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College Knowledge: How Immigrant Latino Parents Access Information

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College Knowledge:

How Immigrant Latino Parents Access Information

by

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DEDICATION

In memory of my mother, Antonia Echeveste,

whose *funds of knowledge* were stretched to unfamiliar territories

but whose inner strength overcame every fear, obstacle and uncertainty encountered.

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ABSTRACT

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Among ethnic groups in California Latinos continue to have the lowest high school graduation rates and the lowest college completion rates. This study focused on understanding the role parents can play and ways schools and educators can support immigrant Latino parents to improve these rates.

Framed with a *funds of knowledge* approach (Gonzalez, N., Moll, L., & Amanti, C., 2005), this mixed-methods qualitative and quantitative study was conducted in a public charter high school in a low income area of Los Angeles where the student body was primarily Latino. The mission of the school was to prepare students for higher education at a four-year institution.

The study results showed that it is possible for a school to engage immigrant Latino parents. With a better understanding of the aspirations, fears, and challenges faced by this community, the information can be provided in a form that is meaningful and that builds upon existing *funds of knowledge*. Critical components of the college outreach program were seeking parent input, developing a parent outreach plan, making information accessible, encouraging parent college visits, disseminating information beginning in middle school, providing

personalized guidance, developing an undocumented student support plan, and creating a college-going culture. Implementing the the college access program encompassed gathering informal and formal feedback, presenting workshops, making documents available in Spanish as well as English, defining terms, arranging college visits, sending and displaying motivating communications, and engaging staff, students, and parents every step of the way.

CHAPTER 1

BACKGROUND OF STUDY

Introduction

This study focused on how immigrant Latino parents access local networks of exchange and how they develop social capital to access college knowledge in efforts to support their children on a college pathway. *College knowledge*, defined as information about access to and success in higher education, is one critical factor in determining whether Latino students pursue higher education options. The purpose of this study was to further validate the extent to which the Latino family unit values education and, within that context, to explore how systemic barriers in accessing information contribute to the historic lack of Latino representation in higher education. The assumption that Latino families do not value education or that Latino students are not interested in pursuing higher education was challenged. This dissertation project was conducted through the lens of under-representation of Latinos in higher education, partially due to parent and family lack of access to and knowledge about college from the public school system and social networks.

Historically, access to college knowledge by immigrant Latino parents and their children has been limited to the information disseminated by school systems and local community organizations (Auerbach, 2004). This information is often introduced after a student enters high school, which has been argued to be too late to prepare students and to influence parental aspirations (Auerbach, 2004, 2007). Getting information at this entry point does not allow the student or his or her family to properly plan or prepare for a college-bound track. It is also primarily directed toward students. Outreach to parents as evidenced by school college

counseling programs is limited and outside the scope of college access programs working within public schools. Immigrant Latino parents are systematically excluded from getting adequate access to college knowledge and therefore, more often than not, do not have the background within their experience to effectively navigate the education system to advocate for and support their children on college pathways.

A traditional approach to disseminating college knowledge among immigrant communities is through college access programs provided by schools or by outside organizations. However, these programs do not adapt to become more culturally relevant. At a school site, the primary distributor of information is the college counseling center. Because college centers in urban high schools are under-resourced and under-staffed, the program effectiveness is compromised resulting in low college eligible graduation rates (Swail & Perna, 2002). Low college eligible graduation rates are due to a combination of factors including students not taking the required courses, limited availability of required courses, and not taking the SAT or ACT.

College access programs are one way of preparing students for higher education and providing parents with information, thus laying the foundation for college knowledge, to support their children on a college pathway. However, college access programs target a few selected students from the general population and are therefore not accessible to all students and parents. The students selected are the students who demonstrate the potential to successfully pursue a college pathway (Tornatzky, Cutler, & Lee, 2002).

Historical Background

The Latino struggle for educational access and equity in the United States has been aggravated by the lack of recognition to elevate them as a significantly represented ethnic group in this country. Until the 1970s census, Latinos or Hispanics were not included as a population sub-group. The census limited reporting of ethnic breakdowns to white and non-white native and non-native Americans, contributing to a binary relationship between minorities and Whites (Valencia & Black, 2002).

Latinos engaged in greater organizing initiatives, following the African American path of the civil rights era. A student movement, a farm workers movement, and other grass roots movements raised awareness about the conditions of Latinos in the United States. Until that time, the League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC), which traces its roots back to 1929, was the only existing Latino-serving advocacy organization in the U.S. The formation of other Hispanic-serving institutions occurred during the 1960s with ASPIRA (which means aspire in Spanish) forming in 1961, the Mexican American Legal Defense and Education Fund (MALDEF) and National Council of La Raza (NCLR) in 1968, Puerto Rican Legal Defense and Education Fund (PRLDEF) in 1972, and the Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities (HACU) in 1986 (Valencia & Black, 2002).

Although money was allocated and legislation was passed to support equity in the public education system, it was still very much a Black and White issue. The term *minority* carried with it the common non-white definition of Black or African American. In the reauthorization of the Higher Education Act of 1998, the Latino community succeeded in establishing itself as a

standalone ethnic group. For purposes of this study, the terms *Latino* and *Hispanic* will be used interchangeably depending on how the literature uses the term.

Latino advocacy organizations were challenged to present a case to acknowledge Latinos without taking away from the African American attainments. The reauthorization of Title V represented significant headway for Latinos by including them in Title V which defined and funded Hispanic-serving institutions, reflecting a more equitable distribution of resources across minority populations (Valencia & Black, 2002).

Social/Political Context

Despite the gains in legislation and advocacy, Latinos continue to be underrepresented in higher education and in the professional sector. In 2006, Latinos had the least number of college graduates over the age of 25 at 12.3% compared to 29.9% for Whites, 16.9% for Blacks, 49.6% for Asians and 20.3% other non-Hispanic ("Statistical Portrait," 2006). According to the PEW report, *Recent Changes in the Entry of Hispanic and White Youth into College* (Fry, 2005), the number of Latinos enrolled in higher education increased between 1996 and 2001; however, the gap between Whites and Latinos continues to broaden due to increases in White students' enrollment in four year colleges and their decreases in two year and non-degree earning institutions. Latino enrollment in higher education increased overall by 24% from 1996 to 2001. Enrollment in four-year institutions was up by 29% and in two-year institutions by 14%. Latino students made up 9% of the total full time freshmen in 2001. Of the 9% enrollment, 42% were enrolled in four-year degree granting institutions and 38% were in two-year granting institutions. The remaining students were enrolled in non-degree granting institutions. Latinos are the ethnic

group with the lowest percentage of students enrolled in four-year institutions and the highest percentage enrolled in both two year-degree granting and non-degree granting institutions.

Children of Immigrant Latino Parents

Demographic data indicated a significant shift in the generational status of Latino children in the United States. From 1980 to 2007, the percentage of Latino children either foreign born or born to an immigrant parent increased 43% to 63%. In addition, the number of Latino children under the age of 18 increased from 9% in 1980 to 22% in 2007. The demographic shifts are attributed to an increase in immigration from Latin America during the 1980's as well as to higher birth rates for immigrant parents (Fry & Passel, 2009). For the context of this study, the following data points are relevant:

> Forty seven percent (47%) of first-generation Latino children have parents who have less than a high school education, compared with 40% of second-generation children and 16% of Latino children in the third generation or higher.
>
> Thirty four percent (34%) of first-generations Latino children live in poverty, compared with 26% of those in second generation and 24% in the third generation or higher. (Fry & Passel, 2010, p. i).

According to the Pew Hispanic Center, the data indicate that these numbers will remain fairly constant up to 2025 when nearly three in ten children will be of Latino ancestry. The peak of second-generation children is expected in 2050. Until then, the majority of Latino children will be born to at least one immigrant parent. Therefore, I conclude that for the next three to four decades, supporting immigrant Latino parents in advocating for their children's educational attainment is a social responsibility we must assume as a nation of immigrants.

High School Drop Out Crisis

The United States is facing an education crisis reflected in the high school dropout rates across the country among poor and minority populations. While the research and data refer to the term as *drop out*, this study will apply the term *push out.* Students are in essence "pushed out" of the education pipeline because their needs are not met (Orfield, Losen, Wald, & Swanson, 2004). The Latino push-out rate directly contributes to fewer students being eligible for higher education. The national high school graduation rate for 2004-2005 was 74.7% and in California it was 74.6% (Sable & Gaviola, 2007). The California high school graduation rate for Latinos in 2005 was 63.4% (California Basic Educational Data System [CBEDS], 2005).

The UC/ACCORD (University of California, All Campus Consortium On Research for Diversity) developed a college opportunity ratio system that breaks down complicated statistics of high school graduation and college eligibility to provide data for every school in the state. The College Opportunity Ratio (COR) is a three number figure with a base of 100 that tracks the ratio of the number of students graduating and the number of students meeting the California State University and the University of California (CSU/UC) eligibility criteria. The state of California had an overall 2007 COR of 100:66:25, which means that for every 100 entering 9th graders, 66 of them graduate and 25 passed required CSU/UC courses. The COR for underrepresented students in California is 100:54:15. Belmont High School in Los Angeles is a predominately Latino (91%) school with 50% English Learner population and 89% of the student body eligible for free or reduced lunch. The COR for Belmont High School was 100:23:9 (Oaks, Mendoza, & Silver, 2004). Nine out every 100 entering 9th graders met the

college eligibility criteria in that school. In order to increase access to higher education, students must graduate from high school prepared and eligible for higher education.

Statement of the Problem

Latino students continue to be underrepresented in higher education even though they belong to the fastest growing ethnic minority group in the nation. A factor contributing to the underrepresentation of first-generation college students is the lack of college knowledge within the family's realm of educational access and opportunity. As the number of Latino children and students increases in this country, successful college pathways need to be in place toward reaching equitable representation in higher education and increasing the numbers of students earning a bachelor's degree. This dissertation project reviewed the college knowledge base of parents and guardians, along with the ways in which that knowledge was accessed, and identified barriers, as well as the most effective practices for parents or guardians to access the college knowledge to support their children in pursuing higher education options and ultimately earning a college degree. The project concluded with programmatic recommendations for schools, educational advocacy organizations, and institutions of higher education.

The research on parent moral support and parent aspirations concluded that parents support their children's education in different ways, but often by sharing aspirations limited by their realities and providing moral support when they do not have the educational background or language skills for direct academic support or guidance (Auerbach, 2004, 2006, 2007; Collatos, Morrell, Nuno, & Lara, 2004; Mau & Bikos, 2000). However, their moral support is guided by their personal experiences and their socioeconomic status, and these may not include aspirations for higher education. In general, parents want a better future for their children and value

education, but many do not have the foundational knowledge to support their students through a college pathway. A general research finding identified parent education level as an indicator for student academic success. This indicator can be bolstered to increase college access by working with parents to increase their college awareness and knowledge.

College access for Latino students has also been framed from a deficit and social reproduction theoretical framework normed to the dominant cultural standards, making the challenge more complex (Gonzalez, Moll, & Amanti, 2005). The deficit lens sets up students and families to fail more often than they are successful in navigating college pathways. However, by re-framing the social and cultural differences through a *funds of knowledge* approach, teachers, counselors, school administrators, and college access program staff will be able to more effectively bridge the social/cultural evolution of the immigrant family.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to understand how immigrant Latino parents access college knowledge and to identify practices that provide immigrant Latino parents with the information to support their children on a college bound trajectory. It will benefit the development of college awareness programs seeking to increase Latino students being college-ready and college-bound by integrating a relevant parent education component. While the body of empirical studies in the area of Latino college access programs has increased significantly over the last decade, studies on the impact of parents' college knowledge on students pursuing higher education is extremely limited. Parents of first- and second-generation students encounter cultural shifts and assimilation issues as the first child in the family pursues higher education and expands the family's social capital.

The study further examined how immigrant Latino parents access college knowledge from various sources, including schools, community organizations, and social networks. Immigrant Latino parents are faced with a new educational system to learn and navigate. Schooling in the U.S. is also structured fundamentally differently from Latin American schooling. The research showed that college knowledge can also be transferred. Access to this knowledge, such as minimum college admission requirements, financial aid, the college application process, college admissions process, and the importance of SAT or ACT test scores, creates opportunities to proceed on college pathways. Students and parents can learn to build, maintain, and expand social networks that increase access to resources. This study reviewed the most recent literature on the parent outreach component of college access programs and included findings from a qualitative research project including interviews and questionnaires of immigrant Latino parents with children in high school or enrolled in their first year at a four-year college or university.

Significance of Study

Many Latino students come from families with limited educational attainment (Auerbach, 2004, 2006, 2007; Collatos et al., 2004; Fry, 2005). Many cannot identify someone they know outside of their school who has earned a college degree. If higher education is not in the realm of knowledge or possibility for students and their parents, it is the systems' responsibility to expand that realm and include it (Auerbach, 2004, 2006, 2007; Collatos et al., 2004). College access programs are a method of gaining college knowledge and increasing the social capital of students and families, which creates a network of individuals and resources; however, very few programs include a culturally sensitive parent outreach component.

A generalized overview of outside college access programs included a parent general information session, a financial aid workshop, student college advising, tutoring, SAT preparation courses, college visits, and assistance with the college application.

The research on this topic over the last five years is limited in the overall area of the role of parents in supporting college pathways. This qualitative project gathered information directly from parents and other relevant K-12 and college staff to identify components of best practices. Latino students, their parents, K-12 educators, college counselors, and community organizations implementing college access programs for minority students may benefit from the study. This study contributes to the best practices in addressing the under-representation of first-generation Latino students in four year colleges and universities.

Theoretical Framework

This study was carried out through the lens of *Funds of knowledge* and a socio-historical perspective. Gonzalez et al.'s (2005) work in *Funds of knowledge* brought together Vygotsky's (as cited in Moll & Greenberg 1990; Wertsch 1985) and Ogbu's (1992) theories to develop an organic framework that provides a fundamental perspective on the different assets individuals and families possess and pass on. *Funds of knowledge* is an outgrowth of neo-Vygotskian scholars which includes the networks of household economies and exchanges found in Velez-Ibanez and Greenberg's work on non-market systems of exchange within Mexican origin populations in the southwestern United States (Velez-Ibanez & Greenberg, 2005). Velez-Ibanez and Greenberg's (2005) early definition of *Funds of knowledge* was "strategic and cultural resources" (p. 47). They looked at how knowledge is constructed through everyday language and activities and the systems of exchange within or outside family networks. From this work,

Funds of knowledge emerges as a framework to understand, "…how families generated, obtained, and distributed knowledge" (Gonzalez et al., 2005, p. 5).

As a part of the socio-historical perspective, Ogbu's (1986, 1992) cultural ecological theory described underlining assumptions that are based on human competencies for subsistence. The competencies are defined by cultural norms and are transferred to the off-spring through child-rearing experiences. This theory is particularly appropriate to the immigrant family because the competencies for subsistence in the native land most likely differ from the subsistence competencies needed in the U.S. The physical move triggers a cultural shift in the set of competencies necessary to raise a competent individual in a new country. For the immigrant family the set of competencies becomes narrower and specialized, shifting the role of education as a primary competency for subsistence. Although Ogbu has also developed a framework for looking at voluntary and involuntary minorities, this study will not address those issues.

