents from Armistead Gardens Elementary/Middle, a majority of parents said the language barrier made it difficult to help their children with homework.\textsuperscript{m} Employees at nonprofit Latino service providers cited the language barrier as a serious problem for parents in terms of helping with homework, monitoring their children’s academic progress, and in communicating with their children’s teachers. Every Latino service provider we contacted described a pervasive problem where

\textsuperscript{m} The Latino population represents 34 percent of all students at Armistead Gardens.
parents they serve do not have enough education to be helpful with their children’s homework; often times, it is because they left school early while a student in their country of origin. These parents not only struggle to read in English – some have trouble reading in their native tongue as well.\textsuperscript{53, 54}

General data about Baltimore’s Latino population appear to corroborate this anecdotal information. About 84 percent of Latino residents speak only or mostly Spanish. About 57 percent have less than a high school degree.\textsuperscript{55} About 6 percent cannot read and 68 percent can only read in Spanish. In combination, the data suggests that many Latino parents would have limited proficiency in speaking English, much less reading it, and would have limited educational training to help in other areas of school, such as math.

**Scope of services: Baltimore City Public Schools**

The majority of funding for Latino-related education comes from federal funding under Title I of the federal No Child Left Behind Act, which covers English as a Second Language (ESOL) positions. For every 20 ESOL students at a school, Title I funds one ESOL instructor; for every 75 ESOL students at a school, Title I funds one supplementary position, such as a bilingual para educator or parent assistant.\textsuperscript{56} It is worth noting that ESOL instructors are not required to be fluent in a second language, and many are not.\textsuperscript{57} If principals decide they would like to hire additional ESOL or bilingual staff, they have the discretion to do so, but there is no dedicated fund from the city school district, state, or federal government for this need. In some cases, schools rely on volunteer services of local nonprofits, such as EBLO and Centro de la Comunidad, to provide interpretation at school forums and parent-teacher conferences.\textsuperscript{58, 59}
BCPS does pay for interpreters through a contract with CTS Language Link, a telephonic interpreter service. At parent-teacher conferences, teachers can place a call to the interpreter hotline and have someone translate on speakerphone. In addition, BCPS contracts with Transact.com, which provides an online library of translated written documents; most of these documents are forms and generic messages, such as annual welcome-back letters and announcements. Usage of both CTS Language Link and Transact.com has increased in absolute numbers since the district started tracking usage. With both services, Spanish is one of the most common languages among BCPS users. In our interviews, employees at several Latino nonprofit service providers and at the school district, including Dr. Alonso, voiced concern that parents were not aware of these resources and were not using them. Available data offer some insight as to why school administrators might be concerned: Although CTS reported more uses in 2011 than 2010, the total number of uses for the past school year was 522. There were 2,160 students classified as English Language Learners (ELL) in 2011, meaning that even under the generous assumption that all 522 uses were by unique ELL families, no more than 24 percent of all ELL families could have used the service.

The school district does not document the number of bilingual staff at its schools, but interviews revealed that many of the schools with high Latino enrollment have hired bilingual staff. Although bilingual staff often occupy ESOL positions, we also found administrative assistants, a speech pathologist, a para educator, a special education instructor, and a Spanish teacher, all bilingual. Schools with high Latino enrollment might increase the number of interpreters on hand by trying to hire bilingual staff in any position, even non-ESOL or instructional positions. Here are the levels of bilingual staffing at six schools we contacted:
1. John Ruhrha Elementary/Middle, with 290 Latino students, or 53 percent Latino enrollment, has four bilingual staff and a fifth joining in the fall of 2012. 61

2. Hampstead Hill Academy, with 219 Latino students, or 36 percent Latino enrollment, has three bilingual staff. 62

3. Lakeland Elementary/Middle, with 162 Latino students, or 27 percent Latino enrollment, has eight bilingual staff.63

4. Highlandtown Elementary/Middle #215, with 122 Latino students, or 38 percent Latino enrollment, has five bilingual staff. 64

5. Patterson Public Charter School, with 112 Latino students, or 19 percent Latino student enrollment, has 15 bilingual staff. 65

6. Maree G. Farring Elementary/Middle, with 108 Latino students, or 18 percent Latino student enrollment, has five bilingual staff.66

In addition to hiring bilingual staff, each school appears to have a different approach to engaging the Latino community. Of the six listed above, all translate their school-specific written materials, such as regular newsletters, into Spanish. Three schools invite a local education-based nonprofit to offer bilingual tutoring and translation services within the school. Hampstead Hill contracts with an interpreter who visits on an hourly basis, in addition to holding half-hour translation sessions each morning for parents with limited English proficiency. Lakeland, which has a bilingual principal and assistant principal, posts every sign within the school in Spanish and English and holds monthly breakfasts for the Latino parents to meet with school staff; Lakeland also benefits from having a bilingual PTO president and bilingual Latino parent liaison. Patterson Public Charter provides a family resource room for a Latino parent group that invites the principal and other school staff as guests in their weekly meetings. This is not a comprehensive
list of Latino engagement efforts, but it gives a flavor of the diversity of programs and approaches at city schools.

