TOWARDS CLOSING THE ACHIEVEMENT GAP:
INCREASING ACADEMIC PREPAREDNESS AND AMBITION AMONG LATINO STUDENTS

Lyndsey Paige Wilson
Politics 318
Whitman College
December 11, 2009

Introduction

As the fastest growing minority population in Washington State, the Latino population in K-12 schools has grown by 372 percent since 1986;[1] Latino students comprised 14.6% of the K-12 population in Fall 2007, and are expected to experience a 150% growth in population by 2030.[2] The ever-increasing achievement gap has drawn attention to the ongoing failure of Washington State to generate the capacity to educate first-generation and language-minority students. Alarmingly, only 56.9 percent of Latinos in the 2005 cohort graduated from high school. Even of those students who did achieve diplomas, less than 25 percent graduated college-ready.[3] Furthermore, while only 7.7% of Whites in Washington have less than a high school diploma, a staggering 43.8% of Latinos never graduated from high school.[4] These inconsistencies have compelled critical conversations among scholars, educators, policy-makers, and community members, who are beginning to ask *why* Washington State has failed to engage in effective development of equal opportunities for all students.

The recent demographic shift in Latino population and subsequent underachievement of minority students has additionally caught the attention of the state. Recognizing the urgency of these widening disparities, the Washington State Legislature passed ESHB 2687 in 2008[5], a bill mandating the examination of the minority achievement gap and a compilation of recommendations to ameliorate this gap. A team of researchers at the University of Washington set out to improve the educational service delivery for historically underrepresented communities, creating a more culturally relevant approach to education. Their report explains that although "the path of lower achievement for Latino students begins early, the opportunities for intervention and investment in Latino students at every step in the educational system is a challenge that the state of Washington cannot afford to overlook."[6]

It is imperative in this global and education-based economy that all students have *de facto* access to the equal public education that is guaranteed *de jure* in the national community, both for the well being of the individual and the economic advantage of an educated work force – since nearly 20 percent of kindergartners in Washington State are Latino, in less than 20 years the work force will consequently be comprised of one Latino for every 4 non-Latino individuals.[7] Recognizing the importance of investing in this growing minority population, the United States Senate passed Bill 5973 in July 2009 that explicitly mandated the diffusion of *cultural competency* into instruction, curriculum, and professional development to address the K-12 achievement gap.[8] As defined, cultural competency "includes knowledge of student cultural histories and contexts, as well as family norms and values in different cultures; knowledge and

---

[1] Frances Contreras, "Literature Review of Best Practices in Intervention at the Middle and High School Levels," Prepared for the Early Outreach Partnership Project, February 2009, p. 3.

[2] Frances Contreras and Tom Stritikus, "Understanding Opportunities to Learn for Latino Students in Washington," Report submitted to the Washington State Commission on Hispanic Affairs, December 2008, p. 7.

[3] Ibid., 11.

[4] Ibid.,19.

[5] Ibid., 4.

[6] Ibid., 87.

[7] Ibid., 11.

[8] K-12 Education - Achievement Gap, SB 5973, 61st Legislature, State of Washington, Chapter 468, (2009).

skills in accessing community resources and community and parent outreach; and skills in adapting instruction to students' experiences and identifying cultural contexts for individual students."[9]

The collective effort to revamp the framework of the education system is further evidenced by Congress's passage of the Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs (GEAR UP) program in 1998.[10] Authorized as an amendment to the *Higher Education Act of 1965*, initially designed by the federal government to facilitate equal opportunity among ethnic minority and low-income groups, GEAR UP furthers the attempts to address the widening imbalance in postsecondary achievement rates by way of a comprehensive and partnership-based intervention program. This report examines the Walla Walla School District as a case study to evaluate the success of the GEAR UP program's approach with regard to Latino students more generally. It is a part of the Washington State University Tri-Cities GEAR UP Partnership with eight school districts in Eastern Washington, which shares federally-funded grant dollars to serve cohorts of students with a variety of programs designed to increase postsecondary enrollment and success. The WSU GEAR UP Partnership began in 2002 and currently boasts three continuing grants, Harvest of Hope 2 and One Vision Partnerships 1 and 2, which comprise over $23 million.[11] As the program's immediate goals have shifted from lowering dropout rates to increasing academic rigor and promoting college enrollment, local post-secondary institutions have consequently experienced tremendous growth in the number of matriculating Latinos.[12] This suggests that secondary institutions have undergone a shift more essential than mere coincidence and provoke a more thorough examination of the potential success of these intervention programs in realizing a steady closure of the achievement gap, specifically with Latino students.

This report examines the best ways of fostering Latino students' postsecondary success, specifically asking the question: *How effective has the GEAR UP program's approach to achieving academic preparedness and postsecondary ambition been at Walla Walla High School?* This report profiles the best methods of improving students' academic capabilities to prepare them for postsecondary education and analyzes how well Walla Walla High School's GEAR UP intervention programs prepare students for post-graduation success. I also examine the best ways of encouraging Latino students to pursue postsecondary education and consider how GEAR UP in Walla Walla promotes student ambition. Lastly, I focus on how successful programs have integrated Latino parents into the postsecondary preparation process and evaluate the programs the Washington State University Tri-Cities GEAR UP Partnership has implemented to facilitate parental involvement.

To address these issues, I have engaged in a thorough review of scholarly literature that comprehensively describes the state of education for Latino students, environmental barriers to success, cultural misunderstandings, and effective intervention programs targeting both students and parents. I then compiled a list of criteria, substantiated by the research that prior scholars

---

[9] K-12 Education - Achievement Gap, SB 5973, 61st Legislature, State of Washington, Chapter 468, (2009).

[10] U.S. Department of Education, Office of Planning, Evaluation and Policy Development, Policy and Program Studies Service, *Early Outcomes of the GEAR UP Program—Final Report*. Washington, D.C., 2008, p. 2.

[11] Superintendent Dr. Richard Carter, interview by author, Walla Walla, Washington, September 23rd, 2009.

[12] Bill Erickson, discussion with author, Walla Walla, Washington, September 25th, 2009.

engaged in, to evaluate GEAR UP's success in each of my three variable areas: academic preparation, college awareness, and parent involvement. My primary research consisted of a series of interviews with administrators, teachers, students, and parents in the Walla Walla School District to gain a multi-faceted understanding of perspectives regarding perceived barriers to Latino postsecondary success[13]. I also sought suggestions from these various stakeholders in the education system to assess the effectiveness of GEAR UP in ameliorating unequal opportunity and to enable me to customize recommendations to the Walla Walla School District. The passion of my community partners Bill and Diana Erickson has both created and sustained this project of ultimately improving the state of the local education system for Latino students. Their generous willingness to contribute ideas, resources, and meaningful contacts, as well as transportation to community events, are a testament to their personal investment in the Walla Walla community and dedication to providing equal opportunity for all students. I am incredibly thankful for their help in this endeavor and their example of true community participation.

The findings indicate the importance of generating a college-going culture wherein the Latino *habitus*, a concept Bordieu distinguishes from *cultural capital (*the resources that families transmit to their offspring which substitute for or supplement the transmission of economic capital as a means of maintaining class status and privilege across generations) as the behavior that people regularly engage in and consider appropriate for themselves,[14] shifts from a separation between the home and school domains to a dynamic partnership between the two. This ideal collaboration of parents and teachers will provide the foundation for communicating the value of post-secondary education and transmitting college-relevant capital necessary for academic preparedness, awareness, and persistent parental involvement. While studies and personal interviews overwhelmingly substantiate the fact that Latino parents are eager for their children to pursue higher education, the findings show that cultural misunderstandings perpetuate the notion of parental apathy and stifle the potential for successful teacher-parent partnerships and co-construction of an educational environment conducive to language-minority students.

This report recommends that the Walla Walla School District focus on the development of this parent-teacher partnership, originating in school efforts to mobilize parents according to culturally relevant avenues of inclusion. Although academic preparedness and college awareness are both components of my secondary question and foci of the GEAR UP program, my investigations suggest that the Walla Walla School District has instituted a series of programs that effectively and equitably meet the needs of the Latino student community. I will engage secondary literature and qualitative data to explain the success of these programs, especially the recently implemented and highly successful adoption of the Achievement Via Individual Determination (AVID) program. However, the focus of this report is a thorough compilation of research exploring the concern presented to me by partners Bill and Diana Erickson that Walla Walla High School lacks strong parent-teacher partnership. Within the school environment, I recommend further professional development in multi-cultural education for teachers and staff,

---

[13] The names of the Latino community members interviewed have been changed to protect their confidentiality.
[14] Susan Auerbach, "Engaging Latino Parents in Supporting College Pathways: Lessons from a College Access Program," *Journal of Hispanic Higher Education* 3 no. 2 (2004): 133.

the implementation of case management programs partnering college and high school students to provide individualized attention and empowerment, and lastly, the incorporation of extracurricular activity organizations into the GEAR UP partnerships to increase retention, transmit social capital, and foster well-rounded student development. In terms of parental involvement, my recommendations include the facilitation of self-organized parent organizations, training Latinos to serve as parent-teacher liaisons, implementation of college awareness programming in already-existing social spaces, and on-site programming conducive to the unique needs of low-income or language-minority parents. While the current GEAR UP programs provide a promising pathway to narrowing the achievement gap, my hope is that further willingness to reorganize ineffective systemic procedures and create new avenues of fostering college readiness will lead to an equitable education for all.

Literature Review

To begin investigating the achievement gap, I have compiled a review of the particular cultural and economic challenges that Latinos in the United States' education system encounter, focusing initially on students' unequal access to college-relevant social capital to explain their disproportionate under enrollment in institutions of higher education. I then examine the avenues by which Latino parents transmit social capital to their children to determine what culturally valued resources are misunderstood or unrecognized by the other stakeholders in the education process. I highlight several authors' analyses of school programs that have successfully partnered with members of the Latino community to create a dynamic multicultural learning environment. Finally, I profile the frameworks of several intervention programs to contextualize GEAR UP and offer a multi-faceted standard of comparison.

College-relevant social capital, the tangible and intangible resources that enhance a student's ability to navigate the pathway to college enrollment, are products of a student's socialization in both home and school settings. The following literature review features authors that emphasize the importance of environmental factors in determining a student's development of social capital; their collective understanding of the consequence of environment is grounded in sociological theory. Scholars Plank and Jordan explain the frequent tendency among administrators to view underachievers as unmotivated or uninterested in school, as if there were opportunities that these students consciously deny, as rooted in the larger conceptual misunderstanding of college choice theory.[15] Their review of literature on college choice differentiates between econometric and sociological models and concludes with an explanation of why an econometric understanding of student college choice is insufficient. While econometric models assume that students and parents are rational decision-makers with an array of choices, the sociological model incorporates the interactive process between social constructs and individual characteristics, acknowledging that institutional barriers prevent people in certain demographics from accessing and accumulating college-relevant social capital. They punctuate this theory of environmentally-determined college choice by the including Hanson and Litten's five-stage model of the transition to higher education, including alongside a student's individual predisposition for achievement the weighty influence of background characteristics, high school

---

[15] Stephen Plank and Will Jordan, "Effects of Information, Guidance, and Actions on Postsecondary Destinations: A Study of Talent Loss," *American Education Journal* 38 no. 4 (2001): 947.

structure, and public policy.[16] An understanding of these factors that establish the context for a student's ultimate choice of enrollment serves a dual purpose: to illuminate areas in which Latino students are prone to less accumulation of social capital and to suggest institutional avenues to ameliorate this unequal access.

College-Relevant Social Capital

Garcia's analysis of the situation of Latinos in the American education system seeks to explain why similarly qualified Latino students choose to enroll in community colleges while their white counterparts enroll in 4-year institutions. He explains that too much prior research focuses on students' underachievement and dropout rates, arguing that Latino students lack social capital, specifically resources and information about the college preparation process, which inhibit their pursuit of higher education. Recognizing the need for intervention programs to compensate for the present lack of such resources, he reviews successful college preparation programs, discussing typical barriers to Latino college attainment and how various programs have equipped Latinos with resources to pursue postsecondary education. His profile of AVID, an academic preparedness program that Walla Walla High School implemented with GEAR UP funding two years ago, compares components of its structure – particularly its function as connecting students to counselors and tutors, thereby increasing the students' social capital - to other, less successful, programs. He also provides a thorough compilation of statistics that debunk misconceptions regarding Latino parents' apathy towards postsecondary education; namely, he demonstrates the widespread desire of these parents to see their children earn a college degree.

To better understand the environmental factors that contribute to educational mobility, Gándara studied a group of highly successful Chicano men and women whose educational attainments exceeded typical expectations associated with their socioeconomic and racial backgrounds. Gándara adds to Garcia's argument that environmental factors heavily influence students' success, contending that the "culture of possibility" that their parents cultivated by reinforcing self-confidence and creating strong motivation for academic success was responsible for the Chicano students' achievements. She chose fifty Chicano men and women with the following qualifications: achieved a minimum of a Ph.D. degree, required financial aid to attend college, graduated from an ivy league institution, and had parents with less than five years of formal education. She interviewed them specifically regarding their upbringing, testing variables related to academic achievement motivation. The wide range of Latino professionals Gándara interviewed provides a reliable basis for her conclusions, which like the authors above emphasize environmental causes resulting in upward social mobility through educational success. However, the discussion is limited to factors beyond the realm of the school's direct influence (i.e. the parenting techniques in home environments). The inability of the school to provide all lacking social capital confirms the importance of creating *critical capital* (the development of a critical understanding of educational inequality and the perpetuation of low status across generations that leads to social action to rectify these conditions), which provides a space for Latino students to generate their own college-going culture that is sustainable within their community.

---

[16] Stephen Plank and Will Jordan, "Effects of Information, Guidance, and Actions on Postsecondary Destinations: A Study of Talent Loss," *American Education Journal* 38 no. 4 (2001): 947.

While Garcia's studies focus mostly on the acquisition of academic resources, such as after-school tutoring, as imperative to a student's achievement, and Gándara focuses on parental expectations as relating to student success, Torrez specifically explains the relationship between information provided to parents and their child's academic achievement. Her work fills in the gap that Garcia's thesis can produce: why is it that grant-funded intervention programs providing resources to Latino students get overlooked by parents? Finding a positive relationship between informed parents and academic preparedness in students, Torrez explains that Latino parents trust the teachers to provide their children with college enrollment information; their ignorance of the system is frequently confused with apathy, and administrators are ineffective in establishing communication lines with Latino parents that would ameliorate underachievement trends. Torrez's methodology was comprised of a survey of Latino parents at three secondary institutions to identify the perceived inadequacy of information available regarding student requirements for postsecondary enrollment and assess parents' expectations for their students' postsecondary education. This study provides concrete suggestions for improving the communication between administration and Latino parents, justifying the need for increased parent-teacher contact with quantitative data that debunks the notion that Latino parents are simply uninterested.

Constructing a Community: Social Capital Transmission in the Latino Family and School

Scholarly sources collectively emphasize the importance of parental expectations and access to information in creating a college-going culture among students. However, if this report attempts to suggest more effective methods of fostering parental involvement, it is imperative to understand the particular avenues of influence Latino parents have in the lives of their students. Delgado-Gaitan investigated the ways that home environments condition the experience of Mexican-American children, focusing on the physical environment, emotional and motivational climate, and interpersonal interactions, which construct a child's socialization process. She chose six Mexican-American families that shared community membership, immigrant status, the Spanish language, and a strong desire for their child's success. Her research consisted in participant-observation and interviews over a period of nine months, designed to understand parent-child interactions. The physical environment plays an important role in the child's access to economic and educational resources, constituting the tangible learning tools she is provided, and Delgado-Gaitan's study revealed the family's tendency to seek information from already-existing networks. Emotionally, the families created a supportive environment that encouraged children to exceed their parents' accomplishments, although the particular advice varied according to the parents' knowledge of school tasks. Her confidence in these parents' supportiveness suggests that, were they equipped with concrete knowledge of steps needed to prepare for college, these parents would actively communicate these values to their children. In daily interactions, parents' affirmations of students' ambitions also communicated cultural values (i.e. the well-being of the child's family as motive for social mobility); it is imperative, therefore, that Latino parents understand their children's specific dreams and the pathway towards achievement so as to provide consistent affirmation. Lastly, the tendency of these Mexican-American parents to view schools as an exclusive domain under the teacher's authority permeated these avenues of value transmission. She found that parents rarely understood the partnership that teachers expect between home and school.

Building on Delgado-Gaitan's discussion of cultural capital in the Mexican-American home, Valdés seeks to examine how the family environment prepares children to succeed within the family and the surrounding community. Her inquiry results in a thorough understanding of the underlying differences between Mexican-American and European-American cultural mores, specifically regarding individualism and familism, and the consequential misperceptions propagated in the school systems. Valdés observed ten immigrant families from borderland Mexico for over a year, engaging in qualitative data collection through interviews and participant-observation in the home and school settings. She found that all families considered their opportunities to be functions of pre-existing family bonds, since the life chances within the more closed, caste-based México exist by virtue of one's social position. In agrarian cultures, Valdés argues, what is worth doing is that which contributes to the welfare of one's family, not moving away, abandoning social networks, or valuing one's own pursuits over the family's. Although less valued among Americans who value individuality and geographic mobility, these networks foster the transmission of ideology (i.e. comments confirming the importance of college and its benefits) and can be used for social mobility, insofar as parents trust these comments, internalize them, and pass them onto their children in the form of expectations and *consejos* (advice).

While prior research provides ample evidence of the importance of the home environment in increasing post-secondary enrollment among Latino youth, the role of the school in fostering academic preparedness and ambition should not be underestimated. Lucas, Henze, and Donato explore successful methods of educating language-minority students and compile the characteristics of schools that successfully promote the achievement of this student population. After locating six schools with qualitative recommendations of success and quantitative data that document high test rates and graduation levels, the research team conducted on-site interviews and surveys. The authors conclude that, in addition to fostering parental involvement, the teaching staffs placed value on these students' language and culture in a myriad of ways: hiring bilingual staff, creating appealing extracurricular activities, challenging these students in class, employing counselors with similar background characteristics, and developing a transition program from ESL to advanced classes. These scholars offer evidence that acknowledgment and integration of students' cultural values in a school environment enhance their ability to succeed and provide a thorough compilation of concrete recommendations for generating further Latino achievement within already-existing school frameworks.

Case Studies of Intervention Programs

With a comprehensive body of scholarship concluding that systemic inequalities prevent the accumulation of college-relevant social capital for Latino students in both home and school environments, despite the positive steps that some schools have taken to address these problems, I proceeded to review case studies of intervention programs designed to transmit capital to enable student academic success and, ultimately, college enrollment. Contreras' references Jeannie Oakes' discussion of contextual factors that make a substantial difference in students' academic preparation and eligibility for four-year universities, including: a college-going culture, rigorous academic curriculum, high-quality teaching, extra support, multi-cultural college-going identity, family connections and social networks. In her comparative analysis of a variety of intervention programs, she noted that the success of programs largely depended on committed staff members and recommended "utilizing the approach of treating participants as part of a

GEAR UP family;" this approach, she concluded, will "go a long way with parents and students from diverse backgrounds and establish a level of trust among all stakeholders."[17] As other scholars have articulated, the cultural capital many low-income or minority-language parents engender in the student's home environment is frequently irrelevant in navigating the pathway to college.

