



New Jersey Consortium  
for Immigrant Children

# The Latinx Experience in Schools: A Policy and Action Agenda



# Introduction

On January 14, 2023, the Latino Action Network Foundation (LANF) and the New Jersey Consortium for Immigrant Children (NJCIC) partnered to host an education roundtable centered around the Latino/a/x experience in New Jersey Schools. The Latino Action Network Foundation (LANF) and their partners at the New Jersey Consortium for Immigrant Children (NJCIC) have long advocated for educational equity within New Jersey. Unfortunately, alongside their Black peers, Latinx students in New Jersey face deep educational inequities, which can have long-standing effects on their self-view, and future trajectories, amongst various other consequences.

For this reason, LANF gathered various stakeholders, ranging from students and teachers to educational leaders and advocates, to determine what the key issues were facing New Jersey Latinx students. In addition, the roundtable discussion resulted in key policy recommendations and actionable items to guide our collective advocacy.

## Summary of Roundtable Proceedings

Prior to the roundtable, participants were presented with various resources to consider in order to help facilitate discussion (See Appendix A).

On the day of the roundtable, Mark Weber, from the New Jersey Policy Perspective (NJPP), and Lady Jimenez-Torres, from NJCIC, provided brief presentations. At this point, participants were invited to ask questions about the presentations or the resources that were shared in advance. This portion of the roundtable produced fruitful discussions regarding the many issues facing Latinx students, which the policy recommendations and action items would subsequently address.

Afterward, participants joined Zoom breakout sessions to discuss potential recommendations to address the issues and barriers Latinx students experience in New Jersey schools. This discussion was guided by the following questions:

- After reviewing the research and data resources provided, what are the unique challenges currently impacting Latino/Latina/Latinx/Latine students in today's school system?
- On a State level, what new policies should we advocate for with the gubernatorial administration – and what legislation and programming efforts should we advocate for?
- What sorts of deficiencies exist in schools and for students and how can we best address those issues?

Upon returning from breakout sessions, participants were able to share their recommendations with the larger group and vote on whether or not they supported the recommendations as written, or with proposed modifications. Any recommendation that did not receive a yes vote from all participants was removed from the final agenda. LANF seeks unanimous approval of all recommendations to ensure that all roundtable participants fully stand by our finalized agenda.

This round table report was drafted during a time in which educational equity has been threatened multiple times by various state and federal entities. For example, most recently, several Supreme Court rulings have been overturned which have been significant in helping Latinx students and other students of color achieve a higher education. In *Students for Fair Admissions, Inc. v. President and Fellows of Harvard College*, decided on June 29, 2023, the Supreme Court's majority decision overturned the precedent of affirmative action, which allowed colleges and universities to consider race when granting admissions to their institution. In understanding the issues facing Latinx students, the roundtable participants were provided with the following information to understand some of the conditions in the New Jersey School system.

## LAN v the State of NJ

LANF's advocacy around educational equity often centers around an insidious issue that impacts all students in New Jersey but has the greatest detrimental effect on Black and Latinx youth. That issue is De Facto Segregation in New Jersey schools. While many believe school segregation to be a thing of the past, left behind with the landmark Supreme Court Ruling in *Brown v Board of Education of Topeka* (1954), the issue persists to this day. According to a 2017 UCLA report, New Jersey was ranked the 6th most segregated state for black students and 7th for Latinx students<sup>1</sup>. This is because, as they further reported, a majority of students of color attend schools that are non-white; between 2016-2017, 107,709 students of color attended 99% non-white schools<sup>1</sup>. Unfortunately, segregated schools have various impacts on all students. For example, diverse school environments have many positive impacts, such as combatting prejudiced views and enhancing a student's ability to interact in a diverse society. Diverse schools have also been shown to improve test scores and grades for low-income black and Latinx students and enhance their likelihood to graduate and attend college<sup>1</sup>.

Many historical and present-day factors contribute to present-day segregation in New Jersey schools. For example, currently, New Jersey institutes zip code barriers, requiring students to attend schools in the municipality in which they live, with some exceptions. The municipalities, and as a result these schools, are often very homogeneous with individuals in the communities often being very similar in terms of race, ethnicity, socioeconomic characteristics, et cetera. While residential segregation continues to be perpetuated to this day, it is largely rooted in historically racist housing policies and practices, such as redlining and block-busting. In fact, a recent report from NJPP even revealed an overlap between the current racial composition of New Jersey School Districts and a 1939 redlining map<sup>2</sup>.