**Scope of services: nonprofit Latino service providers**

Several nonprofit organizations in Baltimore offer some level of targeted English-acquisition instruction, education outreach, and/or interpreter services for the city’s Latino community. In our interviews, members at three of these nonprofits described an uptick in demand for their services within the past few years, though none could quantify the exact increase. In terms of education outreach, the most comprehensive of these nonprofits is EBLO, which has 51 employees and 70 volunteers. In 2009, EBLO provided afterschool tutoring assistance to about 250 Latino students at three Baltimore City schools. It also provides Saturday classes where parents learn English while students receive further education assistance. In at least one case, an EBLO afterschool volunteer also acted as an interpreter during parent-teacher conferences and larger meetings between parents and school administration.

Several other nonprofits in the area provide limited assistance in education outreach and English acquisition classes. Centro de la Comunidad helps Latino parents with enrollment applications and other paperwork in the public school system; when necessary, their education specialist can stand in as an interpreter and advocate for clients with limited English-speaking skills at school functions. Baltimore Reads is a local nonprofit that conducts weekly English-as-a-second-language workshops at La Esperanza Center and Enoch Pratt Free Library; it boasts a student body that is 21 percent Latino.
Policy Recommendations


BCPS should survey its schools with high Latino student enrollment to find out how many bilingual staff they have (relative to bilingual students), what Latino engagement programs or services they offer, and to what extent they have found those programs or services to be successful. We suggest targeting the 17 city schools have at least 10 percent Latino enrollment because it is a manageable number of schools but enough to provide some variation in approaches. The district can compile this information into a list of best practices, which would serve as a guide for schools that see an uptick in their Latino student enrollment in the future. Since schools’ perspective on the efficacy of engagement programs could be biased and anecdotal in nature, BCPS could pursue a formal evaluation of impact of engagement programs, using statistical analysis methods.

2. Interpreter’s Bank

The literature suggests that parent involvement depends on parents’ ability to participate in a two-way dialogue with school staff; dissemination of school information by mail and on school websites has some positive effect, but not as much as active and frequent interaction; parents must be able to engage staff on an ongoing basis, not just through written communications, parent-teacher conferences, or in a triage fashion when behavioral or academic problems emerge. The data suggest that the more active a parent’s involvement, the more positive effect the involvement will have on a child’s performance. One recommendation in the literature is for schools to have bilingual staff or translators who can communicate with Latino parents. As noted previously, Baltimore City public schools have the discretion to hire bilingual staff as para-educators, parent assistants, or ESOL instructors, but the district does not offer any system-
wide support for in-person translation. At the district level, the closest current program is the telephonic interpretation service. Parents and nonprofit service providers noted that, in practice, communication during parent-teacher conferences takes on a variety of forms, including the telephonic interpretation, staff acting as interpreters, and the bilingual child acting as the interpreter.

At the time of our interviews, the BCPS Office of Engagement was investigating an “interpreters bank” model used by neighboring school districts in Baltimore, Anne Arundel, and Howard counties. In Baltimore County, the school district contracts with a list of interpreters who can be requested for in-person translation, most often during parent-teacher conferences. Baltimore County pays $32 per hour, including an hour for time spent driving to and from the school. This service would include interpreters of all languages common in the district, not only Spanish. The interpreter’s bank would be easy to implement in a short time frame and scalable to demand.

3. Orientation for Latino parents with limited English proficiency

The literature and interviews identify unfamiliarity with the U.S. education system as a major barrier for foreign-born Latino parents. These parents may not know about their school’s parent-teacher organization, or they may not know how to participate in one. In some cases, parents may not understand what role they are expected to play in their children’s education, and may avoid active involvement, such as making calls or unscheduled visits to teachers, out of deference to professional educators. One service provider cited cultural barriers and unfamiliarity with the U.S. education system as major barriers for his clients’ ability to be involved in their children’s education. At the start of each school year, or at the point of entry in the case of transfer students, schools with significant Latino student enrollment should hold an
orientation, conducted in Spanish, to explain appropriate ways parents can play a role in helping with homework, encouraging positive attitudes about school, participating in school events, and monitoring students’ academic performance. This orientation would be incorporated into the existing registration process for new students, increasing the likelihood that parents would know about and participate in the orientation.