Acknowledging the many factors that contribute to a student's eventual enrollment in college and the crucial role that schools play in influencing these factors, McDonough discusses ways that institutions can intervene in the student's educational trajectory to encourage the path to higher education. She researched prior scholarship on the school-to-college transition, critically assessed current policy solutions to remedying the achievement gap and suggested actions that policy-makers can and should take to ensure equitable college access for low-income and language-minority students. Her synthetic recommendations include: universities should increase financial aid and schools should effectively communicate aid opportunities to lessen the actual and perceived financial barriers; P-16 school systems should prepare students at the elementary and secondary level in college-relevant skills; counselors should advise students in college preparation steps; schools should increase quality and quantity of college and financial information accessible to parents and students; schools should engage families in fostering students' aspirations; and lastly, policy-makers should create equitable admissions regulations. McDonough explained that, although school counselors typically serve these functions as college information agents, they are usually "inappropriately trained and structurally constrained from being able to fulfill this role in public high schools."[18] She criticizes educational intervention programs, asserting that they are merely "a system of educational triage," affecting only a small fraction of the student body, and not replacements for systemic change. GEAR UP's structure is most promising, however, due to the programmatic emphasis on partnerships among various stakeholders to address the needs of students along the longitudinal, interactive processes from kindergarten to college.

Kannel-Ray et. al. develop McDonough's recommendation that counselors focus individually on underachieving students, advocating a case management-style intervention program wherein the case managers can understand the students' lived experiences and help them navigate the school system. The Western Michigan University GEAR UP partnership piloted this academic case management program, providing one case manager for each cohort of 40 seventh grade students in each of the three urban middle schools. Researchers both quantitatively and qualitatively evaluated the programmatic products by assessing logs of intervention meetings, documented student goals, and questionnaires to conduct interviews with administrators and students. The case manager worked with the students' teachers and parents, as well as monitored their academic progress, suggesting additional resources and helping students during weekly meetings; this relationship most significantly led to "discussing barriers to

---

[17] Contreras, Frances, "Literature Review of Best Practices in Intervention at the Middle and High School Levels," Prepared for the Early Outreach Partnership Project, February 2009, p. 28.
[18] Patricia McDonough, "The School to College Transition: Challenges and Prospects," Report prepared for the American Council on Education Center for Policy Analysis, 2004, p. 15.

completing assignments from social and environmental factors outside of the school house walls and on to behavioral, organizational, and foundational skills needed for school success."[19] The case management program's success in increasing overall student GPAs after one year extended beyond mere numeric progress: the individualized focus that these adults provided to students served a dual-purpose, both to enhance the understanding of the helping adult and to translate the academic steps necessary for college into terms relevant to the student's context. According to this model, the case manager effectively facilitates the intersection of the student's personal world with the academic world, generating a meaningful internalization of academic and college goals. Furthermore, the student's perception of self-worth that arises from the care and individualized attention the case manager provides fosters positive identity construction.

Affirming Oakes' and Van Kannel-Ray et. al.'s convictions that material conditions and relationships are the framework by which people construct their identities, the Indianapolis-based El Puente intervention program designers sought to provide equal access to resources and opportunities for Latinos to pursue a post-secondary education. Researchers Rosario and Vargas explored the three-year pilot program's success in achieving its goals to increase parent expectations, student leadership skills and involvement in school and community, student academic performance, and student understanding of cross-cultural communication. Although researchers have quantitatively proven that such programs mildly increase students' graduation rates and standardized test scores, they stipulated that the students' predisposition to succeed due to student-chosen participation compromised a truly controlled experiment. However, their emphasis on identity formation through personal enrichment and advocacy (focusing on the individual's well-being rather than simply their grades) complicates the notion that a narrow focus on academic achievement or college awareness is sufficient to generate a college-going culture. The program's goal of enriching every student's self-perception was both as an academic endeavor and a relational one, incorporating extracurricular activities that created a deeper sense of self-purpose and community ties.

While many intervention programs focus on all aspects of a student's well-being, some operate under the assumption that targeting parents will both influence the students and permeate the culture by shifting family values towards greater consistency with school values, namely of postsecondary educational attainment. These researchers argue that an increase in parental involvement at school will expand the opportunities for value transmission, seek to explain why Latino parents are typically less involved in school settings, and subsequently recommend ways of increasing involvement. Lopez, for example, elaborates on Garcia's notion that Latino parent apathy is a common misconception, explaining that those with a specific, privileged "cultural repertoire" have constructed the rules and roles of parental involvement. Since many Latino parents lack prior knowledge of these normative scripts and social networks that transmit college-relevant information, their non-traditional forms of involvement are misinterpreted as disinterest. In another article, Lopez examined school districts with large migrant populations and effective parent involvement programs to identify strategies to involve parents in atypical ways. After conducting interviews and observing four school districts, he concluded that schools that privilege mainstream involvement forms undermine culturally specific perspectives of

---

[19] Nancy Van Kannel-Ray, Warren Lacefield, and Pamela Zeller, "Academic Case Managers: Evaluating a Middle School Intervention for Children At-risk," *Journal of Multidisciplinary Evaluation* 5 no. 10 (2008): 25.

minority populations, abdicating the responsibility of schools to create effective programs for all types of students. Lopez explains that the stress of poverty limits parental availability during school hours. However, convenient home visits were particularly effective in fostering relationships between teachers and home. The consequential sense of belonging at school resulted in a *cognitive transition* from parents feeling out of place to possessing the capacity to contribute in a formal school setting.

Auerbach aimed to explore the unequal social capital transmitted to children of white or Latino parents and how one intervention program supplemented Latino families' comparatively fewer resources. Agreeing with scholars Garcia and Gándara that the achievement gap is the product of access to college-relevant resources, Auerbach suggests that an emphasis on the Latino community's narrative culture in curriculum and professional development could serve as a bridge to transmit lacking social capital. This study relied primarily on participant-observation as its methodology; the three-year observation period was complemented by a 25-month-long course for parents of a cohort of students initially in 10th grade through their 12th grade year, called Futures and Families (F&F) during their critical college search and choice phases. She found that the school's acknowledgment of cultural factors contributed to the program's overwhelming success, as did scholars Lucas, Henze, and Donato: a focus on experiential and narrative presentation of information, organization into small groups for social network formation, direct address of cultural concerns such as children leaving the home, and a comfortable environment of Spanish speakers and welcoming school administrators. Not only does this report profile tangible avenues of generating social capital via information and relationships, but her discussion of critical capital confirms the notion that Latino parents would benefit from an open forum to discuss barriers particular to their students and encounters with racism. Auerbach observed an exponential increase in Latino parent participation and advocacy after this program facilitated the critical space needed to acknowledge mutual marginality and recognize collective power.

Bermúdez and Márquez's examine an innovative approach to overcoming typical barriers to Latino parental involvement: the development of a Parent Resource Center. Grounded in the notion that parental involvement contributes significant social capital to students and marginalized parents lack education-relevant capital, the University of Houston – Clear Lake developed the PRC to collaboratively address these disadvantages. The researchers concluded that the parents' enhanced perceptions of self-worth and ability to contribute to the school provided a platform for further parental environment, which suggests that information and awareness can construct *habitus* (the resources that families transmit to their offspring which substitute for or supplement the transmission of economic capital as a means of maintaining class status and privilege across generations); in this case, changing the habitus of parents to shift towards a college-going culture wherein parents consider as normal their partnership with and involvement in the school. The program trained parent volunteers to conduct twice-weekly meetings for Latino parents in the local school that aimed to teach English as a second language, to inform parents of volunteer opportunities, and to give instruction on navigating the school system and helping their children at home. Questionnaires distributed to the thirty-five program participants and a qualitative analysis of the parents' responses to the PRC comprised the researchers' methodology. Just as scholars Auerbach and Garcia explain, the critical capital that resulted from the parents' understanding how to navigate the school system and identification of particular problems facing their children (demonstrated by the parent's self-organized meeting to

write a letter to the school administration suggesting improvements for their Latino children's educational experience) was arguably the most important product of the PRC. These preconditions for cultural change changed the attitudes of faculty members, as well: parental advocacy ameliorated teachers' perceptions of apathetic linguistic minority students and highlighted the systemic hindrances to actualizing their eagerness to be involved. The program's framework is particularly relevant to a critique of GEAR UP's organizational structure, since it implements partnership efforts much like GEAR UP, but has achieved sustainable and self-organized parental involvement, which GEAR UP has not.
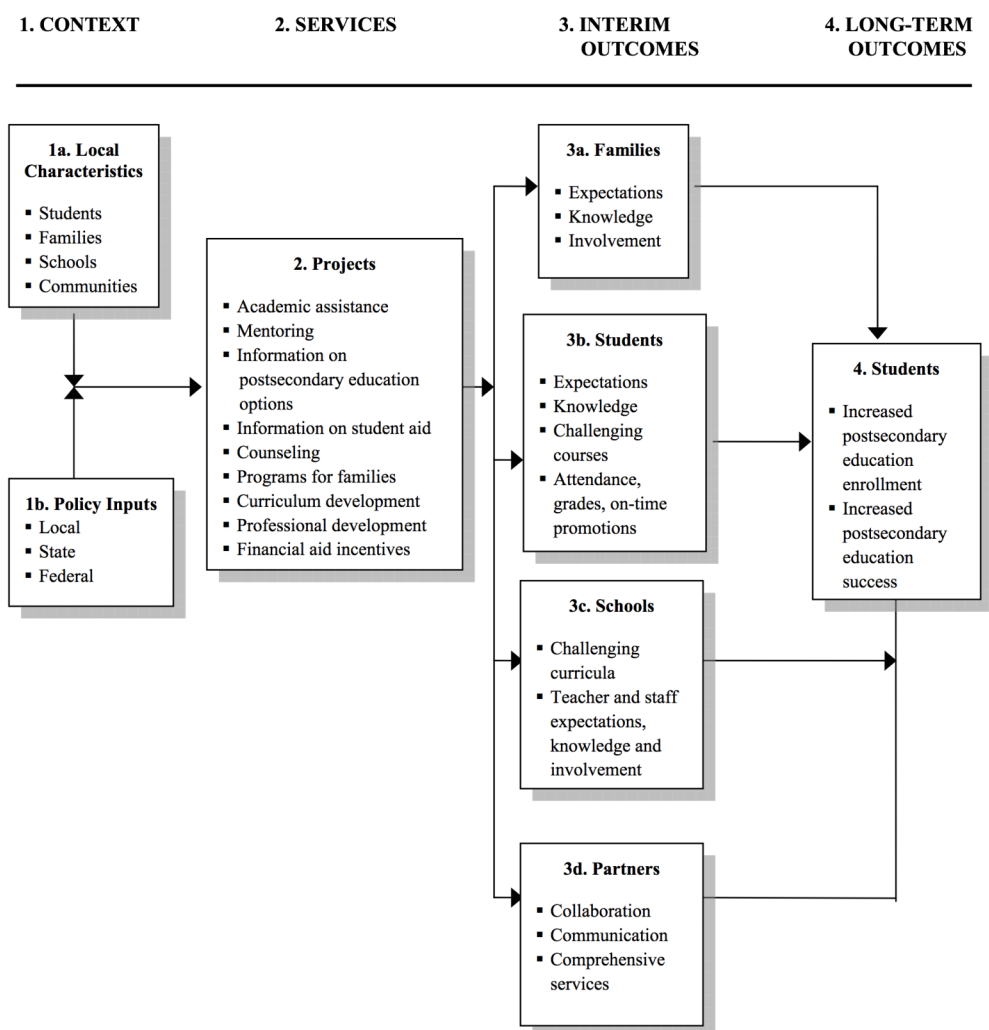
Rothestein-Fisch and Trumbull's study is the culmination of the five-year Bridging Cultures Project, a collaborative action research project that investigated the effectiveness of a professional teacher training intervention program in creating more culturally aware educators. Furthering Lucas, Henze, and Donato's suggestion that acknowledgment of cultural values be disseminated into school programs, this team of researchers concludes that generating cultural competency provides the educator with a comprehensive and empathetic perspective to provide equal opportunities to her students. A myriad of other authors point to the importance of such awareness, culminating in the U.S. government's recognition of the needs of multicultural students as demonstrated by the Senate's passage of a K-12 educational mandate for widespread cultural competency in July 2009. While many intervention programs focus on constructing teacher-student relationships to achieve more equitable outcomes for language-minority students, they explain that teachers persistently misunderstand the student's cultural context, constraining the possibility of effective intervention and perpetuating false racially based assumptions. These researchers also integrate the theme of critical capital in suggesting school-wide awareness of common misunderstandings that arise from lack of cultural awareness; for example, they recommend discussing the differences between individualism and collectivism with Latino parents to provide a platform for meaningful parental advocacy and co-construction of a multicultural classroom. Thus, the achievements of the Bridging Cultures Project serve as a model of diversifying traditional classroom practices and cultivate legitimization of Latino cultural values and norms, such as collectivism, strong family ties, and narrative explanations, an example of reformatting typical information presentation that Auerbach recommended as culturally significant for Latino parents, through their integration into school districts.

The Tomás Rivera Policy Institute evaluated effective post-secondary outreach programs that provide Latino parents with college preparatory information to identify what characteristics they share. The research postulates that successful outreach programs, in terms of actual student enrollment at institutions of higher education, share the following factors: committed program champions, program evaluation, stable funding sources, cultural considerations, and successful partnerships. Extending prior research regarding Latino parent awareness of the college enrollment procedure, the researchers initially searched for outreach programs within the Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities that provide curriculum services specifically for Latino parents, then located which institutions had the greatest increase in Latino enrollment between 1995 and 2000 using the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System. Interviews with administrators and implementers of successful programs comprise the program profiles, a mixture of successful long-term, short-term, and one-day programs. This study offers qualifications for a "successful" program that are particularly well substantiated by empirical research.

While *Reaching Higher Ground* explains the preconditions for successful parent-teacher partnership, Jasis's article *Convivencia to Empowerment: Latino Parent Organizing at La Familia* profiles the success of one school system in fostering an environment conducive to the formation of an internally organized Latino parent group. Jasis adds to Auerbach's concept of critical capital, exploring how one organized Latino parent activist group succeeded in effectively communicating students' needs and collectively instituting positive change in the school system. Jasis argues that Latino parents typically lack the institutional space for meaningful leadership, but are capable and willing to participate in their students' education when culturally sensitive conditions are facilitated by the school administration. He engaged in two years of participant-observations and hundreds of hours of interviews to thoroughly examine the dynamics of the parent activists of La Familia. His theoretical analysis of the dynamics of the grassroots activism operates in a political process theory of social organization, incorporating the idea that *convivencia*, or a surge of self-awareness among the institutionally marginalized Latino parents, was an instrument of mobilization that partnered their self-organized leadership with a willing school administration to bring about change for their students.

Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs

Conceptual Framework of GEAR UP[20]

1. CONTEXT	2. SERVICES	3. INTERIM OUTCOMES	4. LONG-TERM OUTCOMES

1a. Local Characteristics

- Students
- Families
- Schools
- Communities

1b. Policy Inputs
- Local
- State
- Federal

2. Projects
- Academic assistance
- Mentoring
- Information on postsecondary education options
- Information on student aid
- Counseling
- Programs for families
- Curriculum development
- Professional development
- Financial aid incentives

3a. Families
- Expectations
- Knowledge
- Involvement

3b. Students
- Expectations
- Knowledge
- Challenging courses
- Attendance, grades, on-time promotions

3c. Schools
- Challenging curricula
- Teacher and staff expectations, knowledge and involvement

3d. Partners
- Collaboration
- Communication
- Comprehensive services

4. Students
- Increased postsecondary education enrollment
- Increased postsecondary education success

The examination of various intervention programs nation-wide provides a framework for understanding the policies that influenced the formation of GEAR UP, designed to avoid common pitfalls of other programs and ensure success by committing to certain goals. The study *Early Outcomes of the GEAR UP Program* was commissioned by the U.S. Department of Education to determine what results, if any, had the program achieved with its first cohort of students. The research team sought to describe implementation of the program and specifically evaluate the relationship between GEAR UP involvement and student and parent outcomes.

---

[20] U.S. Department of Education, Office of Planning, Evaluation and Policy Development, Policy and Program Studies Service, *Early Outcomes of the GEAR UP Program—Final Report*. Washington, D.C., 2008, p. 2.

Since GEAR UP funds are non-prescriptive and allow for institutional interpretation, this study observed various projects and concluded that students and parents at GEAR UP schools, compared to non-GEAR UP schools, showed positive indications of future postsecondary enrollment. To profile the programs, the research team conducted site visits and inquired about the design and approach of GEAR UP programs; to assess the projected postsecondary preparation, researchers conducted group interviews with parents, students and teachers. They also distributed surveys to students from 18 GEAR UP middle schools and 18 demographically comparable non-GEAR UP middle schools, then compared these results with the 2002 national GEAR UP Annual Progress Reports, in terms of indicators of secondary success.

Key findings of *Early Outcomes* include success in the areas of increased parental and student knowledge of opportunities and benefits of postsecondary education, greater parental involvement in the school, higher parental expectations for their student's academic achievement, and student enrollment in rigorous classes. The research team actually found that the students' transition from middle school to high school presented difficulty to schools in terms of maintaining consistent staff members and administrators. They also published their concern with sustainability in the schools, since the grant is designed to provide funds for one cohort, such as the graduating class of 2006, rather than each year's incoming seventh grade class. They included the negative results of their study: GEAR UP students perform less volunteering than in comparison schools, skip class more frequently, engage in extracurricular activities such as TV watching and playing video games more than in comparison schools, value hard work less than students at comparison schools, and the GEAR UP schools had greater white mobility than comparison schools. These unexpected results may be explained by the qualification of GEAR UP schools as having more than 50 percent of students qualifying for free or reduced lunch and the consequential tendency to have less parent interaction; however, they may also present areas for improvement among GEAR UP schools experiencing success in its target areas: increasing information for students and parents, providing individualized academic and social support, fostering parent involvement in education, attaining educational excellence, school reform, and increasing student participation in rigorous courses.[21]

Overall, the body of scholarly literature emphasizes the interactive process between environmental factors and individual agency, creating space for critical dialogue regarding institutional barriers that perpetuate the achievement gap. Although school and home environments both transmit social capital, the strong influence that families wield in a child's identity formation renders their cultural context essential in understanding a child's eventual educational outcome. The authors collaboratively suggest that the family-generated capital common among low-income or ethnic minority groups, such as the Latino community, is not considered beneficial according to the institutionalized policies within mainstream school systems, thereby inadvertently excluding Latino students and parents from accessing critical resources. Teams of researchers have investigated school-wide programming that creates access points for capitalizing on the cultural norms of low-income or ethnic minority groups. Although these reports include the importance of generating possibilities for academic achievement and college awareness, they overwhelmingly emphasize the importance of fostering parental

---

[21] U.S. Department of Education, Office of Planning, Evaluation and Policy Development, Policy and Program Studies Service, *Early Outcomes of the GEAR UP Program—Final Report*. Washington, D.C., 2008, p. 3.

involvement. Not only will parental involvement provide consistency of values and expectations for students, but the transmission of *critical capital* (the knowledge of issues that disproportionately affect families of color and barriers that must be overcome to achieve postsecondary success) is also imperative in fostering a sustainable mechanism for parental advocacy and co-construction of a school environment conducive to language-minority learners.

