

DISSERTATION

STAFF PERCEPTIONS OF LATINO/A SCHOOL ENGAGEMENT: AN  
ETHNOGRAPHIC STUDY

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ABSTRACT

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Latinos are the largest and most rapidly growing minority group in the United States. They also represent the fastest growing segment of the school-age population. The number of dropouts in the Latino population is significantly higher than other major ethnic groups. Latino/a students face discriminatory barriers within the school system such as overrepresentation in special education, lowered teacher expectations, and harsher disciplinary consequences than Non-Hispanic, White students. The purpose of this study was to explore perceptions, opinions, and recommendations to help improve Latino/a students' retention in high school. Interviews were conducted with middle-school staff. Qualitative document analysis was used to allow new opinions and recommendations to be found that could help increase Latino/a student retention in high schools. Multiple factors such as low parental involvement, few role models, and undocumented status were found to affect Latino/a students' participation in school. Latino/a students' self perceptions also seem to influence their school engagement. Changing policy and involving all the stakeholders involved in education are recommendations to improve Latino/a student engagement and school retention.

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Latinos are the largest and most rapidly growing minority group in the United States (U.S. Census Bureau, 2008). The Latino/a population reached 45.5 million in 2008, and it is estimated that by 2050, Latino/as will represent over one-third of the U.S. population (U.S. Census Bureau, 2008; U.S. Census Bureau, 2000). In addition to Latino/as being the largest ethnic group among children under 18, Latino/as represent the fastest growing segment of the school-age population (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000; Davison Avilés, Guerrero, Howarth & Thomas, 1999).

The number of dropouts in the Latino population is significantly higher than other major ethnic groups (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000; National Center for Education Statistics, 2005; Rumberger, 1991). Significantly fewer Latino/as (53%) graduate from high school than Whites (79%; Urban Institute Educational Policy Center, 2004). This academic gap continues into higher education as more non-Hispanic Whites (30%) are able to graduate from college than Latino/as (12%; Pew Hispanic Trust, 2006).

The high dropout rate among Latino/as is alarming for a number of reasons: and one of the major reasons is that a large portion of this population is affected by continuous hardships in the academic domain (Martinez, DeGarmo, & Eddy, 2004). For example, students who do not complete high school are more likely to be unemployed and when employed to receive lower wages (\$12,809 per year) than high school graduates (\$18,737 per year; National Center for Education Statistics, 2002; Rumberger, 1987; U.S. Census Bureau, 1994). High school dropouts are also more likely to use drugs, have health issues, participate in criminal activity, and are more likely to depend on welfare and social services during their lifetimes than those who graduate from high school (Rumberger, 1995; Martinez et al., 2004; Beauvais, Chavez, Oetting,

Deffenbacher, & Cornell, 1996). The negative impacts of dropping out of high school not only impact Latino/as but the economic costs impact the United States as a whole.

As a national priority, improving Latino/as' high school graduation rate is necessary, not only for Latino/as' academic and career achievement, but also for this country to thrive as the Latino/a population continues to increase. The high Latino/a drop out rate has grave social ramifications for society. For example, due to dropouts' higher rates of unemployment or lower earnings, the U.S. as a whole suffers from lower national income and tax revenues for supporting government services (Rumberger, 1991; Levin, 1972). In addition, there is an increased need for social services and the crime rate increases (Thornberry, Moore, & Christenson, 1985). Further, there is reduced political involvement and poorer health outcomes among the undereducated. (Levin, 1972). Consequently, the impact of dropping out of high school has long term consequences for both the individual and for the society at large, and it is important to ensure that every child in America has a good education in order to attain his or her career goals (Hodgkinson, 1991).

There is a substantial amount of research related to the high dropout rate of Latino/as. Various factors have been hypothesized that may influence dropout behavior (Rumberger, 1991). These factors include but are not limited to: family background, personal characteristics, and structural barriers such as discriminatory behavior experienced in school and in the community (Rumberger 1991; Rumberger 1995; DeGarmo & Martinez, 2006). Even though the dropout problem is a multifaceted issue, focusing on the influence of school discrimination targets systematic barriers that keep Latino/as from graduating. Investigating this issue is paramount to developing innovative,

culturally sensitive ways within the educational system to help reduce the high school dropout rate among Latino/as.

*History of discrimination among minorities in educational settings*

Ethnic discrimination refers to the unequal treatment of people based on ethnicity (DeGarmo & Martinez, 2006), which includes prejudiced statements, harmful stereotypes, and negative actions toward people based on their ethnic group identification (Sellers & Shelton, 2003). There is an extensive history of exploitation and injustice against the African-American community in the United States (Patton, 1998; Hilliard, 2001). Due to the discrimination that African-Americans have continually faced in the United States, there has been much research on their experiences of discrimination within the school system (Felice, 1981; Ogbu, 1997; Hilliard, 2001; Patton, 1998). Even though both U.S. born Latino/as and African-Americans are minorities, there are distinct differences between the experiences of these minority groups based on their history and culture. African Americans have experienced significant institutionalized discrimination much of which was built into the laws of this country prior to The Civil Rights Acts of 1964 (National Archives and Records Administration). The extent of segregation and discrimination against African Americans in the history of this country denied this population their constitutional rights as U.S. citizens (Samora & Simon Vandel, 1993). Latino/as have faced less overt institutional discrimination in the U.S. than African Americans, and this discrimination among Latino/as was not supported by legislation as it was against African Americans. Latino/as were technically considered to be White, so laws that applied to African Americans did not affect them, but they nonetheless dealt with being viewed as inferior by the dominant White society (Samora & Simon Vandel,

1993). Despite their differences, both of these groups face inequality in U.S. society. Because of the extensive focus in research on the inequalities that African American students have faced in the U.S., a review of their experiences demonstrates the difficulties that minorities in general have faced in this country.

After African Americans' emancipation from slavery, White Americans used barriers such as the job ceiling to keep them from affluent careers (Ogbu, 1997). The job ceiling refers to formal statutes and informal practices used by White Americans to limit the access of African Americans to competitive jobs (Ogbu, 1978). Through use of the job ceiling, White Americans have impeded generations of African Americans from competing for sought-after jobs, in addition to equal wages and opportunities for promotion based on education and ability (Ogbu, 1991). Before the 1960s, African Americans were not allowed to compete freely at an individual level for any jobs they wanted and for which they had the school degrees and ability (Ogbu, 1997). Available jobs for African Americans did not require mainstream school degrees, which discouraged this population from academic achievement. Schools helped prepare African Americans for these substandard positions below the job ceiling by giving them an inferior education with inadequately trained and underpaid teachers in schools with inadequate educational materials (Ogbu, 1997). In addition, teachers were found to have lower expectations for African Americans students and they were more likely to be labeled as "educationally handicapped," which resulted in the overrepresentation of African American students in special education classes.

Latino/as have faced similar struggles in the educational system within the United States. To describe the history of Latino/as within the U.S., the term Mexican-Americans

will be used. The Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo, was signed at the end of the war between the U.S. and Mexico in 1848. This treaty increased the territory of the U.S. by adding the territories of New Mexico, California, Arizona, New Mexico and Texas. It was also intended to guarantee the rights of Mexican-Americans as U.S. citizens. (Samora & Vandel Simon, 1993). Among the rights that Mexican-Americans were promised as citizens was the right to equal opportunities in education. However, the right to an equal education was not granted to Latino/as because of ethnic discrimination (San Miguel, 1987). Schools were established slowly after the Mexican American War, and when the schools were built, there was little consideration of the cultural and language needs of the Mexican-American students in conquered territories (Samora & Vandel, 1991). To ensure that Mexican Americans learned English, various states passed laws prohibiting the use of Spanish in school instruction. Consequently, many children who were unable to speak English were punished, at times corporally, for speaking their native language, in school. This devastating practice continued and was documented well into the 1970s (Samora & Vandel Simon, 1993).

The schools for Mexican-Americans were typically segregated, overcrowded, and lacked well-trained teachers and school equipment in the southwestern part of the United States (San Miguel, 1987). Some schools in this area of the United States placed children with distinct Spanish surnames in separate schools or classrooms segregated from non-Hispanic surname children (Powers, 2008). These rooms were known as the “Mexican” rooms. Schools argued that this was necessary because in this manner, all of the children who did not know English would in some way learn it at a faster pace than if they were placed with children who knew English (Samora & Vandel Simon, 1993; Power 2008).

Despite this apparent “effort” for Latino/a students to learn English, the instruction in the “Mexican” room and schools was inferior to the mainstream classrooms, and the teaching of English was considered inadequate (Samora & Vandel Simon, 1993; Powers, 2008). Children with Spanish surnames stayed in the “Mexican” schools or rooms for several years. For example, Mexican-American students were put in segregated schools and classrooms for most of their elementary school years in Arizona (Powers, 2008). Similarly, Mexican-American students were officially segregated through third grade in California (Valencia, 2005). This separation within schools created attitudes of inadequacy among the Latino/a children and superiority within the White children (Samora & Vandel Simon, 1993). In addition, in large school districts such as San Antonio or Los Angeles, gerrymandering occurred, which separated the Mexican-American population from the dominant group through changes in the school boundaries (Samora & Vandel Simon, 1993). This exploitation of the school district boundaries ensured that the White, non-Hispanic schools would typically have more money for equipment, school facilities, and teacher salaries than schools with children who were poor or of minority status (Samora & Vandel Simon, 1993).

In addition, there were high rates of academic difficulties and dropout rates among Latino/a students. One example of these academic difficulties among Latino/as is reflected in their achievement test scores. This population has consistently had lower scores on achievement tests than non-Hispanic, White children (San Miguel, 1987). These tests are typically standardized and validated among an English-speaking, White, non-Hispanic, middle-class population. Therefore, people who are not part of this group may score poorly. As a result, Latino/a students have habitually been assigned to a non-

academic educational track such as vocational studies rather than to college preparation due to the intellectual delays that were evident in these standardized tests (Samora & Vandel Simon, 1993). With schools discouraging Latino/as from pursuing academic achievement and higher education, the inferior educational status among Latino/as in this country has been reinforced and maintained.

*Ogbu: A cultural anthropological perspective*

Understanding how minority status impacts an individual's perception of school is necessary in order to understand the institutional barriers that minorities face within the U.S. educational system. John U. Ogbu was a prominent anthropologist who researched minority students' experiences in the United States (Brandes, Dundes, & Nader, 2003). He was born in Nigeria in 1939. He planned to enter the ministry and was sent to the Princeton Theological seminary. Once Ogbu came to the United States, he became interested in anthropology and changed his career plans (Brandes, Dundes & Nader, 2003; Burdman, 2003). In 1961, Ogbu went to the University of California, Berkeley, received his doctorate, and was a professor there for the rest of his life. Ogbu's research focused on the academic achievement gaps that existed between non-Hispanic, White children and minority children (Burdman, 2003). John Ogbu died in 2003 (Burdman, 2003) and his theories on distinctions between minorities and the cultural attitudes and behaviors that impact their educational experiences frames the discussion of discrimination and oppression that minorities continue to face in this country.

Ogbu (1991) describes how minorities differ in how they have been incorporated into society. Voluntary minorities are individuals who have moved to the United States because they believe that the United States will offer better opportunities than their

countries of origin. They choose to leave their homes and are free from a history of deprecation in their new societies (De Vos and Suarez-Orozco, 1990). Even though voluntary minorities experience discrimination once they are in the United States, their positive expectations about this country influence their perceptions of society and of the public school system. Voluntary minorities are rather successful in school despite language, cultural, and career barriers (Ogbu, 1997). They perceive academic success as necessary and sufficient to achieve good careers and improve their social status and they trust their relationships with public schools and school personnel (Ogbu, 1997).

In contrast, involuntary minorities are people who have historically been systematically exploited through slavery, colonization, or conquest. These individuals are typically resentful because of their perceived loss of freedom, and they interact in a social context in which the historical exploitation by the dominant group continues (Ogbu, 1991). Unlike voluntary minorities, involuntary minorities believe that their present situation in the United States was forced on them by non-Hispanic, White Americans or the government. They do not have a motherland where they can return if their experiences in the United States become intolerable (Ogbu, 1997).

Due to experiences of discrimination and intolerance in schools, Ogbu hypothesized that involuntary minorities may view education negatively. The traditional educational system run by non-Hispanic, Whites becomes a psychological threat to the students' sense of ethnic belonging (Suarez-Orozco, 1991). When schools reflect the inequality of society, students may experience "affective dissonance" (De Vos, 1978, p.22). This term refers to the difficulties minority students face when they have to separate their ethnic-collective identity from their academic identity (Ogbu, 1997).