Gonzalez et al. (2005) define *Funds of knowledge*, "…of a community [as] not a laundry list of immutable cultural traits, but rather are historically contingent, emergent within relations of power, and not necessarily equally distributed" (p. 25). Community *funds of knowledge* expand and evolve as the individual and collective needs change due to the social and political landscape of location and access. The funds of an immigrant Latino community in a small rural community would vary from those in a large urban setting.

Research Questions

Using a qualitative approach to tap into the home and community *funds of knowledge* of immigrant Latino parents, this study examined how these families approach higher education and access college knowledge for their children. Specifically, the research questions were as follows:

1. How do immigrant Latino parents access college knowledge?
2. What elements are critical to an effective college knowledge program for immigrant Latino parents?
    - What would be the key components of a successful program?
    - What components should an implementation include?
    - What would be the recommendations for program implementations from the perspective of parents?

Research Design and Methodology

The research design for this project included data from individual interviews and focus groups, an archival review, and a survey. It is a mixed-methods qualitative and quantitative study with an extensive review of the literature. This study triangulated the data aggregated during the data collection and analysis phase with the literature review on existing research and practices. The study further validated or redirected existing research on how to support immigrant Latino parents in accessing college knowledge to further define and expand aspirations for their children as well as inform their belief systems.

Setting

Next Generation College High School (NGCHS), a pseudonym for purposes of anonymity and confidentiality, is a high performing college preparatory charter high school serving about 430 students in one of the most overcrowded neighborhoods in Southern California. All NGCHS students take a college preparatory course of study. A targeted and culturally relevant parent outreach program is integral to the overall program.

The greater community is considered a first stop for immigrants originating primarily from Central America and Mexico. As these families attempt to make ends meet, they function as networks and not isolated family units. Many households include more than one family and often include extended family members

Demographics

Over 70% of students at NGCHS live in close proximity to the school. Ninety-two percent (92%) of the students qualify for free or reduced meals. The ethnic population for the present school year consists of 92% Hispanic, 1% African American, 5% Asian, 0.4 Caucasian, and 1% multiracial or belonging to other ethnic groups. According to the latest public information available by census tract (U.S. Census, 2000), the school's target community of 6 square miles is home to roughly 211,944 residents, 27% of whom are under the age of 17. Representing a majority Hispanic population (70%), 68% of residents are foreign born from Mexico and Central and South America and 48% of the entire population over the age of 5 speaks little or no English. Fifty-seven percent of households speak Spanish, and almost two-thirds of those feel linguistically isolated.

The annual income within this district is the lowest in city: the median income is $11,475. The poverty rate in the area is 35%, compared with a citywide rate of 18%. Population density in 2000 was high at around 145 persons per acre, compared with a citywide average of 14. Expectations are that 2010 census data will show the community is more populated and isolated today than it was in 2000, according to information from the Los Angeles County Children's Planning Council, based on U.S. Bureau of Census (2000). NGCHS serves a student population predominantly from the surrounding low-income community. The NGCHS demographics mirror those of neighboring high schools. Poverty, primary language, and parent education levels are similar for both Next Generation Charter HS and the closest neighborhood schools. Despite the economic challenges in the area and a long-standing record of school failure, Next Generation students are challenging the trend with exceptional academic excellence. Next Generation ranks among the top high schools with similar demographics in the state and has a 91% graduation rate with all graduates meeting A-G requirements. Table 1 summarizes data from the California Basic Educational Data System (CBEDS) data collection and Standardized Testing and Reporting (STAR) Program (CBEDS, 2005). English Learner percentages reflect students who are designated as ELs.)

Table 1

English Learners and Students with Free/Reduced Lunch at NGCHS and Neighboring Schools in the Local District

School Name	English Learner%	Free/Red Lunch%
Next Generation Charter HS	**17**	**94**
Local Charter School #1	40	92
Local Charter School #2	29	99
Local Charter School #3	12	83
Local District School #1	41	85
Local District School #2	38	93
Local District School #3	41	88
Local District School #4	31	95
Local District School #5	20	74
Local District School #6	12	78

School Community

A distinguishing factor of the NGCHS school community is the commitment to ensure all students and parents are provided appropriate tools to access college knowledge in preparation for college, throughout the college application process, and in a more limited way through the transition from high school to college and continuing with limited alumni college counseling support. The school motto—college ready, college bound, agent of social justice—captures the essence of its mission to challenge what has been the status quo in that community for high school graduation rates, college eligibility, and enrollment rates according to the California Department of Education data. Table 2 indicates that NGCHS had a graduation rate of 91.3% in 2009 compared to its district schools (69.6%), county (75.7%), and state levels (78.6%) (CBEDS, 2009) A total of 100% of its graduates had taken the UC/CSU required courses.

Table 2
Graduation Rates at Next Generation Charter HS (91.3%)

School Totals	Dropouts Gr.9 (2005-06) through Gr.12 (2008-09)	Grade 12 Graduates (2008-09)	Graduation rate*
Next Generation Charter HS	8	84	91.3%
District Total	14,067	32,147	69.6%
County Total:	30,036	93,346	75.7%
State Total:	104,315	382,950	78.6%

Table 3 shows the extent of college-bound readiness by Next Generation Charter HS: 100%, compared to 43.1% at district, 33.5% at county, and 25.5% at state levels (CBEDS, 2009).

Table 3
Percentage of graduating students with UC/CSU required courses

School	Hispanic or Latino of Any Race		Total	
	# of Grads	Grads with UC/CSU Required Courses	# of Grads	Grads with UC/CSU Required Courses
Next Generation Charter HS Total	80	80 (100.0 %)	84	84 (100.0 %)
District Total	22,161	9,543 (43.1 %)	32,147	15,039 (46.8 %)
County Total	50,661	16,982 (33.5 %)	93,346	37,452 (40.1 %)
State Total	156,842	40,041 (25.5 %)	382,950	135,370 (35.3 %)

In addition, according to the site principal, the majority of the students graduating with the class of 2011 were first-generation college-going students. The school has graduated four senior classes and has some data on college retention for the majority of their alumni. The

college graduation rate for NGCHS surpassed the state and national average for Latino students based on data gathered on NGCHS alumni.

Access to Study Participants

Access to parents of Next Generation was allowed by the school principal. The Alumni Coordinator facilitated disseminating information for self-selected participation in the focus group.

Participants

The participants in this study were parents of students who were in their senior year and students who had graduated from Next Generation Charter High School. The survey was given to parents with students in their senior year. Parents of alumni comprised a focus group or were participants in one-on-one interviews. The focus group was formed by four self-selected parents of Next Generation alumni who responded to a request for participation. The focus group included at least one parent with a child in a four-year college/university, at least one parent with a child in a community college and at least one parent whose child had not pursued higher educational options. One-on-one interviews were conducted with four parents.

Selection of Participants

Participants were selected using convenience and purposeful sampling methods. The convenience sample technique was employed by selecting all participants who had children graduating from Next Generation Charter High School. A targeted subset of purposeful sampling was utilized to select participants for interviews. These participants were recommended by the high school administrative team. The administrative team recommended a slate of participants who demonstrated high engagement in their children's education while at the

high school. From the slate of recommendations, parents were self-selected by agreeing to participate.

The focus group was formed to include at least one parent with children attending four-year institutions, one parent with children attending community colleges, and one parent with children not pursuing higher education. Participants for the one-on-one interviews were recommended by the high school administrative team and the alumni coordinator. The recommendation was based on selecting individuals who had actively engaged in their child's education throughout high school, regardless of whether the child was pursuing higher education or not. Four parents were selected based on willingness to participate and availability. Both the focus group and interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed.

Data Collection

Survey

The survey was given to an estimated 100 parents of students currently in their senior year at Next Generation Charter High School. It was conducted during a workshop designed to assist parents of seniors with completing the FAFSA application and was presented as an optional task.

One-on-One Interviews

Interview data were collected in January and February 2011. The interview data were conducted as one-on-one interviews with four parents. All participants signed an informed consent form before participating in any data collection (Appendix A). Each participant who completed the informed consent form was issued a code to indicate their group participation. Group A consisted of individual interview participants. The interview data consisted of in-

depth, open-ended questions. The same guiding questions were used for the one-on-one interviews and the focus group (Appendices B and C). The questions were used as a guide, and follow-up questions were asked depending on how parents answered the questions.

Each participant was contacted to schedule an in-person interview for an estimated duration of 30–45 minutes. The interviews were conducted in an office one block away from the Next Generation Charter High School. All interviews were audio-recorded with the participants' consent. At the beginning of each interview, I reviewed the research topic and the purpose of the interview as it related to data collection. All interviews were transcribed and coded for analysis. High school staff provided a list of parents meeting the interview eligibility criteria. All parents meeting the criteria were invited to participate, and the first four to complete the interview were selected. Pseudo names have been assigned to protect participant anonymity.

The following observations were made of the participating parents as a group:

- All families had their oldest child be the first to go to college.
- Two parent homes
- Involved in students education
- Education level varied from middle school education to some college
- All participating parents were mothers

Focus Group

Focus group data were collected from a group of five parents in January and February 2011. The focus group was also guided by open-ended questions (Appendix D). All participants signed an informed consent form before participating in any data collection. Each participant

who completed the informed consent form was issued a code to indicate group participation. Group B consisted of focus group participants.

Participants were contacted to determine availability for a 60-minute focus group meeting. The focus group was held in a conference room one block away from the Next Generation Charter High School. The focus group was audio-recorded with the participants' consent. At the beginning of the focus group, I reviewed the research topic and the purpose of the interview as it related to data collection. The focus group meeting was transcribed and coded for analysis.

Archival Data

Artifacts providing parental guidance on college knowledge were collected from the Next Generation College High School community forums, and adjunct college access program. The artifacts were coded and analyzed to determine linguistic and cultural relevancy to the target community in this study.

Data Analysis

Each phase of the data collection was analyzed using pattern analysis to determine emerging themes from participants. Pattern analysis is a qualitative and inductive data analysis methodology in which patterns or clusters are derived from a careful examination of the data. Instead of specifying patterns before the data was collected, trends were identified after repeatedly culling through the data. Recurring patterns were refined to identify the main categories or topics. The data were further analyzed and compared to the research within the literature review. Most of the research data was provided in the primary language of the parents

and was translated into English. A detailed explanation of the process and the emerging patterns is discussed further in Chapter 3.

Limitations

Validity is limited to the honest participation of immigrant Latino parents in interviews, focus groups, and survey completion.

Delimitations

The narrow geographic focus, a large urban city in southwestern U.S., as well as the scope created limitations to transferability. The sample size of the project was small. Due to the location of the project, the sample size was heavily represented by the dominant Latino immigrant group. The sample of college access programs assessed was a representative sample and included programs with reportable outcomes.

Researcher Qualification

My background as the researcher may influence how the reader of this study interprets the findings. I share the background of many of the students graduating from Next Generation Charter High School having come to this country when I was four and being raised in the same community by my undocumented, immigrant parents whose *funds of knowledge* at the time excluded any connection to higher education. Integrated into my work as an educator has been the core belief that parents are a critical variable in the equation for improving educational outcomes for Latinos in this country. I am a staff member of the management umbrella for NGCHS. My role within the organization is removed from direct influence on day-to-day operations of the school and execution of the college access outreach program for parents.

Definition of Terms

- *Immigrant Latino parents* is defined as individuals with children enrolled in U.S. schools who were born in Spanish-speaking countries in Latin America and immigrated to the U.S.
- First-generation children are non-native born.
- Second-generation children have at least one non-native born parent.
- First-generation college students are students whose parents have not attended college.
- College knowledge is information on access to and success in higher education.
- Access is defined as physical access to information and materials as well as cultural and linguistic access to the information.
- College Opportunity Ratio (COR) is a 3- digit number that tells how many students graduate and how many pass the courses required for admission to California State University (CSU) and University of California (UC) compared to each 100 students enrolled as 9th graders. For Example a COR of 100:90:50 means that for 100 9th graders, 4 years later 90 graduated, and 50 passed courses required for admission to CSU and UC (Oaks, Mendoza, & Silver, 2004).

Restatement of the Problem

Latino students are underrepresented in higher education and a contributing factor is the lack of college knowledge among their families. Parents of first and second-generation Latino students encounter cultural shifts and unfamiliar issues when the first child in the family pursues higher education. Few studies have examined how parents' college knowledge (or lack thereof) might impact their child's decision to pursue higher education. The purpose of this study is to

understand how immigrant Latino parents access college knowledge and to identify practices that provide immigrant Latino parents with the information to support their children on a college-bound path.

Research Question Focus

The first research question addressed how immigrant Latino parents access college knowledge, whether from schools, colleges, community organizations, friends and family members, or other social networks. The second research question was concerned with describing the elements of an effective and successful college access program, particularly from the perspective of immigrant Latino parents.

Organization of the Study

This chapter has provided an introduction to the socio-political and historical context within which Latino youth and their immigrant parents acquire college knowledge. Demographic data reflected that, as of 2007, 63% of Latino children were either foreign born or born to immigrant parents. These immigrant parents typically have no personal experience of college in their home country and, despite their high aspirations for their children's education, face significant language and cultural barriers in accessing college knowledge for their children.

This study included reviews of the most recent literature and data on the outreach component of college access programs as they impact immigrant Latino parents. Using the theoretical framework of *funds of knowledge*, combined with Ogbu's (1981) cultural ecological theory, the study used qualitative and ethnographic research methods to capture and recognize competencies, knowledge networks, and social capital that are relied upon by these communities. Chapter 2 discusses the relevant literature. Chapter 3 discusses the setting, participants, and

research methodology. Additionally, chapter 3 discusses the findings of the study, outlines effective and inclusive strategies for successful college access programs, makes recommendations for practice, and suggests areas for further research in this area.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The focus of this study was on how Latino parents access college information for their children and how parent engagement can be improved through a richer understanding of the existing *funds of knowledge* within this community. A review of the college access literature revealed that education is highly valued and Latino parents have high aspirations for their children. These studies further revealed that although Latino parents of low socioeconomic status lack formal college knowledge, they use their *funds of knowledge* to support and guide their children through the process. Finally, an examination of studies on transition strategies, chain migration, and networks of exchange suggested that enriching these existing *funds of knowledge* with culturally relevant college access information would enable Latino parents to take a more active role in influencing their child's higher education.

Introduction

Latino students continue to be underrepresented in higher education despite the increase in undergraduate enrollment over the last three decades. The majority of the expanded four-year undergraduate enrollment was filled with the majority White student population. The gap in underrepresentation for Latinos and African American students widened during the higher education expansion in four-year colleges. In 2006, Latinos had the smallest percentage of college graduates over the age of 25 at 12.3% compared to 29.9% for Whites, 16.9% for African Americans, 49.6% for Asians and 20.3% other non-Hispanic ("Statistical Portrait," 2006). According to the PEW report, *Recent Changes in the Entry of Hispanic and White Youth into College* (Fry, 2005), Latino enrollment in higher education increased overall by 24% from 1996

to 2001; however, this increase in enrollment occurred primarily at the two-year and non-degree-earning institutions. Latinos are the ethnic group with the lowest percentage of students enrolled in four-year institutions and the highest percent enrolled in both two-year degree granting and non-degree-granting institutions.