Research Methods

Prior research on intervention programs, such as Garcia's *Hispanic Education in the United States: Raices y Alas*, catalogue ways that the Latino culture's emphasis on collectivism and familism can be channeled into generating college-relevant social capital; scholars argue that these institutional shifts must, however, be initiated by a school system that does not advantage particular types of parental involvement and cultural contribution. The GEAR UP program attempts to create an environment conducive to the achievement of low-income and ethnic minority students, fostering academic readiness and awareness as well as parental involvement, and a myriad of authors have created models for conducting analyses of these programs according to the grant's outlined criteria of success. However, the recent governmental mandates to foster *cultural competency* provoke evaluation of programs such as GEAR UP that explicitly aim to decrease the achievement gap among low-income and ethnic minority students. The particular racial and economic demographics of the Walla Walla School District, with a high percentage of Latino students and nearly 56 percent of students qualifying for free or reduced lunch[22], provide a ready base to analyze the effectiveness of GEAR UP not in simply increasing college readiness and awareness, but in creating a college-going culture that incorporates the diversity of multicultural home environments and facilitates equitable accumulation of college-relevant social capital among all students, in ways that recognize the impact of socioeconomic or ethnic status.

The nature of GEAR UP is non-prescriptive, mandating ultimate goals while providing interpretive funds for customized programming; therefore, it was necessary to gain a comprehensive understanding of how the Walla Walla School District has implemented the funds received from the One Vision Partnership and Harvest of Hope grants. The *Early Outcomes* research team's methodology, although targeting a wide range of schools, provides a coherent framework for the formulation of my own research process and concrete, effective strategies of assessing the degree of achieved college preparation. Their analysis of a wide range of GEAR UP projects contextualizes my own findings and provides recommendations for some of Walla Walla School District's program challenges. However, the lack of investigation into *why* these results have surfaced provokes my research questions, which focus on the most crucial outcomes affecting Latino students: academic readiness, college awareness, and parental involvement. My research questions, which aim to evaluate the success of GEAR UP and offer suggestions for improving the offerings at WWHS, are as follows:

> *How effective has the GEAR UP program's approach to achieving academic preparedness and postsecondary ambition been at WWHS?*

---

[22] Carter, 9/23/09

What are the best ways of encouraging Latino students to pursue postsecondary education and fostering student ambition?

What programs has GEAR UP implemented at WWHS to facilitate parent involvement, and how effective have these efforts been?

I intended to comprise a multi-faceted assessment of the program's goals by interviewing various stakeholders in the local education system; from there, I investigated the nature of these commentaries to determine what changes could realistically ameliorate any disparities. I focused the evaluations and criticisms on issues particularly affecting the Latino community, drawing on subtleties in my conversations with administrators to formulate possible points of contention that Latino parents and students could illuminate or perhaps justify.

Although a quantitative data analysis of survey responses may have provided general notions of community satisfaction or lack thereof with the program, it is precisely this lack of individualized feedback – this constraint of dominant-culture categories - that causes diverse perspectives to be disregarded or misinterpreted. In fact, the scholars contributing to the aforementioned body of secondary literature tend to reject standardized measures as all-inclusive indicators of intervention programs' success; rather, they prefer personal interviews or conversations among focus groups to qualitatively assess the realization of a school's educational objectives and generate relevant ideas for school improvement. Ideally, a contextual perspective of the district's goals for programming would provide a basis for evaluation according to the standards established by prior program assessments as well as criteria by which to judge the actual outcomes of the program's goals.

I began by interviewing the administrators whose policies shape the educational context of the Latino students; my questions aimed to identify the district's goals as well as understand their analysis of GEAR UP's progress thus far. I conducted my first interview with Superintendent of the Walla Walla School District Richard Carter, an instrumental figure in the school district now as well as the original Chair of the Advisory Board of Superintendents. When Washington State University received the GEAR UP grant in 2002, the University forged a partnership with seven school districts in two Eastern Washington Counties, and Carter served as the liaison for the first two years between the superintendents and the University. He explained the difficulties associated with creating protocol that stimulates a flow between these institutions with different interests, but the program's services and grant funds have greatly expanded in the past seven years; my questions focused on the historical development of GEAR UP in the district to begin constructing a thorough contextual perspective. Carter's confidence that the partnership had created systemic protocol that provided for optimal program offerings in each school prompted me to pursue administrative contacts both within the school districts and four individuals employed as local GEAR UP Coordinators to investigate possible discrepancies between the two institutions' visions for the grant.

The next layer of my qualitative research consisted of interviews with faculty and school leaders in the Walla Walla School District. My interviews with WWHS Principal Darcy Weisner and Assistant Principal Matthew Bona focused on their perception of how GEAR UP programs had affected Latinos in my three primary variables: academic preparedness, college awareness, and parental involvement. In these interviews and those with school faculty, including science

teacher Clayton Hudiberg, Spanish teacher Refugio Reyes, Counselor Carol Franklin, and Intervention Specialists Melito Ramirez and Salvador Hernandez, I sought to understand how school professionals viewed the most critical needs of the Latino community and whether or not these programs were effectively meeting their needs. I talked to these individuals to investigate how closely the program in the WWSD matches the practices that appear to be best for an intervention program in light of what the prior scholarship on Latino educational issues suggests. Prior evaluations of intervention programs emphasized the need for institutional and policy changes as well as the changes that ought to be evident among students if these are enacted appropriately. Their assessments provide meaningful criteria that constitute a framework to evaluate each research variable, both from the statements by administrators and the recipients of these policies, the Latino students and parents. Many of the indicators of parent and student success come from the *Early Outcomes of GEAR UP* report, a prior comparative assessment of 18 GEAR UP and 18 non-GEAR UP schools according to criteria drawn from program goals.

Evaluative Criteria for GEAR UP Walla Walla

	Institutional/Policy Goals	Students and Parent Indicators
Academic Preparedness	- Rigorous academic curriculum - Opportunities for all to enroll in higher-level classes (transition from ESL to advanced classes) - High-quality teaching - Cultural considerations - Individualized academic support - Individualized social support	- Increased academic performance - Higher student enrollment in rigorous classes - Lower dropout rate - Increased student leadership skills - Increased involvement in school and community
College Awareness	- High teacher expectations for students' college attendance - Multi-cultural college-going identity - College preparation information communicated - Career and college-oriented special events - Financial aid information	- Frequent one-on-one advising with adult - Expectation of attending college - Knowledge of college opportunities - Knowledge of college benefits - Knowledge of pathway to college
Parental Involvement	- Comfortable environment for diverse parents - Newsletters and invitations in conducive format for parents	- Familiar with upcoming events and classes - Comfortable attending school events - Greater involvement at

	- Collaboration among parents and teachers - Environment conducive to self-organized parent social networks - Frequent parent information sessions	- school - Familiar with college and aid opportunities - High expectations for student achievement - Greater advocacy on behalf of students

In evaluating the success of GEAR UP as an academically oriented intervention program, I evaluate its programmatic offerings according to criteria I have compiled from prior scholarship. Multiple scholars' research has substantiated the need for schools to not simply promote basic literacy, but academic rigor according to a college preparatory curriculum. It is imperative that policies provide opportunities for all students to enroll in higher-level classes regardless of prior English Learner status. The faculty must also prioritize professional development as a mechanism of providing high-quality teaching in a culturally appropriate manner to every student. Van Kannel-Ray et al.'s analysis of the academic case study further emphasized the need for individualized academic support, both to enhance the counselor's empathy and increase the relevance of college information to students. Lastly, I include the goal of individualized social support, a factor that arose from my scholarly literature research as well as interviews. It became evident that social preparedness, in terms of leadership skills and social networks, is nearly as important as academic preparedness, although not emphasized in the current GEAR UP program offering. Although constituting a separate discussion of analysis and recommendations further in this report, the category of social preparedness will be included with indicators of academic preparedness for the purpose of initially evaluating the original variables.

If the school sufficiently addresses academic preparedness from a policy level, then certain indicators ought to be evident among the student body. The most obvious and standardized assessment is academic performance, in terms of GPAs and SAT scores. Although I contacted several administrators in the WSU Tri-Cities GEAR UP Partnership to inquire as to actual GPA increase, enrollment decrease, or college enrollment, this information was not released to me. Therefore, all of my data indicating numeric trends are based on the comments of individuals interviewed and not on my own thorough data analysis. It certainly is difficult to isolate the influence of GEAR UP in promoting these numeric increases, however, so other criteria were established by the *Early Outcomes* research team to qualify academic preparedness: higher student enrollment in rigorous classes and lower dropout rate. In relation to the social preparedness that scholars have deemed so essential to thriving post-graduation, a successful program should increase student leadership skills (in this report, specifically the Latino students') and involvement in school and community.

GEAR UP also aims to promote college awareness and foster student ambition. Prior scholarship explains the importance of teacher expectations in shaping a student's perception of their abilities. Because teachers' judgments of students based on language-minority or low-income status inevitably affect their perceptions of a "college-going student," it is important that the school fosters a multicultural college-going identity, not a college-going culture restricted to one socioeconomic or ethnic group. Beyond these attitude shifts, the accessibility of tangible resources relates to the level of college awareness; therefore, policies should advocate clear and

effective communication of college preparation information, school administration should organize career and college-oriented information sessions, and counselors should inform students of financial aid opportunities. If GEAR UP effectively promotes college awareness and student ambition, indicators of success include: frequent one-on-one advising with adult, internalized expectation of attending college, knowledge of college opportunities, knowledge of the benefits of attending college, and knowledge of the pathways to college.

Lastly, I have compiled criteria for evaluating the intervention program's success in fostering parental involvement among Latino parents. Other scholars' analyses of typical cultural mores among Latino families highlight the miscommunication that occurs due to many Latino parents' lack of familiarity with the school setting: parents are uncomfortable in school settings and lack educational experience, so their ways of participating deviate from normative, mainstream definitions of parent involvement. Schools must, therefore, create a comfortable environment for diverse parents. Methods of communication essential to bridging this informational gap, such as newsletters and invitations to school events in Spanish, must be distributed in a format conducive to parent needs. The school must foster collaboration between parents and teachers as well as among Latino parents, providing open space for parents to self-organize. The school should also sponsor frequent information sessions to educate parents in the pathways to college and best methods of encouraging their children. An effective parent outreach program should result in the parents' general familiarity with upcoming events and classes at the schools, a sense of belonging in the school setting, and consequential attendance at school events and involvement on school grounds. Equipped with college knowledge, parents will expect their students to achieve and advocate on their behalf.

My third layer of interviews, therefore, included the Assistant Director of the Tri-Cities WSU GEAR UP Partnership, Chuck Hallsted, and three site directors, Mike Gwinn, Marika Tomkins, and Jerri Doyle. Although my questions focused on the same three variables, our conversations were useful in situating Walla Walla High School in terms of other GEAR UP programs. The site directors' broader perspective of GEAR UP goals also provided a standard of comparison against the visions expressed by school administrators; an analysis of this disparity, I postulated, would provide insight into the possible points of contentions along ethnic lines. Most relevant to my primary research were the comments regarding lack of Latino parental involvement: the justifications presented were varied and suggested deeper misunderstandings. These collective comments prompted me to pursue interviews with Latino parents to find out what exactly schools lacked in creating an environment conducive to parent participation.

To find Latino parents willing to be interviewed, I expanded the data gathering process to include participant-observation at a parents' night at Garrison Middle School on October 14th. The forum was designed to connect parents with a member of the Walla Walla Police Department to educate them about local gang culture and answer their questions. Salvador Hernandez invited me to participate as an audience member in the Spanish-speaking breakout group and introduced me to the large group of Latino parents. My brief explanation of this research project, in Spanish, allowed me to make several valuable contacts that agreed to be interviewed in exchange for information about my own college application process. Although my project focuses on Walla Walla High School, several parents had children enrolled in the high school; also, I assumed that the general concerns of Latino parents would not vary greatly

depending on their child's grade level, as the GEAR UP programs affected both grade levels. Two interviews emerged from this evening: conversations with Lucia Cruz and Cindy Ortega allowed me to learn about the Walla Walla School District from a Latino parent's perspective. I stimulated discussion that would situate their comfort with the school administrators, gauge their perception of barriers to their children's involvement, and expand on my conception of the Latino parents' attitudes. Hypothetically inquiring as to how the college process would be different were they primarily English-speaking providing some of the most insightful and honest responses regarding the prominence of barriers beyond simply language. Both women's personal narratives also provided critical information regarding the cultural capital that, as scholars argue, advantages and disadvantages Latino students.

My last layer of interviews consisted of Latino students at Walla Walla High School. Although I transcribed our conversations, they were casual and intended to gain a comprehensive understanding of the school and home environments. The students interviewed were particularly attuned to the barriers that Latino students faced in achieving a postsecondary education and provided the most insightful perspectives of parental involvement and cultural disparities. All of these students volunteered to be interviewed during a meeting of Club Latino at Walla Walla High School and met with me at Coffee Perk in Walla Walla, Washington. According to the regulations of the Institutional Review Board of Whitman College, I obtained written consent for my interviews with Latino parents and students. All administrators and school faculty provided verbal consent according to these same parameters. All inclusion of interviewee's comments will be faithful to my best estimation of the context and expressed intent of the speaker. All interview materials will, however, be helpful in constructing a comprehensive grasp of the ideological cleavages separating the administration from the Latino community members. Their observations of the school districts, praises, criticisms, and personal narratives have contributed to this multi-faceted and dynamic, but by no means exhaustive, analysis of the school district's attempts thus far to provide an equitable and accessible education for all.

Results: A Comprehensive Evaluation of Walla Walla's GEAR UP

The comprehensive body of secondary literature provides a scholarly platform for an integrative discussion of the particular obstacles that language-minority students, particularly Latinos, face in the United States school systems. The insightful assessments of intervention programs structured to transmit college-relevant social capital have furthermore outlined meaningful criteria by which to judge the accomplishments and challenges of the GEAR UP program in Walla Walla. The methodological process of qualitative data collection through individual interviews with the policy makers and those affected by policy were designed to contextualize the goals of the school district in terms of its demographics as well as bring to the surface any challenges embedded in the program's current construction. I have categorized the primary findings of this research endeavor into individual evaluations of my secondary research variables: academic achievement, college awareness, and parent involvement, which are products of dominant themes in the secondary literature and summations of the GEAR UP grant's main avenues of promoting college achievement. I will then synthesize these findings and discuss my comprehensive recommendations to ameliorate the particular challenges as illuminated by the qualitative data collected from administrators as well as community members.

Fostering Academic Readiness in Latino Students: from Remediation to Rigor

GEAR UP's ultimate goal of creating a college-going culture hinges on its ability to prepare students academically for education beyond high school. Not only are high grades essential in the admissions process, but an array of organizational and conceptual skills are necessary to thrive in a college setting. The secondary literature collectively suggests the disproportionate lack of this college-relevant social capital in Latino students. Although a variety of organizational and conceptual skills are expected of students in the high school and college levels, many times children from low-income families lack a home environment that fosters such abilities. Specific to the situation of many Latino students is the lack of parental education; for many immigrant families, the parents were never exposed to the United States school system, and many agrarian workers did not exceed elementary grade levels. Not only are these children entirely reliant upon the school system to develop the capacity for higher-level thinking, but they also lack at-home resources for homework help and instruction. The widespread expectation for Latino underachievement that results from these unequal home environments is propagated by stereotypes, which high school student Jennifer Torres said are well-known and discussed; regarding intelligence, it is commonly assumed "If you weren't super smart like the American kids, you won't make it."[23] I asked what makes these kids smarter, and Sosa confirmed the notion of unequal acquisition of social capital in terms of academic resources: "They have parents that can teach them these things they've already learned, they've been in the states, learned things throughout their life."[24]

Recognizing their unequal access to academic resources, one of the primary aims of the GEAR UP grant is to provide remedial services for low-income or language-minority students. The wide variety of initial programs included in-class and after-school tutoring, credit retrieval programs, and summer sessions. Because GEAR UP intends to create a college-going culture, according to Assistant Director Chuck Hallsted, it is important that the programs offered are sustainable beyond the termination of federal funds. Although in-class tutoring is based on the immediate need "to get kids ready for college and beyond," since "a lot of kids are behind, not passing the WASL,"[25] the expense of hiring individual tutors exceeds the usual budget of a given school district. The Twilight credit retrieval program is similarly structured and provides the opportunity for self-selected students to earn graduation requirements after school; however, Spanish teacher Refugio Reyes mentioned that this academic lab rarely services more than five or six students, offering the suggestion of requiring students to attend so as to utilize the program's capacity.[26] While these programs temporarily help the individuals who elect to participate, their effectiveness will expire synchronous to the grant's funds.

Many interviewed administrators indicated that, in terms of sustainability and affecting the maximum number of students, professional development initiatives have proven to be the

---

[23] Jennifer Torres, interview with author, Walla Walla, Washington, October 28th, 2009

[24] Torres, 10/28/09

[25] Carter, 9/23/09

[26] Refugio Reyes, interview with author, Walla Walla, Washington, October 21st, 2009

most successful. One of the most significant programs has been Literacy First, a multi-grade level effort to improve student reading abilities by training teachers to increase literacy in all content areas, teaching vocabulary comprehension skills and strategic reading tools in various subject areas. It began as an intervention tool for teachers of students at least two years behind their cohort's reading level, but evolved into a widespread Instructional Coaching model for professional development across all subjects that ensured consistent and effective teaching for all students. According to Chuck Hallsted, Superintendent Carter believed that Literacy First "had the greatest impact on culture and academic improvement of anything he had done."[27] Chuck Hallsted referred to this success as impacting students of all demographics, since literacy implies "they can do their math better, they can do anything that they are required to do academically and in life. That's been a huge difference in the culture. The culture of 'I can do it!'" Site Coordinator Jerri Doyle explained the role of GEAR UP as "an integral part of supporting and also spearheading a lot of the professional development programs;" Literacy First served as an important professional development model, which the school has now customized and integrated into its own teacher training, entitled Secondary Instructional Practices.[28] The adoption of professional development tools accessed by GEAR UP funds is perhaps the most sustainable method of ensuring the longevity of GEAR UP's stated goals, as teachers are "the person who has the most influence on students, and by GEAR UP providing these opportunities for teachers to gain more knowledge and perspective within their field is huge."[29] Literacy First served as a systemic approach of increasing literacy school-wide, and as an intervention program met the needs of equipping students to fulfill expectations at the high school level.