Behaviors needed for success in school are sometimes seen as “acting white” and as oppositional to the students’ ethnic group identity (De Vos & Suarez-Orozco, 1990; Ogbu, 1997). Involuntary minorities may believe that being educated is necessary but not sufficient to attain superior jobs and to experience upward social mobility. This perception is based on the many examples of members of their ethnic groups who have excellent educations but do not have good careers or social position reflective of these educational achievements (Ogbu, 1997) which can be attributed to prejudice and discrimination. Consequently, non-immigrant minorities do not trust public schools. Because of these beliefs and attitudes, involuntary minorities are ambivalent toward school and do not work as hard as they could (Ogbu, 1993). For oppressed minority groups, schooling can be seen as one more way for the dominant group to maintain an unjust system (Ogbu, 1991).

The educational limitations that Latino/as faced decades ago persist into the twenty first century. Involuntary minorities, such as Latino/as continue to have lowered school performance and this might reflect their frustrations within the educational system (Davison Avilés et al., 1999; Bireda, 2000; Gordon, Della Piana, & Keleher, 2000). Latino/a youth are frequently stereotyped as unmotivated or lacking in educational ambition, as violent, and as antisocial (Cowan, Martinez, & Mendiola, 1997). Wakefield and Fajardo (2004) found that these negative stereotypes are prevalent in schools and seem to influence school staff perceptions of Latino/as. The pervading influence of stereotypes in this country contributes to discrimination both in schools and in the community (Wakefield, Hudley, & Delgadillo, 1999). The discrimination that Latino/as face in the educational system is also evident in overrepresentation in remedial classes,

lowered teacher expectations, and elevated rates of disciplinary problems (Carter, 2006; Felice, 1981; Wakefield & Tauber, 2004). These examples of institutional inequity within the public school educational system reinforce and maintain racial and socioeconomic disparities (Skiba, Michael, & Nardo, 2000).

#### *Overrepresentation of Latino/as in Remedial Classes*

Tracking refers to placing students in different classes based on their perceived differences in abilities (Gordon et al., 2000). It occurs in various forms such as remedial alternatives, or special education programs in addition to gifted and talented programs. Many high school systems also differentiate curriculum between vocational and college preparatory tracks. Tracking can help determine the results of a student's entire academic career. Track assignments are frequently based on some combination of teacher recommendation, parental intervention, and standardized testing (Gordon et al., 2000; Davison Avilés et al., 1999). Standardized assessment tests result in lower scores on average for ethnic minorities and this may be due to racial and cultural test bias. In addition, teacher recommendations, which are subjective measures of a student's ability, can also help create inequalities through racial stereotyping and prejudice (Gordon et al., 2000). This bias is evident in Oakes' study (1995) investigating school districts in Illinois and California in which both African American and Latino students who had the same test scores as non-Hispanic White and Asian students were less likely to be placed in advanced classes.

Latino/a students are generally underrepresented in gifted tracks and overrepresented in remedial tracks (Gordon, 2000; Lavin & Crook, 1990). Davison Avilés and colleagues (1999) found that school personnel who were teaching Latino/a

students in a remedial program failed to meet the students' needs; students thought that the program required them to be independent and self-sufficient in their learning processes even though the students desired and needed support and direction from the school. Remedial classes are designed to help students "catch up with classes" and fill in specific gaps in their knowledge (Davison Avilés et al., 1999; Gordon et al. 2000). Once the remedial assignments are completed, students should return to the mainstream classes, but this was not actually happening (Davison Avilés et al., 1999; Gordon et al. 2000; Meyer & Patton, 2001). This finding is further supported by Davison Avilés and his colleagues (1999) in a study where they found that school employees never expressed the goal for these students to return to the mainstream classroom and earn a diploma. Instead, Latino/a students were encouraged to obtain a GED. In reality, alternative classes typically deny students access to more advanced subject material. It is very challenging for students in alternative programs to catch up with their peers in the mainstream classes, so students in remedial programs fall further behind their upper track peers every year they are in school (Gordon et al., 2000). When minority students are in alternative programs, they miss important core academic curriculum, which creates more challenges for these students. Students do not learn as much as their mainstream classroom peers and have less access to interactive learning experiences and resources (Oakes, 1995). As a result, tracking forms programs that are racially separate in which minority children are provided with fewer educational opportunities (Oakes, 1995). The impact of special education placement is profound. The differences in educational opportunities that result from tracking limit many students' academic achievement and life options. These students may have lower levels of achievement, decreased opportunities for higher

education, and fewer employment opportunities (Markowitz, Garcia, & Eichelberger, 1997; Gordon, 2000; Lavin & Crook, 1990).

School staff often think Latino/a students have learning disorders and lower potential (Oakes, 1995; Lavin & Crook, 1990). The disproportionate number of Latino/as in special education programs demonstrates that ethnic minority students are possibly being overdiagnosed as disabled and placed in remedial programs that they do not need (Meyer & Patton, 2001). Special education programs have become inappropriate placements for students who may not be learning like other students, but may not have actual learning disabilities. These learning “differences” though may be mislabeled as “disabilities” (Meyer & Patton, 2001; Oakes, 1995). Consequently, many minority students are labeled as disabled not due to intellectual delays, but due to schools’ inabilities to meet their needs in the mainstream classroom. A “handicap” is created “out of social and cultural differences” due to the “rigidity and ignorance of our school system” (Trueba, 1989, p. 70).

College-preparatory or advanced placement classes and gifted programs are gateways to four-year colleges. It appears that these courses are similar to “gated communities” from which African American and Latino/a students are barred. Gordon, Della Pianna, & Keleher (2000) collected data on racial inequality from 12 school district offices in cities that are geographically and ethnically representative of the U.S. public school system. They found that in every one of these cities, both African Americans and Latino/as were underrepresented in advanced placement classes while non-Hispanic, Whites were overrepresented. In addition, high schools that served mostly African Americans and Latino/as did not offer advanced placement courses (Gordon et al., 2000;

Bireda, 2000). In a study examining the factors affecting African American, Latino/a, and White students' retention at both public and private universities in Indiana, St. John, Carter, Chung, and Musoba (2006) found that completing college preparatory curricula had a positive influence on retention for all three groups. Therefore, increasing retention for minority students might require offering them more advanced courses in high school.

It seems that there is a correlation between the overrepresentation of Latino/a students in alternative and remedial classes and dropping out of high school (Davison Avilés et al., 1999). Latino/as' academic achievement suffers from tracking systems in schools. Latino/a students in low-track classes consistently showed less improvement in achievement over time than their peers in advanced courses (Oakes, 1995). The largest gains in achievement were found among students who were placed in accelerated classes, demonstrating the importance of these classes. In other words, students in remedial courses showed less improvement over time than similar students who were in advanced courses. For Latino/as, there is unjustified disproportionate assignment to remedial classes and exclusion from advanced classes, fewer learning opportunities, and lower achievement. Tracking practices have developed a cycle of limited opportunities and reduced career options, and perpetuate the differences between Latino/a and non-Hispanic, White students (Oakes, 1995).

### *Teacher Expectations*

Numerous studies have demonstrated teachers' expectations affect how well students learn (Tauber, 1997; Jussim, & Eccles, 1992). Tauber (1997) explains that once a student has been labeled negatively or positively by a teacher, the teacher's treatment of the student will promote negative or positive expectations about the student. Each time a

teacher labels a student in his or her mind, this can potentially influence the student's future behavior and accomplishments (Tauber, 1998; Jussim & Eccles, 1992). School employees such as teachers and principals have lower expectations for Latino/a students than for non-Hispanic, White students (Davison et al., 1999; Bireda, 2000). Low academic achievement of Latino/a students is caused partially by teachers' reduced expectations for minority students resulting in poor academic performance and negative behaviors (Farkas, Grobe, Sheehan & Shuan, 1990; Rist, 1970). Some examples of communicating low expectations include letting students sleep in class, teaching down, never teaching demanding concepts, not calling on specific students, and not encouraging students to further their education (Bireda, 2000). In Rosenbloom & Way's study (2004) of minorities' experiences of discrimination at school, Latino/as viewed their teachers as implicitly and explicitly discriminatory. Students thought that the teachers were uncaring and not invested in their education (Rosenbloom & Way, 2004). In addition, teachers appeared to not care about the academic or emotional well-being of their Latino/a students. Wakefield & Fajardo (2004) also found that Latino/as were treated differently from their peers based on their ethnicity. For example, school counselors and college counselors shared little information about and support for Latino/a students regarding college opportunities (Wakefield & Fajardo, 2004).

Davison Avilés, Guerrero, Baraja Howarth, and Thomas (1999) found that Latino/a students were being "facilitated out" of high school rather than dropping out (p. 469). This may result from low teacher expectations and school staff encouraging students to not be in mainstream classrooms. For example, some Latino/a students drop out of high school because they were told both by principals and counselors that they

would not graduate (Davison Avilés et al., 1999). In addition, principals and administrators persuaded Latino/a students to leave the mainstream classroom for GED programs, Job Corps, or alternative schools. Students were not informed that these programs remove them from the core curriculum of school and limited their educational opportunities (Davison Avilés et al., 1999).

#### *Higher Rates of Disciplining Actions Toward Latino/as*

The disciplinary measures that Latino/as face in school demonstrate the significant inequality they face in the U.S. educational system (Bireda, 2000). Latino/a students were more likely to be suspended or expelled than White students (De La Rosa & Maw, 1990; Gordon et al., 2000; National Center of Education Statistics, 2003). In 2006, 7% of Latino/a students were suspended while 5% of White students were suspended; similarly, 0.2 % of Latino/a students were expelled, while 0.1% of White students were expelled (National Center for Education Statistics, 2009). Davison and his colleagues (1999) found that Latino/a students were more likely to be disciplined for violations of rules, which when committed by White students would be ignored. In addition, Latino/a students were more likely to be punished for minor misconduct and to receive punishments that were more severe than their infractions (Advanced Project and Civil Rights Project, 2000). In Wakefield and Fajardo's study (2004) examining Latino/a and African American males' experiences of discrimination in high school, many participants stated that their teachers were overly cautious of their behaviors due to their racial or ethnic group identification; they reported that they felt that their teachers were waiting for them to do "something wrong" (Wakefield & Fajardo, 2004, p. 7). Latino/s also reported being harassed by school police. It appears that these students get accused

of breaking rules by police officers (e.g., loitering) when they have not done anything inappropriately (Rosenbloom & Way, 2004; Wakefield & Fajardo, 2004).

Latino/ students were frequently suspended for offenses such as “disrespect” or “defiance of authority” (Gordon et al., 2000, p. 14; Advanced Project and The Civil Rights Project, 2000). Some discipline codes defined punishable behavior in subjective measures; how the code was applied typically depended on teachers’ and administrators’ interpretation of behavior, which can be affected by racial and ethnic differences. When discipline codes are subjective, this allows teachers’ unconscious or conscious beliefs about their minority students to influence their choices about how to discipline (Gordon et al., 2000). Zero-tolerance policies, which result in suspension and expulsion for certain weapon infractions, have contributed to the disproportionate measure of discipline that Latino/as experience in school (Gordon et al., 2000). These policies keep teachers and administrators from implementing more effective and less harmful means of discipline. Zero-tolerance policies are more typically seen in predominantly African American and Latino/a school districts (The Advancement Project and The Civil Rights Project, 2000). Schools are more likely to make exceptions in giving suspensions or expulsions when the student involved in the infraction is believed to have “a real future” that would be harmed by these disciplinary consequences (Gordon et al., 2000, p. 12). As a result, there are fewer exceptions made for Latino/as because of discrimination by the school personnel.

Both suspension and expulsion have a severe impact on students’ life opportunities. Suspension impedes equal participation in educational activities. Due to these unequal scholastic experiences, students who are suspended develop negative attitudes toward school, fall behind in their classes, and are more likely to drop out of

school than their peers (De La Rosa & Maw, 1990; Gordon et al., 2000). Students who are already doing poorly in school are the most likely to be suspended, but these are often the students who can least afford to miss class (Gordon et al., 2000).

School engagement has been increasingly examined as a possible way to improve low levels of academic achievement and high dropout rates (National Research Council & Institute of Medicine, 2004). One of the reasons for the increased research in school engagement is that historians have found less respect for authority and institutions among students. As a result, students may not be expected to respect and agree with the behavioral and academic requirements set by teachers and school staff (Janowitz, 1978; Modell & Elder, 2002). Research has shown that there is a decrease in motivation among students across grade levels (Eccles, Midgley & Adler, 1984; Fredricks & Eccles, 2002). Some researchers believe that these issues are most problematic for minority students, whose dropout rates are the highest (Rumberger, 1987). It is vital to encourage the importance of education, so that children can benefit and develop the skills they will need to do well in our current job force (Fredricks, Blumenfeld, & Paris, 2004).