One contributing factor to the under-enrollment of Latinos in higher education and particularly in four-year degree-granting institutions is the endemic dropout rate which reduces the pool of eligible students. Low graduation rates and low college completion directly correlate to fewer students being prepared or eligible for higher education. Therefore Latinos are overly represented in the low-skill and service oriented employment sector (Zarate, 2007). The low graduation rates coupled with the low college readiness of Latino students is a systemic malfunction in public education which historically has handicapped minority and poor parents in being strong advocates for their children.

Immigrant Latino parents have high aspirations for their children and want them to do well in school. The historic academic preparation and attainment of their children in U.S. public schools is misaligned with the hopes and dreams they have for their children to use education as a vehicle toward a better quality of life. Stanton-Salazar's (2001) research challenged the erroneous assumptions that Latino parents do not care about their children's education. In fact, they make attempts to influence the educational trajectories their children follow. Parents, in his research, expressed their hope through an unequivocal value placed on continuing education, even though many had an unclear understanding of what their children's actual educational experiences were or how to help them develop concrete plans to achieve their aspirations (2001).

Overview of College Access Literature

College enrollment in the U.S. has doubled over the last 30 years, yet the matriculation gap between White and Latino students has remained. Significant federal funds, through the TRIO programs and other federally funded initiatives, to increase enrollment and graduation of underrepresented youth have not narrowed the gap (Swail & Perna, 2002).

The Education Resource Institute (TERI) and the Council for Opportunity in Education in partnership with the College Board conducted the first national study of college access programs between 1999 and 2000 (Swail & Perna, 2002). Before this study, limited information was available on the number of college access programs, the type of programs, and programmatic outcomes. This study included responses from 1,110 programs across the 50 states including District of Columbia and U.S. territories, which provided a national representative sample of college access programs. The majority of programs were either fully or partially funded with federal or state dollars. The 1,110 responding programs reported serving 7,890 students in the 1998-1999 academic school year, which averaged a service ratio of 7 students per program per year (Swail & Perna, 2002).

The findings from this study support the critical factor of parent engagement and participation. Sewell and Shah's (1968) research on the influence of parent engagement in college plans further supported parents' role in influencing college planning when students of all socio-economic levels perceive parental encouragement:

> … where parental encouragement is low, relatively few students, regardless of their intelligence or socioeconomic status levels, plan on college… where parental encouragement is high, the proportion of students planning on college is also high, even when socioeconomic status and intelligence levels are relatively low. (p. 571)

They concluded that parental engagement is a variable that can be manipulated in college planning or aspirations, whereas intelligence and socio-economic levels may not be. Most of programs included some form of parent participation either optional or required. The specifics on how parents participated were not available; however, respondents identified parent engagement as a programmatic area to improve on or as an ongoing challenge to effective engagement.

Many parents of first-generation Latino college-going students are immigrants to this country and often have limited experience with higher education. Many of the parents have less than a high school education. The lack of parent college knowledge creates a barrier to first-generation Latino students' access, as well as to matriculation and success in higher education.

Several studies have been conducted on the impact some college access programs have had on students being prepared, accepted, and enrolled in higher education along with the importance of parent support in this process. The research literature has focused on parent outreach and mentoring with the intention to increase college knowledge through networks by tapping into *funds of knowledge* and distributing culturally relevant information. The research on parent engagement focuses on the challenges parents face in advocating for their children within a non-familiar educational culture and system, the moral support parents and families provide, and the dichotomy between concrete and abstract parent and student aspirations.

Aspirations Versus Attainment

Immigrant Latino parents have high aspirations for their children's future and seek to support them in creating and attaining opportunities for a better quality of life. Most Latin American immigrants' background in formal education is limited with very few having a high school education. The challenges in supporting and guiding their children to attain aspirations through an unfamiliar system in a foreign language represent significant barriers to overcome. Parent challenges, coupled with schools' inability or unwillingness to create culturally sensitive and relevant environments, leave immigrant children straddling home and school expectations. The immigrant Latino family values education and in many non-dominant ways actively engages in supporting the social and moral foundation of a good education.

Aspirations and academic attainment among children of immigrant Latino parents is misaligned primarily due to the abstract nature of the aspirations. Kao and Tienda's (1998) research differentiated between abstract and concrete aspirations and demonstrated how abstract aspirations change for parents as students continue through the educational pipeline. Abstract parental aspirations among immigrant Latino parents are well intentioned and founded in a belief in education as a means to a better future. However, when parents are unable to translate their aspirations into concrete actions, the onus of reaching those aspirations is placed on the child and the school.

Moral Support

Susan Auerbach (2004, 2006, 2007) has done extensive research specifically on the role of parents in Latino student access to higher education. Throughout her research she has

highlighted the importance of parental moral support whether parents have the ability to support their child academically or through the college application process.

Auerbach (2004) defined moral support as "consejos" (advice, teachings). "Consejos" encourages students to learn from their parents mistakes, develop a work ethic, and maintain their identity—all important as students prepare for the transition into the unfamiliar world of higher education. Latino parents of low SES may not have the college knowledge needed to engage with their children in preparing and applying for college, but they have the *funds of knowledge* to support their children in different ways including moral support and guidance (Auerbach, 2004, 2006, 2007; Sanchez, Reyes, & Singh, 2005; Jasis & Ordonez-Jasis, 2004; Valencia & Black, 2002).

Education is highly valued within the Latino community. It is a value with parallel tracks—one track is social education and the other academic education. Latino parents perceive academic education as a gateway for their children to do better than they have. The concept of moral support highlighted in Auerbach's work demonstrates that even when parents are not able to provide direct academic or college application support, they pull from their *funds of knowledge* to provide the moral support for their children to expand the knowledge base.

Another study by Sanchez et al. (2005) examined first- and second-year college Latino college students who reported that significant individuals (parents, family members, or community members) were valuable in the preparation and application process and continued to support these students' efforts to stay in college. Specifically, students reported that these significant individuals provided support by listening, asking lots of questions, and providing encouragement. This moral support was defined as "cognitive guidance" (Sanchez et al., 2005).

Cognitive guidance is defined as encouragement to aspire to attain a higher level of education than that of their parents and support in reaching aspirations. Most of the significant individuals did not have the college knowledge to provide technical assistance, yet they had significant impact on the lives of the students because they served as role models and expressed their caring. The Sanchez et al. (2005) study looked at a model school college access program where parents and family members were provided the college knowledge foundation to actively serve as a "significant individual" to first-generation college students.

Latino parents have high aspirations for their children (Auerbach, 2004; Stanton-Salazar, 2001) and value education (Valencia & Black, 2002). Many parents are interested in and search for the power to change and improve their children's education, as in the example of the parents in Jasis and Ordonez-Jasis' (2004) study of *convivencia*). Programs like Futures & Families and the La Familia Initiative in the Bay area provide parents' the critical capital to understand educational inequities and develop the will and power to advocate for their own children and all children (Auerbach, 2004; Jasis & Ordonez-Jasis, 2004) moving them from passive to active advocates for their children. As parents become more knowledgeable of their children's opportunities through their social networks and access to education, they are better equipped to actively advocate for their children.

College Knowledge

High schools have not typically provided extensive information about college preparation or the application process to support students and parents in certain demographic groups. While parents are a primary source of support, schools and institutions share the responsibility of expanding college knowledge across communities and/or individuals to support increased

pathways to higher education for Latino students (Auerbach, 2004, 2006, 2007; Oakes, Mendoza, & Siler, 2004; Sanchez et al., 2005). In most schools, unless students and/or parents are part of a specific college access program or seek the information on their own, they will most likely not come across information to aide them in helping their children continue their education after high school (Auerbach, 2004). Even the college access programs that provide this information need to consider how it is presented and received by the audience. Cultural relevance is critical for parents lacking college knowledge within what Barton and Hamilton (1998) refer to as local literacies. Local literacies, defined as organizing life, personal communication, private leisure, documenting life, sense-making and social participation, are the funds used to make sense of the information presented. When connections to the audience's local literacies are overlooked, the transference of new knowledge is limited. (Mercado, 2005) Information on college knowledge needs to be culturally relevant and constant for it to enter into the local literacies of groups whose knowledge base does not include it. It needs to connect to the context of the student and to the parents' real life (Auerbach, 2004).

In a different study, Auerbach (2007) looked at parent engagement with their children's college application process after participating in Futures and Families programs. According to Auerbach, parent involvement in the college application process ranges from moral support to struggling advocates depending on the parent's college knowledge level. She developed a continuum to determine parents' position in their support of pursuing the college pathway, ranging from less proactive, to ambivalent, to more proactive. The range is defined as less proactive when parents act as moral supporters; ambivalent when parents act as companions

supporting the direction selected by the child, and to more proactive when parents become struggling advocates, taking the information and resources provided to support their child.

She found the less educated with the least college knowledge to be the moral supporters. The parents with the greatest college knowledge were the struggling advocates. Those with unclear college knowledge were ambivalent companions. In an earlier study by Auerbach (2004), parents indicated that participating in the parent trainings of the college access program provided them with testimonials from other parents, which they found especially valuable. They appreciated connecting with others who had gone through similar experiences, understood their context, and looked like they did.

College Preparation and Success

College access is contingent on college knowledge and college preparation. One of the challenges to increasing the number of Latinos in higher education is to prepare them before they reach high school. College access information needs to be integrated into the schools early in the academic career both to share information and prepare students with the skills needed to pursue a college pathway.

The UC/ACCORD study on *California Opportunity Indicators: Informing and Monitoring California's Progress Toward Equitable College Access* (Oakes et al., 2004) identified the need for alignment between policy and practice in order to increase college access by minority populations. Their research identified the following seven factors as critical for improving college access to underrepresented groups: Safe and adequate school facilities; college-going school culture; rigorous academic curriculum; qualified teachers; intensive academic and social supports; opportunities to develop a multi-cultural college-going identity;

and family-neighborhood-school connection around college going. These factors are designed to support college preparation, college knowledge, and college access. Many of these factors are evident in college access pathways such as some of the programs that will be reviewed in this study.

College access also includes the identification of a transitional strategy from high school to college for Latino students. Collatos et al. (2004) provided a personal narrative perspective of the challenges two Latino male students encountered during their transition to college. Both of these students were involved in a small college access program. The program provided students support structures to build academic skills, research and understand educational inequity and information about college. The program also included a parent outreach component. Students' critical narratives indicated how the research helped them make sense of their place as culturally and linguistically marginalized students, understand social reproduction, develop their own identity, and learn how to deconstruct the system and navigate it.

Saunders and Serna (2004) followed a group of first-generation Latino students through the transition from high school to college. The researchers explored the effects of a college access program on the transition itself, as well as the students' ability to access both academic and social support, and maintain a college-going identity. The study found that the cohort nature of the college access program allowed students to develop a network during their high school experience with their peers, school staff, and university partners. It further looked at three levels of social network capacity building: Type 1—creation of new networks and maintenance of the old; type 2—relying on old networks; and type 3—all alone. Of the students in the sample, only one was a Type 3 and this was the student who decided to drop out. The cohort experience in

developing a network replication for most students, particularly those attending college away from home, was critical. Students who were able to create a new college network also had slightly higher grades. First-generation Latino college students need to learn how to build, maintain, and expand social networks once in college; having developed a network as part of their high school experience was critical.

Funds of knowledge

The theoretical framework through which this study was viewed is a social/cultural perspective primarily based on Gonzalez and Moll's (2005) research on *Funds of knowledge*. *Funds of knowledge* outlines the process for how non-dominant groups access and exchange information within their social networks. The premise relies on the notion that every family unit (or units) has resources that equate to dominant-cultural alternatives within their experience and knowledge base. Yosso (2008) elegantly captured the potential for understanding and implementing a social/cultural capital network within the parent and community members of Southside elementary school in her counter-narrative analysis of an organically formed group.

Networks of exchange are developed and evolved based on a community's needs—health, housing, employment, education, services, etc. (Velez-Ibanez & Greenberg, 2005). The knowledge available for exchange is centered around the lived experience of participants and their survival skills. It is both academic and social in nature and it evolves over time and place. Immigrant families are uprooted from their local social networks and circumstantially connect with new networks in the U.S. As a new skill is learned and mastered, it makes its way into the community's accumulated wealth of knowledge. Once this new knowledge is disseminated, it triggers changes in perspective and actions.

The educational system in the U.S. has historically failed certain minority populations including Latinos, African American's and Native American's in reaching high academic attainment levels. Some researchers argue the deficit theory, finding that the cultures of these minority groups are lacking the necessary core elements for academic success. However, the *Funds of knowledge* lens and the Vygotskian perspective of Moll and Greenberg (1990) and Gonzalez et al. (2005) rebut the "cognitive deficiency" notion. Their theories counter the claim that these students do not have a narrowly defined and fixed level of ability but, rather, a potential for learning that must be tapped into by their teachers. This potential takes shape when it is understood in terms of the culture and community within which it is embedded. In other words, families provide strategic resources for teachers and classrooms when they are invited into the learning process and share their knowledge and skills. When teachers and counselors learn first-hand about the rich specialized knowledge contained within these families and communities, a deeper trust and rapport is developed, and learning takes place within this social context.

Chain Migration and Networks of Exchange

Social networks of exchange are evident in the work of Perez and McDonough (2008) in which they explored the theories of chain migration and social capital within the college planning and college choice processes of Latinos in Los Angeles. Students indicated they spoke to family, friends and school staff about the college planning process. An interesting finding was that students identified with extended family members who had personal college experience more often than parents or siblings. However, parents can also play a critical role in creating

opportunities as well as in limiting opportunities depending on how they facilitate the access to college knowledge.

In the area of college choice the study found that students relied on guidance and experience from individuals they had a connection with. However, the guidance provided was biased to the personal experience of the person providing it. Students made college choices based on a personal connection to the college by knowing other students there, knowing or having heard of other students that had graduated, or going to the college with a friend. The personal connection to the college was a strong deciding factor influenced by personal acquaintances. This finding supports the high number of Latinos enrolling in and attending less-competitive and more affordable institutions such as local community colleges versus four year colleges. This pattern follows a migration pattern that continues to limit access to colleges and success in earning a college degree. The migration pattern is defined as the location students are attracted to based on existing connections. For example, students will give more consideration to a college where they know someone or know of someone who attended (Perez & McDonough, 2008).

Perez and McDonough (2008) interviewed Latino students in the Los Angeles area and described their need for personal connections in college choice "to circumvent challenges, such as loneliness and distance from family" (p. 258). Many of the students stated a strong desire to have some connection to family in their college choice—close to home, in a location where other family members live, or in a place where other family members have a history. Students articulated the pressure they received from their parents to stay close to home. This evidence

supports the potential of parents hindering their children's academic success despite their unconditional moral support and value in education.

This chapter summarized the research literature on college outreach programs and, more specifically, on how Latino parents can serve as catalysts to increase the number of first-generation Latino students entering higher education and completing a bachelor's degree. These studies brought to light many factors that influence Latino parents—lack of college knowledge, inability to translate aspirations into attainment, ineffective transition strategies, and a tendency to apply to familiar institutions with personal connections.

The next chapter examines how Latino parents at New Generation Charter High School accessed college information. These findings are categorized within the *funds of knowledge* theoretical framework, followed by practice recommendations to improve parent engagement and college access programs at NGCHS as well as other similar schools.