Estimated Student Cohort Dropout Rates, 2008[30]

TABLE 6: AVERAGE ESTIMATED STUDENT COHORT DROPOUT RATES IN WASHINGTON STATE, 2008

Ethnicity	Average Estimated Cohort Dropout Rate Percentage
All Students	17.5
Latino	29.4
African American	20.1
White	16.9
Native American	39.5
Asian	16.5
Limited English	34.7
Migrant	31.1
Low Income	24.7
Special Education	26.6

Note 1: Cohort drop-out rate calculated from the district level graduation data, accessed on December 4, 2008,

The evolution of the GEAR UP programs has undergone a shift, however, from remedial programs to a collaborative infusion of rigor into all aspects of the high school curriculum. Superintendent Richard Carter testified to the quantitative success of the GEAR UP program in reducing the overall dropout rate, explaining that Walla High School "would lose 150 high

---

[27] Chuck Hallsted, interview with author, Walla Walla, Washington, October 16th, 2009
[28] Doyle, Jerri interview with author, Walla Walla, Washington, October 7th, 2009
[29] Doyle, 10/7/09
[30] Frances Contreras and Tom Stritikus, "Understanding Opportunities to Learn for Latino Students in Washington," Report submitted to the Washington State Commission on Hispanic Affairs, December 2008, p. 27.

school kids before Christmas – we didn't even lose 40 kids for the year."[31] However, retention rates at the high school level are not indicative of the actual success of students in the postsecondary setting. The programmatic structure as articulated by the administration aims for increased rigor so that students can thrive in a university setting; although less quantifiable than dropout rates, the focus on rigor has "become much more academically oriented learning at a higher level." Carter noted that students are "engaged at a higher level, staying in school" and the district is "seeing more of the kids in poverty or the Hispanic population saying no, I'm going on to college."[32] GEAR UP Site Coordinator Mike Gwinn added that "the rigor at school just hasn't been that to support them to be successful – that's what we're trying to address now."[33] Research shows that students enrolled in remedial classes at the college level are unlikely to finish, since only one in seven continue on and finish their college degree.[34] It is therefore imperative that students are not simply assisted through the academic pipeline until graduation, but prepared for the successful completion of a K-16 education.

Advancement Via Individual Determination: A Case Study in Promoting Academic Success

This shift in administrative goals towards more advanced academic expectations was actualized by the implementation of the Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID) program in 2007. Although the AVID program focuses on academic preparation, the ultimate goals coincide with those of GEAR UP: 95 percent of students enrolled in the AVID program go to college.[35] Cohorts of thirty-two selected students are paired with a professionally trained AVID teacher and participate in an elective class period that teaches them "study skills, organizational skills, higher-level questioning skills, inquiry skills, and also teaches them interpersonal skills – how to introduce themselves, look someone in the eye, engage in a conversation – then in years two to four, they'll move into courses that we would call rigorous college prep courses."[36] The programmatic offerings are designed to replace social capital that students may not be receiving at home; therefore, the administrators intentionally select students with promising capacity for academic achievement (based on recommendations of middle school teachers) and provide training in the skills that students may not be socialized into at home. The program recognizes that the "tier one kids already have home support and people around them that they understand and hear about a college-going culture."[37] Site Coordinator Mike Gwinn explained there are "hundreds of students, including Latino students, that are in the middle that have the ability to achieve and go to college but don't have the family resource or the family reference. AVID really gives them a conduit to have a direct path into college."[38] Latina high school student Maria shared that her mother does not help her with homework "because she doesn't know English and my homework…I don't think she knows. I've asked her, just playing around, and she's like 'I don't know!' She only got to eighth grade and she got out because she had to work." For many students in AVID, including Maria, their AVID teacher is the *only* adult

---

[31] Carter, 9/23/09
[32] Carter, 9/23/09
[33] Mike Gwinn, interview with author, Walla Walla, Washington, October 20th, 2009
[34] Gwinn, 10/20/09
[35] Hallsted, 10/16/09
[36] Darcy Weisner, interview with author, Walla Walla, Washington, September 30th, 2009
[37] Weisner, 9/30/09
[38] Gwinn, 10/20/09

figure, what Auerbach referred to as an "institutional agent,"[39] that transmits the social capital necessary for persistent academic achievement, social mobility, and ultimately, postsecondary success.

The mechanism for determining student composition in AVID classes favors the inclusion of Latino students and is a promising solution for amending social capital cleavages between ethnic groups. Assistant Principal Matt Bona explained that middle school teachers recommend students who are "not at risk, but not honors, with high motivation, attendance, writing skills, ability to work with other students, good behavior, and willingness to accept support." AVID is not a program that simply takes otherwise uninterested students, but rather targets "kids who definitely have the capabilities and skills to go to college but maybe are lacking the – I don't want to say motivation – but maybe the backing from home sometimes. They might be the first generation or low-income."[40] The dynamic process of selection includes an administrative component in which points are awarded to students on external factors that typically present a challenge to achievement, including English as a second language status, first generation student, poverty conditions, and a large family, as well as both the student and parent's demonstration of interest in the program.[41] The selection process does not simply ignore the implications of racial diversity by color blindly selecting students based on socioeconomic status. Although advantage is not granted for students based explicitly on their skin color, those factors that disproportionately affect language-minority students are given considerable weight. In terms of preparing students for future success, AVID is not explicitly designed to help a particular racial demographic, but rather provides crucial skills that may be lacking in the students' homes. Site Director Jerri Doyle clarified that "AVID really stresses academic rigor, organizational skills, time management skills, inquiry-based learning, and that's more of the indicator for success than what level you're at or what socioeconomic status or what ethnic group – it really has more to do with the skill base." This distinction is a crucial one: the selection process does not imply that a student from a particular background is on a predetermined trajectory towards success or failure, but AVID seeks to compensate for the products of a student's home environment that limit an otherwise college-going student.

AVID's emphasis on professional development contributes to its effectiveness in addressing racial disparities; while its classroom programs focus on individual students, the diffusion of self-awareness and cultural competency among staff members works to change the culture's embedded notions of race from the top down. The reality of a diverse student body signals the need for teachers to understand different types of learning beyond their field of expertise. Superintendent Carter explained a common challenge to high school teachers who work with many groups of students throughout the day instead of just one classroom: "Teachers at high school have a hard time individualizing, they're used to content teaching."[42] Working with students individually, however, "has made a huge difference because it personalizes education; the relationship with a good teacher is what helps kids learn more."[43] Understanding

---

[39] Susan Auerbach, "Engaging Latino Parents in Supporting College Pathways: Lessons from a College Access Program," *Journal of Hispanic Higher Education* 3 no. 2 (2004): 134.

[40] Clayton Hudiberg, interview with author via phone, October 6th, 2009

[41] Matthew Bona, interview with author, Walla Walla, Washington, October 20th, 2009

[42] Carter, 9/23/09

[43] Carter, 9/23/09

the environment that a multicultural student is from and being trained in strategies that integrate vocabulary and comprehension skills ensures that a teacher can more effectively address the needs of language-minority learners and students living in poverty who are "likely getting half of the vocabulary in their homes that an educated family would get."[44]

The AVID professional development also contains a self-awareness component that has been instrumental in the shift towards equitable educational opportunities for minority students. As Rothestein-Fisch and Trumbull discuss in their analysis of the Bridging Cultures Project, a teacher's cultural competency, or awareness of their students' diverse home environments and cultural contexts, directly affects the quality of education that a student receives. The AVID program in Walla Walla aims to foster this sort of consciousness among teachers, who are trained to understand themselves as "gatekeepers" to their students' futures and are "starting to get more cognizant to where they're closing the gate to students unnecessarily."[45]Gwinn explained that "everybody makes assumptions about 'this kid is college material, this kid isn't.' The AVID strategies and training gets people to question and reformat what does that mean."[46] In reevaluating their own perceptions of a college student, the training has consequently prompted staff members to heighten expectations for all students. However, the limited focus of AVID on a select group of students has stifled the dissemination of this valuable training among teachers in all subjects. Furthermore, the Bridging Cultures Project extended beyond staff and fostered crucial dialogue among students as well. Beyond an individual level, AVID's reevaluation includes a review of the protocols that govern the entire faculty, which has prompted the crucial task of critically assessing "how they're really looking at kids. Do they have policies that are preventing kids from getting into those advanced courses that will help them?"[47] The programs encourage elimination of the dangerous tracking systems that have traditionally embedded and perpetuated racial divisions in advanced and remedial classes. Instead of qualifying for Advanced Placement classes by virtue of prior honors status, Marika Tomkins discussed the "shifted policy towards advanced courses, so students who want to be on rigorous path who haven't been placed can get there." This is particularly relevant for Latino students who may be categorized as an English Language Learner as a young child, but qualify for accelerated math or science courses in high school. It is important to acknowledge the fact that said processes are *shifting* and may not, and likely have not, reached a point where all students sense they are held to equal expectations; not only are they in transition because the program began at WWHS two years ago, but because the AVID training is not yet school-wide (although this was the Site Coordinators' stated goal). Below I have included Contreras' graph based on data from Washington State regarding actual college expectations that teachers hold for their Latino students.

---

[44] Marika Tomkins, interview with author, Walla Walla, Washington, October 20[0h], 2009
[45] Tomkins, 10/20/09
[46] Gwinn, 10/20/09
[47] Tomkins, 10/20/09

Teacher Expectations of Latino Postsecondary Achievement[48]

TABLE 58: PERCENT OF LATINO STUDENTS THAT TEACHER BELIEVES WILL ATTEND A FOUR-YEAR COLLEGE

	N	Percent
Less than 25%	89	37.7
25%	65	27.5
Half-50%	70	29.7
75%	11	4.7
Over 90%	1	.4
Total	236	100.0

      The academic enrichment opportunities afforded to Latino students through GEAR UP programs sufficiently avoid many of the common barriers to language-minority students that arise when mere components of a multicultural home environment, such as socioeconomic status or primary language, are the only factors that determine eligibility for various programs. In evaluating the scope of AVID, the most effective intervention program that Walla Walla has integrated in terms of promoting long-term academic success for minority students, my findings indicate that the number of students serviced render the program relatively isolated, with minimal impact on the culture of the entire school. The task of implementing widespread change therefore hinges on widening the scope of the AVID program. Walla Walla High School recognizes the need for a diffusion of the curriculum and aims to send a group of teachers "to the national conference every year to have them trained in AVID strategies so they can take them back to their own classroom and implement them. Eventually we'd like to see everyone in school taking Cornell notes and having organizational binders in every class."[49] Although perhaps not reaching a wide enough audience, the program's integrative structure and bidirectional (targeting both the higher and lower levels of stakeholders in the education process) focus provide the foundation for longevity; as Assistant Director Chuck Hallsted said, "it's sustainable because teachers have methodology."[50] In other words, the teaching strategies that synchronize content instruction with skill transmission (such as organizational or time-management skills) can be integrated into lesson plans across all subject areas if all teachers learn these techniques; they do not depend on yearly training, but can be implemented once a teacher understands the methods. Junior Isabel Salazar agreed that "AVID students get more benefits than others," because of the thorough, Cornell-style note-taking that is required of participants. Freshman Maria Delgado explained that AVID was the factor that prevented her mother, who could not help her due to her own lack of education with her academic struggles, from transferring her to a school with more individualized attention. She discussed the skills she has already gained from several months in the AVID classroom:

---

[48] Frances Contreras and Tom Stritikus, "Understanding Opportunities to Learn for Latino Students in Washington," Report submitted to the Washington State Commission on Hispanic Affairs, December 2008, p. 65, data gathered in Washington State

[49] Bona, 10/20/09

[50] Hallsted, 10/16/09

> [Our teacher] teaches us things about our future, makes us take notes so we get better at notes. He gives us a paper with two questions and since our period is the last period of the day, during the day you have to write two questions about something that you don't get in class, then we get in groups and it has to be very good questions…We get in groups and we actually teach each other how to figure it out.[51]

This transition to academic rigor, punctuated by the adoption of AVID classes and diffusion of its teaching strategies into all departments, will not only aid motivated Latino students in acquiring social capital to excel at the high school level, but gain the necessary skills to succeed beyond graduation. While these programs have not yet achieved an ideal scope of impact on the student culture, the meaningful influence they do wield on the cohorts of participants combined with their capacity for long-term sustainability indicates a promising path towards widespread social capital transmission.

Generating Social Capital through Social Networks: Emphasis on the Extracurricular

Not only do academic factors contribute to a student's postsecondary matriculation and success, but his or her involvement in school has been shown to dramatically reduce dropout rates and, most relevantly, increase college attendance rates. Although I did not explicitly set out to evaluate the success of the GEAR UP program in terms of extracurricular activities, the importance of these outlets became evident during my conversations with school leaders and Latino students; additionally, prior scholarship indicates the importance of the sense of belonging these activities create. For example, Rosario and Vargas (2005) discuss the need for a school to foster a sense of belonging among students by increasing community involvement and leadership opportunities. Justifying the importance of this interactive process by which children develop a sense of their own efficacy, the authors quote scholar K. Appiah: "Creating a life involves developing an identity, enmeshed in larger, collective narratives but not exhausted by them. It involves social forms…that…make certain activities and projects possible. It involves, equally, a sense of belonging, of being situated within a larger narrative."[52] While the primary purpose of GEAR UP differs from the enrichment goals of El Puente, the program's success was due to its "functioning as a kind of familia, a safe haven, a place of cultural affirmation, personal security, and emotional support and safety" which "managed to create a plausibility structure they trusted and that worked to protect, nurture, and motivate them to perform."[53] Prior State of the State Researcher Caitlin Schoenfelder's analysis of the relationship between these social ties and student ambition explains that "the depth of support a student finds outside of the home relates directly to a more positive sense of school membership, which then relates to higher levels of self-esteem and higher academic aspirations."[54] Since these academic aspirations are one of the cardinal objectives of GEAR UP, the importance of fostering a positive and inclusive school environment cannot be neglected; Mike Gwinn confirmed the importance of an

---

[51] Delgado, 10/25/09

[52] José Rosario and Felipe Vargas, "Making Something of Themselves: Latino Soul Making in an Urban Setting," Indianapolis: Center for Urban and Multicultural Education, 2006, p. 12.

[53] Ibid., 10.

[54] Caitlyn Schoenfelder, "The Larger Ecology of Latino Success in Secondary Education: Why Some Latino Students are Beating the Odds," *The State of the State for Washington Latinos 2006*. Walla Walla: Whitman College, 2006, p. 28.

environment in which students sense they belong, explaining that a "connection to the school and feeling that [students] have an understanding of how the school system works, increasing their comfort and interaction in the school, has always been one of our goals."[55]

The particular type of social capital a student accumulates directly contributes to her sense of belonging in the school setting. Not only do language barriers and neighborhoods of residency impact which students naturally gravitate towards others, but their prior experiences effectively categorize them into groups of students who share common traits. This is particularly challenging for Latino students who lacked parents "taking them to band or orchestra or dance – all of those things that the middle to upper class students receive."[56] Not only does their lack of similar extracurricular activities tend to separate them from other students and perpetuate racial divisions, but the inaccessibility of other forms of after-school involvement propagates their uninvolvement and consequential sense of estrangement from the school, which research shows correlates to high school dropout rates and low college enrollment. The ample opportunities for involvement are disproportionately taken advantage of by White students, explained high school students Edgar Gutierrez and Jennifer Torres; Latino students typically participate in Club Latino and spend time together.[57]

Although many Latino students are involved in peer networks, they are not generally centered around school activities. Many administrators I interviewed mentioned the need for after-school programming to reduce other after-school activities that perhaps dissuade students from becoming more involved at school. One problem that arises from too much free time is the propagation of the dangerous gang culture which leads to even higher dropout rates. Intervention Specialist Melito Ramirez considered the most critical barrier to Latino student achievement the negative influence of social networks:

> The dealings I have here is pregnancy and the gang issue that's pulling these Latino kids off of the educational system. They're focusing on that – the recruitment that's going on, the easy money - it's the power of being in a big group. I wish we could do something. I keep telling them, having an education is the biggest power you could have.[58]

The powerful influence of *machismo* in the Latino culture perpetuates the importance of excessive masculinity, oftentimes encouraging gang membership and a consequential uninterest in the schoolwork necessary for college enrollment. Edgar Gutierrez told me about his mother's influential emphasis on the significance of education and relayed his internalized perspective on the *machismo* culture:

> The best way you can get back at someone is to prove them wrong. The only way I'm ever going to get respect is if I go to college, because fighting my way for respect is just going to prove what people say about me right, because I won't be able to defend it with anything.[59]

---

[55] Gwinn, 10/20/09
[56] Doyle, 10/7/09
[57] Edgar Gutierrez, interview with author, Walla Walla, Washington, October 28th, 2009, and Torres, 10/28/09
[58] Melito Ramirez, interview with author, Walla Walla, Washington, October 20th, 2009
[59] Gutierrez, 10/28/09

Unfortunately not all children, particularly boys, are being socialized according to these same values. Tomkins recognized the express difference between genders as girls face "different kinds of barriers,"[60] due to the prevalence of *machismo* culture; although the national trend points towards increased female enrollment apart from race, they lack of gang culture among most females renders a more conducive social environment in which to excel towards college. GEAR UP does not currently fund the extra-curricular activities that could potentially foster school-based relationships and prevent the primarily male gang culture, although the school's after-school program funds a boys' soccer program to "find as many ways a they can to make frameworks for success for Latino students."[61]

The ties a student creates at school serve as a source of a sense of belonging and increase the likelihood of college achievement; leadership positions, moreover, extend beyond a sense of inclusion and engender efficacy among students, enabling them to empower one another. Refugio Reyes spoke to his experience with Latino Club students: "The officers, the ones that are more involved, they expect to go onto college…. if they're more involved in school, they're more likely to be interested in school, want to have a career and go on to college."[62] Gwinn adds that leadership is an important part of experiencing pride in their accomplishments "as they learn on the go about themselves and about their abilities"[63] The school has programs in place to encourage intermixing among age groups and a student's self-identification as role model for another younger student; WEB, at the middle school level, and Link Crew, at the high school, join upstanding upperclassmen with incoming freshmen "to get our students connected to the school and to students."[64] These leadership opportunities are employed in the school's effort to "target the kids who aren't involved, who don't have extracurricular activities that the majority of other students have, that the Latino population or poverty white…don't feel comfortable taking advantage of"[65]

Another factor contributing to less extracurricular involvement is the transition from middle to high school; although many students were involved in GEAR UP programs in middle school, and recognized them as such, the lack of clear labeling at the high school level has left some students unaware of opportunities they previously enjoyed. Doyle confirmed this challenge, explaining that "GEAR UP is so integrated, parents and students don't realize they're being serviced by us."[66] Hallsted added that the absence of a menu of service means that GEAR UP does not get credit for many programs they fund. While this has not presented a problem, and perhaps serves to effectively integrate its goals into the school culture, high school students Edgar Gutierrez and Jennifer Torres agreed that the lack of advertising programs as under the GEAR UP umbrella contributes to less Latino participation. Some students who had a positive experience in middle school may be less inclined to branch out of their existing peer groups at the high school level. Contreras discussed the need for seamless program transitions to retain students as they progress towards the college path, specifically because the high aspirations

---

[60] Tomkins, 10/20/09
[61] Tomkins, 10/20/09
[62] Reyes, 10/21/09
[63] Gwinn, 10/20/09
[64] Weisner, 9/30/09
[65] Doyle, 10/7/09
[66] Doyle, 10/7/09

students have in middle school tend to diminish throughout high school.[67] The desire for transparency may inadvertently be obstructing student's participation in these enriching and peer network-generating opportunities. The demonstrated need for additional extracurricular activities that legitimately influence a child's educational prospects combined with the indicated interest of many Latino students suggest a possible area for GEAR UP expansion, although concrete recommendations will be considered at the end of this discussion.