Engagement is multifaceted, and it is defined in three ways (Fredricks et al., 2004). Behavioral engagement refers to participation in school. More specifically, it describes participation in academic and social or extracurricular events. It includes positive conduct (e.g., following rules, absence of disruptive behaviors like skipping school), participation in learning and academic endeavors (e.g., effort, attention, contributions to class discussions), and participation in extracurricular school activities (e.g., athletics, school government; Finn, 1993; Finn et al., 1995; Birch & Ladd, 1997; Skinner & Belmont, 1993). Behavioral engagement is necessary for attaining positive

academic outcomes and for averting dropping out of school (Fredricks et al., 2004). Another aspect of engagement is emotional engagement. Emotional engagement includes both positive and negative reactions to “teachers, classmates, academics, and school and is presumed to create ties to an institution and influence willingness to do the work” (Fredricks et al., 2004, p. 60). It refers to students’ emotional reactions in the classroom (e.g., boredom, interest, happiness, anxiety; Connell & Wellborn, 1991; Skinner & Belmont, 1993). Cognitive engagement refers to investment in school; it includes “thoughtfulness and willingness to exert the effort the effort necessary to comprehend complex ideas and master difficult skills (Fredricks et al., 2004, p. 60). Cognitive engagement involves self-regulation, motivation to work beyond the requirements, and a desire for challenge in school (Fredricks et al., 2004; Connell & Wellborn, 1991; Newmann, Wehlage, & Lamborn, 1992; Wehlage, Rutter, Smith, Lesko, & Fernandez, 1989).

School engagement may prevent youth from dropping out of school. Most of the research in this area has focused on behavioral engagement. Students who drop out complete less homework, demonstrate less effort in school, have more discipline issues at school, and participate less than their peers in class (Ekstrom, Goertz, Pollack & Rock, 1986). A correlation has also been found between low levels of behavioral engagement and skipping school, suspension, and failing to move on to the next grade level (Connell, Spencer, & Aber, 1994; Connell, Halpern-Felsher, Clifford, Crichlow, & Usinger, 1995). Participating in these problematic behaviors is a precursor to dropping out of school (Fredricks, 2004). Being part of extracurricular activities has been correlated with a decreased chance of dropping out of school (Eckstrom et al., 1986, Mahoney & Cairns,

1997; McNeal, 1995). Behavioral engagement in a student's early years of school critically affects the dropout process (Rumberger, 1987). Past literature (Alexandra, Entwisle, & Horsey, 1997) has shown that teachers' ratings of students' behavioral engagement and academic adjustment in the first grade were connected to the decision to drop out of high school. Students who drop out are more likely than other students to have poor attendance, be disorderly in class, and experience academic difficulties in the early years of school (Barrington & Hendricks, 1989; Cairns, Cairns, Neckerman, 1989). A student's level of emotional engagement can also influence a student's decision to drop out. Feelings of alienation or social isolation can motivate a student to drop out (Finn, 1989; Newmann, 1981). Having an emotional connection to a school or teachers can help keep children in school (Fine, 1991; Wehlage et al., 1989). Students who have poor attitudes and social issues in school are more likely to drop out of school (Cairns & Cairns, 1994; Ekstrom et al., 1986).

A high level of school engagement may be particularly crucial for the academic achievement of Latino/as (Brewster & Bowen, 2004). Teacher ratings of school engagement (e.g., measuring classroom participation and affect) were found to be significantly related to higher grade successes of Latino/a students in middle school and high school (Herman & Tucker, 2000). Similarly, Reyes and Jason (1993) found that Latino/a youth who expressed that they liked school were more likely to graduate from high school. Minority students usually have more behavioral issues than White students (Finn & Rock, 1997). It is also more common for Latino/a students to be absent from school (Bryk & Thum, 1989, Rumberger, 1995). Because behavioral problems are related to dropping out, student engagement is a critical factor to study when examining

the academic achievement of Latino/a students (Barrington & Hendricks, 1989; Brewster & Bowen, 2004).

### *Recommendations*

There is a substantial amount of research providing recommendations that could help reduce the discrimination that Latino/as face within the school system (Rumberger, 1991; Meyer & Patton, 2001; Martinez, DeGarmo & Eddy, 2004). Many recommendations focus on how school staff can work to reduce the high dropout rate among Latino/as. Students should not be required to adapt to the established teaching methods, materials, and assessments that are used in schools, which frequently leads labeling certain students as learning disabled when they may not be (Meyer & Patton, 2001). Martinez and colleagues (2004) argued that teachers and administrators must be better prepared to handle the growing diversity of students in their classrooms. Furthermore, teachers should be held responsible for achieving the goals set by their districts and communities for increasing their diversity training.

Teachers should have access to multicultural curriculum materials and be willing to adapt standardized materials when there is no multicultural alternative (Martinez, DeGarmo, & Eddy, 2004). Educators should engage in continuous cultural self-assessments to understand their attitudes, values, and beliefs, so they can determine how to improve their cultural sensitivity (Meyer & Patton, 2001). In addition, teacher education and administrator preparation and development programs need to include the necessary cultural knowledge, experiences, and skills for the inclusion and teaching of diverse students (Meyer & Patton, 2001). Gordon and colleagues (2000) recommended a detailed way of reducing racial inequalities within the school system. Schools should

have specific assessments measuring their level of racial equity. When disparities are evident, schools should establish racial equity plans that include specific, quantifiable goals and plans to address these inequalities. In addition, schools should inform the public of their progress through annual racial equity reports (Gordon et al., 2000). Bireda (2000) argued that the concept of equality should be based in the school administrative system, so that school policies and practices would help improve minority students' experiences in school. The school administrator should model culturally-sensitive appropriate behaviors and hold the school staff responsible for helping all students feel nurtured, accepted, and respected within the school (Bireda, 2000).

There are also recommendations that discuss the importance of involvement of institutions to help Latino/a students graduate from high school. It is imperative to recognize the important role of schools, communities, and families in the effort to help at-risk and actual dropouts (Rumberger, 1991). Systematic efforts are needed that incorporate family, community, and school efforts that promote problem-solving styles, social skills, network building, a use of role models, advocacy, and making use of resources available in various settings (Stanton-Salazar, Vasquez, & Mehan, 2000). School staff, families, policy makers, and community members must work together as allies for the creation of a new, accepting culture that incorporates the diversity of students (Meyer & Patton, 2001). Both school achievement and failure is a shared responsibility (Meyer & Patton, 2001; Gordon et al., 2000). It is essential that all people in the U.S., including parents and school staff, assure that all children are provided with the skills to succeed in our increasingly diverse society (Wakefield & Fajardo, 2004).

### *Summary and Purpose of the Current Study*

There has been a substantial amount of research examining the discrimination that Latino/a students experience within the school system (Davison Avilés et al., 1999, Rumberger, 1991; Gordon et al., 2000; Meyers & Patton., 2000). The literature on the high Latino/a high school dropout rate has focused on various school factors associated with dropping out of high school. These factors include discrimination experienced in schools such as overrepresentation in special education, lowered teacher expectations, and increased discipline (Gordon et al., 2000; Wakefield & Fajardo, 2004; Bireda, 2000).

Past studies have examined the disparities that Latino/as face in school by involving students and parents (DeGarmo & Martinez, 2006; Harry, 1992; Davison Avilés et al., 1999). However, few studies have investigated teachers' perceptions of Latino/a school engagement among Latino/a students. This study will be unique in that teachers will be included in an open discussion about this issue. Previous research recommends ways that teachers can help the educational disparities that Latino/a students face, but few studies have actually sought educators' perceptions of Latino/a school engagement. Because of educators' vast experiences with students, learning about their opinions and recommendations would be valuable. Teacher's multicultural training will also be explored so that the breadth of their training along with its strengths and deficits can be examined. Past literature has noted the impact of teachers on students' retention, but they have not directly addressed these issues with them. This study is significant because it involves directly asking teachers for their opinions on this issue aimed at providing recommendations from teachers that could help improve high school retention among Latino/a students.

There are five purposes of this study. The first purpose of this study will be to focus on perceptions by teachers of Latino/a school engagement. Exploring their opinions about this issue will provide important information about systemic issues within schools while also describing teachers' subjective experiences regarding this population. The second purpose is to elicit their recommendations for improving Latino/a engagement. Because of educators' experiences within the school system, they could identify useful and innovative ways to help Latino/a students. Thirdly, investigating teacher perceptions of influential people in Latino/a student's lives can help formulate ways to improve student retention through the help of these important people in students' lives. The fourth purpose is to learn about teachers' perceptions of the need for multicultural training, and the fifth purpose is to elicit their recommendations to improve multicultural training. In summary, the current study seeks to answer five research questions:

Research questions:

1. Do teachers think there is a need to improve school engagement for Latino/a students (e.g., behavioral engagement, emotional engagement, and cognitive engagement)?
2. What suggestions do teachers have for improving school engagement among Latino/a students?
3. Who influences Latino/a students and in what way?
4. Do teachers think there a need for awareness and training to help develop more cultural sensitivity within the schools?
5. What recommendations do teachers have to improve multicultural training?

## Method

### *Participants*

School staff members were recruited from one middle school in Colorado. I attempted to conduct interviews in two middle schools, however I only received approval from one school to conduct the study. Interviews with all of the participants occurred at the school except for one interview that occurred at the participant's house due to convenience. Individuals at all staff levels were interviewed, but their specific roles will not be described to protect the participants' confidentiality. The key informant participants included administrative staff and counselors, and the staff participants included teachers, paraprofessionals, and administrative assistants. The school in this study has a significant percentage of Latino/a students (50%), and a high number of students (72%) who receive free or reduced lunches, which suggests that many of the students have limited financial resources (See Table 1 for demographic details).

There were a total of 15 participants in this study, four key informants and eleven staff interviewees. Eight (47%) of the participants were males. Eight (53%) of the participants reported being non-Hispanic-White and five (33%) of the participants reported being Hispanic. Twelve (80%) of the participants reported being married. The mean age of the participants was 39.8-years-old with a range of 23 to 67 years old. The mean length of years that the participants had been in the school system was 13.13 years with a range of 3-28 years (See Table 2 for demographic details). Key informant interviews and staff interviews lasted from forty minutes to an hour. There were four exceptions in the teacher/staff interviews which lasted for twenty-five minutes to thirty-five minutes, and this could have been due to various factors (e.g., the participants' time

constraints, their level of comfort with discussing the topics of the study with the interviewer, reservations due to the issues that the school district was facing).

### *Measures*

The questions for interviews with the key informants and teacher/staff participants were developed by both co-investigators of this study. Each of the questions was developed to gain insight into teachers' perceptions about Latino/a school engagement.

### *Procedure*

Each participant was individually interviewed by the primary co-investigator. For the recruitment process, an email was distributed among the teachers in each school to inform them of the study. As an incentive to participate, there was a raffle for two fifty dollar gift certificates to downtown businesses that was held after the last participant interview was conducted. The primary co-investigator attended two teacher meetings to hand out flyers, which included the same information in the recruitment email to encourage teachers to participate in the study. I also tried to contact sixteen other staff members via email who did not respond, so I was not able to conduct as many interviews as originally planned.

There were a number of contextual issues in the school district in the fall of 2009. The staff members were very busy, due to the restructuring of the district from junior highs to middle schools meaning that grade six was now placed in middle school and grade nine was moved to high school, and the time required for participation may not have appealed to them. In addition, there were multiple stressors occurring in the district close to the time at which the interviews were being conducted. Another stressor may have been the multiple arrests of school staff in the district (not at this specific school)

engaging in inappropriate sexual conduct with students. A local newspaper reported that parents in the district were upset that the district had not notified them earlier of these allegations. These issues may have created tension in the district that contributed to staff members' reluctance to participate in an interview with me, someone they did not know. A local newspaper also reported that the district was also facing a reduced budget and in order to cut its budget, schools closures were being considered. The uncertainty of the district's finances may also be creating stress for the school staff members, which could have also contributed to the lack of interest or response to being interviewed.

The interviews were held in a community in northern Colorado. Each interview was recorded with two different recorders. The interviews were then transcribed. Research assistants typed all transcriptions in text form. The primary co-investigator conducted all of the interviews with the teachers and key informants. Each interview transcription was recorded, transcribed, and organized using NVivo 7.0 (Richards, 2005) software for the qualitative analysis.

All participants were given written consent forms prior to joining the study. The complete consent form was explained verbally to the participants. The participants also completed a demographic survey providing a description of the participants' demographics.