CHAPTER 3

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter discusses the analysis and findings of this study regarding access to college knowledge by immigrant Latino parents. The study was conducted over a two-month period (January and February, 2011) at Next Generation Charter High School (NGCHS), located in Southern California. At NGCHS parents are encouraged to be active partners in their child's education and are invited to participate on the site-based council, as volunteers on campus, and in targeted workshops to support their child's access and success in college. In addition, the school provides a parent coordinator to keep parents informed and engaged in their children's education.

For the purposes of this study, a *funds of knowledge* methodology was used to gather data and discover knowledge about the students' families and communities. Using an ethnographic approach combining interviews, surveys, and a focus group, the study's goal was to develop greater awareness of the context, assumptions, and strategies these families used to approach college and higher education.

The specific research questions guiding this study were:

1. How do immigrant Latino parents access college knowledge?
2. What elements are critical to an effective college knowledge program for immigrant Latino parents?

Introduction

The main focus of this study was to seek an understanding of the ways in which immigrant Latino parents access knowledge to support their children to prepare, become eligible

for, and pursue higher education options. The research was conducted from the perspective of immigrant Latino parents through a qualitative approach of individual interviews and a focus group. A survey was also conducted to gather information from a larger sampling. Available archival data was reviewed and integrated into the findings as background information. The data was collected within the *funds of knowledge* framework, which guided the research from the parents' aspirations and intentions to the more granular details of how they accessed information and built on existing funds.

This chapter (a) describes the participants; (b) reviews the findings gathered from surveys, interviews, and focus groups with parents; (c) analyzes all data to derive patterns and gain an understanding of the parents' *funds of knowledge* and their aspirations, fears, and challenges relating to college access for their children; and (d) provides practice recommendations for schools and/or organizations engaged in college outreach and college access programs, particularly those targeting Latino youth and their immigrant parents.

College-Going Culture at NGCHS

The Next Generation Charter High School community is located in an urban area with a high concentration of first-stop immigrant families. The demographic profile of the students is representative of neighboring schools. A strategy the school has used to bolster its college going culture has been to integrate parents into the success equation. The school begins to work with parents when students enroll in 9th grade. All parents of 9th grade students are expected to attend a college knowledge orientation which provides the foundation for many and builds upon existing knowledge for some. From this point the school maintains a parent outreach strand focused solely on building college knowledge through various workshops, "talleres," held during

the school year. The school also provides parents with written information about college, including such topics as requirements, application process, SAT/ACT exams, financial aid, and social/cultural transitions.

Parent Participants

The research participants were parents who were selected because they had a child graduate from Next Generation Charter High School. All interview participants identified themselves as immigrants from Mexico and Central America with various education levels in their home countries ranging from elementary education to college degree.

The average parent education level of the parent community at NGCHS is 1.71[1] with over half of parents' education level being less than a high school diploma. As Table 4 indicates, a quarter of the parent population of the school has a high school diploma most likely earned in their home country.

Table 4

Parent Education Levels at Next Generation Charter HS

Education Level	Percent
Not a HS Graduate	55%
HS Graduate	26%
Some College or AA	8%
College Graduate	8%
Graduate Degree or Higher	1%
Decline to State	1%

[1] The average was calculated using the following scale values: 1 = Not a high school graduate; 2 = High school graduate; 3 = Some college; 4 = College graduate; 5 = Graduate school.

Although parents with higher education degrees are present in the school community, the majority of those degrees were also earned in their home countries and therefore did not increase employment opportunities in this country. They also do not provide parents with the type of college knowledge that would be required for their child pursuing higher education in the U.S., such as steps for choosing high school courses, selecting a college or university, and financial aid planning.

The parents' education level and the transference of their education attained in another country contributed to the socio-economic profile of the student body. Over 90% of the families enrolled qualify for the National Free Lunch Program with 94% qualifying for free meals and 3% qualifying for reduced cost meals.

Interview Participants

Research outreach was coordinated with high school staff, which made participant recommendations based on the criteria provided. As a group, participating parents in the one-on-one interviews shared certain characteristics: They were from two parent homes, the eldest child was the first to go to college, they were involved in their student's education, and they were all mothers. Education level of the participants varied from middle school to some college. Four mothers participated in the one-on-one interviews. A short description of each family is provided below.

Participant 1: The Mendoza family. Ms. Mendoza is the mother of three children, all enrolled at Next Generation schools at some point. The oldest son graduated with the first graduating class and is on track to earn a college degree within four years. The middle son transferred out of the high school after the freshman year to another high school closer to home.

He graduated from high school without meeting the required state college eligibility criteria and therefore is not eligible to apply for a four-year college. His mother is concerned about his going through the community college track. His mother noted a significant difference in the student and family support from one school to the other. She stated that her third son, currently in middle school, will go to Next Generation for high school. The family unit includes mother, father and three children. The father works and the mother cares for the children. Mr. and Mrs. Mendoza are originally from El Salvador and immigrated before their children were born. All three children were born in the US. Ms. Mendoza is the parent who is mostly involved in all aspects of schooling. The father works and is involved in all major educational decisions.

Participant 2: The Esparza family. Ms. Esparza's oldest son had just completed his freshman year in a small liberal arts college out of state. Her second oldest son will start high school in the fall and has experienced difficulty at school both academically and socially. She is concerned that he may struggle to get into college. Her youngest daughter is in fifth grade and has already affirmed that she will be attending the same university as her eldest brother.

The family unit includes mother, father and three children. Mr. Esparza works and Ms. Esparza primarily takes care of the children and is involved in all educational aspects. They have been part of the school community for almost ten years and expressed a strong sense of trust in the school administration. Both parents were very intentional about starting an educational savings account for each child when they were born without knowing very much about higher educational options. It was an investment for the future.

Participant 3: The Valdovinos family. Ms. Valdovinos attended the interview with her youngest son who is currently a sophomore in high school. The Valdovinos family is living the college access experience through the lens of undocumented students. The oldest daughter, Thelma, was accepted and enrolled in a private four year university where she received a highly coveted full scholarship as an AB 540 student. The second oldest son decided to pursue his college education in his home country enrolling in the Universidad Autonoma de Mexico Baja California and where he just completed his freshman year. The youngest son is unsure what route he will take given that he too qualifies as an AB 540 student.

The family unit includes mother, father and three children. All family members are undocumented. Both Mr. and Ms. Valdovinos work. Education has been a priority in their household, and they believe it is the way for their children to access a better quality of life.

Participant 4: The Gutierrez family. The Gutierrez family has six children, two of whom have graduated from high school and enrolled in four-year universities. The oldest is entering her senior year in college and is playing a critical role in ensuring the younger siblings are on the right path to college options. The four younger children are all on college pathways with high expectations from their parents to pursue and earn a college degree.

Ms. Gutierrez is very engaged with the education of all of her children some of whom have needed more hands-on academic support than others. She has a presence at all school sites and is well known by her children's teachers as a strong parent advocate for her children and a teacher/school support person. The family has experienced its share of financial difficulties due to illness and unemployment. Through the challenges, they maintain a steady focus on the academic success of all six children.

Focus Group Participants

The focus group included five parents: four mothers and one father. One parent had received a college degree in the home country of Honduras, and two parents graduated from high school in their home countries of El Salvador and Guatemala. The other two parents had some middle school education. One of the five parents was proficient in English. Of the five families, one had an AB 540 eligible child who was not enrolled in any higher education school even though he had been accepted into three universities as a senior. The other four families had a student enrolled in a four-year university. The five parents represented various countries in Latin America including Mexico, Honduras, Guatemala and El Salvador. The focus group interview was recorded and translated by a skilled bilingual adult.

Survey Participants

A survey was developed and implemented to gather information on how parents access college information, where they got the information and when they got it. A copy of the survey is in Appendix D. The survey was conducted during a senior parent workshop specifically designed to assist parents and students with completing the FAFSA application. The survey was presented as an optional task during the workshop orientation. There were about 100 families in attendance most of whom were Spanish speaking. The survey was distributed to all families interested in completing the survey. An English version of the survey was made available to interested parents even though many may not have been be eligible for the study sample. Surveys were collected at the end of the orientation as parents made their way to their assigned support rooms. Fifty-three surveys were returned. Forty surveys met the study eligibility requirements.

The survey included three sections: demographic information, college knowledge, and aspirations. It included a total of 14 questions including 2 open-ended questions.

Data Analysis

Survey data were entered into an Excel spreadsheet and analyzed using manual pattern analysis and frequency analysis. The interview and focus group data were analyzed using a pattern analysis after collection. Themes were pulled from the data and trends were established using qualitative and inductive analysis. Relevant trends were triangulated with survey data to further support findings.

Survey Data Overview

Survey data showed that more than 50% of the participating parents had learned about the college application process before high school (or "always knew about it") and the remaining parents learned about the process in high school (see Figure 1 below). This early exposure to college knowledge is critical in planning for a higher education.

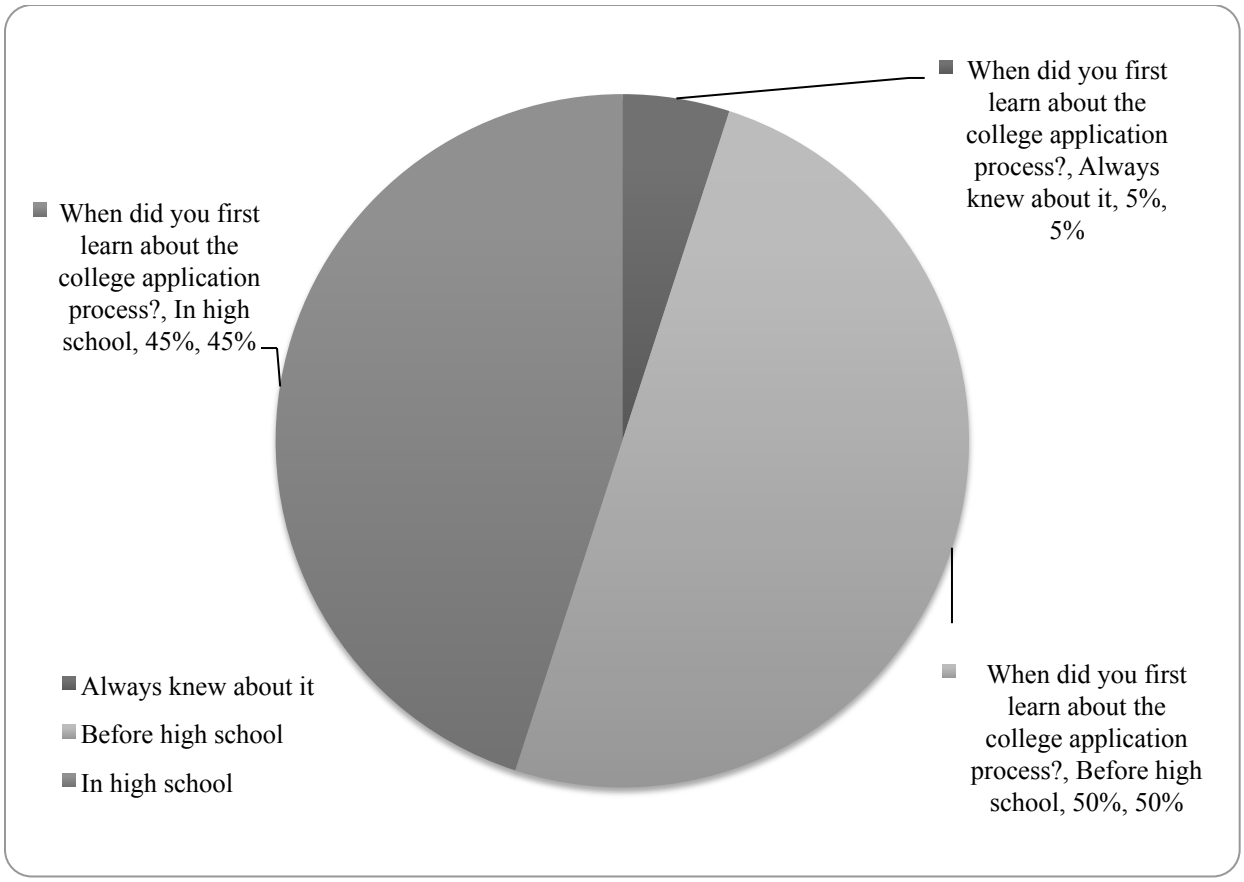

Figure 1: When parents first learned about the college application process.

Since the vast majority of respondents (88%) said that their child would be the first in the family to attend college, their strategies and sources for obtaining information can make a big difference in preparing their child for college. Almost all parents (98%) relied heavily on the school for their college knowledge, with 11% also citing their local network of family and friends, as depicted in Figure 2.

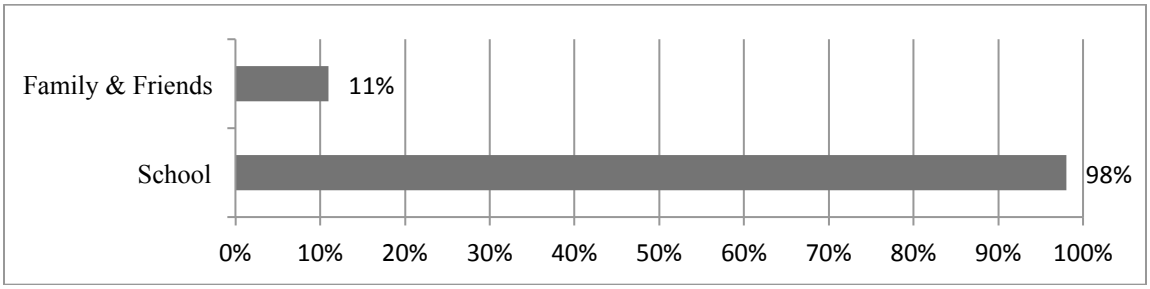

Figure 2: Where and how parents first learned about the college application process.

The medium for delivery of college knowledge that was most recognized and used by participants was parent workshops, with 78% of parents identifying workshops as their primary strategy for receiving information, as reflected in Figure 3 below.

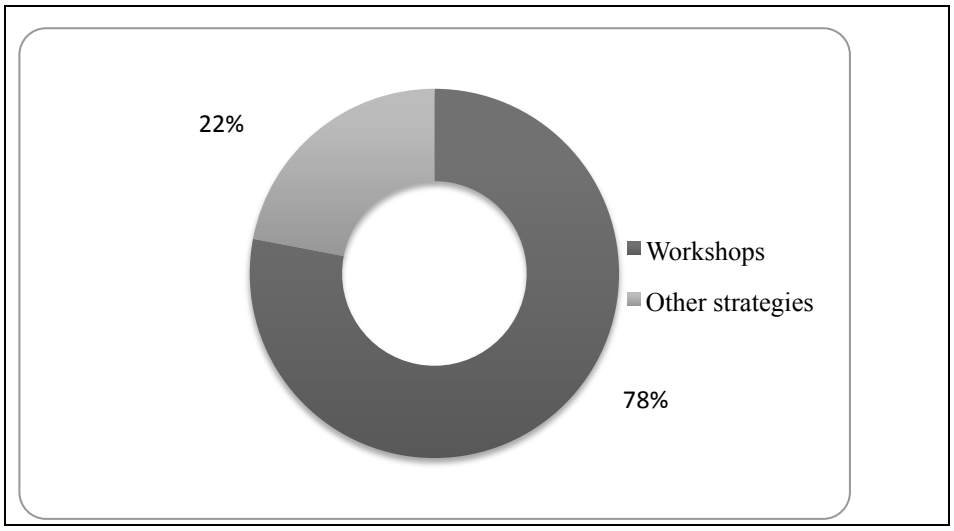

Figure 3: Strategies used by parents to access college information.