While segregation in schools is not legally mandated today, it is, in effect, still happening. This is known as De Facto Segregation. *LAN v the State of NJ* is a lawsuit filed in 2018 that challenges segregation in New Jersey schools and calls on the commissioner of education to prepare and submit to the court a remediation plan for school segregation in New Jersey.

## NJCIC Report

In November 2021, NJCIC and partner organizations released the report - [English Learners In New Jersey Exposing Inequities And Expanding Opportunities In The Wake Of The Pandemic](#). The report shares the experiences of New Jersey English Learners (ELs), immigrant students and immigrant parents, and English as a second language (ESL) and bilingual teachers, administrators, and counselors within the public education system in New Jersey, thus illuminating the need for change in districts across the state. This report was only a small glimpse into some of the inequities English Language Learners face. The trend continues to show that the Latinx student population has steadily increased in New Jersey<sup>3</sup>.

Some of the insights based on the surveyed population, which included ESL and bilingual educators, administrators, and counselors and focus groups with students and parents of ELs include:

- Lack of compliance with state regulations for the Bilingual Education Code
- Reports of lack of language accommodations for ELs and lack of meaningful communication with parents
- No attendance recovery policy at their school and schools failing to communicate their policy to ELs parents/ guardians
- Lack of or incorrect reporting of drop-out rates for ELs (small suburban districts)
- Lack of cultural and language-accessible Mental Health Services for ELs.

This report included some policy recommendations such as:

- Develop an accountability process to make sure every school district complies with the Bilingual Education Code
- Create a “complaint investigation” system to react to reports of violations
- Revise the Code to require and improve language accommodations for parents and students.
- Mandate professional development for educators and their staff
- Create career pathways for Mental Health Practitioners and Bilingual Educators.

Many of the findings from this report resonated among conversations during the Education Roundtable event. Particularly, both emphasized the lack of diversity in the teaching profession and other professional services offered in school.

## NJPP Presentation

In addition to NJPP articles shared with participants in advance of the roundtable (see Appendix A) Mark Weber from NJPP presented for the roundtable participants. Mark’s presentation discussed how, because it relies so heavily on property taxes, there is deep inequity in school funding. Mark also covered NJPP’s aforementioned work discussing systemic racism and educational inequity, specifically how practices such as redlining, blockbusting, and infrastructural development have had a deep impact on property wealth and, in turn, also impact school funding inequity. Additionally, regarding funding, Mark discussed how, according to the funding standard established by the School Funding Reform Act, many New Jersey students are in underfunded schools. While many schools in New Jersey are underfunded, those that are severely underfunded (by over \$5,000) are largely majority Black and Latinx schools. Mark also discussed the consequences of underfunding which included the following:

- “Smaller staff salaries per pupil”
- “Less competitive staff salaries”
- “Lower test scores”
- “Less student ‘growth’”
- “Fewer staff per student in non-tested subjects (arts, PE, foreign languages)”
- “Less experienced teachers”

This also included limited mental health resources for students of color, such as school counselors.

Finally, regarding funding gaps, NJPP data revealed gaps in COVID-19 school readiness. The following statements were determined using data from September and December 2020. Their findings revealed that Black and Latinx students were likelier to be receiving education in remote-only school districts, while White students were likelier to have experienced hybrid education settings (ie. a combination of in-person and remote learning). They also found that severely underfunded schools (by over \$5,000) were likely to be experiencing remote learning environments.

This presentation also covered the New Jersey and nationwide teacher shortage, with fewer teaching candidates in New Jersey than there were a decade ago. NJPP’s data revealed that there were 6,587 completers of teacher preparation programs in New Jersey in 2008-2009 versus just 2,883 in 2018-2019 and 3,017 in 2019-2020. Additionally, there are fewer teacher candidates per student in New Jersey, fewer potential teachers of color, and fewer college students choosing to study to become a teacher, amongst several other factors. In understanding some potential reasons for this shortage, NJPP also uncovered that there is a substantial pay gap between teachers and “college-educated non-teachers”.