4. Increase frequency of Spanish town hall meetings

Several studies noted the importance of school staff communicating with parents in their native tongue. If parents feel they must use English to communicate with school staff, they may feel intimidated and less inclined to engage staff about their children’s education.\(^{84, 85}\) Within the last two school years, BCPS began holding occasional forums in Spanish at neighborhood churches and the Enoch Pratt Public Library where Latino parents could converse with school district administrators in Spanish. Two employees from EBLO emphasized these forums (described as “Spanish Town halls”) as a crucial step in engaging parents. We recommend increasing the frequency of these types of meetings, perhaps in combination with the interpreters bank to supply translators if full-time bilingual staff are not available.

Since lack of transportation is sometimes offered as a barrier to parent involvement, the meetings should be held in neighborhoods with a strong Latino student enrollment, such as Upper Fells Point and Highlandtown.\(^{86, 87}\) In cases where the meeting is held apart from many Latino residents, BCPS should adopt a policy of providing or reimbursing travel costs to these town hall meetings.

In the event that the entire meeting cannot be conducted in Spanish, the district might adopt a model currently in practice at Armistead Gardens. At this school, a volunteer from EBLO attends
all parent-school functions, providing headsets for the Spanish-speaking parents, and stands in the back of the room, translating. If a parent has a question, she can ask it on the parent’s behalf.

5. Education-Oriented Radio Program in Spanish

One mode of engagement that received little treatment in the literature was communicating by radio. Denver Public Schools (DPS) operates a live hour-long radio program (“Educa”) three days a week on an A.M. frequency, which then rebroadcasts on Sundays. The program has three main subjects: school district news, civic affairs news, and practical tips about education and health. Parents can call with questions. The show is entirely in Spanish. In the past, Educa has hosted members of the school board and the school superintendent with a professional interpreter helping the school board member take live calls from Spanish-speaking parents in the district.88 The DPS model also has a segment called MATT Maestro en Casa, which teaches parents English-language skills; parents can register by phone or online for workbooks and take an English proficiency exam at the end of a 35-week period to receive a diploma. In its first year, the program had 3,000 parents register and 200 receive diplomas. Denver officials running Educa said MATT Maestro en Casa was not Denver-specific and could be replicated in other metropolitan markets.

We were unable to conduct a radio market analysis of costs associated with implementing a similar Spanish radio program in the Baltimore area. However, the costs associated with the Denver radio program may serve as a useful proxy. The annual cost of running the program is $250,000, but the school district only pays $40,000, or about 15 percent of the actual costs.89 Half of the district’s costs come from federal Title III funds and the other half comes from the district’s general fund. The majority of the program costs are covered by in-kind donations by
local radio stations, which includes volunteer staff hours by a professional producer and board operator.

Since the program is new, no independent assessment of its effectiveness in encouraging parent involvement exists. However, within the first few months of Educa’s launch in 2010, the show more than doubled its audience to about 54,200 unique listeners; furthermore, the district has since reported anecdotal evidence of more Latino parents attending school functions as a result of Educa. ⁹⁰, ⁹¹

There is not a Baltimore-based Spanish radio station, but there are several Spanish radio stations in Maryland, which would be candidates for hosting a similar program, most notably 99.1 “El Zol.” Following the Educa model, the radio show could focus on topics of interest to Latino parents across the Baltimore-D.C. metro areas, such as the annual enrollment process, strategies and services for helping children with their homework, and preparing students for college. It could host school administrators, such as Dr. Alonso, and school board members. Much like the Spanish town halls, this would give Latino parents an opportunity to communicate in Spanish with school district decision makers.

Conclusions

As of 2012, Latino students in BCPS do not share the bleak educational outlook of Latino students nationally: Their MSA test performance in reading is improving, they are already competitive in the state’s MSA math test scores with White students, and they outperform other demographic groups in the graduation rate. However, our interviews indicated that the BCPS needs to reassess its system-wide policies aimed at Latino students with non-English-speaking parents, exemplified by BCPS’ reliance on telephonic interpreters and translated written communication, rather than dedicated or contracted staff. With the influx of Latino students
expected to continue, the school system should adopt measures to engage Latino parents with limited English proficiency. These measures can be low-cost and easy to implement, such as enabling schools to draw from a pool of local interpreters on a contract-basis or surveying best practices taking place at individual schools. Eventually, BCPS should consider options for systemic engagement, such as a Spanish radio show that would cater to a local and regional Latino audience on an ongoing basis throughout the school year.
APPENDIX FIGURE 1.1