Finally, most parents in the survey responded that they understood both the college application and financial aid processes (see Figure 4).

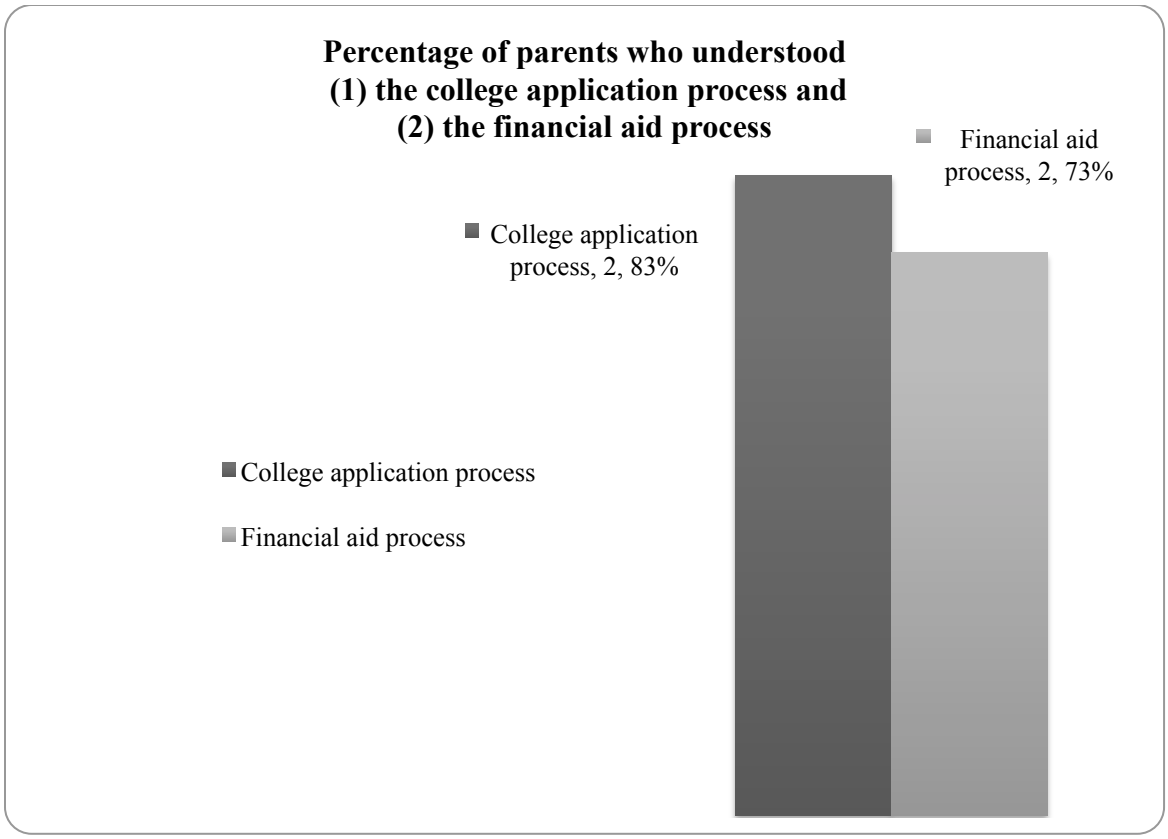

Figure 4: Parent understanding of the college application and financial aid processes.

Patterns Drawn From Interview and Focus Group Data

Three distinct patterns emerged from the data through the process of pattern analysis: (a) aspirations for my child, (b) information access that worked, and (c) fears about the process. These patterns are reflected in Table 5, with the related sub-themes shown as well.

Table 5
Themes and Sub-themes That Emerged from Data Using Pattern Analysis

Themes	Aspirations for my child	Information access that worked	Fears about the process
Sub-themes	Good education including a college degree	Learning it for the first time—need to layer and reinforce information	Financial cost
	Better future than their parents	Workshops were most effective means for accessing college information	Separation from family
	Better employment opportunities	Personalized guidance by school staff to motivate and support parents	Unknowns of college life

Aspirations for my child had sub-themes that included (a) attaining a good education including a college degree, (b) preparing for a better future than their parents, and (c) better employment opportunities. This broad pattern and its sub-themes are discussed further below.

Aspirations for my Child/Children

The first and overarching pattern observed throughout the data gathering phase strongly tied to the research related to parental aspirations and the moral support provided to their children through the course of their upbringing and the college application process. This pattern arose as parents were asked to reflect on aspirations for their children before they entered high school. Some parents shared aspirations they had for their children as far back as birth.

All of the interviewed participants expressed having educational aspirations for their children from an early age. Some specifically aspired for their children to obtain a college education, and others aspired for their children to pursue their educational goals. All aspired for their children to have better employment opportunities and a better life than they had. This study demonstrated how immigrant Latino parents care about their children's education academically and socially. These three aspirations, education, better employment, and a better life, are explored further.

Aspirations for education. Educational aspirations were strong among all parents interviewed as well as those participating in the survey. The survey results indicated that 100% of participating parents, "Hope their child will pursue a college degree" and 100% of them also responded that "Five years ago they expected their child to pursue a college degree." Immigrant Latino parents' aspirations for their child/children to pursue educational goals were supported by these two data points. Parents' aspirations build on the opportunities they did not have or missed. Many families immigrated to this country in search of a better future for their family due to social or political challenges in their home countries, as well as more opportunities for their children (Focus Group, Interviews). Whether their children were born in this country or not, all parents interviewed shared the common aspiration of higher education for their children:

> (As spoken). Aspirar a que ellos pudieran seguir con sus studios, que se graduen. Es la mayor aspiracion de todo padre que lleguen a logran lo que uno no ha podido lograr. (Translation). [They] aspire that they would be able to continue with their studies, that they would graduate. This is the main aspiration of every parent, that they achieve what one was not able to. (Ms. Gutierrez, S.P.)

Parents also shared how they inculcated their aspirations and sought to motivate their children in sharing the goal of higher education. Several parents shared this aspiration:

(As spoken). Pues desde que nacio nosotros siempre hemos tenidos las mejores aspiraciones que el se prepara, que sea una buena persona, que sea algo positivo para este pais. Siempre deciamos que el llegaria a ese lugar [universidad.]

(Translation). Since he was born, we have always had the best aspirations that he would be prepared, that he would be a good person to be something positive for this country. We would always say he would make it to that place [university].

(As spoken). De repente decia, 'es muy hard for me mami.' Pero OK deciamos, 'pues siguele trata, trata todo el tiempo y tu da hasta donde puedas pero siempre trata de llegar hasta donde quieras llegar.'

(Translation). Suddenly he would say, "It's too hard for me mami." But OK we would say, "Continue, try, always try and you give all you can but always try to get to where you want to get to." (Ms. Esparza, S.P.)

(As spoken). Yo siempre tenia en mi cabeza que si, ella iba a lograr a llegar a una Universidad, igual que mis otros hijos pero ella por ser la primera y darle ese ejemplo a sus hermanos. Si, lo teniamos muy claro que si queriamos eso para ella y pues si apoyandola.

(Translation). I always had in my head that she would be able to make it to a university, like my other children. But her, for being the first and giving that example to her brothers. Yes, we had it very clear that yes, we wanted that for her and so yes, supporting her. (Ms. Valdovinos, S.P.)

(As spoken). Antes de graduarse el de la high school, yo siempre lo apoyaba a el para que fuera a la Universidad porque asi como yo ni el papa, pues yo en mi pais saque mi high school pero no fui a la Universidad. Mi esposo lo mismo, entonces como nosotros no fuimos a la Universidad quieriamos que nuestros hijos fueran a la Universidad y siempre los apoyamos. Siempre le estuvimos diciendo 'tienes que ir a la Universidad no tienes que quedarte.'

(Translation). Before graduating from high school, I always supported him so that he could go to the university because like neither I nor his dad, I finished high school in my country but did not go to the university. My husband the same. Then like we didn't go to the university, we wanted our children to go to the university and we always supported them. We would always tell them "You have to go to the university, you don't have to stay behind." (Ms. Mendoza, S.P.)

Ms. Valdovinos*:* (As spoken). Mis aspiraciones era inculcarle buenos principios. Y pues en la casa, … siempre tratamos de mejoralo para que todo este bien. En la casa, rlla siempre vio harmonia, amor y yo creo que esa fue una de las aspiraciones de salir adelante y pues como primera igual- de hecho no nomas de nosotros de la familia sino de varios generaciones ha sido.

(Translation). My aspirations were to teach her good values. And, in the home, she always sees, we try to make it better so that everything is fine in the home. She always saw harmony, love in the home and I think that was one of her aspirations to go forward (pursue higher education) and as the oldest. In fact, not only from our family but from various generations. (Ms. Valdovinos, S.P.)

Another parent shared how she and her husband began to set the frame early by differentiating the approach to talking about college from a "what if" to a "when" frame:

> (As spoken). Uno no debe decir, si vas a luniversidad va a suceder esto. Sino cuando estes en la Universidad vas a hacer esto y lo otro. De esta manera el nino va metiendo en su mente, desde chico va metiendo en su mente que va ha estar alli. Asi como padre uno tiene que ser un poco fuerte con esto. Estar constante, eso es no parar de estar animandoles. Porque si, ellos van a tener muchas frustraciones y deseos de abandonarlo todo, asi es todo ser humano tiene sus altas y sus bajas, pero para eso estoy ahi para estarles diciendo, 'sigue, sigue, si puedes.'
>
> (Translation). One should not say, if you are going to the university, this is going to happen. Instead, when you are in the university, you will do this and that. This way, the child begins to get in his mind, since he is young getting in his mind that he will be there. As a parent, you have to be little strong on with this. Be consistent, that is don't stop motivating them. Because, yes, they will have many frustrations and want to abandon it all. Every human being is like this having ups and downs, but that is why I am there to continue telling them, "Continue, continue, you can do it." (Ms. Gutierrez, S.P.)

Among the participants, there was acknowledgement of different ability and motivation levels in their children as Ms. Valdovinos referenced her own judgment between her oldest daughter whom she expected to pursue and obtain a college degree and her second child who had struggled throughout high school. In the second child's case, she hoped he would earn his high school diploma and believed he would at least pursue a short career path. However, she aspired for continuing education for both her children:

(As spoken). Igual que el hiba, a este, pues primero la verdad teminar su high school porque asi que diga yo muy estudiante no verdad, nada que ver, pero al menos yo decia al menos una carrera corta si lo hace el.

(Translation). The same as he was going, well, first to be honest was to finish high school because to say that he was very studious, not exactly, but at least I would say at least a short career he can do. (Ms. Valdovinos, S.P.)

This data supported the notion that immigrant Latino parents seek to support their children in building their social capital through education to have a better quality of life than they have.

Aspirations for a better life. Parents expressed a goal to support their children to achieve a better future. For example, Ms. Gutierrez shared the following:

(As spoken). La aspiracion de la mayoria de todos los padres es esa. Que ellos puedan lograr estudiar y prepararse para un futuro mejor. Y para que se puedan sentir muy seguros de si mismos y asi lograr todos sus objetivos para que puedan realizar todo en la vida.

(Translation). The aspiration of many parents is that. That they are able to achieve to study and prepare themselves for a better future. And for them to be able to feel very sure of themselves and achieve all of their objectives so they can realize everything in life. (Ms. Gutierrez, S.P.)

Some parents expressed an explicit desire to support their children in attaining a higher quality of life than they themselves were able to attain. A sincere desire to support their children

to have the opportunities that they themselves did not have for various reasons and to escape some of the challenges they have faced:

> (As spoken). No quiero que ellos vivan lo que you he vivido. Nuestra meta como padres que no se queden como nosotros. Estamos en un pais de la prosperidaad y tenemos que aprovechar el tiempo.
>
> (Translation). I don't want them to live what I have lived. Our goal as parents is for them not to stay like us. We are in a country of prosperity and have to take advantage of the time. (Focus Group)
>
> (As Spoken). Es la mayor aspiracion de todo padre que lleguen a logran lo que uno no ha podido lograr.
>
> (Translation). The main aspiration of every parent, that they reach what one has not been able to accomplish. (Ms. Gutierrez, S.P.)

Neither the survey nor the interviews specifically asked questions about the parents' hopes for a better life for their children. However, many parents shared the aspiration to support their child in achieving a better future than they themselves had experienced. This was often closely tied to their aspirations for education and employment.

Aspirations for better employment. Parents also expressed the desire for their children to have better employment options than they have had. In Ms. Mendoza's words:

> (As spoken). Entre mas preparado este el va a tener un mejor futuro un mejor trabajo.
>
> (Translation). The more prepared he is, he will have a better future and a better job. (Ms. Mendoza, S.P.)

Parent participants across the data collection points shared an understanding that a high school diploma was not sufficient for the kind of work they would like to see their children engage in:

> (As spoken). Deciendole que el estudio es mejor (universitario) que no es terminar la high school, porque pues agarran otros trabajos mal pagados y recibiendose ella, ella iba a mandar o no mas estar en un escritorio sentada a estar hacienda el trabajo pesado. (Translation). Telling her that studying is better (university) that it is not completing high school, because you get other jobs poorly paid and graduating [from college], she would be managing or only sitting at a desk instead of doing a physically hard job. (Ms. Valdovinos, S.P.)

The survey asked parents what kind of work they hoped their children would have as an open-ended question. The response varied from secretary, office work to teacher, doctor, and engineer. A common thread was regardless of profession listed, it was defined as professional. This aligned with the interview data where parents aspired for their children to have work opportunities requiring a higher level of education than they had, higher status, and higher compensation.

Parents also expressed an understanding of the different employment prospects for those earning a high school diploma and those pursuing higher education whether it was a four-year college degree or a short career path:

> (As spoken). Ya graduado el de la Universidad para uno de high school… Para un nino de high school, No lo quiero ver trabar en un McDonalds, en un Subway, o sea en una tienda porque ‘te van a dar part-time y va a ganar el minimo o no te va alcanzar para nada ni tus cosas personales, con un titulo vas a estar sentado en una oficina, vas a ganar mas,

y osea y no va a ser un trabajo pesado. Pues va ser un orgullo que tu vas a estar en una oficina, hasta podes ya no mandar pero relacionar con gente de tu mismo nivel. Vas a ganar mas dinero que uno que solo se gradue de high school.'

(Translation). A university graduate to a high school… for a high school child, I don't want to see him work in a McDonald's, in a Subway, to stay in a store because they will give him part time [employment] and he will earn minimum (wage), "You won't have enough for anything not even your personal things [expenses]. With a degree, you will be sitting in an office, you will earn more, and it will not be a heavy job [physically]. It would be very proud that you will be in an office, you may even be managing, but relating with people at your own level. You will make more money than one who only graduates from high school." (Ms. Mendoza, S.P.)

Ms. Valdovinos shared the following statement with her youngest son during the interview:

(As spoken). 'Me gustaria que tu estuvieras en un puesto pues de respeto donde dirijas que seas lider a que estes a que te esten mandando con un sueldo pues mal.'