## Issues Raised by Participants

Aside from the issues that were presented prior to the roundtable discussion, the following issues were raised by participants during the discussion portion of the roundtable.

### Lack of Resources and Information

Roundtable participants raised several concerns regarding accessibility, especially in terms of language access and the availability of several in-school services. Specifically, participants highlighted the need for increased access to information, language services, role models and mentors, and mental health services as it relates to Latinx students and their parents or guardians. While some of these services already exist, they have limited adaptability to meet the unique needs of Latinx communities. For example, to be equipped to handle specific stressors faced by Latinx individuals in school settings, language accommodations, and cultural competency training are necessary for mental health providers.

While terms like “access” and “accessibility” will be widely used throughout this report, participants indicated that accessibility alone will not solve such issues. Along with accessibility, we need the availability and acceptability of resources and services. This is to ensure that they are not only provided but can also be effectively utilized by parents and students. In addition, outreach is a vital component of this framework. Participants shared several community stories regarding limited awareness of state-specific programs and resources which community members may qualify for, such as Cover All Kids. As such, enhancing awareness of these programs is necessary. Access to existing resources and information is further limited due to language barriers for parents or guardians whose first language is not English, as this information is publicly presented and widely available in English. And even when information is released in languages other than English, it is frequently not presented comprehensively, especially for parents or guardians with little to no formal education.



Lastly, participants delved into systemic barriers impacting the educational experience of the Latinx student population. For example, participants emphasized the lack of a compliance framework within the bilingual education code, which impacts Latinx students as many are bilingual. There were also discussions about the lack of a protected complaint system for students, parents, and staff, regarding inadequacies for Bilingual Education Programs. Furthermore, they discussed the lack of language-appropriate, school-based services as a workforce development issue due to a lack of career pathways for bilingual educators, special education educators, clinical support staff, and student support services staff. As part of community stories, participants shared that the lack of a significant number of bilingual educators, specialists, and student support staff, can lead to staff burnout as these staff often become the go-to person for all matters related to language access, even if they are not fully trained or certified as bilingual service providers.

## Higher Education Preparation

Another example of the lack of resources that participants have observed in schools includes the lack of resources devoted to preparing students for higher education. This is especially crucial for first-generation students, who may be less familiar with the processes and need more guidance. Greater resources devoted to this can also motivate students to apply to and consider higher education as an option.

## Special Education Processes

Participants further highlighted a lack of information regarding specific school procedures. For example, they specifically discussed how processes related to IDEA (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act), can be particularly intimidating. Special education processes are littered with technical jargon. A process that is, in general, already very difficult to understand can be complicated if resources and communications are not available in your native language. Additionally, there are not many staff members that can effectively evaluate students in their native language or communicate results, and discuss educational plans with parents or guardians in their preferred language.

## Parent or Guardian Involvement

In addition, participants discussed that parents and guardians specifically tend to be underinformed, especially in their primary language, regarding their children's needs at school. This is further exacerbated by studies that reveal that a large proportion of US adults tend to have relatively low literacy rates, which can impact their ability to comprehend informational forms that are sent home with students<sup>4</sup>. In addition, while several school resources and information may be available online, participants discussed that not everyone will have access due to a lack of technology equipment, and consistent wifi, among other issues. And, even when they do have access to such resources, participants identified their own experiences with state and government websites as being confusing and difficult to navigate.

## Teaching to the Test

Furthermore, available resources need to be better allocated. For example, participants discussed the influence of testing and other metrics on how schools allocate their resources. They mentioned that schools tend to teach to the test and funnel all their time and resources into preparing for state standardized tests as they draw near, thus valuing scores and rankings over actual student learning. This issue is further exacerbated by the media attention that school rankings receive, such as USNews School Rankings. Meanwhile, other non-academic programs and courses suffer from diminishing funding and attention.

## Needs of Various “Sub-groups”

While many Latinx students and parents tend to experience similar needs within schools, participants also identified specific sub-groups within the Latinx community with unmet needs and barriers.