### *Introduction to Qualitative Research*

When conducting a qualitative study, the researcher is interested in discovering and understanding a specific situation, the process underlying this situation, the individual perspectives of the participants in the study, or a combination of all of these factors (Merriam, 2002). The data for qualitative analysis are collected through document analysis, observations, and interviews. These data are then analyzed inductively to

identify the common themes present across all the data, and then, a detailed account of the findings is presented while incorporating literature references that contributed to the formation of the study (Merriam, 2002). Qualitative analysis will be used in this study to explore aspects of language, discover patterns in the data, seek the meaning of the text, and to encourage reflection of the unstructured data (Creswell, 1994). Qualitative research is also descriptive, so the researcher can investigate process, meaning, and understanding through the data itself (Creswell, 1994).

Qualitative document analysis (QDA; also referred to as ethnographic content analysis) will be used for the current analysis (Altheide, Coyle, DeVriese, Schneider, 2008). In this type of data analysis, new concepts are allowed to emerge that have not been explored in past research. This qualitative method allows for discovery behind the phenomenon through individuals' own words and perceptions. QDA involves the constant comparison and discovery of significant situations and meanings (Altheide, Coyle, DeVriese, Schneider, 2008). The research goals of QDA are discovery and verification (Altheide, 1987). This analysis collects data rather than forcing it into "predefined categories;" concepts always emerge in ethnographic research (Altheide, 1987). Categories and variables guide an ethnographic study, but new concepts are expected to emerge throughout the analysis (Altheide, 1987).

### *Analysis*

#### *Qualitative Data Analysis*

The overall qualitative framework of this analysis is qualitative document analysis. In order to inductively code, abbreviated grounded theory (constant comparative analysis) was used with the transcripts of the interviews (Willig, 2003). In the

abbreviated version of grounded theory, the principles of grounded theory such as coding and constant comparative analysis are used, but the researcher does not have the ability to refine the analysis by seeking additional data, nor is theory development a key element of the outcome (Willig, 2003). Line-by-line analysis was used to ensure that the analysis was grounded and that higher-level categories emerge from the data. By using constant comparative analysis, the major thematic structures were induced (Hutchinson, 1988). Constant comparative analysis refers to open codes or first level codes being compared with each other in relation to the data (e.g., writing analytical notes on linkages to various frameworks of interpretation), so categories can emerge that are more abstract, which will organize the initial codes into second level or axial codes (e.g., a matrix analysis of the major themes in the data). Then, the categories are joined in order to discover the framework of the data (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Carney, 1990).

Constant comparative analysis was used to categorize the different themes in the interviews. This analysis occurs when no prior codes are established and is a form of inductive coding using five steps. The codes are generated from the text by moving from more literal meanings to more abstract ideas (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The first step of constant comparative analysis is to conceptualize the data, referring to breaking apart a section of the data that represents a phenomenon. Codes are compared so that similar phenomena can be given the same name. The second step is categorizing. This step involves grouping concepts that seem to pertain to the same phenomena. The phenomenon which is represented by a category is given a conceptual name, but this name will be more abstract than that given to other concepts grouped under it. Categories

have conceptual significance because they are able to bring together around them other groups of concepts or subcategories (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

The third step involves naming the categories. The name chosen is the one that seems most logically related to the data it represents, yet it should be a more abstract concept than the ones it describes. The most important part of this step is to name the categories, so that they can begin to be developed analytically by the researcher. The fourth step is the development of categories in terms of their properties and dimensions. Properties are the characteristics of a category, and dimensions represent locations of a property along a continuum. Both of these aspects are important to develop among the categories because they form the foundation for making relationships between categories and subcategories (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). The fifth step in data analysis is called “axial coding” (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). In this step, the categories that surfaced from open coding are interconnected with each other and are linked with their second level categories (Punch, 2005). The purpose of this step is to start reorganizing the data by linking the categories developed through open coding and incorporating them into larger categories.

All the steps of the analysis were conducted by the primary co- investigator. In order to have internal validity, the investigator found convergence of the categories developed among the interviews (Creswell, 1994). It is not necessary to generalize findings in qualitative research. The point of this type of research is to form a unique interpretation of events (Merriam, 1998).

### *Trustworthiness*

To establish the trustworthiness of this study, credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability need to be established (Creswell, 1998). To ensure credibility (internal validity), method triangulation was used. Method triangulation refers to using different data sources, data collection methods, or data investigators and theories to improve the pursuit of the research questions and to enhance trustworthiness (Creswell, 1998). I had different data sources to support the credibility of my study by interviewing the key informants and staff participants. To further ensure credibility, peer review was implemented with two of my colleagues who were familiar with qualitative procedures. The peers listened to themes discussed in my coding strategy, and they made sure that the coding was plausible and accurate. My peers also asked me challenging and thoughtful questions about the meanings, methods, and interpretations of the data (Creswell, 1998). I kept written notes of these sessions, which are termed “peer debriefings.” The purpose of peer examination is to reach consensual validation. Dependability (reliability) refers to knowing that the results will be subject to change. This was found by providing a dense description and by peer examination. Confirmability (objectivity) establishes the value of the data; this was established by the primary researcher leaving an audit trail, so that other researchers can follow her methods (Creswell, 1998). To keep a record of the audit trail, methodological notes (e.g., notes about procedures and strategies) and trustworthiness notes (e.g., notes related to credibility, dependability, and confirmability) were kept (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Methodological notes included a description of the analysis process, but reflective journaling was also primary co-investigator, describing reactions and descriptions of each

interview during data collection. Clarifying research bias is also significant, so that the readers of the study are aware of the researcher's bias and assumptions that may affect the findings of the study.

### *My Perspective as the Researcher*

My interest in this study stems from my own cultural background. I am a first-generation Latina who has been immersed in Latino/a culture throughout my upbringing. I have worked with the Latino/a community in Houston, Texas as a translator for Latino/a clients who had experienced traumatic brain injuries and were undergoing neuropsychological tests. I have a strong interest in the Latino/a population since I started graduate school in Colorado. I have helped conduct focus groups in Spanish with a colleague who was investigating Latino/as' opinions of sexual education being offered in schools. I have also researched Latino/as' difficulties with high school and college by examining the educational hardships that Latino/as face in the school system. I have studied group therapy among the Latino/a population to examine how this type of therapy can be more effective for Latino/as. I also worked at a community clinic with a large Latino/a population. My master's thesis was on exploring the high Latino/a teen birth rate. I studied Latino adolescents' impressions and Latino parents' opinions on pregnancy, taking into consideration their cultural values, attitudes toward contraception, and acculturation. Both my clinical and academic work with the Latino/a population has motivated me to continue investigating Latino/as in her dissertation.

I have many opinions about this study. I think that there are many factors that contribute to the discrimination that Latino/as face within the school system. I think that schools, parents, and communities need to work together to eradicate the educational

disparities that Latino/as experience. I do not think that focusing solely on teachers' influence on the dropout rate will be enough to work on this issue. I hope that teachers will provide helpful and creative ways to improve the Latino/as high school retention rate through their experiences with parents and the community. I think that it is imperative to advocate for Latino/as because of all the institutional discriminatory barriers that they face in society. I am looking forward to having a deeper understanding of this phenomenon in order to help the Latino/a population.

## Results

The results of this study focus on three areas: description and recommendations of ways to improve school engagement among Latino/a students, influences for Latino/a students, and opinions and recommendations concerning teacher multicultural training. Due to the complexity of the results, they will be presented in an overlapping manner. This allows for a more holistic and fluid discussion rather than structuring it around the individual research questions. In addition, themes that surfaced which were significant, but not related to the research questions will also be discussed. As the interview questions were used as probes, more topics surfaced during the interviews and they will be described in detail. The key informant themes will be presented first, followed by the participant themes.

### *Key Informants*

#### *Behavioral engagement.*

The majority of the key informant participants believed that school engagement among Latino/a students should be improved. One of the components of behavioral engagement is academic participation. When describing this topic, key informants discussed the academic barriers that Latino/a ELA (English Language Acquisition) students face. A participant explained if a student's first language is English, the student will have "a better chance of keeping up with directions, a better chance of completing the task at hand from day to day, a better chance of getting a higher grade," and "that level of success is going to lead you towards being more engaged from day to day." The participants also talked about Latino/a students' difficulties with standardized tests, which impact their academic experiences; one participant stated that if English Language

Acquisition (ELA) students have a high grade point average, but their scores on the Colorado Student Assessment Program (CSAP) are not high, “they cannot be labeled as gifted and talented.” It appears that lower CSAP scores may keep some Latino/a students from meeting the criteria for access into honors classes. One participant observed, “If you go to the honors classes, English classes, or science honors classes, you’re going to see one or two Hispanic kids there and they have twenty, thirty kids in the classroom.” Another participant added, “What we need to do to get these kids engaged, especially our Latino/a students, is to get them exposed to honor classes.” It seems that the language difficulties that some Latino/a students face may limit their performance on standardized tests, thereby impacting their abilities to take honors classes.

One significant theme that the key informants described was students’ undocumented status and its negative impact on their academic participation. One participant stated, “I don’t know how we can truly tell all students that they should be working hard and be college ready when a large percentage of them know that they are not going to be actually allowed to enter college.” The participant added, “And it’s not that you’re not allowed to enter [college], you’re not eligible for a lot of financial aid, you’re not eligible for scholarships, and you’re not eligible for grants. There’s a lot of funding issues and when you’re already coming from poverty and now the doors are all being closed...” Another participant agreed, “they [Latino/a students] worry, they know it’s going to be difficult, it’s going to be really hard to get an education.” These students’ educational limitations may deter them from being as engaged as they could be.

When discussing athletic participation, the key informant participants believed that Latino/as have a high level of participation in team sports at school. For instance, one

participant stated, “this season, we have a high number of students who have participated in both softball and football,” and another participant agreed, “A lot of our Hispanic guys go out for football.” The high level of Latino/a participation could be due to the many Latino/a students at this school. A few participants talked about the financial barriers that limit Latino/as’ participation in athletics. For example, one participant said, “it’s fortunate that we do have a budget for scholarship for students that can’t afford the athletic fees. We’re often able to provide for low socioeconomic students...it often tends to be Hispanic students though that don’t have the funds.” It seems that even though Latino/a student athletic participation is high, there are still financial limitations that affect their athletic experiences, such as being unable to participate in summer sports camps due to the financial costs.

*Emotional engagement.*

The key informants thought that Latino/a students had a high level of emotional engagement, and they were proud that the teachers at their school had strong relationships with their students. One participant stated, “I would say that teachers do a phenomenal job with developing positive relationships with kids.” At the same time, several participants thought that emotional engagement could still be increased. The key informants did not discuss cognitive engagement at length, and this topic may have overlapped with their opinions about academic participation.

*Increasing school engagement: The school’s role.*

In order to improve Latino/a school engagement, several participants described the importance of role models on how influential recruiting Latino/a school staff can be. One participant observed that the majority of the school staff is “white females,” but the

student body is “overwhelmingly male and overwhelmingly Hispanic.” The participant added, “I think we need to push for more males going into public education, and we certainly need to recruit more Hispanic males into public education.” An additional participant agreed, “I think we need to have staff that these kids can connect with.”

Another participant described the positive impact that a positive role model in the school can have: “I mean, these kids get to see faces and people who speak their language, their culture their food, and they can relate. That helps engagement tremendously.”

*Increasing school engagement: The community’s role.*

In their description of ways to improve school engagement, a salient theme was the importance of involving the whole community to help Latino/a students. One participant said, “I think as educators we can certainly get into the discussion around the need for Latino/Latina students to have positive role models outside of school, encouragement from parents and family for higher education, and reinforce the values that we are teaching here at school.” A different participant described the need for community involvement to increase school engagement among Latino/as: “As long as there’s some change, let’s do it. It’s easy to say, well it’s up to the parents, and parents can say, ‘well, it’s up to the teachers and the district, they’re the ones educating my child.’ The kids can say ‘well, it’s up to my parents and the district.’” It seems that by working as a community with a strength-based approach rather than trying to pinpoint who is to blame for the low Latino/a student engagement, hope can be instilled to help these students.

*Influences.*

The participants mentioned various influential people in Latino/a students' lives. Counselors and teachers were described as influencing students. A few participants also described gang influences. One participant stated that "most kids by the time they've gotten into middle school, they've already heard about, seen, learned about gangs. We still have a lot of kids that gravitate towards that."