(Translation). "I would like for you to be in a respectful position where you lead, that you would be a leader instead of others managing you with a bad salary." (Ms. Valdovinos, S.P.)

All parents communicated that they had high aspirations for their children, whether for a college education, a better future, or good employment prospects. Despite their own low levels of education, these parents conveyed strong messages about the value and importance of education and its role in achieving employment prospects and a better life. They talked about

how they had shared these aspirations with their children over the years, often in the context of the struggles and the challenges of their own lived experiences. These aspirations, even without college knowledge, would provide a strong source of motivation and support for their children. A critical next step would be access to a more specific college knowledge base in order to build upon these aspirations.

Information Access That Worked

While all parents shared aspirations for higher education, they did not all have the same level of awareness about what it would take to support their children through a college pathway. There was a consistent reliance on the school to work with the students. The parents participating in this study, however, became at some point actively engaged in learning about the college application and admissions process. How they engaged in the learning process was influenced by their personal experience outside of school within their networks of exchange and within the school community. The general finding was that with the exception of two parents in the focus group, all other parents had a very rudimentary knowledge of what college was and how to support their children in getting there.

The sub-themes for information access that worked were learning this information for the first time, including related challenges, and effective strategies for accessing the information such as workshops and personalized guidance by school staff. These sub-themes are examined in greater detail below.

Learning it for the First Time. A sub-theme observed during the interviews was the difficulty of learning the information. This sub-theme is distinct from the pattern of how parents accessed the information. One parent explicitly shared that learning about colleges and the

application process was not easy. She recommended that parents be exposed to basic information at least three times to ensure a basic level of understanding:

> (As spoken). La primera informacion no fue facil no entendi mucho era algo nuevo tambien. Para mi era la primera vez que yo estaba interandome como aplicar a la Universidad de un hijo. Fue un poco dificil, no fue tan facil. Ya que comenzaron a llegar mas talleres, ya fui comprendiendo mas. Ya cuando va uno como el tercer taller ya va comprendiendo. Mi hija me ayudo y asi lo entendimos juntas.
>
> (Translation). The first information was not easy to understand, a lot of it was something new. Also, it was the first time I was learning how to apply to the university for a child. It was a little hard; it was not that easy. As more workshops were available, I started to understand more. When one is in about the third workshop, you start to understand. My daughter helped and that's how we understood it together. (Ms. Gutierrez, S.P.)

Several of the reasons given by parents for the difficulties were: new education system to learn different from their home countries, new terms to learn, first time going through the process, how information is presented, and whether they had an opportunity to ask questions. The following excerpts were taken from the focus group:

Focus Group parent: (As spoken). Aqui no tenia nada de informacion antes de ella [hija]. Tenia la informacion que ella me daba. Los talleres me ayudaron. La informacion del internet, y la informacion que ella sacaba. La primera experiencia es dificil porque uno viene de no saber nada a conocerlo y como dijo ella a veces uno se siente avergonzado de preguntar o algo porque uno ve que hay otros padres que a lo major tampoco estan entendiendo pero ellos hacen que si y uno los ve haciendo todo y uno dice, hay si

pregunto voy a quedar como que si soy tonta o algo. Bueno, si la informacion la dan de una manera mas practica mas sencilla para que uno no se sienta coibido y tengan mas confianza en preguntar.

(Translation). I did not have any information before her [daughter]. I had the information she would give me. The workshops helped me. The information from the internet and the information that she would get. The first experience is difficult because one comes from not knowing and like she said, sometimes one gets embarrassed to ask or something because one sees that there are other parents, that perhaps don't understand either, but they pretend that they do and one sees them doing everything and one says, if I ask I am going to look like a fool or something. If the information is given in a way that is more practical, simpler so that we don't feel … you have more confidence in asking questions.

Focus Group parent*:* (As spoken). Es normal cuando uno viene de otro pais es normal. No tenemos la informacion, no estamos informadas, entonces es logico es nuevo, una nueva experiencia y pues yo he aprendido mucho en los talleres.

(Translation). It's normal when you come from another country. We don't have the information, we are not informed, then its logical that it's new, a new experience and well, I have learned a lot in the workshops. (Focus Group)

Ms. Esparza shared how she knew very little about college and built her knowledge over time by attending workshops. She used this knowledge to support her and her husband's aspiration of college access for their son:

(As spoken). De hecho no sabia mucho, le voy a ser sincera, no sabia mucho. Si, trataba, me involucraba un poco aqui, aprender un poquito, pero a veces viene uno un poco mas cerrado. Tal vez no va a ir a la escuela [Universidad] pero si, si, a veces nos veniamos a las reunions lo poco que podiamos ir aprendiendo lo ibamos aprendiendo y pues alli fue donde nos nacio mas la idea de que el si tenia que ir a la Universidad, tenia que ir. (Translation). In fact, I didn't know very much, I am going to be sincere, I did not know much. Yes, I tried, I would get involved a little bit here, learn a little bit but sometimes, well one is more narrow minded, perhaps he is not going to go to go to school [university]. But yes, and sometimes we would go to the meetings and the little we could learn we would learn and that is where the idea was reinforced that he did have to go to the university, he had to go. (Ms. Esparza, S.P.)

Impact "talleres" or workshops had on access to information. When asked, "What was the primary means for accessing information on college knowledge?" 98% of parents surveyed indicated the school as the primary means and 78% indicated workshops were the primary source of that information, ranking significantly above teacher conferences, pamphlets, or meetings with the college counselor. Parent interviews and focus group feedback indicated workshops as a primary means to accessing information:

(As spoken). Lo primero fue los talleres que nos daban en la escuela. Antes de que entraran a la high school ya nos habian dado talleres en la escuela media. Algo un poco libiano por decir, asi con poca informacion. Solo como motivandonos para que nosotros no interesaramos y nos daban direcciones para poder buscar en el internet y cosas de esas. Pero desde que entraron al novena grado empezaron los talleres mas formales. Si nos

proveeron mucha informacion en la escuela. Muchos talleres con los hijos y los padres. (Translation). The first thing were the workshops they gave us at the school. Before she started high school, they had given us workshops in the middle school. Something light so to speak, like with a little information to motivate us so that we would be interested and they would give us internet addresses so we could look and things like that. But when 9th grade started, the formal workshops started. They gave us a lot of information at the school. Many workshops with students and parents. (Ms. Gutierrez, S.P.)

Workshops were the main means of accessing information for all participating parents including the focus group participants and survey participants.

Personalized guidance by school staff. Interview participants also expressed the importance of getting the information in personalized format. They valued having someone present the information, help them understand it, be available to answer questions, and motivate their children. The parent below gives a concrete example of how personalized information had a direct impact on completing required financial aid forms:

(As spoken). Los talleres son mas efectivos porque te estan explicando paso a paso lo que tienes que hacer. Incluso nos diereon uno donde nos invitaron a venir y llenar las formas por ejemplo del FAFSA para la ayuda finaciera. Si solo te lo dan o te dicen como verlo, no es lo mismo que este alguien alli diciendote en esto tienes que poner esto o lo otro… dando una guia directa, para mi eso es lo mejor.

(Translation). The workshops are more effective because they are explaining step by step what you have to do. In fact, they gave us one where they invited us to come and fill out forms, for example the FAFSA for financial aid. If they only give it to you or they tell

you how to see it, it's not the same as having someone there telling you here you have to do this or that… giving direct guidance for me is better. (Focus Group Parent)

The school provided students and parents with a wealth of written information about college preparation, requirements, and financial aid in addition to the structured college knowledge parent education program conducted primarily through workshops. All workshops were provided in English and Spanish. Parent perspectives on the usefulness of written information appeared to vary depending on the parent's educational level. The two college educated parents in the focus group, found the written information a useful means of communications, but other parents did not find it effective. For example, one focus group parent found the information from a workshop to be more practical and accessible than written information:

> (As spoken). Yo pienso que talleres [son mas effectivos]. Porque usted lo manda por escrito y el papel ayi anda el papel por toda la casa y tal vez a unas mamas que no saben leer y escribir entonces quien le va a dar esa informacion? Los talleres son mas practicos. (Translation). I think workshops [are more effective] because you send it in writing and the paper is there, all over the house and sometimes to some parents that don't know how to read and write, who is going to give them the information? The workshops are more practical. (Focus Group Parent)

Similarly, a parent of six with a high school education did not find written information an effective means of communication and highlighted the benefits of accessing information through a more personalized approach:

(As spoken). Muchos retos porque cuando te dan algo por escrito,a veces uno ni lo lee. Lo pierde, los dejas por alli otras veces hay terminus que no entiendes y no sabes de que este hablando. No te da el mismo interes. No te apacionas cuando estas solo leyendo. En cambio cuando vienes al taller y te estan explicando la misma persona que esta dando el taller te motiva te dice esto y te da mas posibilidades a preguantar y interarte de mas cosas.

(Translation). Lots of challenges because when they give you something in writing, sometimes you don't even read it. You lose it, you leave it somewhere and other times, there are terms you don't understand and you don't know what it is talking about You don't have the same interest. You don't get excited when you are only reading. Instead, when you come to a workshop and they are explaining, the same person giving the workshop motivates you, they tell you this and they give you more opportunities to ask questions and learn about more things. (Ms. Gutierrez, S.P.)

A good example of how personalized staff involvement can make a big difference in guiding Latino parents through the process is provided in Thelma's story below.

Thelma's case. The Esparza family faced unique challenges throughout the college application, admissions, and enrollment process because the student, Thelma, was undocumented. This story captured how the integration of parental aspirations, access to information, and a partnership with the school all contributed to a successful outcome.

Ms. Esparza expressed her sincere aspirations for her daughter to pursue a higher education but she was well aware that as an undocumented student, it would be challenging. She expressed to her daughter that it would be best for her to pursue a college degree in their home

country thinking that she would only be able to earn an associate's degree as an undocumented student. However, her daughter, motivated by her parents' aspirations from a young age, sought information on her opportunities given her status. The school staff supported the student and her family in learning about the process and sorting through the opportunities and challenges:

> (As spoken). Alli si era un miedo porque de hecho yo le decia a mi hija 'yo creo que nada mas la high school aqui mija y luego si quieres seguir la escuela este te vas para Mexico o agarras una carrera aqui.' Porque lo que yo tenia entido es que el colegio si lo podian hacer las personas indocumentadas. Pero ella decia, 'no porque nadamas son dos anos y despues que voy a hacer.' Que la iban aceptar si estaba en nuestra cabeza, pero de poder pagarlo eso iba a ser lo pesado. Pero ella me dice 'ya me aceptaron alli, ahora quiero ir alli. Aunque frijoles comamos todo el ano pues vas a ir alli.' Ya se dio la oportunidad de la otra Universidad y fue mejor.
>
> (Translation). There was fear because in fact I would tell my daughter, "I think only the high school here mija, and then if you want to continue with school, you go to Mexico or get a career [short] here." But she would say, "No because that is only two years and then what am I going to do?" That they would accept her was in our minds, but being able to pay for it, that was going to be hard. But she would tell me, "They have accepted me there, now I want to go there." Even if we ate beans all year, she was going to go there. And then, another opportunity came from the other university and it was better.
>
> (Ms. Esparza, S.P.)

Slowly, the family was recognizing that Thelma had the opportunity to attend a four-year college in the U.S. and did not have to return to Mexico after completing high school or community

college. Their daughter's resolve to attend university, even if it meant "eating beans all year," combined with the guidance from school staff, helped them realize that there might be opportunities for Thelma to receive financial aid:

> (As spoken). Si, igual y sabia que no hagarrar becas de gobierno solo privadas. Me informe cuando ibamos a los talleres de [Next Generation] de Junior en [middle school]. Desde middle school empezamos a informarnos de los detalles. Lo que yo me di cuenta es de que habia una oportunidad entre AB 540. Aplicar por medio de eso, igual que la aceptaban igual que no. Si teniamos muy claro que era muy dificil, no por la calificacion, pero ya ve que solo aceptan ciertos ninos en cada escuela. Pues nosotros lo intentamos. Siempre tratamos de aplicar, sino a qui, alla. Nosotros aplicabamos.
>
> (Translation). Yes, I knew she would not get government scholarships only private ones. I learned about this when we went to the workshops at [Next Generation] at the [middle school]. Since middle school we started to learn about the details. What I learned was that there was an opportunity in AB 540. To apply through that, they may accept her or not. We were very clear that it was very hard, not because of the grades, but you know they only accept certain students in every school. Well, we tried. We always try to apply, if not here, there. We just applied. (Ms. Esparza, S.P.)

In Thelma's case, early access to college knowledge (starting with a middle school workshop) helped the family to gather information about the challenges and opportunities ahead of their daughter as an undocumented student. Thelma was accepted into one of the top public universities in the state and to a reputable local private university. Her daughter was awarded one of two AB 540 full scholarships to the private university. The family is very proud and

appreciative to have received the support to help Thelma navigate the complex process as an undocumented student. The mother stated:

> (As spoken). La escuela la ayudaron mucho a Thelma. Ellos me la apoyaron bastante. La consejera en high school, el maestro Mr. Santos, me la apoyaron mucho, como siguir los procesos, muy eficientes.
>
> (Translation). The school helped her a lot. They supported her very much. The counselor at the high school, the teacher Mr. Santos, supported her a lot, how to follow the process, very efficient. (Ms. Esparza, S.P.)

Thelma may not have reached her or her parents aspirations if they had not had access to the necessary information needed to navigate the admissions process for an undocumented student. The parents, the student, and the school were essential components of the success equation. The school provided access to information about the process and actively engaged with Thelma and her family to navigate the system and reach her aspirations. What is different about her story is the power of an authentic partnership to support one student. This partnership between the student, parent, and school was not unique to Thelma. Every parent interviewed had a similar story of how the school and various staff members supported their child's success in the application process.

Fears to Overcome—Financial, Separation, and the Unknown

Another emerging pattern among interview participants was the reference to various fears they encountered as the college application and matriculation process unfolded for their children. Parents expressed their desire for their children to pursue a higher education; they understood how this investment would yield better outcomes in the job market; they also knew it was a

cultural shift from their personal experience. Yet, these intellectual understandings were not sufficient to address emotional and cultural fears of approaching something unfamiliar, a process and an experience they had very little knowledge about. These fears included the financial burden of a college degree, the student separation from the family, and the unknowns of college life. These three elements are addressed in the following paragraphs.

Financial fears. Parents expressed fears about the cost of getting a college degree and how they could possibly afford the cost. One parent commented: (As spoken) "La gran diferencia es el costo. Lo que cuesta una universidad aca nunca costaria en nuestro pais. (Translation). The biggest difference is the cost. What a university costs here would never cost in our home country." (Focus Group Parent)

They knew it was expensive and did not know what options they had. As the financial aid fog began to clear, there were other fears such as not having a social security number, not filing tax returns because they get paid in cash, being undocumented, and for some a sense of shame in sharing household financial information with their children. These were social, cultural, legal, and emotional barriers and fears to overcome just to continue to application process.

All parents interviewed made reference to the school's support in completing the financial aid application, FAFSA. The school provided staff to walk parents individually through the online application process. Parents agreed that if the school had not provided this direct guidance, some of them and perhaps many others would have given up because the form was complicated and long. Financial aid information was a key lever in helping parents overcome the potential deal breaker for their children's opportunity to pursue higher education.