### Immigrant Students

One sub-group identified by participants was immigrant students. These students need different levels of support, depending on how long ago they arrived in the United States and their familial support at the time of their arrival. Even in this group of recently arrived immigrant students, there is a varying degree of trauma associated with their journey to the United States. Thus, participants discussed a lack of trauma-informed resources and training for school staff and other professionals working with students. They also mentioned their lack of general knowledge about immigration processes and different ways to arrive. Other issues specific to this group include bullying due to a broad variety of factors, such as their literacy skills, language proficiency, and stereotypes. Furthermore, this sub-group may experience circumstances that require further support or different levels of support. Such circumstances include arriving in the United States as a teenager or adolescent, being an independent student with no parental support, or experiencing homelessness.

### English Language Learners

The following subgroup discussed were English Language Learner (ELL) students. Because they are still learning English, this provides unique needs for ELL students throughout K-12 education. Participants highlighted High School ELL students as they may experience additional challenges. In particular, first-generation students interested in a college education, face barriers as they are not familiar with navigating financial aid, college courses, and college life.

### Students with Disabilities and Special Education Students

Students with Disabilities and Special Education students also have specific needs. Students with physical disabilities have infrastructural needs which are crucial to navigating and their comfort on school grounds. As for mental health needs, NJPP has documented existing gaps in the availability of mental health resources for Black and Latinx students as compared to White students<sup>5</sup>. This indicated that schools with a majority of Black and Latinx students lack adequate resources to meet the mental health needs of their students. While lacking these resources more deeply impacts special education students, the effects will impact other students as well who may at times need additional support or mental health support as well.

### Opportunity Youth

Participants also discussed how certain sub-groups tend to be stigmatized. Specifically, they discussed the stigma associated with the term “drop-outs” and the stigma attached to students who decide to or are unable to continue their education. For this reason, participants discussed the importance of referring to these students as “opportunity youth” and potentially highlighting paths other than just higher education.

## Data Needs

Participants also discussed a greater need for disaggregated data, which is important for understanding the effectiveness of programs, education policy, et cetera. Additionally, participants considered how various programs are implemented with no cost-benefit analysis or evidence of their effectiveness. Furthermore, they discussed the importance of collecting broader geographical data so that the entire state is covered, both urban and rural areas alike.

## Funding

Because a lot of the issues experienced by Latinx students in New Jersey are systemic, funding is only a part of the puzzle. However, it is still an important issue that needs to be addressed. One concern participants raised was that of transparency, with participants wondering how money is spent. Participants specifically questioned how schools allocated dollars from the American Rescue Plan Act of 2023. Additionally, participants also mentioned that it is important to consider whether schools have the funding to feasibly implement programs that will be discussed within our policy recommendations.

## Pandemic Learning Loss

Of course, participants also discussed the recent COVID-19 global pandemic and how it impacted student learning, especially with students having to learn behind a computer screen instead of in a typical classroom setting. Studies have shown how the pandemic has had any effects on Latinx students, and students of color. For example, one UCLA study exploited how the pandemic caused many Latinx and other students of color to cancel their plans for higher education<sup>6</sup>.

## Defining Success

It is also important to consider how schools define success and the culture that this breeds. In reality, success varies from person to person. Individuals may define success in many different ways whether that be learning English, getting an associate's degree at a community college, obtaining post-graduate degrees, or seeking career and technical education (CTE), amongst a variety of other definitions of success. For this reason, all pathways to success need to be considered and valued within a K-12 education system. Unfortunately, this is not often the case. Schools tend to have a single view of success, with test scores and pathways to higher education being at the forefront of the typical definition of success within the education system.

## Future Outlook and Academic Trajectory

Additionally, when considering a student's future outlook, it is vital to ensure that schools are properly equipping them with adequate resources catered to their specific needs to meet certain benchmarks. Various aspects have been shown to be vital in influencing students' future outlooks and achievements. For example, early education has been shown to influence high school graduation, job earnings, and homeownership, amongst a variety of other aspects<sup>7</sup>. This is why it is important to ensure that, from early education on, schools provide students with the proper tools and environment to meet their educational benchmarks. For Latinx students, especially those who are foreign-born, it is often rarer that schools have resources readily and easily available to them to ensure that they can meet these benchmarks.



## Intersectionality

Finally, participants acknowledged the interconnectedness of all of the issues that Latinx students face in school. There tends to be a ripple effect where one issue influences another. Participants provided examples, such as how some schools with greater resources provide their students with greater opportunities to engage in dual enrollment courses, while this is not even an option in other schools. This results in students in schools with dual enrollment courses having greater opportunities to graduate with an associate's degree through their high school program, and in turn, save time and money. Considering the interconnectedness of such issues and how they can influence other areas, it is important that such issues are not addressed in isolation. Broad, systemic changes are needed to ameliorate all of the barriers that impact Latinx students in the school environment. As we move forward to the recommendations, this is crucial to remember.