Several participants also described the impact of a child's family. One participant thought students' engagement "has a lot to do with what's going on at the homes in the families." Another participant added, "I think the family is the most important [influence]." The cultural differences that Latino/a parents and students face between schools in Mexico and schools in the United States may impact Latino/a engagement. One participant stated that "we have moved into an era where our teachers are expected to be facilitators of the learning environment. The learning is supposed to be taking place between students, not between the teacher and the students...and that pushes students towards higher levels of cognitive engagement." He added, "I believe that we get students that maybe have, Hispanic students for example, who are coming from a school system elsewhere, south of the border, maybe, it's where schooling is more about sitting and taking notes, and memorizing, and it's not necessarily about peer-to-peer interactions and higher level thinking skills." Another participant agreed that parents will tell him that they did not have problems with the school in Mexico, "the teachers are just more strict, they're more firm, and boom, their kids get educated. The school systems in Mexico are different." For the Latino/a students who are from Mexico, these cultural differences may impact the students' and parents' expectations of how the students should be taught

*Barriers to parental involvement.*

The key informants also described the importance of parental involvement; one participant stated, “I think it’s imperative; this is the way our school system is designed. We need parental participation and those students whose parents are participating are more likely to succeed and are more likely to be engaged.” Despite the importance of parental involvement, the participation of Latino/a parents within the school system is low. A participant described the low level of involvement: “We’ve offered some family nights for our Hispanic families, and I think we had one parent show up for that night, and our personnel that put it together did a lot of outreach to reach out to the families.” The participants described barriers to parents’ participation. A key informant said, “There’s a definite language barrier there. We do our best to get translators in for back to school nights and parents’ nights, but the medium of instruction, the medium of discourse is still English, and so if that’s not their primary language, I don’t know how accessible they feel the school climate is.” The transportation difficulties that parents have to overcome also keep them from actively involving themselves in school functions. A participant explained that some families live far away, “so it’s just not convenient for our families to drive here.” Other obstacles such as poverty and parents’ time constraints due to work were also identified.

*Recommendations to reduce barriers to parental participation.*

Some participants provided recommendations about how to increase parental involvement: one key informant said, “I think we need to create a more welcoming environment for parents. We need to make sure that the first time they come in here that we are doing more listening than talking. I think that we often do more talking than listening with our parents, and I think that climate is something we definitely need to

work on.” Other suggestions included developing more partnerships with community centers that serve Latino/a families and applying for grants that could help promote more parental involvement outreach.

#### *Multicultural Training.*

The majority of participants agreed that more cultural training is needed. When explaining why cultural training would be helpful, one participant said that he “didn’t think that” the school was “putting a lot of effort in that arena,” and another participant thought that “some kind of training to understand the Hispanic culture better and the students’ situation at home” would be helpful. Most of the key participants thought that cultural training should occur on-site at the school rather than at another location. One participant explained, “I think in general though in-house, embedded in our building trainings are more appropriate, more realistic because financially we don’t have to send people elsewhere, we don’t have to get subs in the building.”

Several key informants described their recommendations for cultural training. One participant said that “staff development” involving “ELA coaches that would go into all the classrooms and talk to all the teachers, providing strategies and modeling for teachers” would provide useful training. Another participant had found “panelist discussions and guest speakers” that come to “share their own perspective” as helpful. He added, “It helped me to really see that there are people out there that had very different experiences than I had.” He also mentioned that “we haven’t done enough professional development at the college level for teacher induction programs” with regards to multicultural training, and he added that it is important that “all teachers” in the district are “on board with modifying curriculum to meet the needs of second language learners.

Another recommendation included “celebrating the multicultural aspects of the many cultures represented in the school.” By discussing the needs, ideal location, and description of how cultural training should be provided among school staff, innovative ideas for useful training can be created within the school system.

### *Teacher/Staff Participants*

#### *Behavioral engagement.*

Many of the participants believed that school engagement could be improved. When describing academic participation the staff participants discussed the academic barriers that Latino/a ELA students face. A participant explained:

“They [Latino/as] struggle so much with that language transition piece, they started with a completely Spanish speaking home or school system. Many of them moved here and had to jump into completely English speaking schools, and so to make that leap when they never really got to be fluent readers and writers in their own language, and all of a sudden they have to learn a whole new language.

Something happens, there’s a gap that takes place that they can’t transfer knowledge that they’ve never had a chance to build, and so I think that school is seen as this huge, you know, hard thing.”(Participant 8)

Language difficulties can also negatively impact Latino/as’ self-esteem. One interviewee described how “a lot of time in school, that you know, there’s a billion misspelled words, and they can’t quite get the grammar right, and they definitely don’t have punctuations and things like that, and so I think they get misread that they’re dumb. They feel defeated a lot at school.” She added, “Somewhere in there, maybe they quit and say ‘I just can’t do this anymore,’ or ‘I’m not good at this.’ ” The negative impacts of feeling misunderstood

at school can influence students to feel that they cannot succeed academically and may hinder their school engagement.

Another theme that surfaced was how one's difficulties in school impact a student's behavior in class. One teacher described how students may experience this:

“So you sit back and say ‘I’m not going to try because I’m just going to fail. I’ve been told it. It’s been proven, so I’m going to do that.’ And then after awhile, the behaviors become an issue. Parents stop caring about the grades, ‘I just want to the kid to be good!’ You know, the administrators say, ‘I just want the kid to be able to sit through class!’” (Participant 4)

It appears that teachers, administrators, and parents may shift their focus solely to a student's behavior when the student feels that he or she will not succeed academically in the school system and starts acting out in class. Another aspect of behavioral engagement is positive conduct. There were conflicting opinions concerning discipline. Several participants believed that Latino/a students are disciplined at higher rates than the other students in the school while a few other participants did not agree that Latino/as were overrepresented in disciplinary consequences.

In their discussion of athletic participation, several participants thought that Latino/a participation in school sports was high. One participant said, “I think that 80% of the boys in wrestling are Latino/as,” and another participant added “we have a lot of Hispanic participation in sports.” Many participants explained the benefits for students that participate in sports. A participant explained how athletic involvement can help students succeed:

“We can teach them a lot of skills related to what you need to be successful in the job world. You know, just shaking a coach’s hand at the end of a match, looking him in the eye, working hard against your opponent, and learning something when you lose... We take these lessons that we teach in athletics, and we try to apply it to what they’re learning in class, and it just gives them a lot of structure; it gives them something they really feel proud about. It gives them a positive peer group to hang out with because we’re preaching the same thing to all these kids, and we’re hoping that they’re modeling the behavior that we’re talking about.”

(Participant 12)

One participant explained how financial limitations may negatively impact Latino/as’ involvement in sports:

One thing sadly is the money issue because if they’re not playing in elementary or middle school in clubs, they’re falling behind, and then when they get to high school, instead of playing varsity, they might be playing on the J.V. or C team, and they want to play varsity, but they don’t have the background or the experience or the skill. And maybe, they’re going to say, ‘You know what, I’m just not going to stick with it.’ (Participant 9)

A different participant agreed, “Money is a big stumbling block for involvement in sports...it costs thousands of dollars to join these club teams, so kids are priced out.”

Many participants described how helpful it could be for Latino/a students for the district to offer soccer as a team sport. One participant stated, “You know, for example basketball isn’t necessarily the most popular sport for Latino/as. If we had a soccer team, and you know, for a boy for example, if your dad grew up playing soccer, naturally that’s

the direction you want to go in.” Another participant added, ” I’d like to see a soccer team going.” A different participant noted that even if soccer was offered as an official school sport, many of the Latino/a students would still be at a disadvantage because of the lack of club sport training. It seems that even though Latino/a student athletic participation is high, there are still financial limitations that affect their athletic experiences, such as being unable participate in club sports from a young age.

*Emotional engagement.*

Some participants believed that Latino/a students had a high level of emotional engagement. One participant expressed, “So emotionally, they [Latino/a students] want to work hard, they know they’re going further than most of their family members did educationally speaking. I feel like they have a lot of hope.” Another participant agreed, “I think they [Latino/a students] have a positive attitude about the school and what goes on here. And, they put a lot of effort into their schoolwork.” The participants described how teacher’s expectations influence students. One participant stated, “I think the teacher’s expectations are going to play a lot into what students can achieve.” A couple of participants were aware that teachers may have lower expectations for Latino/a students. One teacher said, “I know that that is a reality, that there are maybe lower expectations on some level out of this classroom.” A few teachers described the danger of a self-fulfilling prophecy in which Latino/a students may hear that they are “supposed to fail,” and this influences Latino/a students to believe that they are expected to fail. A participant explained, “I think something happens when we, when there’s this thing of don’t fail, don’t fail, so many of you [Latino/as]] are failing, stop...you know, why are you guys all, why are things so bad, I think something in them goes, ‘oh, I’m supposed to be bad.’ ”

The majority of the participants did not want to make generalizations about Latino/a students when they were asked about Latino/a school engagement. For instance, one participant explained, “It’s really mixed, I mean we have some Latino students who are top students, and incredibly organized and driven, and then, we have other kids that really struggle with motivation and you know, for different reasons.” Another participant agreed:

How can you generalize according to a Latino population because I have some Latina girls that are like A+, amazing, over the top, and I have some Latino boys that are A+, over the top, I got some, you know B, C-ers, and then I got the ones who you have to push. I think that’s typical for any subgroup. I don’t think it’s, in particular, has to do with them being Hispanic. (Participant 13)

A different participant added, “It would be easy to clump it, to generalize it, but I can’t allow that, you know, I can’t go home and say, ‘Ok, what do I need to do about my Latino population? They’re not excelling, they’re just not buying in.’ No, I can go home and say, “ ‘Well, Jenny is a participant, Jenny is just not buying into it’ ...then, I have to look at what I need to do to meet that student’s needs.” She added, “I know there’s statistics that show that Latinos aren’t performing as well, but I have to take them individually.” There does appear to be a lot of variability in Latino/a student performance at this school and frustration with the idea of having to make generalizations about Latino/a students.

*Increasing school engagement: The school’s role.*

Several participants had recommendations about how to improve Latino/a student school engagement. One participant recommended that the school get grants to sponsor

scholarships, so that all Latino/a students can participate on a sports team or provide a bus after school to help with transportation. Another participant described how grants could help improve engagement: “My hope is that one day; somebody puts out the money to take 10 or 20 Hispanic kids to Mount Rushmore or to the Grand Canyon. I think, you get a kid’s mind going, I think if they could see a whole world outside of their normalcy, you never know, that could get some curiosity, some initiative, some desire.” A salient recommendation among the participants to increase Latino/a engagement was the need for more role models in the school. A couple of participants expressed there are not many role models for Latino/as. One participant noted, “I don’t think that there’s any role models for Hispanic kids to be successful. I mean, you can look at Gloria Estefan, Edward James Olmos; it’s like whatever, those are old people. Those are like Grandmas and Grandpas in their perceptions.” Another participant described the importance of role models: “If you don’t have those role models in your life, then you’re more susceptible to the negative pressures that are out there.” Another participant talked about the significance of having diverse staff. He stated, “I think we need to have more teachers who come from backgrounds where students can identify with them. So then, they really feel like they have a place at the school, and they feel valued.” A few participants discussed how role models for Latino/as do not have to be Latino/a in order to positively impact Latino/a students. The participants described the European-American role models as “open, supportive, and non-judgmental.” Several participants expressed that they did not know what else could be done within the school to improve Latino/a student engagement. The recommendations for improving engagement among Latino/a students show positive changes that can be made both at the school and at home.

### *Influences.*

The participants described many influential people in Latino/a students' lives. A few participants said that "everybody" is an influence for Latino/a students. One participant added, "I believe that we all influence a child from the parents, the close relatives, society, and the school. Friends were also described as influencing students' lives. One staff member noted, "At the middle school age, friends become a strong and social influence." Several staff members described how influential school staff is: "We're all mentors. Teachers are mentors. Administrators are mentors." One teacher explained, "I think that teachers have a great influence. The more relationship you create, the more you can work one-on-one with the student." Another participant stated, "I think that teachers can influence students greatly." Many participants described the positive influence that both having a Latina family mentor and having a Latino counselor in the school has been for the students.

### *Increasing school engagement: The community's role.*

A few participants believed that Latino/a students were exposed to negative influences in their community. A participant described these influences: "There's all these negative influences that are going on around you. It just creates a real, real, real barrier to get over and be successful through the kind of the later junior high/high school years." Several participants described how students who have parents who are not involved in their lives may want to become members of gangs. Another participant said that students are very motivated by "a sense of belonging" which can "be a problem with gangs because gangs say, 'hey, we'll take you in, and you can belong,' and that's a real pull for them." A different participant thought that many Latino/a students "identify with

gangs since they are not having the success at home or at school, they go to gangs.”