One family interviewed can be identified as an outlier in this category. The Esparza family, while unfamiliar with the specifics of a college education, opened a savings account for each of their three kids. It was a savings account for their education, not knowing exactly what that would entail.

Separation fears. All parents with students living on campus shared their struggle with their fears of separation and loss. Having their children leave home to go to college was a cultural shift and probably the most difficult emotional fear to overcome for some more than others. Elmer's story captured the emotional turmoil a family may face during this transition phase which can have a significant impact on the final outcome for the student.

Elmer's story. Elmer's parents always encouraged him to pursue a college pathway and supported him along the way. They shared their aspirations with him and at least hoped that he would get into a local state university. College was a topic of discussion since Elmer was in elementary school. He had decided early in his high school career on his top university choice and both his parents supported his choice until he was accepted and decided to go. Ms. Mendoza shared her emotional struggle with letting her son pursue his goal of a college education, one she had for so many years actively encouraged him to pursue:

> (As spoken). Cuando Elmer me decia que se iba a ir a la Universidad, yo le decia tu estas loco, si ni has aplicado. 'Mami te tienes que preparer y me tengo que preparer yo, nos tenemos que preparar los dos,' me decia. Sentia el temor de que se va a ir de la casa, va estar en otro abmiente. O sea yo no se como esta la juventud de alla. Siempre he estado al pendiente, yo no se, a mi me han dicho que las universidades, que los muchachos le

hacen a las dorgas, que toman, que se hacen sus parties. Peor es que el va a ir hacer eso y no va ir a estudiar.

(Translation). When Elmer would tell me that he was going to the university, I would tell him you are crazy, you haven't even applied. "Mom you have to get ready and I have to get ready, we have to both be ready," he would tell me. I felt the fear that he was leaving the house, that he would be in another environment. To say, I don't know how that youth is. I have always been there, I don't know, they have told me that the universities, that the kids do drugs, that they drink, that they make their parties. Worst would be if he goes to do that and doesn't go to study.

(As spoken). Cuando me dijo que se iba a la Universidad, yo senti que se me partia en mil pedazos el Corazon. … ya queria que el dijera, 'ya no voy a ir a la universidad.' Yo le decia, 'yo ya no quiero que vaya a la universidad.' Le decia, 'estas seguro que quieres ir?' El me decia, 'mami no tengas miedo, tenme confianza, yo no voy a ser como otros ninos en la universidad.' Yo empezaba a llorar en las noches cuando el no se diera cuenta. Me dice mi esposo, 'pero por que lloras si el va a superarse, tu no tienes que ser egoista el tiene que superarse, si nosotros no fuimos a la universidad tienes que dejarlo volar.'

(Translation). When he told me he was going to the university, I felt my heart break into a thousand pieces… I wanted him to say, "I'm not going to go to the university." I would tell him, "I don't want you to go anymore." I would tell him, "Are you sure you want to go?" He would tell me, "Mom don't be afraid, have confidence in me, I will not be like other kids at the university." I would start to cry at night when he would not find out.

My husband would say, “Why are you crying if he is going to better himself, you shouldn’t be egotistical, he has to better himself, since we didn’t go to the university, you have to let him fly.”

(As spoken). Ya que empezo a arreglar sus maletas, yo sentia que mi corazon se me estaba hacienda pedazos. Pero decia yo, ‘no, no tienes que llorar delante de el porque entonces no va ir a la universidad porque te va a ver triste y entonces no va a lograr su futuro.’ Ya que saco sus cosas de la casa el salio llorando, le dimos la bendicion. Era duro para el, era duro para nosotros el primer ano. Mi esposo me decia, ‘tienes que demostrarle, cuando lo dejemos en la universidad, no tienes que llorar porque si no, el se va a regresar a la casa y no va a seguir estudiando. Yo no quiero un hijo que se quede viendo television, que vaya a trabajar en un McDonald’s. Si el tiene la oportunidad de ir a la universidad dejalo, que no te mire llorar.’

(Translation). When he started to prepare his bags, I felt like my heart was breaking into pieces. But I would tell myself, “No, you don’t have to cry in front of him because then he will not want to go because he is going to see you sad and then he will not realize his future.” When he took his bags out of the house, he was crying, and we gave him his blessing. It was hard for him, it was hard for us the first year. My husband would say, “You have to show him, when we leave him at the university, you don’t have to cry because if you do, he will return home and won’t continue his studies. I don’t want a son that watches television, that would work in a McDonald’s. If he has the opportunity to go the university, let him, don’t let him see you cry.” (Ms. Mendoza, S.P.)

(As spoken). A veces el me llamaba, se sentia triste, yo le decia tienes que seguir adelante. Aunque cuando colgara llorara. Le afectaba a la familia, a los otros ninos… Ya me siento orgullosa, ya va a salir de la Universidad, ya se va a grauduar, … Fue bien duro, duro. Cuando mis hijos estaban pequenos, yo les preguntaba a las madres, porque lloran si se van a la unversidad, y me decian esperese. Ahora entiendo a las madres. Yo ya no queria dejarlo ir, gracias a mi esposo lo dejamos ir.

(Translation). Sometimes he would call me, he felt sad, I would tell him to continue on even though, when I hung up, I would cry. It affected the family and the other kids… Now I am proud, he will be finishing the university, he will be graduating. It was really hard, really hard. When my kids were small, I would ask mothers why they would cry if they are going to the university, and they would tell me wait. Now I understand the mothers. I didn't want to let him go anymore, thanks to my husband we let him go. (Ms. Mendoza, S.P.)

Fears of separation or loss are often compounded by fears related to the unfamiliar college lifestyle, especially when the campus is far away.

Fear of the unknowns of college life. Parents expressed their fears and excitement about their children going to college. One family spent many weekends as a family visiting the college campus because they could not believe their oldest daughter had made it there and were hopeful they would motivate their younger children with these visits. Another family, including father, mother, younger daughter, and student, drove half way across the country to take their oldest son and first in their extended family to go to college to his college in the Midwest.

Whether the students were staying locally or going varying distances away from home, parents were excited for their children even when they experienced emotional reservations.

Coupled with their excitement were fears of the unknowns of college life. The college life, away from home, was a new experience for the majority of research participants with only one of them having experienced it firsthand. Even for those who were familiar with college life in their home countries, having their child go to college and living away from home in this country was a new experience:

> (As spoken). En nuestro pais es muy diferente al pais de aqui, el pais de uno muy diferente porque uno nunca sale de la casa siempre o sea donde va a estudiar agarra el bus.
>
> (Translation). In our country it is very different from here, our country is very different because one never leaves the house that is to say wherever you go study, you take the bus. (Ms. Mendoza, S.P.)

Fears included safety, not being there for them, worries over preparedness to live alone (would they eat properly, know how to do laundry, etc.) and concerns about the lack of family nurturing and potential social and environmental influences such as drinking alcohol.

Participating parents had developed a certain level of trust with the high school that enabled them to be closely involved in the transition from high school to college. As the students went on to their freshman year in college, most parents visited the campus that their child was moving to and this provided them with some comfort. A few parents asked other parents whose children were attending the same college to look out for their child if they were unable to visit the campus:

(As spoken). Cuando se iban los muchachos notaba que los papas teniamos miedo de que ellos se iban a salir a la calle pues a tomar a andarse ahi nomas. Pero por eso es important que uno conozca el lugar a donde se van a ir. Si uno tiene la oportunidad de viajar y conocer pues esta bien nosotros tuvimos esa oportunidad fuimos a la Universidad estuvimos una semana. Nos convencio tambien la escuela.

(Translation). I noticed when the kids were ready to go, that the parents, we were afraid that they would be on the street, well drinking and hanging out. But that is why it is important for one to know the place where he is going. If one has the opportunity to travel and see, then it is fine. We had that opportunity and went to the University for one week. The school convinced us. (Ms. Esparza, S.P.)

Parent participants are like every other immigrant Latino parent. They each came with a different struggle and share a different story but all have similar aspirations for their children. They, like many other parents, were willing to work on overcoming their fears for the good of their children.

(As spoken). Si hay miedo, uno esta acostumbrado a estar con ellos todo el tiempo. Cuando se iba a ir para Berkeley, si me daba mucho miedo de estar sola tanta horas. No es lo mismo que aqui, cualquier coso y rapido la vemos. Igual uno entiende que padres e hijos tambien tenemos que tener nuestro espacio asi que volar y aprender a volar sola, pues que mejor que ahorita que esta estudiando.

(Translation). There is fear, one is used to being with them all the time. When she was going to go to Berkeley, I was very afraid [for her] to be alone so many hours. It is not the same here, whatever happens, we can quickly see her. One understands that parents

and children have to have their space, so fly and learn to fly, what better than now that she is studying. (Ms. Valdovinos, S.P.)

The parent school community tapped into their networks of support at parent workshops, at the school, and in the community to get the reassurance some of them needed in supporting their child to go to college. Parents demonstrated an understanding of how difficult the process of letting their children go was, but also shared how important it was to let their children soar. They overcame many fears to support their children, and after the first experience felt they were better prepared to support the next child. As Ms. Esparza stated, (as spoken) "Ya no tengo miedo si lo logramos con uno lo podemos con el otro. (Translation). I'm not afraid anymore, if we did it with one, we can do it with the other."

Discussion

The research conducted as part of this dissertation centered around understanding how immigrant Latino parents access college knowledge to support their children on college pathways. Unlike much of the research relating to college access for Latino students, this dissertation focused on the role parents play or can play in the process. The data collected makes reference to how students access information, and some parents' comments described how they worked with their children to make sense of the information. These references were natural links to the parents' own learning process and should not be taken as a focus area for this study.

While the Latino population continues to increase in the United States, Latinos continue to have the lowest high school graduation rates and the lowest college completion rates. There are many contributing factors to this unacceptable educational trend. This study specifically

focused on understanding a more effective role parents can play and how immigrant Latino parents can systematically be supported to work in partnership with schools and educators to counteract this trend.

The premise of the research was specifically on gathering information on how parents access information within a qualitative approach. Due to the nature of qualitative research, the findings and conclusions are representative of the data gathered from parents and the patterns discerned from the analysis. In addition to understanding how parents access information, two other patterns emerged, which centered on parents' aspirations for their children and the fears they face along the way in supporting their children on a college pathway.

This research study provided insight into how a new fund of knowledge evolves within a community. The demographic profile of the parent community with low educational attainment levels had limited *funds of knowledge* to draw on to support their children in reaching a college education. The school community collaborated with parents to build on existing educational *funds of knowledge* to bridge the knowledge difference related to higher education. The outcomes for these families were positive, even for the two children who did not enroll in four year colleges or universities. All of the children who enrolled in four-year universities were the first in their families to go to college and with that experience and success have significantly contributed to expanding the *funds of knowledge* for their family and their network of support. The school was the source of information and the institution on which parents relied. Schools and other organizations can play an active role or a passive role in contributing to increasing *funds of knowledge* within a community.

Significance of Findings

Building on Parent Aspirations

Immigrant Latino parents care very much about their children's education, and they have aspirations and dreams for them. All parents interviewed for this study expressed a desire to give their children an education that would help them have a better future. Several of them specifically stated their desire for their children to have a better life than they have and to get an education that would be the gateway for that better life. This is consistent with several research studies that have shown that Latino parents place a high value on their children's education (Auerbach, 2004; Ceja, 2004; Delgado-Gaitan, 1990; Gandara, 1995). However, despite their strong aspirations Latino families often encounter communication barriers, language difficulties, and other obstacles that prevent them from accessing critical knowledge to support their children on college pathways (Valdez, 1996).

The aspirations shared in this study did not include a specific pathway. Parents did not know exactly what it would take for their children to have a "professional" career or what it would require for their children to be college-eligible. Parents aspired for their children to go to college or the university, but they did not possess the concrete knowledge to support them on that pathway. Interviewed parents were very committed to providing the moral support and being active cheerleaders for their children, trusting that the school system would lead them to a college experience.

In this study, parents trusted the educational system and the school provided them with the support and understanding that they sought. NGCHS immerses students and parents in a

college-going culture. Its mission is to challenge students in a college preparatory program. It recognizes that immigrant Latino parents value higher education but need guidance on how to best prepare their child for college and move through the college application process. However, other settings might not be as responsive to parent needs and, as in the example shared by Ms. Mendoza, violate their trust. In her case, her second son, Miguel, transferred out of NGCHS to attend a school closer to home. Miguel was a college bound student when he transferred at the end of 9th grade. Yet he graduated from high school without meeting the minimum college eligibility requirements even though Ms. Mendoza had remained engaged in his education and met with the college counselors regularly. Ms. Mendoza had already gone through the process at NGCHS with Elmer, her oldest, and expected that same level of support and outcomes from Miguel's school provided by Elmer's school. Because she was not able to navigate the bureaucracy of Miguel's high school, she felt she had failed him.

Miguel's case is an example of a highly motivated student and an involved parent who had aspirations of a college education for her child, but the school failed to put Miguel on a college track and program him for the appropriate courses. Ms. Mendoza did not fail Miguel. The system failed Miguel. Ms. Mendoza was engaged in Miguel's education. She monitored his report cards and grades knowing the importance of the GPA for college admissions and financial aid. She attended the college workshops offered by the school. She requested meetings with the college counselor. Regardless of her efforts, Miguel was not programmed on a college track and would not be taking the necessary course work to be eligible for a four year college/university. This information was not even provided to Ms. Mendoza. Ms. Mendoza observed that in

Elmer's graduating class most students were going to college but in Miguel's graduating class very few were going to college.

The parent's aspirations were the same for both her children. She invested the same amount of effort into supporting her second child as she did into supporting her first. The difference was the educational context for each child. One school's college-going culture was concrete and intentional in its actions toward outcomes whereas the other engaged in the appropriate activities but appeared to have significant gaps in the process.

Using Workshops, Reinforcement, and Personalization to Enhance Information Access

The interview process provided significant insight into how parents' acquire information and how they understand the information received on college knowledge. According to all data points, parents heavily relied on the school to provide them with information and to provide their children with information as well. Parents expressed a high level of trust in the school and its staff to provide them with the information and tools they needed to support their children on a college pathway.

The school's outreach program is very similar to that found in many other schools. The difference would be on the specific mission of the school and the outcomes they measure to ensure mission alignment. The school's ultimate goal is to get 90% of the students accepted into a four-year college/university, a goal that requires planning a student's path from the moment they set foot on the campus. This last year the school successfully prepared and supported 80% of the graduating seniors to be accepted at least one or more four-year colleges.

An effective strategy was the use of workshops or "talleres." There was consensus from parents that workshops were the most effective means of getting information and understanding

the information. Having someone explain the information step-by-step and be available to answer questions was very helpful, and it provided a personal touch. This is consistent with the recommendations of Espinosa (1995) who emphasized the importance of face-to-face communication in the primary language, as well as the need when first making contact. It may require several personal meetings to generate trust and active participation.

Connected to the workshop strategy was the idea of multiple layers and reinforcement. The information was new for many immigrant parents because many of them had never lived this experience, and for those who had, the system in the U.S. is very different from that of the home country. All interviewed parents, needed new information. Providing numerous opportunities to expose parents to the information was useful in gaining an understanding of the application process.