To Navigate the System: Exposure and Expectations

Although academic preparedness and strong ties in the school setting are factors that contribute to a child's ultimate enrollment in a four-year institution, these variables are irrelevant if the student lacks the knowledge of college opportunities and ambition to achieve them. Prior research illustrates the success that a variety of intervention programs have had in not simply spreading awareness of these opportunities, but fostering a sense of empowerment among first-generation students and creating an expectation of college achievement. At Walla Walla High School, many students, Latinos in particular, are unaware of the steps required for college admission. Spanish teacher Refugio Reyes explained that the most critical barrier to Latino students is the "knowledge of the help that's out there, like financial aid or even how to fill out applications or what test you need to have to get to college." It is important to notice the distinction: the crucial aspect of these students' lack of knowledge is not merely the content of college admissions processes, but the conviction that college is a feasible and worthy goal. Doyle elaborated on this need for awareness of opportunities, since "a lot of kids have that hope aspiration that they plan on going to college, they don't know how to overcome the barriers between that thought and the implementation of that actually happening."[68] My conversation with high school student Isabel Salazar illuminated these obstacles as internalized by Latino students:

> Isabel: I think for Latino students, that's why some don't have the aspirations, is they get discouraged seeing their family background or financial things, or nobody else has gone to college, or stereotypes.
> Lyndsey: What do you mean by stereotypes?
> Isabel: Most Mexicans work in the field, McDonalds, that kind of thing.[69]

Recognizing the tremendous disadvantage that first-generation students do have in acquiring information about the college application process, one of the primary goals of GEAR UP is to spread college awareness. At Walla Walla High School, GEAR UP coordinators have implemented a variety of programs that seek to achieve this goal. Whether or not these programs sufficiently replace the cultural capital that students from college-going families acquire was a component of my interview questions: particularly, whether or not they adequately communicate this information in a way that recognizes the Latino students' particular needs. Referring to GEAR UP, Hallsted confidently said "We can provide programs they're not getting at home.

---

[67] Frances Contreras, "Literature Review of Best Practices in Intervention at the Middle and High School Levels," Prepared for the Early Outreach Partnership Project, February 2009, p.14.
[68] Doyle, 10/7/09
[69] Isabel Salazar, interview with author, Walla Walla, Washington, October 21st, 2009

There's no question about it."[70]

        Doyle stated that the district's objectives include "making students and families aware of college piece of it – the awareness, prep, planning, financing."[71] A successful component of this programming thus far has been the yearly field trip for each cohort of students: seventh graders tour Whitman, eighth graders visit Walla Walla Community College for a career fair, and occasionally they travel to Washington State University in Pullman as well. AVID students also have the opportunity to earn field trips by meeting class requirements and recently traveled to Eastern Washington University. Additionally, ImagineU is a partnership effort of Washington State University and Walla Walla High School that brings approximately 20 professors from the university to discuss the college experience in student classrooms, as well as answer questions in an open forum for students and parents later that evening.[72] One way the school district has attempted to infuse a desire to go to college is by personalizing the pathway according to each student's interests and encouraging them to begin developing their own ambitions. As they progress into high school, students with particular interests have opportunities to attend more specialized events: "if a student is interested in medical or healthcare, we get them to [the University of Washington]; if a group of students is into veterinary or engineering, we get them to [Washington State University]."[73] Doyle explained an advisory program at the middle school level that seeks to personalize the college process for students, Navigators 101. The students develop a portfolio of their best work as well as plan careers, academic pathways, and do a learning style inventory to better understand themselves and possible career paths.[74] The success of this program was more than evident in my conversation with freshman Maria Delgado, who participated in these self-inventories:

        I want to go to college and graduate, and I want to be a family lawyer. I would like help people if they have problems in their family, like a divorce…I look at my mom's life, she's divorcing, and my dad doesn't sign. I kind of want to defend those people. They were having a hard time for my dad to give child support. If I didn't go to college, then I wouldn't be a family lawyer. It takes, like, seven years.[75]

The key to Maria's internalization of the college process was her exposure to a variety of career opportunities and personalization of one pathway to her particular life experience. For middle school student Estela Cruz, this pathway is still unknown: "I want to find out what job I want to have and what college I want to get into. I don't really know [what's out there]. I don't have internet so I don't really know."[76] The importance of technology has surfaced throughout my discussions with administrators and community members, particularly because of the differential access to these resources based on socioeconomic status. Hallsted went so far as to say that "technology is the great equalizer for the poor population, whether Latino or poor whites. 50% don't have access to computers at home. Our insertion of technology has increased opportunity

---

[70] Hallsted, 10/16/09

[71] Doyle, 10/7/09

[72] Weisner, 9/30/09

[73] Hallsted, 10/16/09

[74] Doyle, 10/7/09

[75] Maria Delgado, interview with author, Walla Walla, Washington, October 21st, 2009

[76] Estela Cruz, interview with author, Walla Walla, Washington, October 25th, 2009

and access."[77] Prior scholarship affirms the importance of access to technology in procuring critical information about college opportunities, and highlights the problematic but inherent relationship between socioeconomic status and technological resources. Researchers at the Institute for Higher Education Policy recommend a focus on federal initiatives to provide software databases to underachieving student demographics as a method of remedying the persistent unequal college achievement.[78] Technology also serves as a sustainable resource that extends beyond the GEAR UP grant's temporary funding; although there was initial tension within the partnership concerning the preservation of technology in the school districts, the computer laboratories will remain once cohorts pass through the middle and high school levels.[79] The programs that serve to expose students to opportunities and personalize them to foster each student's ambitions have "put it in their heads that not only is it a possibility, but [college is] very reachable. It's not something for other kids, it's something you can and do have direct control over."[80]

In addition to merely exposing students to the pathways necessary to achieve their ambitions, it is important that students feel that someone directly cares about their future and can help them navigate this path. While the role of parents in meeting this need will be discussed later in this report, the fact of having an older person demonstrate his interest in a student's future provides a strong link to resources, an inspirational role model, and accountability and motivation to excel. Discussing her mentor, Maria remarked that "in middle school she used to tell me a lot about high school and college, and now, well, right now I haven't asked no one."[81] AVID student and high school junior Isabel understood, since "some people are shy and it would be better if they had one person to rely on," but said "as for me, I'm kind of comfortable coming up to my teacher."[82] Ms. Cruz, a local Latina mother, also expressed this desire for one-on-one attention in the school setting: "I would like her to get the college person to help her, hand to hand, to overcome. For example, taking her to the places or connecting her with people who can tell them, 'Okay if you like to do this, you can get this, and we are doing this.'"[83] Due to the lack of social capital, many students do rely on adults at school for their information about college and curriculum planning. However, as Isabel and Maria indicated, merely having a person accessible does not mean that students will either initiate contact or feel at ease confiding in her. Regarding a mentor, Nallely felt that "it's really helpful because you can feel comfortable around that person; they help you a lot since they know you more and they give you advice. "

Although staff members are available at Walla Walla High School, it is clear from both administrators and students that sufficient attention to individuals is unimaginable within the current framework. Bilingual Counselor Carol Franklin explained the heavy load that the school's four counselors juggle:

---

[77] Hallsted, 10/16/09
[78] Kathryn Volle et al., "Missed Opportunities: A New Look at Disadvantaged College Aspirants," Washington, D.C.: The Education Resources Institute, 1997, p. 32.
[79] Carter, 9/23/09
[80] Hudiberg, 10/6/09
[81] Delgado, 10/21/09
[82] Salazar, 10/21/09
[83] Cruz, 10/25/09

> The college counseling piece is something we do along the way, I have 500-some kids. It's public school. You have what you have for staff and you just work through that. If the kids want to get more information on colleges or careers they can go to the career center.[84]

Although the counselors make in-class presentations about course registration and resources available, there is virtually no time for them to mentor students, as their jobs focus primarily on working with problematic students. When asked about counselors, Sosa illustrated the disconnect between "middle-road" students and the counseling staff: "Well, I can go to them – you don't feel that kind of mood. They don't really open themselves out to you. I don't even know who the counselors are."[85] It is clear, however, that many motivated students like Jennifer Torres simply lack access to college application information (*informational capital*[86]) and adults that can motivate them and guide them through the process, since they oftentimes do not have such a knowledgeable person in their homes (*relational capital*[87]). While the need for an adult mentor is apparent in light of the limited resources many students, Latinos in particular, have access to, "people don't really trust counselors at school. Not something you would go to if you have a problem."[88] A challenge presented to the GEAR UP program, therefore, is how to effectively and personably provide these resources to students.

GEAR UP has plans to integrate Check and Connect, a personalized mentorship and accountability program that offers individualized attention to students as they navigate their academic pathways. Describing a microcosm of the intended program, Tomkins relayed an experience mentoring several girls:

> They responded well to mentoring, met with them their whole 8th grade year, so now 2 years later, I can go back and check up on them. Their trust level is built, we can assess where they're at, tweak what they're doing, move forward. We're doing that on a small scale and as a strategy intend to grow.[89]

While this program will contribute to a rigorous education, the overarching goal of AVID, the individualized attention is designed to draw students and parents together with an "institutional agent" (Auerbach 2004, 134) that can provide details specific to the family. Hallsted sees this move towards one-on-one meetings as crucial to the continuing refining of the ways that the school district implements GEAR UP's goals: "Two things we're commonly discussing as we thoughtfully look forward is improving the amount of rigor, academically, and then also the amount of individual focus and intervention that we can do around the concept of case management."[90] Science teacher Clayton Hudiberg hoped that these programs will encourage a collaboration among teachers, mentors, and students, since "oftentimes kids just sign up for courses without getting a whole lot of counseling with teachers…I'd like to see the AVID

---

[84] Carol Franklin, interview by author, Walla Walla, Washington, October 27th, 3009
[85] Torres, 10/28/09
[86] Susan Auerbach, "Engaging Latino Parents in Supporting College Pathways: Lessons from a College Access Program," *Journal of Hispanic Higher Education* 3 no. 2 (2004): 127.
[87] Ibid, 127.
[88] Gutierrez, 10/28/09
[89] Tomkins, 10/20/09
[90] Hallsted, 10/16/09

elective teachers come to me for suggestions for exactly what science they should be taking over the next years."[91] Ideally cooperative, the implementation of case management models for individualized attention seem to carry the potential for eliminating the problem of students slipping through the cracks without an understanding and trustworthy adult. The literature's emphasis on the importance of students' sense of belonging to a school community, typically conveyed through personal interaction and support by a committed staff member, suggests that GEAR UP Walla Walla is on the right track in introducing Check and Connect, similar to the Academic Case Management program that Kannel-Ray et. al. discuss. While the scope of the case management may be small to begin with, structurally and methodologically it seems a research-supported solution that will inspire students to internalize college aspirations and apply their full effort towards academic preparedness.

The Discrepancy of Space: Parental Involvement at Home and *School*

The preceding discussions of my findings regarding academic readiness and college awareness are situated in the school setting and involve attempts by the administration to incite a shift in the student culture towards a widespread expectation of postsecondary college enrollment. It is significant to note that these efforts occur along a vertical axis: they target professional development in a top-down approach of infusing college preparation in classroom interactions, as well as create opportunities through a bottom-up approach of student empowerment via programs that allow students to situate themselves along the college pathway, such as fairs that expose students to college opportunities and career tests that personalize the college process. Although the school has established a comparatively extensive series of macro- and micro-level programs within this public space, intervention programs must recognize the significance of a students' private sphere in college decisions and generate horizontal avenues of influence in an attempt to holistically revamp the culture.

Virtually ever administrator interviewed conceded that parental involvement could use more attention. While considering the effectiveness of GEAR UP in fostering parent participation, Chuck Hallsted mused, "We are always looking for new and better ways to engage [Latino parents]. I don't think we've arrived."[92] This is only to be expected, however, since parental involvement necessitates participation from both parties and so many variables factor into its actualization. My findings conclude that the primary reason for the lack of involvement is cultural incompetency. Essentially, while many well-meaning and mildly successful efforts to include Latino parents have improved participation, the administration's insufficient attention to cultural context and acknowledgment of its contribution in the school setting have perpetuated the dominant culture's embedded misunderstandings of the Latino community. This is not to say that measures are not in place that may ameliorate these problems or that the GEAR UP coordinators do not recognize these issues, but the fact that cleavages do exist between Latino parents and the school district point towards areas for improvement in terms of cultural understanding. The literature's collective review of intervention programs that seek to involve and empower Latino parents suggest that cultural awareness among staff members, or *cultural competency*, is one of the most crucial factors encouraging a home-school partnership. The fundamental miscommunication that frequently occurs follows a vicious cycle: nontraditional

---

[91] Hudiberg, 10/6/09
[92] Hallsted, 10/16/09

involvement (insofar as parents interact with their children mostly outside the school setting, investing in their children in ways invisible to teachers and other parents rather than volunteering to supervise at recess or working with counselors to create a curriculum plan for their child), translates to apathy among teachers and other parents (since Latino parents seem uninvolved and therefore uninterested in their children's well-beings), which perpetuates disappointment and squelches otherwise creative attempts to include Latino parents and self-cognizantly restructure these events to facilitate involvement, fostering feelings of exclusion among Latino parents. Lopez explains that "the assumption is that parents who are not involved in traditional ways (such as helping with homework or joining parent organizations) are incapable of providing learning environments for their students, perpetuating a dangerous stereotype of apathy and uninvolvement" (Lopez 2001, 256).

For example, many administrators mentioned their disappointment due to a disproportionate number of Latinos attending events on campus or taking advantage of the resources that programs like GEAR UP made possible. These frustrations are prone to amplification when it seems that the administration already takes Latino "culture" into account, which translates into providing bilingual materials and staffing a few Latino faculty members. In our discussion of ways to contact parents, Jerri Doyle mentioned that e-mail would be an effective way to send direct information; after inquiring as to the accessibility of computers in many Latino households, Doyle replied "No, there's a large portion that are low-income and do not have [access to e-mail]. I do say, right around the corner, there is a kiosk that parents can come in anytime and use to check for online grades, but it's not being utilized very well." However, these resources are not conducive to the schedule of all parents. Similar frustration arose from low attendance rates:

> You know we provide opportunities for families, but it doesn't necessarily mean that they take advantage of it – that's probably our frustrating part. We can promote as much as we know how to promote, we can encourage and provide incentives, and do everything that we can from our end, bring in the most fabulous people, but if they don't come to listen to them then obviously it wasn't successful.[93]

This frustration with the products of embedded disparities between Latino parents and their children's schools creates a precarious foundation for assumptions that can lead to ineffectual policies rather than a pointed effort to bridge the home-school cleavage. For example, Superintendent Carter explained his perception of Latino parent convictions regarding college:

> It's cultural for parents to not really - they understand getting to school and supporting education - but going beyond high school doesn't come into their way of thinking. Many parents haven't gone more than 6th or 8th grade education themselves. A lot of these are 1st generation.[94]

His comment points to a specific, and often overlooked, distinction that is important to make: just because Latino parents did not attend higher education, or even high school, themselves does not mean they lack *desire* for their kids to go. In fact, Contreras found that nearly 85% of parents

---

[93] Doyle, 10/7/09
[94] Carter, 9/23/09

want their students to enroll in college.[95] It means they lack *information* relevant to helping their child navigate the school system. In fact, providing access to education is one reason many immigrant families come to the United States. High school student Jennifer Torres added that "a lot of people come down here from Mexico to get the American dream. My parents came here so we could have a better future."[96]

As noted in my aforementioned evaluation of academic readiness programs, one major goal of GEAR UP's intervention programs is to substitute for the students' lack of college-relevant social capital. An exhaustively documented reason for this lack of social capital is the fact of disproportionate educational achievement among parents. As I previously mentioned, while only 7.7% of Whites in Washington have less than a high school diploma, a staggering 43.8% of Latinos never graduated from high school.[97] Although this translates into lower income and higher poverty rates, it also impacts the acquisition of Auerbach's categorically distinct *information* and *relationships* as social capital.[98] Essentially, middle-class White parents can "draw on personal experience of higher education and professional careers as well as on broader, information-rich social networks to work the system and advance their children's prospects;" in contrast, Latino parents "support the value of education and encourage their children's success behind the scenes through *consejos* (narrative advice) and 'invisible strategies' that often go unrecognized by schools," but lack "sufficient detailed college knowledge from personal experience, social networks, or resources in Spanish to guide their children."[99] Whether or not parents in Walla Walla sense this theoretical disparity in informational and relational capital is the objective of my subsequent inquiry.

---

[95] Frances Contreras and Tom Stritikus, "Understanding Opportunities to Learn for Latino Students in Washington," Report submitted to the Washington State Commission on Hispanic Affairs, December 2008, p. 12.

[96] Torres, 10/28/09

[97] Frances Contreras and Tom Stritikus, "Understanding Opportunities to Learn for Latino Students in Washington," Report submitted to the Washington State Commission on Hispanic Affairs, December 2008, p. 19.

[98] Susan Auerbach, "Engaging Latino Parents in Supporting College Pathways: Lessons from a College Access Program," *Journal of Hispanic Higher Education* 3 no. 2 (2004): 127.

[99] Ibid.