Gangs can also a way to “show your cultural pride.” A participant described how this occurs:

I don't think that Latino boys really know how to express their pride and their culture, sometimes it comes out the wrong way, so joining a gang or pretending to be affiliated with a gang is somehow showing your cultural pride. I think there's some really negative influences out that take advantage of boys and girls that maybe don't have strong family structure, that don't have a positive Latino role model showing them what it really means to be a proud Latino. (Participant 12)

In contrast to the description of gangs among the participants, a couple of participants expressed that there is not much gang activity at this school, and one participant argued that gang activity has decreased in the last few years. Another influence related to ethnic identity is notion of a “school boy.” A participant described the idea of a “school boy,” as a derogatory term among Latino/a students. A “school boy,” refers to a student who does well academically, which is viewed as “not being true to your Hispanic self because you are so engaged in school.” This notion related to the idea that doing well academically is not viewed as Latino/a since a student would be engaged with the school system, so excelling in school may be viewed by some students as not supporting one's ethnicity.

#### *Barriers to parental involvement.*

Several participants also described the impact of a child's family. One participant expressed that Latino/a students' families are a “huge, huge influence on them.” The participants talked about the low parental involvement of Latino/a students. Having more

parental involvement “would make a huge difference.” One participant said, “There’s a lot of different reasons why we don’t have as much parent participation as we should have.” The participants described barriers to parents’ participation. A couple of these limitations include not understanding English well and having little education. One participant expressed, “Sometimes, the Latino/a parents don’t always feel they can be involved because of a language barrier or because they haven’t gone to school.” Another participant agreed,

A lot of parents, to them, not speaking English, or not having experiences in school, it’s kind of an embarrassment and therefore, they don’t spend as much time coming to these events because they don’t know the language, even though we’re making resources available, I think it’s a huge intimidation piece.

Several participants noted that the lack of education among Latino/a parents may negatively influence Latino/a students’ school engagement. They described how Latino/a parents “don’t know, they really don’t know how to tell or how to get their kids ready for success in school, so that they can be successful in college.” One participant explained that Latino/a parents may find it difficult to help their kids with their homework when they “can’t read English” or when they stopped attending school at a lower grade than their children, and they “can’t really help with the math stuff, and the higher level stuff.”

Parental involvement was also limited due to parents’ time constraints. One participant stated, “You know, some of them are working many, many hours as well, and so you know, coming to school functions is not always easy for them. So, there’s a lot of stumbling blocks.” Another participant added, “Because when you’re living paycheck to paycheck, your number one goal is to feed your family not just to get them, you know,

good grades and parent-teacher conferences and all that.” Many participants further discussed the high level of poverty at his school. “70%” of the students receive free or reduced lunch at this school. A participant stated that “many” of the “Latino families live in poverty.” A few participants noted that it was difficult to identify if some issues were “Hispanic challenges” rather than “socioeconomic challenges.” Many participants explained how poverty restricts academic success. One participant explains “The socioeconomic factors regardless of whether it’s a White kid or a Hispanic kid, there’s a whole variety of other factors that impact their life and that come into play before the kids even get to school, and while they’re at school, there’s other things that they’re dealing with in their life.” A couple of participants also talked about how poverty limits Latino/a students’ participation in extracurricular activities because some students have jobs and they are trying to help their families financially. The multiple other factors that students living in poverty face such as “incarcerated parents, transient living conditions, homelessness, or a lack of food” make it very difficult for students living in poverty to focus on what is being taught in class. Sometimes “getting to school at all is a pretty big accomplishment.” The fact that many of the Latino/a students live in poverty at this school impacts their engagement and participation in school.

The majority of the participants described how the home influences that may negatively affect student engagement are out of their control. One participant explained, “To be able to change that child when they’re at home for the other 18 hours a day, it’s just, it’s really insurmountable, it’s a really insurmountable challenge without the parents not buying actual actions in the right direction.” Another participant stated that her “frustration comes from, okay, what can I do while I’m here for these students and while

they're here and outside, I really don't have much control over that." The staff expressed that they try to do everything they can do, but there are still many aspects of Latino/a students' lives that are out of their control, and there is this feeling of inability to create change in the various aspects of Latino/a students' lives.

*Recommendations to reduce barriers to parental participation.*

Several participants provided recommendations about how to increase parental involvement. For instance, one teacher suggested on developing a "program to help empower the parents to enable their kids to be more prepared for school. And know really what the expectation, or not know what the expectations are so they could carry out the expectations. So if I say to a parent, 'Your child in 6<sup>th</sup> grade needs to read at a 6<sup>th</sup> grade level,' well maybe they just moved here a year ago, so what are the steps?" He added, "I would say the biggest deal is that they [Latino/a students] can read at grade level, and that their reading is not a challenge because everything else branches off of reading." By informing parents about the importance of reading at grade level and explaining what steps they can take to have their child do this, engagement can be increased. The majority of the participants emphasized the importance of calling parents at home. This is occurring frequently at this school, but they wanted this practice to continue. One participant suggested that the school continue improving communication with the Latino/a parents: "Just having a better web of communication like certain things...just keep the parents on board as to what's happening, trying to empower them, to participate and be involved, maybe having a greater web of communication in terms of setting up rides for kids." Several participants strongly supported home visits of staff and teachers at Latino/a families' homes. For example, one participant said that the family mentor and

school counselor's visit to Latino/as' neighborhood at a community center "makes them feel more comfortable." Another participant agreed, "I've always been a fan of teachers making home visits for conferences...If somehow, we got a chance to go to people's homes, I think we would get more respect and that's a huge piece. We expect them to come over here, but I think more, obviously more teacher-parent contact is needed." That participant added that it is not likely this would be supported by the school district because it would not be feasible to visit every student's home. Nevertheless, increasing parent-teacher contact is very supported by this school's staff as a way to increase parental involvement.

*Supportive school environment.*

The majority of participants described how culturally sensitive and warm the staff at the school are to Latino/a parents. For instance, English classes are offered to parents, and the staff at this school frequently engages in outreach through phone calls and meetings with Latino/a parents to encourage their involvement. One participant explained that this school "does a great job reaching out to all of our students' parents. We have a ton of bilingual staff here, and you know, we always try to make them welcome. Just encourage families you know to show them that we really want them to be here, and we'll help make it happen." This school also provides "translated signs in the hallways, every newsletter being in you know Spanish, and translators at back to school nights." In addition, there is a free dental program, a program that helps children receive glasses if they need them, and "there's a lot of things done to help meet the basic needs of families, like gifts given in the holidays and meals provided for different things."

### *Multicultural Training.*

The majority of participants agreed that more multicultural training is needed. The participants believed that multicultural training could help teachers understand “where these Latino kids are coming from.” Another participant agreed: “One of the important factors that the training could provide is an understanding of yeah, these kids have challenges, but maybe there’s other ethnic facets that I’m not realizing here. The training would be able to teach me about and could help me be a better teacher.” Most of the staff participants thought that cultural training should occur on-site at the school rather than at another location. One participant thought that on-site training would be “convenient.” Some participants thought that off-site training was preferable. One participant thought that having training at another locations “makes it seem special, this isn’t just some other school thing that we stuck you in at a school, and you have to sit here and do. This is an above-and-beyond, special thing, and it’s special because you’re going to the Hilton...I think that would emphasize the importance of it.” A couple of participants did not think that the location of a training activity mattered.

Several participants described their recommendations for cultural training. One participant thought that teachers “need an awareness or some kind of experience that puts them out of their comfort zone.” He recommended that teachers go on a trip to a place in another country like Mexico to have “that awareness of how different things are.” Another suggestion was that teachers “visit student homes; visit the environments to get that immersion perspective.” This participant added, “There’s so many differences to explain, just sitting down in a classroom, it’s hard to make them [teachers] really get it, so having to interact with individuals...” Another participant thought it would be useful

to have multicultural training on a teacher collaboration day. By discussing the needs, ideal location, and description of how cultural training should be provided among school staff, innovative ideas for useful training can be created within the school system. The staff participants did not give many specific recommendations for cultural training, but the majority of the staff participants had endorsed additional multicultural training. Interestingly, one participant did not think staff needed more cultural training. She described the staff at this school as “very well educated” in diversity, and she did not think it was necessary for the staff to have any more multicultural training.

The majority of the participants expressed that this school is doing a phenomenal job with their Latino/a students. Many of the participants described the wonderful opportunities that are being provided for Latino/a students. For instance, a few participants talked about the helpful school interventions which benefit students’ performance. A participant talked about “homework help” that is provided on Tuesdays and Thursdays for the children after school with tutors who are students from a university in town. Another participant described summer programming, which involves providing “academics combined with different activities such as athletics during the summer.” One participant explained the benefits of summer programming:

I think kids, not just Latinos, but kids of low socioeconomic background, the more time and the more structure we can give them, and particularly with the Latinos because they have to grow depending on when they got here, depending on what their language skills are, they have to grow at a faster rate to catch up to grade level. The more time we can get with them, the greater chance we have to

remediate their skills and get them achieving at their true intelligence level.

(Participant 12)

A different participant stated that the school just received a “huge grant for after school programs and for summer school programs over the next five years.” Providing additional school assistance will help students who are not performing at grade level. Other helpful interventions for students include having a “great counseling program,” helping the Latina girls attend the Latina Conference, applying for grants for scholarships and programs such as summer programming, and providing fundraisers at the school to buy athletic equipment. One participant described the passion and dedication that the teachers have at this school: “We get here so early, we work so hard all day long, and really and truly we pour our lives into them [students].” The participants also discussed how this school encouraged bilingualism. One participant said, “I try to let them (students) know how important it is to be bilingual especially in the global economy that we have, and how that’s going to create opportunities for them, whether they’re here or in another country.” Several participants expressed that there are influential role models at the school. One participant talked about the influence of having Latino/a staff at this school. A Latino staff member believed that if Latino/a staff do their jobs well, they can send a good message to the students. Another participant described all Latino/a staff at this school as a “huge influence” in Latino/a students’ lives.

Many of the participants talked about how happy with their jobs and in their work with Latino/a students. This school was described as a “wonderful environment.” A participant said that he was very happy with his job and his ability to “help so many Latino children.” Another participant agreed, “I’m so proud of this district of how they

have really embraced the Latino culture.” Several participants expressed that they “really like” their students. In addition, a few participants described how their school had improved. One participant explained that he “had a clear judgment of the transition between the two” administrations at the school, and that the change in the administration is what “made the school as successful as it is now, and it continues to move in a very, very positive direction, in a steep curve in a positive direction.” The positivity that the staff feels for working at this school demonstrates the passion and dedication that these staff members have for their students.

#### *Comparison of Key Informants and Staff Participants*

Both groups (key informants and staff participants) were very similar with few notable differences in the themes that emerged. Participants in both groups discussed common themes such as (e.g., barriers to academic participation, athletic participation, high emotional engagement, recommendations to improve engagement, influences for Latino/a students, recommendations for multicultural training, etc.)

The differences among the groups were in specific themes with the key informants’ description of how Latino/as’ lower scores on standardized tests kept them from entering honors classes. The key informants also talked about the cultural differences between schools in Mexico and schools in the United States. Although both of the groups talked about discipline, role models, poverty, the lack of parental involvement, and the wonderful work that the school is doing to help Latino/a students, the staff participants discussed these themes in much more detail than the key informants. Themes that were specific to the staff participants included the lack of control teachers feel that they have over the students’ home lives, the awareness of lower teacher

expectations in general for Latino/a students, the variability of Latino/a student academic performance at the school, uncertainties about how to improve engagement, and the frustrations with having to make generalizations about Latino/a students. In summation, the key informants and participants described behavioral and emotional engagement and ways to improve Latino/as' level of engagement, important influences for Latino/a students, and recommendations for multicultural training. They also describe barriers that the Latino/a students face (e.g., language barrier, undocumented status, poverty, etc.). In addition, the warmth and dedication of the staff at this school was markedly evident.

## Discussion

Findings from this study provide insight into factors that may influence Latino/a student engagement such as low parental involvement, a need for more role models, and the limitations of being undocumented. These findings indicated that there are multiple factors impacting school engagement/disengagement and then by elaboration the high Latino/a dropout rate. Factors that had been discussed in previous literature such as underrepresentation of Latino/a students in honors classes, harsher discipline for Latino/a students, and lowered teacher expectations were mentioned in the interviews (Bireda, 2000, Gordon et al., 2000, Farkas, Grobe, Sheehan & Shuan, 1990, Lavin & Crook, 1990). For example, several participants talked about how the majority of students in advanced classes were European-American. When discussing the disciplining of Latino/a students, there were contradictory reports. Some of the participants thought that Latino/a students were punished more severely than European-Americans, but the majority of the participants did not see this as an issue. A few of the participants were aware that some teachers may have lowered expectations of Latino/a students, but they did not endorse these views.