## Participant Recommendations

After discussing these issues, participants began to consider multiple recommendations to address some of the identified barriers and concerns. Below is a list of recommendations that participants unanimously agreed upon.

### Civil Rights and Advocacy

One of the recommendations was centered around creating an Office for Educational Equity within the Division of Civil Rights/ Office of the Attorney General. As opposed to going to the Department of Education (DOE) to report any complaints regarding education equity or civil rights concerns, students, parents, guardians, and others can directly submit complaints to this new, specialized office. Thus, this would remove the DOE's involvement in such proceedings in favor of a more impartial office.

Additionally, participants re-emphasized that civil rights can be a “murky” area, with parents sometimes not understanding its full capabilities or that they have the option to file complaints. As such, part of this recommendation would include enhancing awareness so that individuals understand that they can file complaints within this office. This office would also have the task of creating resources and disseminating information to enhance clarity around what civil rights are, how to file complaints, et cetera.

Participants also emphasized independent students' needs in this area. In creating this office and associated resources, it is essential to consider how students who do not have parents or guardians can advocate for themselves. This is especially important because they tend to have limitations in their ability to be heard, for example, by not being able to be involved or have representation on the school board. As such, as part of this conversation, participants considered the importance of allowing non-citizen parents and independent students to have the right to vote in school board elections

Another recommendation participants discussed was having a legal advocate and ombudsman for students across district levels. As such, this would not be a single office at the state level, but the ombudsman would be paid for at the state level and would be present state-wide. A state-wide office, ideally the aforementioned Office for Educational Equity would be tasked with supervising the ombudsmen by having individuals at each district report to them. Having advocates coupled with the new Office for Educational Equity, participants hope that students would have multiple pathways for complaints that are free of retaliation. In fact, within these pathways, participants envisioned these advocates being one level below filing a complaint to the Office for Educational Equity in terms of escalating concerns.

However, this option would allow individuals to bring a third party in to help navigate and speak with the school district. Another option that would reduce retaliation would be creating a Student Advocacy and Empowerment Office. This would create pathways for educating students, teachers, and administrative staff so that they can prioritize concerns around discrimination and ensure that such concerns are properly elevated. Based on personal experiences, a student participant highlighted that complaints tend to be more effective when they have teacher support. Thus, this would create a complaint process that is more effective for students and a protected framework for teachers and school staff who are reporting incidents as well.

Similarly, another recommendation was creating an Office for Parent Advocates within every school district, which would also be state-funded. This would be someone who advocates for the interests of parents and guardians. Typically, if parents and guardians have financial and social capital, they could have lawyers advocate for them. Being that this is not feasible for all parents, Parent Advocates could ensure that all parents and guardians, regardless of what resources they have available, have someone to advocate for them.

This, as well as the Office for Educational Equity, were highlighted as methods to enhance student empowerment, especially considering that many students, such as independent students, need to be their own advocates. To enhance trust in these advocates as well as in the Office for Educational Equity, participants discussed that it is important to make it clear that these are on the civil side of the Attorney General's Office and are not related to law enforcement. Additionally, integrating the ombudsman into the school environment and community could help to that end. Finally, it is important for the ombudsman and the Office for Educational Equity to provide a confidentiality disclaimer so anyone who needs their services knows that information will not be shared or used against them.

## Implicit Bias Training at a School District Level

Participants discussed the need for various types of professional development training beyond educators. These trainings should focus on a variety of subjects to expand their knowledge and awareness of the intersectionality of experiences students face. Focusing on the Latinx student population, which can also include immigrant students and students of mixed-status families, participants also discussed the importance of trauma-informed approaches. In offering the following recommendation, we focus on approaches to education, establishment, and implementation of these recommendations at a school district level.

### Educate

#### *Mandatory Training for Teachers and School Staff on Bias Training and Cultural Humility*

Recommendation: We propose the implementation of specific training for all teachers and school staff members as part of their professional development. This training should focus on raising awareness about implicit bias, promoting cultural sensitivity, and fostering equitable practices in the classroom. Equipping educators and school staff with the necessary tools will lead to a more inclusive learning environment that takes into account the diverse needs and backgrounds of students.