Latino Parent Aspiration for Student's Educational Achievement[100]

	N	Percent
High School Grad	13	6.5
Business or Trade School	1	.5
Some College	7	3.5
AA degree	29	14.6
BA degree	31	15.6
Some Graduate School	2	1.0
Master's degree	24	12.1
Graduate (Ph.D.) or professional degree (J.D., or M.D.)	92	46.2
Total	199	100.0

Information as Capital

The language barrier is a very real, and sometimes insurmountable, concern of Latino parents that hinders the acquisition of information and formation of information-rich social networks. Both administrators and community members acknowledged the pervasive influence of language ability on a parent's level of involvement at the high school. Ms. Ortega explained the hindrance that low English skills presents to her family's access to information: "Language is a big barrier. It's hard, so, like my husband gets so confused. If his classes were in Spanish, he would be happy. I'm sure there's a lot of information, but we don't know where to get it from."[101] Inability to comfortably converse in English also discourages some parents from pursuing resources at school. Jennifer Torres added that her dad "doesn't speak English and he doesn't like putting himself out there, he doesn't know what's happening."[102] Spanish teacher Refugio Reyes relayed a story about his mother, whose inability to speak English prevented her from acquiring information to help him navigate the college pathway, although her *consejos* demonstrated her desire for him to attend college:

> My mother was the same way – she always wanted us to go to school and be educated, but never went to a conference or anything like that. With her, she didn't speak English and didn't understand it, and didn't know the system. But she would always tell us, 'Find a teacher at school that can help you, find out things you need to get to school. I'm sure someone can – I can't help you because I have no idea what's going on, but I know there's a way to find it. Go on to college, I want you to.' I think a lot of parents are in the same boat – they're not aware of everything that's out there for their kids even though they want their kids to go on to school.[103]

---

[100] Frances Contreras and Tom Stritikus, "Understanding Opportunities to Learn for Latino Students in Washington," Report submitted to the Washington State Commission on Hispanic Affairs, December 2008, p. 57.
[101] Cindy Ortega, interview with author, Walla Walla, Washington, October 25, 2009
[102] Torres, 10/28/09
[103] Reyes, 10/21/09

Mr. Reyes' experience as a first-generation Latino student highlights the inability of parents to participate not simply due to the language barrier, but because their own inexperience with the school system deprives them of the knowledge of what questions to ask. Mike Gwinn reflected on this disparity in terms of the high school: "I would say that Wa-Hi does have a college-going culture for a large set of its students, but those are students that whose parents went to college, and they're going there because their parents have that frame of reference."[104]

The resources to apply for college and plan curricula are certainly available within the school for those students who seek them out. However, the inability for parents to help their children through the educational process or accompany their students to meet with faculty members can essentially squelch a child's prospects of accessing these resources. High school junior Isabel Salazar, for example, is a self-professed high achiever because she approached her teachers and generated her own information networks (interestingly, she is also enrolled in the AVID course). Illustrating that unfamiliarity with the school system stifles a parent's ability to directly contribute practical advice, Salazar explained that the issue is "not that [my parents] wouldn't be helpful, but they don't speak English that well. I'd ask them, but it's not like their opinion wouldn't matter, but they're not very aware of what schools there are here. They're both from Mexico."[105] Bilingual Counselor Carol Franklin added that "the people who haven't been here long enough to be acculturated to really be Americanized, they are still struggling with feeling comfortable here, encouraging their kids, knowing how to encourage, which direction to point them in. That's going to be an on-going process."[106] Author Bermudez attributes the apprehension many Latinos sense towards the school system to a lack of understanding due to unfamiliarity and potential mistrust resulting from cultural misunderstandings; for example, when conferences are scheduled during work days in peak harvest times, Bermudez found that some parents interpreted the time conflict as intentional. The parents and students I spoke with actually applauded the school for hiring bilingual faculty members and communicating in Spanish. Negative emotions such as mistrust were not as much of an issue as was simply feeling out of place.

The administration recognized the need for Latino parents to feel welcomed in the school environment. Since "the high school is now 34% Latino, it's definitely something that we try to address every year and try to get better at. A lot of these parents haven't had any experience with education, let alone a campus this size, and sometimes it's kind of intimidating for them."[107] Efforts to make parents comfortable focus on simply getting parents to step foot on campus, explained Counselor Carol Franklin. "Once they get here it's okay, there's people to welcome them and translators, but to get here is intimidating."[108] Although it is certainly important to get parents on campus, it is as equally as important to sustain that level of participation by creating an environment of comfort. Social networks among parents must exist in the areas they gather, not only because the Latino culture tends to be group-oriented, according to prior scholarship, but because they feel out of place when the majority of other parents are non-Latino English speakers. Ms. Ortega explained her own experience feeling disconnected even within a parents'

---

[104] Gwinn, 10/20/09
[105] Salazar, 10/21/09
[106] Franklin, 10/27/09
[107] Bona, 10/20/09
[108] Franklin, 10/27/09

organization at school:

> I'm kind of shy and I'm not a very talkative person with other people that I don't know. I just felt like I didn't fit in the group, so I quit PTA. Not knowing the other moms made me kind of uncomfortable. Maybe because there weren't other Hispanic moms. That's one reason I stopped.[109]

Parents who are eager to help their children but are deterred by discomfort in the school setting consequently seek information from pre-existing social networks. Ms. Ortega recognized her own tendency to learn from trusted family members:

> As a parent, I'm not very familiar, I'm not very involved. I know what I've heard from family. Yuri has cousins that all went to [the University of Washington], and they're my husband's cousins. Their mom tells me there's lots of programs for being Hispanic. But you know, I'm not just gonna blame the system. I don't go where I can get the information. I'm the first one to blame myself. I'm sure there's a lot of help. I just don't go find it.[110]

Similarly, freshman Maria Delgado referred to the language barriers and lack of social networks in the school setting to justify her mother's underinvolvement:

> I don't think she feels comfortable because she doesn't speak that much English, so I know English, so she's like you get along with those people and I don't. But I'm like, I can translate. But she was like if there was more Hispanics, I would go. Still she doesn't talk to them because they don't know each other.[111]

Junior Isabel Salazar confirmed the Latino parents' propensity to prioritize pre-existing social networks over the uncomfortable and unfamiliar school environment, adding that her "parents never go [to school events], they probably would want to…They don't know people outside of church, I would say... I wouldn't think they'd feel comfortable by themselves.[112] Parents' pre-existing social networks are likely comprised of parents with similar socioeconomic statuses and interests, however, yielding limited information about the college process. Ms. Ortega referenced the inability of these friendships to help her navigate the school system, explaining that "there's a lot of parents that I talk to and [my daughter] plays soccer. We all talk to each other, still I end up with no answers."[113] Ms. Ortega is not neglecting to seek out information, but the space in which she feels comfortable simply lacks the information that a school setting would. Tomkins added that ultimately, parents want the "best for their child, but if often seems that they don't really necessarily know what's best and hope that you know what's best."[114]

I would be hard-pressed to find parents who do not want the best for their children; however, this does not translate into high educational aspirations in all Latino families. Although

---

[109] Ortega, 10/25/09
[110] Ortega, 10/25/09
[111] Delgado, 10/21/09
[112] Salazar, 10/21/09
[113] Ortega, 10/25/09
[114] Tomkins, 10/20/09

nearly 85% of Latino parents want their students to pursue higher education, there are some parents who simply do not understand its true value in attributing to social mobility.[115] Doyle cited the internalization of education's relevance as a "big barrier for us to overcome, as far as re-educating them regarding the importance of [higher education]. Instead of once high school is over you just go to the workforce, you need college to get skills and knowledge to get a better job after graduation.[116] High school student Jennifer Torres and teacher Refugio Reyes explained that job opportunities in the United States are often the motivation for adults to immigrate, and parents may not understand the actual advantage of a college education:

> My friends' parents say no you don't have to go to college, you can just get a job around after HS. You could be happy with that because you have a job. If you get a job then you're fine, you don't need anything more. They think that college is a waste of money because you already have good opportunities.[117]

> A lot of the parents come from places in Mexico, maybe born in Mexico, and for them working was the way to survive. As soon as they were able to work, they probably started working. They don't know any better, they probably tell their kids that they have to work in order for them to survive. They probably teach their kids to work instead of to study.[118]

Even for those parents, such as Ms. Ortega, who understand that education is valuable, they may not entirely understand why: "We don't know how to begin. Give us information on how to motivate our kids, *why* to go to college. The only thing I can tell you is to get a better education and get a good job. There's gotta be other reasons."[119] These comments signal the need for a meta-understanding of college value. In other words, giving parents concrete steps to help children achieve postsecondary education assumes that the parents want this for their children. While among the majority of Latino parents this desire persists, some parents need to internalize the true value that higher education will provide their children so that the information will be effectively communicated synchronous to other family values. Ms. Ortega recognized the powerful influence of the home environment, as scholar Gándara praised in her analysis of the families of high-achieving Latinos, but simply needs more reasons to encourage her children to pursue college; since she did not experience its merits in her own life, she and other Latino parents could learn from narratives of other achieving Latinos' upward mobility.

Another major obstacle to creating a habitus of college-going culture among parents is overcoming the particular concerns of Latino parents that are products of misinformation or simply lack of information. Financial aid for documented Latinos is a significant concern, which is to say nothing of the concern of undocumented students, who are unable to receive financial aid to attend higher institutions.[120] For those documented students whose parents often work in

---

[115] Frances Contreras and Tom Stritikus, "Understanding Opportunities to Learn for Latino Students in Washington," Report submitted to the Washington State Commission on Hispanic Affairs, December 2008, p. 12.

[116] Doyle, 10/7/09

[117] Torres, 10/28/09

[118] Reyes, 10/21/09

[119] Ortega, 10/25/09

[120] For more information on the particular challenges facing undocumented students' aspirations and abilities to attend institutions of higher education, reference Ariel Ruiz's report: "The Future of Children and Immigrants: A Study of Latino Aspirations and Abilities." *The State of the State for Washington Latinos 2009*. Walla Walla, WA.

low-income jobs, financing college seems impossible. Ms. Ortega illustrated the stress of funding her daughter's college experience:

> We know she's gonna go, don't ask me how, I know it's expensive, don't ask me how. I wish they had programs like that meeting we went to. From step one, this is what you do, this is who you call. Step two, where is she gonna stay? Dorm or apartment? I have so many questions.[121]

The cultural tendency to value close family connections and therefore live at home also influences the way that Latino parents consider post-graduation opportunities, particularly their anxiety surrounding their children moving far away. Refugio Reyes' experience as a first-generation college student illustrates the unfamiliarity of parents with such long-distance separation:

> I wanted to study in Arizona and my parents were in Idaho, and always telling me 'Why are you going to far away?' Even when I left, they would always send me money, even when I didn't need it. They were always calling me, worried about 'Where are you eating?' Even when my mom called me and said 'I'm making dinner, I was just thinking of you and wondering if you were eating dinner,' and I said, 'of course I'm eating dinner, mom.' I think if parents went along with students to college to visit school and saw that everything was going to be okay, they would let them go.[122]

Going away to college, added high school student Isabel Salazar, "has to do with your family background…maybe some parents wouldn't want their kids to move away…Usually for Mexicans, you stay home until you're like married."[123] Not only does the Latino culture's propensity towards remaining at home beyond age 18 contribute to the hesitancy towards moving away, but many parents' heavy work schedules limit their travel ability and render their experience in other cities minimal. Ms. Ortega, who has never been to a college campus, catalogued her concerns:

> Let's say she goes to Seattle – strangers…Maybe hanging out with different people, going to bars, people putting something in her drink. If she has a roommate, who knows where she comes from. I would like to see it. I'm sure if she goes there, we'll have to go with her, that will help. Just to get an idea and picture it.[124]

It is clear that many Latino parents are lacking substantive information, both in terms of detailed merits of a college education and the actual steps towards realizing this goal. Many barriers hinder their acquisition of this information, particularly language ability, unfamiliarity with the school system and consequential discomfort, which prompt them to seek information from pre-existing social networks lacking in college-relevant experience. The dialogue thus far concerning relationships that transmit information hinges on the exploration of what factors prevent relationship formation within the school; this report will now explain why more Latino parents at WWHS are not more frequently physically present at the school.

---

[121] Ortega, 10/25/09
[122] Reyes, 10/21/09
[123] Salazar, 10/21/09
[124] Ortega, 10/25/09

Relationships as Capital

Scholars Bermudez and Marquez observed that the Latino community perceives the home-school relationship differently than mainstream Americans whose families have attended these schools for generations. Many parents feel a high level of respect for their child's teacher and sense their own authority in the home domain as separate from the teacher's authority in the school domain. Parent intervention, therefore, is seen as an interference with a trained professional's job; there is less propensity among Latino parents for advocacy within the school, as their own inexperience undermines their self-perceptions of ability to meaningfully contribute in the school setting. Referring to her own parent's relative invisibility at school, student Isabel Salazar said "a lot of things are also cultural. A lot of things are left unsaid. You just know that it's not expected, but if you want to go [to college], that's good."[125] Ms. Ortega expanded the concept of this home-school separation of authority as understood by many Latino parents:

> When you're at school, you belong to the teacher. That's pretty bad, because the teacher's only the teacher, not the mom. I think it's pretty common, I don't know about you, about the English, but I hear from other parents, when you're in school you're in school.[126]

Student Jennifer Torres added that her parents "don't know how to get involved and sometimes parents don't think that they need to because they think the school will handle it for them…they think that their place is in the home, so they don't have that responsibility."[127] It is not simply that parents do not care about their children's education, but their conviction that another more qualified person has authority over the school domain renders many of them oblivious to the expectation that they involve themselves.

Latino parents do mobilize when behavioral issues, which typically fall under a parent's umbrella of authority, arise. Science teacher Clayton Hudiberg explained that during parent-teacher conferences, "oftentimes they are focused more on the kids' behavior and kids' respectfulness versus 'How's their academics?' and 'Are they going to be able to go to college?' There is that cultural divide a little bit."[128] The parents did not see the conference as an opportunity to seek information about college, perhaps presuming that this was dealt with by teachers, but rather as a chance to gain more information about their children's performance in areas that they assume control over. Freshman Maria Delgado confirmed that her mother's minimal communication with the school typically focused on her behavior: "She's involved like calling and saying how are my grades and checking if I'm in school, but I never miss school."[129] The parents' understanding of their role confirms the literature's notion of the conceptual divide between home and school in the Latino community.

---

[125] Salazar, 10/21/09
[126] Ortega, 10/25/09
[127] Torres, 10/25/09
[128] Hudiberg, 10/6/09
[129] Delgado, 10/21/09

Parent Outreach Programs

The school district recognized the need for increased and effective parent outreach programs to address the lack of information and relationships as social capital contributing to a child's construction of college ambition within the home environment. Principal Darcy Weisner explained the parent night, organized to "pile up all kinds of things on those evenings: graduation requirements, local colleges present, importance of transcript, importance of grades, our AP people there to talk about programming and state assessment."[130] The purpose of this night, he added, is to "get parents and students to understand that in high school, the grade and the transcript are either going to open doors or shut doors, so it's really important that you do your best and take advantage of all the interventions if you need help."[131] Although an important message, the heavy concentration of such new information in one event that "piles" on so many details that lack any contextual significance can sometimes overwhelm parents. Auerbach's study of Futures & Family, another college access program for parents, highlighted the need for a presentation of this complex information in multiple formats, since "simply presenting the facts was not enough; families needed opportunities to make sense of college information in relation to their own lives."[132] However, the first parent night Chuck Hallsted recalled "had parents in there for three hours with their headsets on – they just couldn't get enough information."[133] Ms. Ortega concurred, explaining that "when [the Latino parents] got the opportunity to say something…they [eventually] kicked us out! If not, they would have continued! There are things people want to talk about, just express the way you feel, ask, and learn."[134]Although the literature catalogues a variety of successful programs for transmitting this information in more effective methods, it is clear that simply being at school, seeing other parents' eagerness to learn, and being exposed to the resources available is a meaningful experience for many parents. Latina parent Lucia Cruz, for example, realized her role in her daughter's education at night for parents:

> She was telling me a lot of things but I didn't put attention to her – I thought they were just kid conversation or something, but until I saw it in the school, I took it seriously. Now I am caring more for them, I know that there's ways to help her, and things that I need to be aware of.[135]

In addition to transmitting information regarding the pathways to college, school programs have been structured to increase the comfort of parents unfamiliar with the local school system. The school's attempts to foster a welcoming environment were evident at one such parent's forum at Garrison Middle School. Doyle explained the intention of the staff at GMS to "do a lot of family nights, which brings the parents in and increases that comfort level – in part, the Latino families."[136] Principal Gina Yontz perfectly illustrated one minor, but significant, attempt to build bridges across racial cleavages at one such event: during the break-out sessions divided by primary language, she joined the Spanish session, although not a native speaker herself. Ms.

---

[130] Weisner, 9/30/09
[131] Weisner, 9/30/09
[132] Susan Auerbach, "Engaging Latino Parents in Supporting College Pathways: Lessons from a College Access Program," *Journal of Hispanic Higher Education* 3 no. 2 (2004): 131.
[133] Hallsted, 10/16/09
[134] Ortega, 10/25/09
[135] Lucia Cruz, interview with author, Walla Walla, Washington, October 25th, 2009
[136] Doyle, 10/7/09

Ortega explained that she and her husband were "pretty impressed" by the program, since its efforts to create a welcoming environment created a positive space for the transmission of important information. The success of the focus on welcoming environments is evident in the high number of participants at GMS's annual open house (630 this year, 780 last year), a carnival-themed event with food and booths representing various community organizations.[137]

The struggle as WWHS attempts to close the Latino parents' concept of a cleavage between home and school is symbolized by the construction of physical space during these events, providing key insights into remedying this divide. Marika Tomkins explained the Latino parents' discomfort as represented spatially during a parent night last year:

> We served a large Mexican dinner in the commons and college fair in the gym. For the parents that were less acculturated, it was really hard to go from the Mexican dinner in the commons and physically move to the small gym where all of the club and college fairs were going on. That is one thing we're looking to formulate into our case management program, so we have staff member to physically walk a family over so they can get information on their own.[138]

The presence of an *institutional agent* to accompany an unfamiliar parent to the academic portion of the program was the missing ingredient that WWHS has begun to recognize and address. Auerbach discusses the role of institutional agents (college-educated professionals, fellow parents with children, and school administrators) that can help supplement the Latino parents' lack of information-rich social networks and negotiate a trajectory of upward mobility.[139] Ms. Ortega referred to her own lack of contacts within the school: "Other than him [the school counselor] I have no idea, I just don't know anyone else."[140] The lack of information as previously discussed combined with this deficiency in college-relevant relational networks further emphasizes the need for this institutional agent to symbolically escort the parent from noninvolvement, represented by hesitancy to move beyond the culturally and socially comfortable dinner, to involvement in the unfamiliar school territory, represented by the college fair. Jerri Doyle explained that the case management model is designed to address this deficiency of individual contact with parents, although it has yet to be implemented. The school district's efforts thus far to build relationships with the Latino community outside of school materialized in door-to-door greeting last summer. Also, some parent information events were held in labor camps.