Another interesting finding was the idea of a self-fulfilling prophecy. Latino/a students may have internalized self-doubt from the awareness of the research that Latino/a students have such a high dropout rate from high school and are underrepresented in higher education, so they start believing that they cannot graduate from high school, they will not be able to go to college, and in some sense, that they are expected to fail. This notion negatively impacts these students' beliefs in their abilities to excel academically. The notion of affective dissonance was described in this study,

which is consistent with prior research (De Vos, 1978). Affective dissonance refers to the struggles that minority students face when they have to separate their collective identity from their academic identity (Ogbu, 1997).

Gangs were identified in this study as a potential way for Latino/as to feel that they belong. Latino/a students may go in search of a sense of belonging if they are not getting the support they need at home, and gangs can be viewed as a way to show one's affiliation with being Latino/a. Promoting a more positive way of being Latino/a is crucial. An interesting term identified in this study was the idea of a "school boy." A "school boy" refers to a student who does well academically. Succeeding in school and being a "school boy" is viewed as not encompassing one's Latino/a ethnic identity. This notion relates to the idea that doing well academically is seen as "acting white" and as oppositional to the students' ethnic group identity (De Vos & Suarez-Orozco, 1990; Ogbu, 1997). Due to this pressure to not be seen as a "school boy," Latino/a students may feel that they do not want to excel in the school system in order to be accepted and feel that they belong with their Latino/a peers. Wanting to belong to the Latino/a ethnic group may cause Latino/a students to not work as hard as they could in school, so they are not seen as "acting white" (Fryer & Torelli, 2005). Trying to encourage Latino/a students to be "school boys" or "school girls" and connecting it to being Latino/a could help motivate Latino/a students to excel in school and to influence each other to believe in themselves academically.

A notable finding was the frustration that teachers face when discussing Latino/a students. The staff participants seemed to be very understanding and knowledgeable of the struggles that Latino/a students and their families experience, and they also voiced

their frustrations with their limitations. They explained that they can only impact those eight hours when the students are in class, but they cannot influence the students' home influences which may negatively impact their student engagement. The participants who were teachers also mentioned their annoyance with generalizing about Latino/as. They did not want to generalize because it makes it seem as if all Latino/as are the same, which is a significant issue when researching Latino/as. There is much variation among groups of Latino/as (e.g., country of origin, level of acculturation, socioeconomic status, etc.) The resistance to generalizing about Latino/as demonstrates finding the balance between overgeneralizing and assuming that all Latino/a students face the same struggles, and possibly overlooking the institutional barriers that some Latino/as may face such as undocumented status, poverty, or limited English proficiency.

An important finding was the participants' support for more Latino/a role models in the school. Limited mentors and positive role models at home, school, or in the community can negatively impact educational achievement (So, 1987; Trueba, 1999). At the national level, approximately 4% of public school teachers and 4.1% of principals are Latino/a while Latino/as make up 15% of the student body (Digest of Educational Statistics, 2000). Having limited representation of Latino/a staff may make the representation of Latino/a issues less evident in the school system (Zambrana & Zoppi, 2002). By seeing more Latino/a staff, students can believe that they too can be professionals. The benefits of role models have been discussed in prior literature. Having a role model, specifically one that is known to an adolescent, has been correlated to more positive ethnic identity, increased self-esteem, higher academic performance, decreased substance use, and fewer behavioral problems in school (Yancy, Siegel, & McDaniel,

2002; Dubois & Silvercorn, 2005; Malgady, Rogler & Constantino, 1990; Ceballo, 2004).

These findings emphasize how having a role model in a Latino/a student's life could increase school engagement. Ceballo (2004) found that adult role models and mentors who can provide scholarly assistance to Latino/a students are instrumental in students' lives. The active involvement of role models (e.g., challenging students intellectually, helping them get involved in extracurricular activities, and assistance with college applications) can be invaluable for students whose parents may not be familiar with the American school system (Ceballo, 2004).

One recommendation to help this issue could be to hire more Latino/a teachers and staff. Hiring staff that are committed to helping Latino/a students is essential to provide mentors for students at school. In addition, encouraging students to ask for assistance from staff, and also supporting staff in helping these students could contribute to increased school engagement for Latino/a students. Forming a program that requires students to have staff mentors could help students get the assistance they need. This school seems to have some very influential role models for the students, but requiring that every student have a mentor could ensure that all students get individualized attention. The staff at this school strongly support mentoring and understand how necessary it is for the students, which demonstrates the cultural understanding and sensitivity of the staff toward Latino/a students.

Cultural differences were found to be influential. It seems that parents may have different expectations of what schools do in the United States. If Latino/a parents are not U.S. born, they may not understand the American school system. In addition, they may not be aware of the importance of their involvement in the school system or of the

necessary criteria for students to apply for college. The difficulties understanding the American school system, along with some parents' lack of education and difficulties with the English language are significant barriers to their active participation in their children's education. Latino/a parental involvement was low at this school. Multiple barriers were identified that influence parental involvement, such as poverty, transportation, time constraints, and language barriers. Even though this school provides translators, the parental involvement remains low. Increasing parental involvement is seen as a factor that could make a huge difference to students. Low levels of parental involvement have been well documented in the literature (Ceballo, 2004; Martinez, DeGarmo, & Eddy, 2004). Latino/a parents do not feel as comfortable or as confident in assisting their children with school work as European-American parents do (Okagaki & Frensch, 1998; Stevenson, Chen, & Utall, 1990). Past literature has demonstrated that Latino/a parents believe in the importance of education, but they may demonstrate this in different ways than European-American middle class families (Arellano & Padilla, 1996; Okagaki & Frensch, 1998; Okagaki, Rensch, & Gordon, 1995). It appears that even though Latino/a parents may not be involved directly with the school, they have been found to still be involved with the children's education through direct verbal support of education for their children, such as repetitive affirmations of the need for an education (e.g., talking about how important education is) and nonverbal support of educational tasks (e.g., giving their children the time they need to study by excusing them from having to do other activities, encouraging their students to not be employed in order to have more time for schoolwork; Ceballo, 2004). Due to the institutional barriers that

Latino/a parents may face such as limited education and little English proficiency, encouraging traditional parental involvement in school is challenging.

Acknowledging these barriers can help the school reach out to these parents to encourage them to directly encourage education among their children. In addition, through outreach, the parents can start to feel more certain about their abilities to positively impact their children. Greater parent-school cooperation is needed. Specifically, recognizing that Latino/a parents may show their support for school in different ways than what the school expects from American parents is an important step. Emphasizing the partnership between parents and teachers could help increase parental involvement. Through school's staff support of Latino/a parents along with specific recommendations on how they can delineate the importance of education (e.g., explicitly talking about the importance of education, giving their children time to study), Latino/a parents can learn about how they can significantly impact their children's academic success. Furthermore, creating programs that have school staff teach parents how to help children with school could also address specific topics such as how to assist students with specific subjects. By applying for grants to help increase parental involvement, more activities can be funded to increase parental participation in school. Outreach to Latino/a parents is crucial. Latino/a parents are frequently called at this school, so continuing to do this would be helpful. Visiting parents at their homes or at a nearby community center could also increase parental involvement since the parents may feel more comfortable in these situations. Even though it is challenging to encourage Latino/a parents to be involved in the school, this school is actively attempting to increase involvement, which is exactly what needs to be done in order to involve all the people that are impacting the

students' lives, and as a team, parents and teachers can help Latino/a students reach their academic potential.

Poverty is a factor that influences parental involvement and it was very emphasized by the participants of this study. A substantial portion of the students at this school lives in poverty. The academic accomplishments of low-income minority students have been found to be lower than their European-American middle-class peers (Steinberg, Dornbusch, & Brown, 1992; Stevenson, Chen & Uttal, 1990). Youth from low-income families tend to show lower levels of cognitive functioning, social development, psychological well-being, and self-esteem than their peers with more financial advantages (Duncan, Brooks-Gunn, & Klebanov, 1994; Hanson, McLanahan, & Thomas, 1997). Due to the high number of low-income students at this school, it is important to remember the influential role that poverty will play in school engagement. If students are not able to eat or have a stable home environment due to financial difficulties, they will have difficulties being able to focus in class and succeeding academically. The time constraints of parents who do not have flexibility in their jobs and their worries about paying their bills may keep them from being as involved as they could be in their children's education. Through the school's provision of free dental care, free eyeglass program, and free and reduced lunches, the school is being sensitive of their students' financial needs. Continuing to apply for grants that help these students and their families can help this school improve both the students and their families' lives while also building the relationships between school staff and parents.

A prominent finding was that most of the participants did not have many specific recommendations for improving cultural training. Several participants did not know how

more cultural training could be provided. This was perplexing since the staff is very involved and supportive of improving Latino/a student engagement. This lack of recommendations could be because the staff at this school is already doing so much for Latino/a students that they may not know of what else they can possibly do. The School staff is helping Latino/a families tremendously. The dedication of the school staff fuels their openness and welcoming attitude toward Latino/a parents. The community resources that this school provides (e.g., English classes, a free dental program, and a program for free eyeglasses) demonstrate the commitment that the school has to helping students and their families. The outreach provided by the school's bilingual staff through phone calls to parents to promote school-parent communication helps build the teamwork that is needed between school staff and parents. Providing translation at school functions and having bilingual staff that can engage in the outreach necessary to reach Latino/a parents helps reduce the barriers that Latino/as may feel about attending school functions. In addition, there are many opportunities provided for students at this school, such as summer programming, homework assistance, and a great counseling program. This school has cultural sensitivity for Latino/a families' language and cultural needs, but it also attends to the financial needs of low-income families. The passion of the teachers at this school to help their students was very clear in this study. Not only are they dedicated to helping these students, but they value their careers and the work they do with these students. School staff also encourages bilingualism by communicating to Latino/a students how beneficial it is to be bilingual. This sends the message that not only are Latino/a students accepted as they are, but their ethnic identity is valued and respected.

The accepting, understanding nature of this school can be a model for all schools to strive for by their dedication, help, and understanding of Latino/a culture.

Another important finding was the limitations placed on undocumented Latino/a students. There are multiple barriers that undocumented students face. They can apply to college, but they cannot get financial aid, scholarships, or grants. Only eleven states allow undocumented students to pay in-state tuition, which students still have a difficult time affording (Pezza, 2010). Latino/a students may not see college as a reality if they cannot afford it, so this may negatively impact student engagement since these students see their educational opportunities as limited. In addition, undocumented individuals start facing the limitations of their immigration status as they grow older. Certain milestones do not exist for undocumented youth such as attaining one's license to drive, being able to vote, or being able to work legally within the United States (Gonzales, 2009; Pezza, 2010). Due to the language issues that some undocumented students may have, these students may not think they are capable of succeeding in school since their language difficulties may hinder their academic performance. This may unfortunately lead to these students internalizing these difficulties and making them think that they are not capable of attending college. Their self-esteem begins to be impacted as they start thinking that they are not capable of succeeding due to their language barriers

Undocumented students are receiving mixed messages. These students hear that if they work hard in school, they can have a college education and the career they want, but when these students graduate from high school, they are faced with the cruel reality that the end goal of being employed legally is unattainable (Chavez, Soriano, & Oliverez, 2007). With the current hostile political climate toward undocumented individuals in this

country, the debate over immigration affects many Latino/a students who most likely did not have any role in the decision to come to the United States. Helping support Latino/a youth in their ability to attain an education is crucial. One way to encourage undocumented youths' educational future is through support of the DREAM Act (Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors Act). The DREAM Act was originally proposed in 2001 and it would give legal residence to undocumented high school graduates who serve at least two years in the military or finish two years of higher education (Ong, 2010; Pezza, 2010). If this legislation had been passed into law, 2.5 million undocumented youth under the age of 18 would have been impacted by it, but it did not pass in 2010 (Ong, 2010). The DREAM Act is considered to be the sole federal policy that would significantly impact the dropout rate at a national level because the tuition and path to citizenship would only be possible for high school graduates (Chavez, Soriano, & Oliverez, 2007). The fact that the DREAM Act did not pass last year is disheartening, but the fight to pass this act continues. The importance of the DREAM Act passing delineates how necessary it is to have policy change in order to positively affect Latino/as' dropout rates. Undocumented youth feel hopeless and trapped by their circumstances. They are aware of what they could possibly achieve, but their legal status makes them feel that are "less than" their peers. Lack of full access to one's social rights impedes undocumented youth's ability to fully apply themselves to their goals. These students learn that they do not have the right to work, a right to an education, limited access to healthcare, and a lack of equal opportunity (Chavez, Soriano, & Oliverez, 2007). By criminalizing and limiting undocumented students' opportunities, we contribute to Latino/as feelings of inadequacy and indirectly support the idea that they are

not expected to succeed academically. Providing support for policy change as the Dream Act, which could dramatically improve the Latino/a high school rate, is necessary so that all Latino/a students regardless of their immigration status have the same educational opportunities.