#### *Enhance Understanding of Trauma-Informed Approach*

Recommendation: It is crucial to support teachers and school staff in better understanding the impact of community violence, societal stressors, and trauma on students. By providing professional development and resources, schools can help educators and school staff respond to inquiries using a trauma-informed approach that recognizes signs of distress. Understanding the community's history, changing situations, and other societal stressors will equip school staff to provide appropriate support to students who have been or are currently exposed to adverse environments.

### *Micro-aggressions and Intersectional Experiences*

Recommendation: It is important to educate staff and students on the impact of microaggressions and intersectional experiences students of color and immigrants face. Further, it is vital to develop strategies to address microaggressions experienced by students from teachers, peers, and the school environment. Schools should prioritize creating safe spaces for students to discuss these experiences and implement proactive measures to prevent and respond to micro-aggressions.

## Establish

### *Establish a Protected Framework for Reporting Incidents*

Recommendation: Schools must create a protected framework that encourages teachers, school staff, and students to report incidents without fear of retaliation, as was discussed in previous recommendations. Thus this recommendation would work in conjunction with others. It is important to establish uniform protocols for reporting that ensure confidentiality for those reporting incidents. By fostering a safe reporting environment, we can address issues promptly, promote transparency, and maintain accountability in school districts.

### *Enhance the Complaint Process for Students*

Recommendation: This framework also requires strengthening the effectiveness of the complaint process for students by providing clear guidelines, accessible channels, and additional support. It also recognizes that complaints are more impactful when supported by teachers and possibly involve multiple teachers in the resolution process. Improving the complaint process ensures that students' voices are heard and promotes a sense of accountability within the school system.

## Implement

### *Implement Restorative Justice Approaches for Accountability*

Recommendation: We encourage school districts to adopt restorative justice approaches as an alternative to punitive disciplinary measures. Restorative justice emphasizes accountability, healing, and repairing the harm caused by incidents. It starts by creating an environment where students can openly discuss their experiences and in doing so, foster a sense of community with fellow students. In specific incidents, a conversation is fostered between involved students led by school leadership, through the use of open-ended questions, open dialogue, and reflection of actions. Finally, the re-entry of a student, after disciplinary action, is led by a welcoming mode that focuses on wraparound support and promotes student accountability and achievement<sup>8</sup>.

These measures will promote equity, foster cultural understanding, and ensure that all students have a safe and conducive learning environment.

## Higher Education and Alternative Pathways

Participants also discussed recommendations for making higher education more accessible to Latinx students. Specifically, they discussed that this is important to enhance the number of dual language future professionals. They suggested that states create incentives, including tuition reimbursement and loan forgiveness, for students who commit to going into bilingual education and teaching, since there is a shortage. They also suggested that forgiveness be expanded to other school staff as well, such as evaluators or Learning Disabilities Teacher Consultants (LDTC) so that more efficient services can be provided to Latinx students by these professionals as well. Furthermore, participants discussed the process of applying to higher education and how Latinx parents should receive more information and resources in their language and that are culturally sensitive to feel more comfortable with the various aspects of this process.

One example they provided was the FAFSA and how some parents may need to be made comfortable with sharing their financial information to complete this application. Participants also highlighted that Higher Education is not the only pathway students take and, thus, resources and information regarding different post-high school opportunities should also be made available, especially so students are aware of the different options that are available to them.

## Funding

Participants also suggested that there should be increased funding for schools in districts where students of color are the majority. This is especially important considering the fact that low-funded schools are being evaluated using the same metrics as schools with greater amounts of funding. To ensure that students in low-funded schools can achieve these high standards, funding needs to be made equitable across school districts. This would begin with first ensuring that SFRA is fully-funded, and then discussing whether that is sufficient for the school, which, generally, it would not be<sup>9</sup>. This recommendation not only considers how to ensure that sufficient funds are made available to these schools but also ensures that funding is allocated efficiently. For example, this would mean ensuring that budgets are equitable, with sufficient funding going to special education resources, ESL resources, and various other areas that are vital to student learning and to meet the needs of Latinx and other students with specific needs. This portion of the recommendation requires internal infrastructure and supports for schools to understand how to efficiently and wisely utilize their funds.