Creating an environment of familiarity and utility has succeeded in attracting parents who are otherwise uncomfortable in the school. For example, Maria Delgado took her mom to the Cinco de Mayo party because "it's all like her culture…and she feels like she's at home."[141] Research has proven that having another reason to venture onto school grounds will oftentimes lure these parents as well; providing a family meal or presenting a student performance have successfully brought many parents to WWHS. Edgar Gutierrez believed that more parents came

---

[137] Doyle, 10/7/09
[138] Tomkins, 10/20/09
[139] Susan Auerbach, "Engaging Latino Parents in Supporting College Pathways: Lessons from a College Access Program," *Journal of Hispanic Higher Education* 3 no. 2 (2004): 134.
[140] Ortega, 10/25/09
[141] Delgado, 10/21/09

to the parent nights "because there was free food" and because "their kids were involved or something…showing off their artwork."[142] The implementation of student-led conferences, in which students present their portfolio of best work to their parents under the advisory of a teacher, creatively capitalizes on the parent's desire to recognize their child with a form of relationship-building between parent and teacher. Conference attendance consequently dramatically increased from 50% to nearly 90%.[143]

While fostering relationships between teachers and parents must be a priority, scholars such as Auerbach emphasize the need for social networks among parents whose children are navigating the college process together. They serve as a support system for one another and reduce the feelings of unfamiliarity during on-site events. WWHS has attempted to facilitate a parent outreach program, much like the models that scholars Lopez and Bermudez discuss, which trains parent leaders to disseminate college information to other parents through pre-existing social networks. Marika Tomkins described GEAR UP's initial efforts to implement the program Abriendo Puertas, which targets new families that have recently moved to the school district. It trains parents to provide guidance and direction to these newcomer parents on how to work within the school system and support their students.[144] The program has experienced limited success, however, because "it's been challenging to get people in that role who are sustainable…It's hard maintaining volunteers and providing them that oversight structure that they need."[145] Various administrators attributed its lack of success to the unavailability of parents. Hallsted explained that the program "hasn't matured" because they are still looking to "find parents volunteers to be leaders and be a catalyst to bring parents together."[146] Superintendent Carter agreed that "we haven't done a good job in this area," since the local community college was supposed to be part of efforts to create a parent outreach program and is so far uninvolved; however, the Columbia Basin College in Pasco and one in Moses Lake have been very involved in the GEAR UP program, which he believed made a big difference in parent outreach efforts.[147] Clearly, the need for such parent outreach programs is recognized; their realization, however, has thus far been AH.

Linking Home and School: The Importance of Communication

Although previously discussed methods of spreading awareness among parents can be successful, they hinge upon the ability to effectively communicate. The dichotomy that tends to materialize in Latino communities between the home and school serves to cut off mainstream avenues of communication, so WWHS has developed other ways of ensuring equal information about upcoming school events and behavioral issues with Latino parents: automated phone messages, direct calls, and language-appropriate mailings.[148] Noting the limitations of these seemingly sufficient mechanisms of contact, Refugio Reyes added that "GEAR UP could do a better job of maybe passing on information to parents – not just students, but parents."[149]

---

[142] Gutierrez, 10/28/09
[143] Doyle, 10/7/09
[144] Tomkins, 10/20/09
[145] Tomkins, 10/20/09
[146] Hallsted, 10/16/09
[147] Carter, 9/23/09
[148] Hallsted, 10/16/09
[149] Reyes, 10/21/09

Although these bilingual and personalized attempts for contact are well-meaning and somewhat effective, the tendency for Latino parents to not inquire as frequently about details in school and their reliance on their child for primary information leaves these efforts vulnerable to their uninterested students; while this may be a problem with teenagers regardless of race, the separation between school and home domains exists more markedly in the Latino community. Several interviewed students confirmed Reyes's notion that the lack of parental involvement may be related to students' failure to pass information on to parents. Edgar Gutierrez smiled, explaining that "kids can check the mail before their parents, answer the phone – that's very common. If you skip a class, they usually call and you usually know what time they're gonna call and you can just pick up" when a school administrator calls, effectively blocking their parents from hearing about problems. Isabel explained that, "usually in a Mexican home, you wouldn't see your parents calling the school to find out when your conferences are. Mostly they just expect you to do what you need to do." Unfortunately, this leaves many parents unaware of these opportunities that they may want to take advantage of.

Jerri Doyle also commented on the miscommunication that may extend beyond culture to the simple fact that some teenaged students do not engage in daily conversations. Maria Delgado explained that, were it not for her consistent and initiated communication, her mom would have no clue what problems occurred at school. "Whatever happens I always tell her about school," said Delgado. "I always tell her everything. She knows if there's something going on with me. She doesn't have to go to school to figure it out." The agency that students play in their parents' acquisition of information is perhaps more significant than administrators realize. Isabel Salazar explains that her "small courtesies" of telling her parents about her day "keeps them involved…I think if you don't have communication with your parents, they won't know what's going on."[150] Consequently, she added, "some students don't want their parents to go and they don't give [the notes] to them." This lack of information is more dangerous to Latino parents because it frequently serves as the only form of home-school communication. Ms. Ortega added that Latino parents "depend on you [their kids], whatever they tell you – that's fine. They don't know anything else. When we depend on our children, they don't know that much."[151]

On the other hand, some parents may not understand the value of such programs and be uninvolved where their students wished they were more involved. Since non-Latino parents engage more frequently in traditional and visible parent involvement activities, such as grading papers in class or supervising school activities, Latino students may experience a sense of neglect that their parents cannot understand. The separation of school and home domains may not prevail in some Latino parents' conceptions, but for Maria Delgado, this creates routine disappointment. Although the school telephones her house, her mother "is not really motivated by them telling her in English. If I just tell her, she'll be like, 'No, it's not that important.' But it is to me. And I want her to go sometimes to things"[152] Parental apathy speaks volumes to students whose value systems are largely constructed in the home environment; fortunately, Maria's active involvement in the AVID course will continue to reinforce the importance of college in the school setting. For some students, though, there are no institutional agents counteracting these messages. Edgar Gutierrez explained that "a lot of kids look up to their

---

[150] Salazar, 10/21/09
[151] Ortega, 10/25/09
[152] Delgado, 10/21

parents, respect them. When they see parents that care about them going to college and show it by being involved and talking to their teachers and talking to them, too, it would make them want to go to make their parents proud."[153] This remark not only confirms the importance of parental expectations as previously discussed, but also extends the parent's ideal role beyond mere *encouragement* in pursuing college to *actively engaging* in the school setting. Students Edgar Gutierrez and Jennifer Torres recalled a mutual friend whose life prospects dramatically changed after his parents actively asserted themselves into his life in partnership with his school:

> I know someone who was in a gang, so he was doing really bad in school: skipped classes, getting failing grades, his friends –'homies'- said it wouldn't be cool. He said it wouldn't matter then. At first his parents weren't really involved and thought he was doing fine, but pretty soon they found out (maybe 'cause teachers called?). Someone contacted them because they got involved in what was happening because he had gone to juvi, so they started realizing 'Oh well, we should stop this.' At first it was making sure he didn't go out. What really pushed him off, his mom would tell him how much it hurt her to see him throwing his life away, and he was like… 'My parents are being hurt,' so he started changing his life. He got out of that and is working on getting better grades and actually trying. (Does he want to go to college?) Yeah. After he decided 'I actually have to try, well what better way to get myself out there and go to college.'

Not all Latino students will engage in gang behavior, but may simply fall through the cracks without a parent advocate helping them navigate the school system. This story serves to illustrate the true importance of parental intervention and compound the reasons why a college intervention program such as GEAR UP ought to focus on the home environment. Its influence on the student is tremendous and, when accessed in culturally appropriate ways and integrated in an inclusive fashion, can severely alter the direction of a student's educational trajectory. High parental expectations and active engagement must be cultivated to create a consistent and shared ideology of the value of education to maximize the likelihood of an educational intervention's success. Among parents who decidedly agree on the value of education, meaningful involvement creates a platform whereby the parents' eagerness for their children to attend college can be channeled into effective partnership with knowledgeable school administrators, creating information-rich social networks for parents to disseminate knowledge among pre-existing peer groups and advocate on behalf of their children.

Synthetic Discussion and Policy Recommendations

This report seeks to offer a comprehensive evaluation of the most critical barriers to Latino higher education at Walla Walla High School and how effectively the GEAR UP intervention program has addressed these obstacles. I contextualize and assess three primary variables: academic preparation, college awareness and ambition, and parent involvement, to substantiate my conclusion that while GEAR UP's integrated programs substantially improve the status of Latino students in terms of the first two variables, efforts to increase parental involvement have yet to achieve cultural relevancy and widespread success. A general theme

---

[153] Gutierrez, 10/28/09

emerged in the analysis of these primary findings: although Latino students are recognized as typically low-income and language-minority students, their particular cultural context is insufficiently integrated into the construction of GEAR UP programs. While the recently introduced AVID has created culturally appropriate avenues for the transmission of social capital, its position in the school consequently relegates its effectiveness to this domain – the school. This mechanism for supplementing a lack of college-relevant capital via vertical power structures does not adequately recognize alternate spheres of influence along a horizontal axis: namely, the role of parents in creating a consistent college-going culture. School faculty members oftentimes operate without the awareness of cultural differences that render Latino parent roles incompatible to traditional participation. While systems are in place to integrate Latino parents, dormant frustration with the lack of mainstream parental involvement threatens the perpetuation of dangerous racial stereotypes. The product of these primary findings are a series of recommendations substantiated by scholarly literature that provide possible methods of comprehensively revamping the already flourishing GEAR UP program to adequately address the Latino community, utilizing their cultural contributions to co-construct a multicultural environment and drawing them further into the school system for mutual benefit: a truly horizontal partnership between school and home.

- **Integrate AVID teaching methods into a sustainable teacher development program across all subject areas.** The uncertainty of awarded grants renders this goal urgent and worthy of attention, not simply because of the programs that supplement disproportionate social capital, but due to the cultural change possible via teacher self-awareness and cultural competency. The implementation of AVID has begun to change teachers' perceptions of a college-going student, disarming dangerous and preemptive sorting mechanisms that structurally bar language-minority Latino students. Classroom exposure to organizational and higher-level thinking skills transmits social capital that Latinos have disproportionate access to. Additionally, such dissemination of AVID methodology would provide access to students who transfer to the school district or express an interest later in high school.

- **Deliberately incorporate community organizations into the GEAR UP partnership to facilitate extracurricular activities and create leadership opportunities for students.** I furthermore discussed the importance of extracurricular activities as a mechanism of retaining students and generating peer networks that revolve around attractive school activities, preventing precarious associations that deter achievement and college aspiration. After-school programs create social networks that generate a sense of belonging among traditionally marginalized students, situate them in a larger community of responsibility and opportunity, focus on constructive activities and deter dangerous alternatives, and ultimately empower students by encouraging positive identity formation and leadership skills. Secondary literature supports the correlation between these positive social networks and high school retention, college ambitions, and eventual success. Furthermore, positioning these social networks on school ground allows administrators to propagate the achievement ideology so diffused into curricula during the day. The GEAR UP name should be invoked to encourage participation among marginalized students and to propagate a consistent college-going ideology among students.

- **Integrate comprehensive evaluations into the current standardized forms of assessing student success to include leadership, participation in extracurricular activities, and other locally developed assessments.** The importance of social preparedness as an indicator of future success emerged throughout the course of my interviews, largely unacknowledged by prior GEAR UP evaluations. To measure their achievement in comprehensively preparing students to be marketable to colleges and succeed in a new social environment, the GEAR UP partnership should create a system of accountability for new program initiatives involving community partnerships and extracurricular activities.

- **Implement a community mentorship program that connects students with experienced and caring adults**. The absence of an informed and involved parent due to their own lack of educational experience renders some students, particularly Latinos, unaware of what steps to take and uncomfortable asserting themselves to form relationships to negotiate upward mobility. While GEAR UP programs provide resources for students to navigate college pathways, it is clear that students will benefit from stronger individual connections, as thoroughly explained by Van Kanner-Ray et. al.'s evaluation of an academic case management program. Although ideally the district should invest in the hiring of faculty members to provide this invaluable one-on-one counseling, it is important to consider sustainable alternatives to meet the particular needs of every student that lacks a mentor, particularly once GEAR UP funds expire. The recent College Coaches program initiated by students at Whitman College illustrates the partnership potential between WWHS and local institutions, wherein GEAR UP's structure can construct meaningful and sustainable associations that outlast the termination of GEAR UP funds.

- **Organize a committee of already-engaged Latino parents to provide the content for a faculty discussion of Latino parents' particular needs.** Parental involvement surfaced as the variable requiring the most administrative and policy reassessment. As I discussed, simply viewing parental involvement in terms of non-Latino, mainstream, normative involvement - such as supervising at recess and coming to PTA meetings - submerges Latino contributions beneath the threshold of relevance, contributing to dangerous stereotypes of parental apathy. The policy makers' failure to recognize the particular cultural contexts of Latino families, favoring mere acknowledgment of their socioeconomic status or language-minority status, creates a precarious foundation for building meaningful policy. My research, substantiated by studies such as Gándara's, Garcia's, and Auerbach's, concludes that the types of cultural capital unique to Latino families do impact a student's educational attainment; therefore, understanding a student in light of her environment and working with parents according to their perceptions of the school system are imperative steps to involving parents in a substantive way. Brainstorming ways of accommodating Latino parents in the school ought to include Latino parents, not simply as token participants, but as meaningful contributors. Several administrators explained that the construction of various committees require Latino parents, but the community members I spoke with explained the lack of information about opportunities to be more involved. Exerted effort towards recruiting interested parents will result in a depth of cultural competency and consequential increase in relevant and consistent programs for students.

- **Reinstate evening programs for Spanish-speaking parents to receive information on college preparation in multiple formats, focusing on small groups to build internal support systems.** Organizing breakout sessions divided by primary language is an effective way to maintain comfort and still provide the information parents seek. While the case management program serves as a promising attempt at connecting staff members with parents and their students, the school cannot realistically accommodate all Latino parents on an individual basis. I therefore urge GEAR UP to follow the success of the F&F parent information program that Auerbach's study profiles, which was organized as a night school for parents, integrating ESL lessons with college preparation and awareness. These programs ought to provide information in a narrative and experiential fashion, as well as foster parent relationships among each other via small group interaction and time for casual socializing. Experiencing a network of peers within the school setting creates a sense of belonging for parents that generates a basis for further involvement.

- **Facilitate a mentorship program that trains college-aware Latino parents to advise less informed Latino parents in pre-existing networks and settings, such as local libraries or churches.** In addition to programs conducted at the school setting, it is imperative that social networks for peer support, information transmission, and leadership formation exist outside of school as well. Realistically, meeting at school is not conducive to all parents' schedules or comfort levels and restricts the expansion of parent networks. I urge WWHS to prioritize the Abriendo Puertas program and train parents in a Spanish curriculum with the building blocks for disseminating college-relevant information. The Tomás Rivera Policy Institute's profile of successful parental outreach programs found that committed program champions and cultural considerations factor heavily into the realization of their goals. Therefore, staff members and resources should be focused on recruiting parents to spearhead this sustainable mechanism for change as well as contribute to the co-construction of a culturally considerate school environment. Ms. Ortega explained the significance of getting "trained parents to teach small groups…It's amazing what you can learn when you talk with other parents. You always learn something. That would make a tremendous difference for all of us."[154]

My discoveries were the result of a specific focus on the educational needs of the Latino community to promote a closure of the achievement gap for this demographic. Although the GEAR UP program has been evaluated in terms of its success in encouraging college enrollment and persistence, it has not been critically examined for its relevance to various subgroups. The programmatic focus on low-income and language-minority students, however, deems necessary the evaluation of it for these groups – especially since the grant is non-prescriptive and open to the interpretation of various school districts. Were program organizers to understand the particular needs of their school's demographics, these scarce resources could be applied to effective programs immediately instead of funding experiments that may overlook important cultural factors.

If these themes resonate with Latino parents, I recommend reading Jasis' article *Convivencia to Empowerment: Latino Parent Organizing at La Familia*, as it profiles a self-

---

[154] Ortega, 10/25/09

organized parent group that successfully lobbied for better educational conditions for their children, cooperating with school faculty and representing their interests in a professional and genuine manner. Their presence at venues of traditional avenues of communication, such as conferences and parent-teacher meetings, established the legitimacy of their group, which allowed their opinions validity in terms of policy making. This recommendation shows one way that Latino parents retained their particular substantive interests while structurally acculturating to the mainstream school system to effectively achieve results. The administration at WWHS also proved very receptive and eager towards Latino parents, indicating that positive change is possible and is happening. Although my recommendations included ways for the school to encourage parent involvement and contextualize their Latino students effectively, it is imperative that a teacher-parent partnership co-constructs these new policies. **This report's most meaningful recommendation, therefore, urges open dialogue and increased communication among stakeholders at school and at home**. This will require a culturally aware extension by the school, and a venture into the unfamiliar by the parents. The dream of these students achieving a college diploma and succeeding beyond their parents' achievements rests upon the cooperation of the most influential people in a student's life. Ultimately, the narrowing and eventual elimination of the achievement gap, the equal opportunity to access a meaningful education, hinges on this creation of a partnership between parents and teachers.

Appendices

Appendix A – Interview List*

*All interviews were conducted in English and transcribed by the interviewer and author of this report, Lyndsey Wilson, during the conversation.

Walla Walla School District Administrators

Bona, Matt, Assistant Principal at Walla Walla High School, interviewed in his office at Walla Walla High School, October 20th, 2009.

Carter, Richard, Superintendent of Walla Walla School District, interviewed in his office at the Walla Walla School District Offices, September 23rd, 3009.

Franklin, Carol, Bilingual Counselor at Walla Walla High School, interviewed via phone, October 27th, 2009.

Hernandez, Salvador, Intervention Specialist, interviewed in the lunchroom of Garrison Middle School, October 7th, 2009.

Hudiberg, Clayton, Science Teacher at Walla Walla High School, interviewed via phone, October 6th, 2009.

Ramirez, Melito, Intervention Specialist, interviewed in his office at Walla Walla High School, October 20th, 2009.

Reyes, Refugio, Spanish Teacher at Walla Walla High School, interviewed via phone, October 21st, 2009.

Weisner, Darcy, Principal of Walla Walla High School, interviewed in his office at Walla Walla High School, September 30th, 2009.

Washington State University Tri-Cities GEAR UP Partnership Coordinators

Doyle, Jerri, WSU GEAR UP Site Coordinator, interviewed in her office at Garrison Middle School, October 7th, 2009.

Gwinn, Mike, WSU GEAR UP Site Coordinator, interviewed in Marika Tomkins's office at Walla Walla High School, October 20th, 2009.

Hallsted, Chuck, WSU GEAR UP Assistant Director, interviewed in Reid Campus Center at Whitman College in Walla Walla, Washington, October 16th, 2009.

Tomkins, Marika, WSU GEAR UP Site Coordinator, interviewed in her office at Walla Walla High School, October 20th, 2009.

Latino Parents and Students*

*Names have been changed to protect the confidentiality of the interviewees

Cruz, Lucia, and Estela Cruz, local parent and Garrison Middle School student, interviewed at Coffee Perk in Walla Walla, Washington, October 25th, 2009.

Delgado, Maria, Walla Walla High School student, interviewed at Coffee Perk in Walla Walla, Washington, October 21st, 2009.

Gutierrez, Edgar, Walla Walla High School student, interviewed at Coffee Perk in Walla Walla, Washington, October 28th, 2009.