### *Limitations*

While the findings of this study contribute to our understanding of Latino/a student engagement, there are some limitations that are important to highlight. The majority of the Latino/a students at this school are of Mexican descent, and although this is representative of the Latino/as in Colorado, it limits this study's ability to represent the diverse countries of origin of Latino/as (Pew Hispanic Center, 2008). Future research could add to these results by including schools with more diverse nationalities among the Latino/a student body. Another limitation as well as an area of future research is that the participants were not specifically asked about the differences between Latino/a students (e.g., undocumented vs. U.S. born, mixed immigration status families vs. U.S. citizen families, variation in socioeconomic status, etc.).

Another potential limitation is related to the recruitment of the participants for this study. I tried contacting 31 staff members at the school and was only contacted by 15 of these members to set up an interview, which is a small number of participants. These 15 staff members may have similar qualities given their availability and receptivity to being involved in a study.

Another limitation which could also be future research is that Latino/a students and parents were not included in this study. Future research should include these groups in order to hear their opinions and recommendations about this issue. The investment and

dedication of this school for their students is evident, so this school's acceptance of a researcher entering the school and interviewing the staff demonstrates that this school is very supportive and understanding of its Latino/a students, which indicates a certain bias. A final limitation is that staff members may have been compromising their responses during the interviews since they knew that the interviews were being recorded, so they may not have expressed their true opinions due to being interviewed about their workplace.

### *Conclusions*

There is no easy solution to the high drop-out rate among Latino/as. It is essential to involve all stakeholders such as school administration, teachers, parents, politicians, and the community. Building bridges between these stakeholders is necessary in order to form the support needed to pass legislation like the DREAM Act. By encouraging parent-teacher communication and through the incredible dedication and support of school staff for Latino/a youth, undocumented Latino/a youth will hopefully be able to have all the social rights that they deserve. Emphasizing the need for policy change among community members, teachers, and school administrators is needed to make the policy changes that are necessary. Making sure to not blame any particular entity, such as parents or school staff, is necessary to facilitate teamwork and understanding with all involved parties. Through the endless work that this school does for Latino/as, the staff at this school has delineated their support and understanding of the Latino/a community while also reaching out and understanding the hardships that low-income Latino/a families face. Through motivating policy makers, parents, and the whole community to continue helping decrease the high Latino/a dropout rate through grants and policy

change, Latino/a youth will learn that they are a priority, and that we all believe they are capable of graduating from high school. Acceptance of the high dropout rate is not an option. Complacency with this issue teaches Latino/as that they are not expected to succeed, and they are.

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Table 1

Student demographics

Characteristics

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Female 198(45%)

Male 240 (55%)

*Racial Group<sup>a</sup>*

White, Non-Hispanic 187 (43%)

Hispanic 219 (50%)

Asian or Pacific Islander 13 (3%)

American Indian or Alaskan Native 10 (2%)

Black 9 (2%)

Total Minority 251 (57%)

*Students receiving free and reduced lunch at this school*

Students receiving free lunch 275 (63%)

Students receiving reduced lunch 41 (9%)

Total students with free/ red. lunch 316 (72%)

District total % of free/red. lunch 27%

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*Note.* Total n = 438 for school

<sup>a</sup> The racial group labels were determined by the Colorado Department of Education.

Table 2

Participant Demographics

<u>Characteristics</u>	<u>Participants (n = 15)</u>
Female	7 (53%)
Male	8 (47%)
Mean age <sup>a</sup>	39.8 (SD = 9.92)
Mean amount of time working in school system	13.13 (SD = 6.96)
<i>Racial Group</i>	
Non-Hispanic, White	8 (53%)
Hispanic	5 (33%)
Mixed race	1 (7%)
Other	1 (7%)
<i>Marital Status</i>	
Married	12 (80%)
Single	1 (7%)
Living with partner	1 (7%)
Divorced	1 (7%)

---

## Appendix A

### Consent Form

#### **Teacher perceptions of Latino/a school engagement: An ethnographic study Colorado State University**

Dr. Ernest Chavez and Carla Pallares, members of the Psychology Department at Colorado State University, would like to invite you to participate in research involving your perceptions of Latino/a students' school engagement. You are invited to participate because you have certain qualities and first-hand knowledge that can help this study.

If you choose to participate in the research, you will be asked to attend one interview meeting with Carla Pallares. Each meeting will last for approximately one hour.

To become part of the research study, you must read and sign this Consent Form. By signing the form, you agree to participate in the discussion meeting.

**Discomforts and Risks:** It is possible that you may feel uncomfortable as a participant. You are **not** required to discuss anything that makes you feel uncomfortable. It is not possible to identify all potential risks in research procedures, but the researchers have taken reasonable safeguards to minimize any known and potential, but unknown, risks.

**Benefits:** There are no direct benefits for the participants from participating in this study.

**In Case of Injury:** The Colorado Governmental Immunity Act determines and may limit Colorado State University's legal responsibility if an injury happens because of this study. Claims against the University must be filed within 180 days of the injury.

**Project Withdrawal:** At any time, you may stop participating in the study.

**Invitation for Questions:** Before you decide whether to accept this invitation to take part in the study, please ask any questions that might come to mind now. Later, if you have questions about the study, you can contact the investigators, Carla Pallares at (303) 659-4000, ext. 3471, or Dr. Ernest Chavez at (970) 491-2968. If you have any questions about your rights as a volunteer in this research, contact Janell Barker, Human Research Administrator at 970-491-1655. We will give you a copy of this consent form to take with you.

**Confidentiality:** Only members of the research team are informed of participant identities. The importance of confidentiality will be emphasized during the interview. This is to protect your privacy and the privacy of the other participants.

**Recordings and Notes:** The research conversations will be tape-recorded. Research team members will transcribe the interviews. Only the research team will be able to

listen to the tapes and transcribe. Your identity will be kept in a separate place from the tapes and the transcriptions.

**Publications:** Articles may be written discussing issues and themes that the research teaches us. Some of your comments may be reflected the articles, possibly in your own words, however your identity will not be revealed.

**Authorization:**

Your signature acknowledges that you have read the information stated and willingly sign this consent form. Your signature also acknowledges that you have received, on the date signed, a copy of this document containing 2 pages.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of person agreeing to take part in the study

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Printed name of person agreeing to take part in the study

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of person providing information to participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Research Staff

Appendix B

Teacher demographic form

1. Age: \_\_\_\_\_

2. Sex:

- Female
- Male
- Transgender

3. Ethnicity:

- African-American
- Native-American
- Asian/ Pacific Islander
- Non-Hispanic, White
- Hispanic/Latino/Chicano
- Mixed \_\_\_\_\_
- Other \_\_\_\_\_

4. What is your marital status?

- Single
- Married
- Live-in relationship
- Divorced
- Separated
- Widowed

5. How long have you been teaching?

\_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix C

### Key informant/Staff demographic form

1. Age: \_\_\_\_\_

2. Sex:

- Female
- Male
- Transgender

3. Ethnicity:

- African-American
- Native-American
- Asian/ Pacific Islander
- Non-Hispanic, White
- Hispanic/Latino/Chicano
- Mixed \_\_\_\_\_
- Other \_\_\_\_\_

4. What is your marital status?

- Single
- Married
- Live-in relationship
- Divorced
- Separated
- Widowed

5. How long have you worked in the school system?

\_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix D

### Teacher/Staff Interview Questions

Before we start, I want to make sure you read, signed, and got a copy of the consent form. I also want to make sure that you filled out the demographic form and turned them into me, thank you.

My name is [*facilitator's name*]. I will be interviewing you today and I am going to tape-record it, but only so I can study it carefully later. Everything we talk about is confidential – only our research group is allowed to listen to the tapes. Participant confidentiality and protection of participants' identity will be assured in various ways (e.g. names will not be kept with the data or with the published results). This also means that we will all agree here in this room to keep everything we share today to ourselves and not to take it outside this room.

1. Do you think there is a need to improve school engagement for Latino/a students? Can you please discuss this question in the following areas of engagement?
  - a. Behavioral engagement- e.g., academic participation, participation in social or extracurricular activities?
  - b. Emotional engagement- e.g., their reactions to teachers, classmates, academics, and school?
  - c. Cognitive engagement-e.g., student's investment, willingness to exert the effort needed to comprehend complex ideas and skills?

Follow up question if teacher agrees that engagement needs to be improved: Do you have any suggestions that you or your colleagues have used to help increase Latino/a student engagement?

2. Who influences Latino/a students and in what way?
3. Do you think there is a need for awareness and training to help develop more cultural sensitivity within the schools?

Follow up questions if teacher thinks there is a need for awareness and training: What would training look like? How would it be useful to you in the classroom? Would you prefer on-site or off-site training?

Thank you for your time and for sharing your thoughts and ideas with us. It has been very helpful. Do you have any questions about this study or what we have talked about today?

## Appendix E

### Key Informant/Staff Questions

Before we start, I want to make sure you read, signed, and got a copy of the consent form. I also want to make sure that you filled out the demographic form and turned them into me, thank you.

My name is *[facilitator's name]*. I will be interviewing you today and I am going to tape-record it, but only so I can study it carefully later. Everything we talk about is confidential – only our research group is allowed to listen to the tapes. Participant confidentiality and protection of participants' identity will be assured in various ways (e.g. names will not be kept with the data or with the published results). This also means that we will all agree here in this room to keep everything we share today to ourselves and not to take it outside this room.

4. Do you think there is a need to improve school engagement for Latino/a students? Can you please discuss this question in the following areas of engagement?
  - a. Behavioral engagement- e.g., academic participation, participation in social or extracurricular activities?
  - b. Emotional engagement- e.g., their reactions to teachers, classmates, academics, and school?
  - c. Cognitive engagement-e.g., student's investment, willingness to exert the effort needed to comprehend complex ideas and skills?

Follow up question if teacher agrees that engagement needs to be improved: Do you have any suggestions that you or your colleagues have used to help increase Latino/a student engagement?

5. Who influences Latino/a students and in what way?
3. Do you think there is a need for awareness and training to help develop more cultural sensitivity within the schools?

Follow up questions if teacher thinks there is a need for awareness and training: What would training look like? How would it be useful to you in the classroom? Would you prefer on-site or off-site training?

Thank you for your time and for sharing your thoughts and ideas with us. It has been very helpful. Do you have any questions about this study or what we have talked about today?

## Appendix F

### Audit Issues

#### *Analysis Decisions*

When I began analyzing the interview transcripts, I coded all of the themes that emerged even if they were not related to Latino/a students to have a holistic reflection in the codes of what topics had been discussed. The codes that I included in the final results were directly related to Latino/a student engagement because I did not want to include superfluous amounts of data that would detract from the research questions of my study. I incorporated themes that were discussed by the participants, but not directly asked by the research questions because I wanted to allow the emergence of new themes that I was not specifically examining within my study.

I included the codes found among the key informants and the staff participants to illustrate the similarities and differences between both groups of participants. I discussed the recommendations to improve school engagement and recommendations to improve parental involvement separately because of the substantial focus in the interviews on parental involvement. Even though increasing parental involvement can help improve school engagement, I thought it was important to separate these two groups of recommendations to show the amount of ideas and recommendations that teachers have to increase parental involvement, which seemed greater than the recommendations to improve school engagement for Latino/as in general. I did not describe codes that could be used out of context, which could depict Latino/as in a negative manner.

### *Peer Examination Procedures*

I had several meetings with my research assistants and research assistant colleagues about my coding procedure. I had five research assistants transcribe the interviews, and I taught them about qualitative research including the concepts of qualitative document analysis, constant comparative analysis, and abbreviated grounded theory. We also had discussed my literature review for them to have an understanding of the background of my dissertation. A discussion of the themes that the research assistants had found in the interviews they had transcribed was recorded, and I listened to this recording after I had coded the interviews in order to not be influenced by their impressions as I was coding. There was much overlap between the codes I had found and the codes that my research assistants discussed. I discussed my coding procedure and codes that had emerged in my data with my colleagues. They noted the importance of organizing my results in a fluid manner.

One colleague emphasized that I did not have to include all the codes for the purposes of my study, and that helped me emphasize the themes that were most relevant to my research questions in the results. We also talked about the contradictions and interesting findings in my analysis as I involved in the coding process. Issues pertaining to confidentiality, politics, and impressions of the interviews were also discussed. After I wrote my results, I asked for feedback from a colleague about the fluidity of my results, and he made helpful recommendations to connect the codes that had emerged in my study to my original research questions. We also discussed the organization of my results and ways to make its structure more fluid and organized.