## Data

To address data needs, participants established that foundations can apply for grants or collaborate with organizations and educational institutions to gather data on the effectiveness of programs, understand how effective resources created for Latinx students are, and understand the needs of impacted populations, amongst various addressing various other data needs. Collecting such data is vital because advocacy can tend to be hampered by a lack of data; we need the numbers to support our claims. Additionally, they discussed an increased need for state data collection and data disaggregation across programs and school districts. Disaggregation of data can help us focus on the populations that we are really concerned about, so it is important to ensure that the state government is disaggregating data. However, this would require advocates to provide more specificity around what the data needs are. Finally, they stated that, once we do have more data tailored to Latinx students and their needs, it is important to bring it to the New Jersey State Legislature, especially the Latinx caucus, so that they can be informed on the issues facing Latinx students and what policies changes need to be subsequently be made.

## Community-Based Solutions

Community-based solutions were also identified as potential solutions to the issues Latinx students face within New Jersey schools. As such, participants encourage schools to foster the integration of community members and community-based organizations in schools. An example of this would be when teachers invite professionals to speak in their classrooms, they can be encouraged to reach out to members of the community so that members are integrated into the school setting and students see their communities represented in the school environment. They also would encourage formal partnerships between schools and the community. For example, this includes enhancing the presence of Community-Based Organizations (CBOs) within the school environment through state funding and investment in community grants. Participants who have experience with or as a part of CBOs discussed how they often operate in fragmented ways; this effort can bring them together in collaboration with local schools which can in turn increase their collective reach and effectiveness.

This recommendation also requires outreach to enhance the awareness of CBOs and various other members of the community. Participants specifically discussed LANF searching for a grant that would allow us to utilize our statewide network of Latino CBOs for parent organizing. This would be a vehicle for delivering this information and school-community partnership directly into communities by providing community members with information and mentoring. The outreach would directly target parents who have children in public schools to engage in a parent-organizing model.

## Resources and Information

Participants also discussed several potential solutions to address the lack of resources and information or the inaccessibility of resources and information. First, they discussed the importance of creating accountability for access to information for parents in their own language at every school district level. This includes having interpreters available in every meeting, such as school board meetings or IEP (Individualized Education Plan) meetings. The interpreters should not simply be Spanish speakers but professional interpreters hired by the schools. Simultaneous interpretation is a skill, just because someone speaks both the languages being interpreted does not mean they have the skills to successfully and seamlessly interpret. It is also important to make information from such meetings understandable to all, even those who may not be familiar with specific terms and concepts. So, schools must also provide context at meetings such as defining what an IEP is to parents. This also includes addressing literacy challenges. It is not just important to provide resources to all, but also to make sure that they are understandable to all, including their context, regardless of literacy level.

Furthermore, participants discussed creating and disseminating resource guides and directories for parents, in multiple languages. While there are currently resource guides that exist, it is important to enhance their reach through outreach, translating the directories, and making them easier to find. Additionally, these resource directories would need to incorporate resources that address the unique needs of the school community, including that of undocumented students and parents, independent students, English Language Learners, etc.

## Representation

Another issue participants sought to address through their recommendations was representation throughout the New Jersey Department of Education, including teachers, administrative staff, and state-level officials. Specifically, participants identified a need for increased representation in leadership roles at the state level related to education policy. This includes the State Board of Education, which influences what schools allocate their money towards and the overall New Jersey education system. Thus, it is important to influence the School Board Election process to get more representation of the Latinx community. Part of this process includes public education and outreach to ensure that there is a greater public understanding of the board election process, how this process works and impacts school performance, and the importance of voting for your school board members, especially amongst the Latinx community. Additionally, the participants recommended that the legislature work on a set of bills to provide incentives with the purpose of diversifying the teaching profession. Such measures would include loan forgiveness and tuition reimbursement for those that pursue degrees in education. This also includes creating pathways for bilingual educators and service providers.



## Immigrant Student Needs

Participants also discussed recommendations for programs that support the needs of newcomer students and their families. These programs would need to provide holistic social and educational support to newcomers. To implement these programs, participants suggested identifying school districts serving communities that are in immediate need of such a program. These would be communities with a high number of newcomers. Once these supports are in place, they suggested that school staff need to identify classes or subjects where newcomer students need more support. This would be done on a case-by-case basis, where each student would be identified to understand their individual needs. One specific resource that participants advocated for, however, was a universally available technology basics course for students and their families.