Jimenez, Emma, Walla Walla High School student, interviewed at Coffee Perk in Walla Walla, Washington, October 21st, 2009.

Ortega, Cindy, local parent, interviewed at Coffee Perk in Walla Walla, Washington, October 25, 2009.

Salazar, Isabel, Walla Walla High School student, interviewed at Coffee Perk in Walla Walla, Washington, October 21st, 2009.

Torres, Jennifer, Walla Walla High School student, interviewed at Coffee Perk in Walla Walla, Washington, October 28th, 2009.

Appendix B – Interview Questions

Paraphrased questions from the interview transcripts

Superintendent Dr. Richard Carter Interview – 80 minutes

1. How was GEAR UP first brought to the Walla Walla School District?
2. Why was the Walla Walla School District chosen as a recipient of the grant money?
3. What are the strengths of the current programs?
4. How has the Latino population been affected by the GEAR UP program?
5. What is the school district's current vision for the GEAR UP program?

Principal Darcy Weisner Interview – 60 minutes

1. How did the Walla Walla School District first become involved with GEAR UP?
2. Could you tell me more about how the programs have changed since you have been at Walla Walla High School?
3. What are the current programs offered at Walla Walla High School?
4. How have the goals of GEAR UP been met, specifically with regard to Latinos?
5. What are specific weaknesses of the GEAR UP programs?
6. Have you seen an increase in parental involvement because of GEAR UP?
7. What is the administration's vision for the educational system in the Walla Walla School District?

Assistant Principal Matthew Bona Interview – 45 minutes

1. What is your role with the GEAR UP program, specifically with the new AVID program?
2. What are the most critical needs of Latino students at Walla Walla High School?
3. What role does AVID fill in addressing these needs?
4. In your opinion, how effective have these programs been, and why?
5. What are specific challenges of the AVID programs?
6. Have parents been generally receptive of the AVID program? Are they part of the entrance interview process?
7. How has the AVID program increased parental involvement? What strategies do you think were the most effective? The least effective? Why? What barriers do parents face to involvement?

8. Is there evidence of a shift in Latino parent involvement since the start of GEAR UP?
9. How does GEAR UP influence students' college ambitions? Do most students at this school expect to enroll in college?
10. What role do you see AVID taking in serving the entire campus?
11. What is the reasoning behind targeting this particular group of students – how are students selected for AVID, and based on what criteria?

Melito Ramirez Interview – 10 minutes

1. As an intervention specialist, what are the most common concerns voiced by Latino parents?
2. What are particular barriers to Latino student success?
3. How has GEAR UP positively impacted the Latino student population?

Carol Franklin Interview – 40 minutes

1. What are the most critical needs of Latino students at Walla Walla High School?
2. How do the cultural resources of Latino students and non-Latino students differ? How do they either advantage or disadvantage the students?
3. What barriers do Latino parents face to involvement?
4. What are the most effective ways of lessening these problems?
5. What are common concerns that Latino parents discuss with you?
6. Do many Latino parents expect their children to attend college? Why or why not?
7. What is the culture at Wa-Hi like in terms of going to college? Do many Latino students you work with plan on going to college? If not, why?
8. In your opinion, what are the most effective programs that GEAR UP offers?
9. What are the least effective, and how could they be changed?

Clayton Hudiberg Interview – 40 minutes

1. What is your role in the AVID program?
2. What are the most critical needs of Latino students at Walla Walla High School?
3. What programs does GEAR UP offer that address these needs?
4. What are the specific strengths of the GEAR UP program?
5. What challenges have you observed with the GEAR UP programs?
6. How have GEAR UP programs increased parental involvement?
7. Do more Latino parents attend conferences because of GEAR UP efforts?
8. What should be done to change these programs so as to meet the goals of GEAR UP?

Refugio Reyes Interview – 40 minutes

1. What is your role with the GEAR UP programs?
2. What are the most critical needs of Latino students at Walla Walla High School?
3. What programs does GEAR UP offer that address these needs?
4. How could these programs be changed to make them more effective?
5. Do Latino students expect to attend college?
6. Does involvement in a leadership position or club generate more interest in attending college?

7. Does the school provide enough outlets for student involvement?
8. Are there parents who do not attend school events that have expressed a desire to be more involved? What barriers do they face to being more involved at school?
9. What specific cultural concerns do Latino parents have with regards to college?
10. Tell me about some parents at the school who *are* very involved.
11. Do Latino kids generally want their parents to be more involved at school?
12. How have GEAR UP programs changed students' academic habits?
13. How important is teacher encouragement to Latino students? Can you tell me about some teachers who the kids really admire?

Salvador Hernandez Interview – 30 minutes

1. How involved are the Latino parents at Garrison Middle School?
2. What are the main concerns you hear from Latino parents?
3. How have the GEAR UP programs impacted the Latino students?
4. What would make these programs better for these students?

Assistant Director Chuck Hallsted Interview – 120 minutes

1. How did the Walla Walla School District first become involved with GEAR UP? Are there any similar or related programs in the schools in addition to GEAR UP? What do they do?
2. How effective have the parent communication models been?
3. How have educational conditions generally improved because of GEAR UP?
4. Have school/parent relations improved with GEAR UP? What strategies do you think were the most effective? The least effective? Why?
5. What barriers do parents face to involvement?
6. What are specific challenges of the GEAR UP programs?
7.   How does the GEAR UP program solicit feedback?
8. How have the goals of GEAR UP been met, specifically with regard to Latinos? Have the programs been effective in addressing these goals?
9. What are the goals of GEAR UP the administration hopes to achieve in the WWSD? Have they changed in light of the past success?
10. Are these programs replacing what students get at home?
11. Are these programs sustainable? How will you ensure that GEAR UP programs continue?

Mike Gwinn and Marika Tomkins Interview – 60 minutes

1. What do you do as a Site Director?
2. What are the most critical needs of Latino students at Walla Walla High School?
3. What specific programs are offered that address these needs? How effective have these programs been, and why?
4. How have GEAR UP programs increased parental involvement? What strategies do you think were the most effective? The least effective? Why?
5. What barriers do parents face to involvement?
6. What are typical parent attitudes towards educational achievement?

7. How does GEAR UP influence students' college ambitions? Do most students at this school expect to enroll in college? Do you hear back from students who have graduated the program? Do you have any examples of students who really benefited from GEAR UP?
8. What effects have you observed from the individual case management programs?

Jerri Doyle Interview – 90 minutes

1. What do you do as a Site Director?
2. What are the most critical needs of Latino students at Garrison Middle School?
3. What GEAR UP programs have been implemented to address these needs?
4. What does professional development include?
5. Do all parents have access to school communication?
6. Why have Latino parents not utilized school offerings?
7. What are challenges you see in the GEAR UP programs at Garrison?
8. How have GEAR UP programs increased parental involvement? What strategies do you think were the most effective? The least effective? Why?
9. What barriers do parents face to involvement?
10. Do you think parents are more familiar with college preparatory information because of GEAR UP?
11. How does GEAR UP influence students' college ambitions? Do most students at this school expect to enroll in college?
12. What should be done to change these programs so as to meet the goals of GEAR UP?

Cindy Ortega Interview – 80 minutes

1. How did you hear about GEAR UP? Why did your child become involved?
2. In what ways are you involved with GEAR UP or other school events? Do you usually go to the events offered – why or why not?
3. What does the school do to tell you about events, parent-teacher conferences, and college information? Do these forms of communication work?
4. Tell me about the conferences – what are they like?
5. What does your child want to do after graduation? How do you feel about that?
6. What obstacles stand in the way of your child going to college? Do you feel like you have the support to overcome these obstacles?
7. If you child does want to go to college, what steps should you and your child take to make sure she can enroll? Who would you talk to?
8. How has the GEAR UP program benefited your child, and what could be changed to make it better?
9. How would the college process be different if you were bilingual?
10. What information do you wish someone would provide you with?
11. How many Latinos serve on school boards? What other ways are there to be involved?
12. Tell me about a time at school when you were treated differently than other parents.

Lucia Cruz and Estela Cruz Interview

1. How did you hear about GEAR UP? Why did your child become involved?

2. In what ways are you involved with GEAR UP or other school events? Do you usually go to the events offered – why or why not?
3. What does the school do to tell you about events, parent-teacher conferences, and college information? Do these forms of communication work?
4. Do you usually go to these events – why or why not?
5. Do you feel comfortable in the school? What would make it more comfortable?
6. How does your child do compared to other students?
7. What does your child want to do after graduation? How do you feel about that?
8. What obstacles stand in the way of your child going to college? Do you feel like you have the support to overcome these obstacles?
9. Tell me about a time at school when you were treated differently than other parents.
10. If you child does want to go to college, what steps should you and your child take to make sure she can enroll? Who would you talk to?
11. Do parents who didn't go to college have a harder time helping their kids?
12. What information do you wish someone would provide you with?
13. To Estela: Do a lot of other kids' parents talk about college with them like your mom does? Why or why not?
14. How would the college process be different if you spoke English?
15. Are many Latino parents involved in school? Why or why not?

Jennifer Torres and Edgar Gutierrez Interview – 60 minutes

1. How did you hear about GEAR UP? What made you decide to get involved?
2. Would you consider yourself a good student? In what ways?
3. Why do your parents want you to go to college?
4. Does speaking English affect whether or not parents are involved?
5. Do parents know about conferences and school programs? If not, why?
6. Why do they decide to go or not go? Do they want to know about opportunities to be involved?
7. How important is it for parents to be involved?
8. Is it more difficult for Latino kids to get into college?
9. What stereotypes are you referring to – are Latino kids perceived a certain way by teachers or other students?
10. Is it cool to be in AVID? How do other students feel about GEAR UP programs?
11. When you have questions about college, who do you talk to?
12. What ways could the school get more Latino parents to be involved?
13. Why aren't more Latino students involved in clubs?

Emma Jimenez Interview – 60 minutes

1. How did you hear about GEAR UP? What made you decide to get involved?
2. What have you done with GEAR UP? Are you a part of any programs, or have you gone to an event they organized? Do you feel like you participate more or less than other people? (or about the same…)
3. Would you consider yourself a good student? In what ways? How have these programs helped you to be a better student?
4. Why do some kids drop out of AVID and GEAR UP programs?

5. How important are grades to you - why do you think they matter? Is it cool to get good grades? Are people ever made fun of for doing homework and caring about grades?
6. What do you want to do after you graduate from high school - have you thought about going to college? Why do you want to go to college? Do you remember when you first thought you wanted to go to college?
7. What are things that high schoolers need to do if they want to go to college? If you have questions about college, who do you ask? What exactly do teachers tell you about going to college and the steps you should be taking?
8. Why do some kids decide not to go to college? Is it harder for Latino kids to go to college than other students? If you decide to go to college, what are problems that Latinos typically face?
9. Tell me about your parents. Are your parents involved at school – what sorts of activities do they come to? Are they involved more or less than other parents? Do they want you to go to college?
10. How much do your parents know about your grades and your goals after graduation? Do they ask you questions about what you're learning, help you with homework, or talk to your teachers?
11. If another student was interested in going to a GEAR UP event or participating in the AVID program, what would you tell them? What are your favorite and least favorite things about GEAR UP?

Isabel Salazar Interview – 45 minutes

1. How did you hear about GEAR UP and AVID? What made you decide to get involved?
2. What have you done with GEAR UP? Are you a part of any programs, or have you gone to an event they organized? Do you feel like you participate more or less than other people?
3. Would you consider yourself a good student? In what ways? Why do other kids drop out of AVID and GEAR UP programs?
4. How have these programs helped you to be a better student? What do you wish they helped you with?
5. How important are grades to you - why do you think they matter? Is it cool to get good grades? Are people ever made fun of for doing homework and caring about grades?
6. What do you want to do after you graduate from high school - have you thought about going to college? Why do you want to go to college?
7. What are things that high schoolers need to do if they want to go to college? If you have questions about college, who do you ask? What exactly do teachers tell you about going to college and the steps you should be taking?
8. Why do some kids decide not to go to college? Is it harder for Latino kids to go to college than other students? If you decide to go to college, what are problems that Latinos typically face?
9. Tell me about your parents. Are your parents involved at school – what sorts of activities do they come to? Are they involved more or less than other parents? Do they want you to go to college?
10. How much do your parents know about your grades and your goals after graduation? Do they ask you questions about what you're learning, help you with homework, or talk to your teachers?

11. If another student was interested in going to a GEAR UP event or participating in the AVID program, what would you tell them? What are your favorite and least favorite things about GEAR UP? What would you change to make it better for other Latino kids?

Maria Delgado Interview – 45 minutes

1. How did you hear about GEAR UP/AVID? What made you decide to get involved?
2. What have you done with GEAR UP? Are you a part of any programs, or have you gone to an event they organized? Do you feel like you participate more or less than other people? (or about the same…)
3. Would you consider yourself a good student? In what ways? Why do other kids drop out of AVID and GEAR UP programs?
4. How have these programs helped you to be a better student? What do you wish they helped you with?
5. How important are grades to you - why do you think they matter? Is it cool to get good grades? Are people ever made fun of for doing homework and caring about grades?
6. What do you want to do after you graduate from high school - have you thought about going to college? Why do you want to go to college?
7. Do you remember when you first thought you wanted to go to college?
8. What are things that high schoolers need to do if they want to go to college? If you have questions about college, who do you ask? What exactly do teachers tell you about going to college and the steps you should be taking?
9. Why do some kids decide not to go to college? Is it harder for Latino kids to go to college than other students? If you decide to go to college, what are problems that Latinos typically face?
10. Tell me about your parents. Are your parents involved at school – what sorts of activities do they come to? Are they involved more or less than other parents? Do they want you to go to college?
11. How much do your parents know about your grades and your goals after graduation? Do they ask you questions about what you're learning, help you with homework, or talk to your teachers?
12. If another student was interested in going to a GEAR UP event or participating in the AVID program, what would you tell them? What are your favorite and least favorite things about GEAR UP?
13. Why is it important to you that your mom goes to events?

Bibliography

Auerbach, Susan. "Engaging Latino Parents in Supporting College Pathways: Lessons from a College Access Program." *Journal of Hispanic Higher Education* 3 no. 2 (2004): 125-145.

Bermudez, Andrea, and Judith Márquez. "An Examination of a Four-way Collaborative to Increase Parental Involvement in the Schools." *Journal of Educational Issue of Language Minority Students* 16 (1996): 1-16.

Contreras, Frances. "Literature Review of Best Practices in Intervention at the Middle and High School Levels." Prepared for the Early Outreach Partnership Project, February 2009.

Contreras, Frances, and Tom Stritikus. "Understanding Opportunities to Learn for Latino Students in Washington." Report submitted to the Washington State Commission on Hispanic Affairs, December 2008.

Delgado-Gaitan, Concha. "Schools Matters in the Mexican-American Home: Socializing Children to Education." *American Educational Research Journal* 29 no. 3 (1992): 495 – 513.

Down, Andrew, Jesus Martin, Michelle Fossum, Sybil Martinez, Maria Solorio, and Hipolito Martinez. "Parents Teaching Parents: A Career and College Knowledge Program for Latino Families." *Journal of Latinos and Education* 7 no. 3 (2008): 227-240.

Gándara, Patricia, Katherine Larson, Russell Rumberger, and Hugh Mehan. "Capturing Latino Students in the Academic Pipeline." *Brief Series* 10 (1998): 1-10.

Gándara, Patricia. *Over the Ivy Wall: the Educational Mobility of Low-income Chicanos*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995.

Garcia, Eugene. *Hispanic Education in the United States: Raíces y Alas*. Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield, 2001.

GEAR UP. "GEAR UP" http://www.gearup.wa.gov/

Higher Education Coordinating Board. "Washington State GEAR UP" http://www.hecb.wa.gov/collegeprep/gu/guindex.asp

Jasis, Pablo. "Convivencia to Empowerment: Latino Parent Organizing at La Familia." *The High School Journal* 7 (2004): 32-42.

López, Gerardo. "Redefining Parental Involvement: Lessons from High-performing, Migrant-impacted Schools." *American Educational Research Journal* 38 no. 2 (2001).

Lopez, Gerardo. "The Value of Hard Work: Lessons on Parent Involvement from an (Im)migrant Household." *Harvard Educational Review* 71 no. 3 (2001): 416-437.

Lucas, Tamara, Henze, Rosemary, and Ruben Donato. "Promoting the Success of Latino Language-minority Students: an Exploratory Study of Six High Schools." *Harvard Educational Review* 60 no. 3 (1990): 315-340.

McDonough, Patricia. *Choosing Colleges: How Social Class and Schools Structure Opportunity*. Albany: New York Press, 1997.

McDonough, Patricia. "The School to College Transition: Challenges and Prospects." Report prepared for the American Council on Education Center for Policy Analysis, 2004.

Plank, Stephen and Will Jordan. "Effects of Information, Guidance, and Actions on Postsecondary Destinations: A Study of Talent Loss." *American Education Journal* 38 no. 4 (2001): 947.

Reyes, Pedro, Scribner, Jay, and Alicia Scribner. *Lessons From High-performing Hispanic Schools: Creating Learning Communities*. Williston: Teachers College Press, 1999.

Rosario, José and Felipe Vargas. "Making Something of Themselves: Latino Soul Making in an Urban Setting." Indianapolis: Center for Urban and Multicultural Education, 2006.

Rothestein-Fisch, Carrie and Elise Trumbull. *Managing Diverse Classrooms: How to Build on Students' Cultural Strengths*. Alexandria: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 2008.

Schoenfelder, Caitlyn. "The Larger Ecology of Latino Success in Secondary Education: Why Some Latino Students are Beating the Odds." *The State of the State for Washington Latinos 2006*. Walla Walla: Whitman College, 2006.

Torres, Celina, and Amalia Márquez. *Reaching Higher Ground: Parental Outreach Programs at the Postsecondary Level*. Los Angeles: Tomás Rivera Policy Institute, 2005.

Torrez, Nena. "Developing Parent Information Frameworks that Support College Preparation for Latino Students." *The High School Journal* 2 (2004): 54-59.

U.S. Department of Education, Office of Planning, Evaluation and Policy Development, Policy and Program Studies Service, *Early Outcomes of the GEAR UP Program—Final Report*. Washington, D.C., 2008.

Valdes, Guadalupe. *Con Respeto: Bridging the Distances Between Culturally Diverse Families and Schools*. New York: Teachers College, 1996.

Van Kannel-Ray, Nancy, Warren Lacefield, and Pamela Zeller. "Academic Case Managers: Evaluating a Middle School Intervention for Children At-risk." *Journal of Multidisciplinary Evaluation* 5 no. 10 (2008): 21.

Volle, Kathryn. "Missed Opportunities: A New Look at Disadvantaged College Aspirants." Washington, D.C.: The Education Resources Institute, 1997.

Zarate, Maria Estela. *Understanding Latino Parental Involvement in Education*. Los Angeles: Tomás Rivera Policy Institute, 2007.