Baltimore City Population Growth Rates: Total and Hispanic Only 2000 - 2010

APPENDIX FIGURE 1.2

Hispanic/Latino Enrollment

APPENDIX FIGURE 1.3

Foreign Born Population in Baltimore-Towson MSA

APPENDIX FIGURE 1.5

Latino Enrollment in Baltimore City Public Schools 2011

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indicator</th>
<th>Calculation</th>
<th>Result</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Maryland State Assessments (MSA)</strong></td>
<td>A series of tests for reading and mathematics, given each year in grades 3 through 8. A science section is given in grades 5 and 8.</td>
<td>Hispanic students have closed the mathematics gap with Whites; are on track to close the reading achievement gap that remains.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Maryland High School Assessments (HSA)</strong></td>
<td>The HSA consists of three tests-- algebra, biology and English--that all students who entered grade 9 in 2005 must pass to graduate. 2011 was the last year that the government section was given.</td>
<td>A marked achievement gap exists between Hispanic and White students in algebra, biology, government, and English.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP)</strong></td>
<td>The largest nationally representative and continuing assessment of students in mathematics, reading, science, writing, the arts, civics, economics, geography, and U.S. history.</td>
<td>This test is used to give a national perspective. We cannot compare scores against NAEP because Baltimore did not have a large enough sample size of Latinos taking the exam.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Scholastic Assessment Test (SAT)</strong></td>
<td>Drawn from those students who decide to take the SAT test each year. Scores are calculated by adding together the individual English and Mathematics sections of the test.</td>
<td>Hispanic student SATs in 2011 were lower than in 2007 and 2010 (the available years) but are higher than the average city student. Since the test is voluntary, and the sample for Latinos who have taken the test is small, the results should not be extended to the entire population.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Dropout Rate: Status Rate</strong></td>
<td>The percentage of civilian, non-institutionalized 16- to 24-year-olds who are not in high school and who have not earned a high school credential (either a diploma or equivalency credential such as a GED. This rate includes all dropouts regardless of when they last attended school, as well as individuals who may have never attended school in the United States. This is a national metric.</td>
<td>The Latino dropout rate has improved dramatically although it remains significantly above all other groups. Because this rate includes those who may have never attended high school in the United States (such as immigrants who did not attend high school in their home country) it should be interpreted with caution.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Dropout Rate: 4-Year Adjusted Cohort</strong></td>
<td>The four–year adjusted cohort dropout rate is defined as the number of students who leave school, for any reason other than death, within the four year period divided by the number of students who form the adjusted cohort.</td>
<td>The class of 2011 had a dropout rate of 25.83 percent, up from 18.81 percent for the previous class. For comparison, the total rate for 2011 was 19.38 down from 23.79 in 2010.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Graduation Rate: 5-Year Adjusted Cohort</strong></td>
<td>First-time 9th grades plus all students who transfer into the cohort minus students who transfer out, emigrate, or die by the end of a five-year period make up the cohort. The rate is derived by dividing receive a degree within 5-years by the total cohort.</td>
<td>Asian students outpace all other students in this measure, but Hispanic students are second with a 75.73 percent graduation rate in 2010. White and Black students lag behind.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

APPENDIX FIGURE 1.7

Grades 3 - 8 Combined
Reading: Percent Proficient and Advanced, by Race/Ethnicity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>All Students</th>
<th>Black</th>
<th>White</th>
<th>Hispanic</th>
<th>Asian/Pacific Islander</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>48.8</td>
<td>56.7</td>
<td>72.4</td>
<td>80.7</td>
<td>82.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>56.1</td>
<td>67.5</td>
<td>70.7</td>
<td>76.2</td>
<td>86.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>61.1</td>
<td>70.7</td>
<td>74.7</td>
<td>84.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>61.1</td>
<td>70.7</td>
<td>74.7</td>
<td>84.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


APPENDIX FIGURE 1.8

Grades 3 - 8 Combined
Math: Percent Proficient and Advanced, by Race/Ethnicity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>All Students</th>
<th>Black</th>
<th>White</th>
<th>Hispanic</th>
<th>Asian/Pacific Islander</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>33.5</td>
<td>47.8</td>
<td>66.3</td>
<td>78.5</td>
<td>80.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>46.9</td>
<td>64.5</td>
<td>64.5</td>
<td>76.3</td>
<td>85.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>48.2</td>
<td>59.1</td>
<td>62.3</td>
<td>76.3</td>
<td>85.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>52.3</td>
<td>60.9</td>
<td>76.3</td>
<td>85.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


35
References


24 Ibid.


38 Ibid.


45 Personal Interview with Sara Rivera, Centro de la Comunidad, February 15, 2012


48 Ibid.


51 Ibid.

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Rivera, Sara. (2012). Interview with Sara Rivera, Legal/Immigration & Education Services Counselor, Centro de la Comunidad, Feb. 15, 2012