Another effective strategy was to personalize the support provided to students and parents in different ways. Providing a hands-on FAFSA workshop where parents received real-time support in completing the application on line was very effective. During the focus group, parents commented on how difficult it was and that if the guidance had not been available they or other parents may have given up; or if they had the means would have paid someone to complete it for them. Every family faced unique circumstances with very real challenges that could easily keep their children from going to college. Having staff who could assist families proved effective. The college knowledge support staff included the college counselor, the teachers, and the administration. Parents had several school personnel they could reach out to for support and guidance.

The importance of parents' effectively accessing information was directly connected to the influence parents had in their children's upbringing and how they guided their children through the transition into adulthood. Providing parents with accessible college knowledge gave them powerful tools to engage their children in critical conversations about pursuing a college path or simply graduating from high school. These tools allowed parents to transfer their abstract aspirations into concrete action steps for their children. Less motivated students were positively impacted by their parents' aspirations and engagement in their educational outcomes.

An unintended consequence of building a college knowledge foundation among immigrant Latino parents was the ripple effect it had within the family unit and its network of support. Parents participating in this research had younger children and they expressed their confidence in working with the next graduate. The family unit's *funds of knowledge* expanded through the first experience and will continue to be strengthened with every experience thereafter. These funds will expand to influence the network of support and will have an ongoing effect on increasing the high school graduation and college completion of chidren within the network.

Addressing the Fears of Immigrant Parents

Parents expressed anxiety and fear over the college admissions process and the transition from home to college. These fears were typically related to the lack of information and the fact that it was a new experience for many parents and their children. They were afraid of what it meant to them individually and as a family.

The financial fears were over how to pay for a college education. This is a very real fear when most families live under the poverty level and have to keep food on the table for their

younger children. The separation fears were due to the cultural shift in educational belief systems and practices. This shift required families to allow their child to leave the safety of the home and the protection of the parents to enter a foreign environment. The fear of the unknown was specifically about the fears related to the negative aspects of a college environment.

Financial fears were addressed effectively through information dissemination and personalized counseling. Once parents had an understanding of financing options, grants, scholarship, and loans, they were able to actively engage in the conversation to figure out what would work for them and their child. Some families were willing to sacrifice, yet they were unaware of the total amount of the sacrifice. Ms. Valdovinos for example shared that they were willing to eat beans every day to pay for her daughter to go to the school of her choice where she did not get any financial aid. While the willingness to sacrifice was there, the family's annual household income was probably very close to the total cost of attending a top ranking state school with no financial assistance. In this case, willingness to sacrifice was not sufficient and would impose an extraordinary, unrealistic burden on the family unit.

The fear of separation and loss is more nuanced in nature because of its direct emotional connection to the parents as human beings. This was a new experience for them, and as Elmer shared with his mother before he was accepted into college, parents and children need to prepare for the separation. The college admissions process is very technical, long, and complex. These factors take precedence in the short period of time between end of 11th grade and mid-12th grade with test preparation, test taking, college research, application requests, personal statements, letters of recommendation, etc. The social/emotional aspects of this transition are often not addressed because time and resources are limited. Yet, as Ms. Mendoza shared, her separation

struggle almost prevented her from allowing her son to take advantage of a lifetime opportunity. It is recommended to work with parents in preparing for the separation before and during the application and transition time. The data in this study demonstrated parents' willingness to let go if they were assured their children would be in a safe and supportive environment.

Fearing the unknown is human nature and not exclusive to parents and families unfamiliar with the college experience. Fifty-five percent of the parents in this study did not graduate from high school and only 26% were high school graduates. Parents' prior knowledge of college life was mostly based on hearsay because they had not been exposed to it directly. With over 80% of the parents having no personal experience of college, and with limited access to role models in their local communities, their perceptions and expectations of the college experience were often colored by misperceptions.

For example, Ms. Gutierrez shared how amazed she was at beauty and immensity of the college campus. She had never been on a college campus before. Had she had first-hand experience with visiting a college campus, many of her fears would have been mitigated earlier. Three out of the four parents interviewed said they were concerned college life was about drinking and hanging out. This was their perception and therefore their reality. Parent perceptions shift through exposure and information.

The study revealed that while parents had strong aspirations for a college education for their children and were committed to being involved throughout the application process, they often lacked the knowledge and social support networks needed to navigate the educational system. The following section outlines recommendations and best practices for improving access to college knowledge.

Recommendations for Practice

The following recommendations, as listed in Table 6 below are directed to schools or organizations engaged in college access programs.

Table 6

Practice Recommendations for Effective and Inclusive College Access Programs

Recommendation	Associated Activities and Considerations
Seek parent input	Focus groups, surveys, informal feedback
Develop a parent outreach plan	College access, financial aid, cultural issues
Make information accessible	Multiple formats, language and terms
Encourage parent college visits	First-hand experience of college campus
Ensure early dissemination of information	Preferably beginning in middle school
Provide personalized guidance	Motivating, supporting, and engaging parents
Develop an undocumented student support plan	Avoidance of marginalization/intimidation
Create a college-going culture	Engaged staff, students, parents in collective effort

The immigrant Latino family is a tight family unit and parents want to be part of this process. Effectively engaging parents will further motivate students to prepare for opportunities in higher education and succeed in the critical step of transitioning from high school to college. The following recommendations were extracted from the data analysis based on parents' perspectives of effective practices and identifiable gaps in the preparation and transition process to college.

- *Seek parent input*—Parents, regardless of education level, possess a wealth of information on how to best support their fellow parents and themselves in accessing college knowledge effectively. Information gathering strategies may include focus groups, surveys, and anecdotal records of informal parent feedback. Use this information to develop an outreach plan.
- *Develop a parent outreach plan*—Develop an intention and outcome-driven parent outreach plan that includes trainings and information on college access, financial aid, and social/cultural issues related to pursuing higher educational options.
- *Make information accessible*—Provide information in language and terms accessible to the target demographic. Provide ample opportunities for exposure to information in multiple formats—parent meetings, parent/teacher conferences, specific workshops, monthly newsletters, and campus college information campaigns.
- *Encourage parent college visits*—Extend college visit opportunities to parents so they can experience firsthand what a college campus looks like and feels like. Provide them with an experience where they can visualize their child being part of a college community.
- *Ensure early dissemination of information*—Disseminate information on college knowledge as early as possible, preferably by middle school. Early exposure through workshops and written material will begin to address many parent fears and/or concerns about the process and what it would mean to their child and family.
- *Provide personalized guidance*—Provide parents with the individualized support they may need to navigate their unique circumstances in making college a reality for their child. This does not require a case manager; rather it requires a shared commitment

across the school community to support every child and every family in achieving their goals along a college pathway. Engage staff to support college knowledge initiatives and act as motivators in engaging students and parents in the process.

- *Develop an undocumented student support plan*—Develop an integrated support plan to address unique issues related to undocumented students. Adopt strategies sensitive to marginalization and intimidation of undocumented students and families.
- *Create a College-Going Culture*—Establish a college-going culture that sets goals for students and engages all school staff and parents in motivating and preparing students to reach their individual goal. Make it a collective effort.

The Latino education pipeline continues to demonstrate significant challenges to improving high school graduation rates as well as college admissions and completion rates. The same system that fails Latino students also handicaps their parents by failing to provide the support and motivation needed to stay the course to meet their higher education goals for their children. This study sought to make the case for meaningfully engaging immigrant Latino parents in their children's education throughout the K-12 pipeline and during the high school to college transition. By engaging parents meaningfully, they are given tools to effectively support and motivate their children in achieving their aspirations. The research participants debunked the myth that Latino parents do not care about their children's education. These parents, like other parents, want the best for their children and have hopes and dreams of a brighter future.

Questions for Further Research

This study has shown how it is possible for a school to reach out to immigrant Latino parents to gain an understanding of their *funds of knowledge*. With a better understanding of the

aspirations, fears, and challenges faced by this community, the information can be provided in a form that is more meaningful and that builds upon existing *funds of knowledge*. In order for a college outreach program to be successful with this population, certain critical ingredients were identified in the Recommendations section above and in Table 6.

One topic that needs to be studied further is how reducing the isolation of immigrant Latino families might result in greater parent engagement. College visitations are an effective way to alleviate may fears or misperceptions that parents might have about the college experience. When schools create opportunities for parent-to-parent contact (such as ESL classes and social or cultural events), these social networks build trust and mutual reliance, which can promote sharing of college knowledge. Similarly, if a first-generation Latino family is uncomfortable with sending their child to a college where there is no existing family connection, might it help to create mentoring relationships with Latino students at that college? Another way to alleviate parent fears is by enabling them to talk on the phone (and in Spanish) with parents of Latino students at that college. By tapping into anxieties common to many Latino parents and creating new community pathways and networks of information exchange, the uncertainties of sending a child away might be alleviated.

Another interesting topic for further study might be the impact of exposure to college financial aid information much earlier in the process. There is a general lack of familiarity among Latino youth and their parents about college financial aid. Although the Latino families in this study highly value education, almost all the families were low income and the costs of college posed a daunting challenge. A recent study of Latino youth and their parents by the Tomas Rivera Policy Institute (Zarate & Fabienke, 2007) found that 54% of parent respondents

were somewhat familiar or not familiar with college financial aid and more than 50% of both youth and parent respondents indicated either that a person had to be a U.S. citizen to be eligible for financial aid or that they did not know whether citizenship was a requirement. As Zarate and Fabienke (2007) suggested, perhaps students and their parents should be exposed to financial aid information in middle school so that they can begin to plan for college.

A gender study of college-going immigrant Latina students would be another important research topic. While Latinas are more likely to graduate from high school and attend college than Latinos, they face certain unique cultural challenges, and they often take on additional responsibilities to help out at home. They also might not enjoy the freedom of their male counterparts because of family concerns about night classes or living and traveling on their own.

Undocumented Latino students often hold themselves back from college opportunities because of fears of deportation or other punitive consequences because of their immigration status. They also typically believe that they are not eligible for financial aid and therefore do not take the necessary steps to get on a college track. This is an important group, and there is an urgent need for researchers, educators, and activists to develop and promote programs and services to reach out to them.

It would also be interesting to examine the effects of young Latinos entering the teaching profession and the extent to which this could impact *funds of knowledge* relating to college access, and perhaps result in a greater responsiveness to the community's needs. It is ultimately through connections between home and school that *funds of knowledge* are shared and exchanged. Teachers might hold perceptions about parent capacity to support their children that are inaccurate or incomplete. As more schools build collaborations and partnerships between

school staff, educators, and immigrant Latino parents, they will acquire more insights about how to customize and adapt their college access programs to be more accessible and culturally relevant.

Finally, the present study was a single case study of a charter high school with a college-going culture and a mission to prepare and support its students on a college track. The data reflected that parents had high aspirations for their children and they trusted that NGCHS would provide them and their children with the tools and pathways to build upon these dreams. The high school graduation and college attendance rates at NGCHS are much higher than those at neighboring schools with the same demographics. An important next step would be to do a comparative study focused on how other high schools support and prepare immigrant Latino parents and to compare and contrast different approaches for creating successful college outreach programs.

APPENDIX A

Participant Release Form

Informed Consent Form

Date: _____

Loyola Marymount University

Understanding how immigrant Latino parents access information to support their children in pursuing higher education options.

1) I hereby authorize Ana F. Ponce to include me in the following research study: College Knowledge: How immigrant Latino parents access information to inform their beliefs and aspirations.

2) I have been asked to participate on a research project which is designed to gather information from parents to further understand how college information is accessed and which will last for approximately six weeks.

3) It has been explained to me that the reason for my inclusion in this project is that I am a parent of a student who is a senior in high school or graduated from high school.

4) I understand that if I am a subject, I will be asked to complete a survey and/or participate in an interview to gather information for the study.

   These procedures have been explained to me by Ana Ponce, student researcher from Loyola Marymount University.

5) I understand that I will be audiotaped and/or photographed in the process of these research procedures. It has been explained to me that these tapes will be used for teaching and/or research purposes only and that my identity will not be disclosed. I have been assured that the tapes will be destroyed after their use in this research project is completed. I understand that I have the right to review the tapes made as part of the study to determine whether they should be edited or erased in whole or in part.

6) I understand that the study described above may involve the following risks and/or discomforts: sharing personal experiences and aspirations for your children may be difficult and trigger temporary emotional upset.

7) I also understand that the possible benefits of the study are to inform the development of culturally relevant and accessible college access programs for Latino students.

8) I understand that Ana F. Ponce who can be reached at 213 – 417-3400 will answer any questions I may have at any time concerning details of the procedures performed as part of this study.

9) If the study design or the use of the information is to be changed, I will be so informed and my consent reobtained.

10) I understand that I have the right to refuse to participate in, or to withdraw from this research at any time without prejudice.

11) I understand that circumstances may arise which might cause the investigator to terminate my participation before the completion of the study.

12) I understand that no information that identifies me will be released without my separate consent except as specifically required by law.

13) I understand that I have the right to refuse to answer any question that I may not wish to answer.

14) I understand that if I have any further questions, comments, or concerns about the study or the informed consent process, I may contact David Hardy, Ph.D. Chair, Institutional Review Board, 1 LMU Drive, Suite 3000, Loyola Marymount University, Los Angeles CA 90045-2659 (310) 258-5465, david.hardy@lmu.edu.

15) In signing this consent form, I acknowledge receipt of a copy of the form, and a copy of the "Subject's Bill of Rights".

Signature _____ Date _____

Name _____

APPENDIX B

One-On-One Interview Questions

What educational aspirations did you have for your child before graduating from high school?

How did you support your child in attaining those aspirations?

How important is education to social and economic success?

How much did you know about college options before your child started high school?

Did you understand the requirements to be eligible to apply to a four year college?

How did you access information to better understand the college application process, financial aid, and college matriculation?

Who did you get most of the information you needed from?

APPENDIX C

Focus Group Interview Questions

What educational aspirations did you have for your child before graduating from high school?

How did you support your child in attaining those aspirations?

How important is education to social and economic success?

How much did you know about college options before your child started high school?

Did you understand the requirements to be eligible to apply to a four year college?

How did you access information to better understand the college application process, financial aid, and college matriculation?

Who did you get most of the information you needed from?

APPENDIX D

Survey Questions

Demographic Information

How do you define your ethnicity?

White, African-American, Asian, Latino/Hispanic

Were you born outside the United States?

Yes/No

College Knowledge

Is your child the first in the family to attend college?

Yes/No

When did you first learn about the college application process?

Preschool, Elementary School, Middle School, High School, Always known

Where did you first learn about college options for your child?

School, Community Organization, Family Members, Friends, Media

Did the school provide you information on how to support your child in to be college-eligible?

Yes/No

What strategies did the school use to provide you with college information?

Parent Workshops, Parent Conferences, Information Packets, Meeting with College Counselor

Do you understand the college application process?

Yes/No

Do you understand the college financial aid process?

Yes/No

Do you understand the difference between a two-year and a four-year college?

Yes/No

What information do you believe you did not have in order to support your child to be college-eligible?

Open-ended

Aspirations

Do you expect your child to pursue a college education?

Yes/No

Did you expect your child to pursue a college education five years ago?

Yes/No

What employment prospects do you expect from your child?

Open ended

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