Additionally, they suggested that undocumented parents and guardians be educated and empowered to learn about and engage in the school-based decisions that impact their children's education. For example, part of this includes advocating so that the School Board election process allows non-citizen parents and students who are independent the right to vote.

Finally, participants advocated for implementing a safe zone policy for school districts and for schools to follow related protocols in case ICE or other law enforcement attempt to make unlawful arrests in schools. As part of the DHS-sensitive locations, schools are safe havens for immigrant students and families, these schools should be formally protected with such protocols, and accountability measures, in place.

## Conclusion

The Latinx community is a non-homogenous group with varying needs and concerns. As such, it is imperative that these differing needs are addressed, especially in the school setting to ensure that all resources are conducive to student learning and success. Unfortunately, as it stands, the New Jersey school system does not have all the resources needed to enhance Latinx student well-being and performance in the school environment. However, with the implementation of the above recommendations, we are a small step closer to ensuring true equality for Latinx students in schools and that they are in an environment that truly caters to and considers their unique needs.

Thank you to all the participants who, with their unique expertise and lived experience, helped develop these recommendations.

# Resources

- 1 Orfield, G., Ee, J., & Coughlan, R. (2017). New Jersey's Segregated Schools: Trends and Paths Forward. UCLA: The Civil Rights Project. Retrieved from <https://www.civilrightsproject.ucla.edu/research/k-12-education/integration-and-diversity/new-jerseys-segregated-schools-trends-and-paths-forward/New-Jersey-report-final-110917.pdf>
- 2 Baker, B., & Weber, M. (2021). Separate and Unequal: Racial and Ethnic Segregation and the Case for School Funding Reparations in New Jersey - New Jersey Policy Perspective. Retrieved 11 October 2021, from <https://www.njpp.org/publications/report/separate-and-unequal-racial-and-ethnic-segregation-and-the-case-for-school-funding-reparations-in-new-jersey/>
- 3 New Jersey Student Demographics . Education Law Center. (2022, July 7). <https://edlawcenter.org/research/data-research.html>
- 4 Nietzel, M. T. (2022, October 12). Low literacy levels among U.S. adults could be costing the economy \$2.2 trillion a year. Forbes. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/michaelnietzel/2020/09/09/low-literacy-levels-among-us-adults-could-be-costing-the-economy-22-trillion-a-year/?sh=56d6cdcc4c90>
- 5 Weber, M. (2022, September 7). New Jersey's black students suffer a decline in access to school mental health staff - New Jersey Policy Perspective. New Jersey Policy Perspective -. <https://www.njpp.org/publications/report/new-jerseys-black-students-suffer-a-decline-in-access-to-school-mental-health-staff/>
- 6 A change of Plans. Latino Policy & Politics Institute. (2022, October 3). <https://latino.ucla.edu/research/fact-sheet-education-covid/>
- 7 "Preparing our Youngest Learners for Success in the Future." Dearborn. (2021, August 15). <https://umdearborn.edu/news/preparing-our-youngest-learners-success-future>
- 8 6 restorative justice practices to implement in your classroom [+real examples]. University of San Diego - Professional & Continuing Education. (2023, June 9). <https://pce.sandiego.edu/restorative-justice-in-the-classroom/>
- 9 Weber, M. (2021, August 19). School funding in New Jersey: A fair future for all - new jersey policy perspective. New Jersey Policy Perspective -. [https://www.njpp.org/publications/report/school-funding-in-new-jersey-a-fair-future-for-a ll/](https://www.njpp.org/publications/report/school-funding-in-new-jersey-a-fair-future-for-a-ll/)

# Appendix A - Preparatory Resources

Below are all of the resources that were shared with participants prior to the roundtable. Participants were asked to read these resources in advance.

NJPP reports:

- <https://www.njpp.org/publications/report/separate-and-unequal-racial-and-ethnic-segregation-and-the-case-for-school-funding-reparations-in-new-jersey/>
- <https://www.njpp.org/publications/report/new-jersey-school-funding-the-higher-the-goals-the-higher-the-costs/>
- <https://www.njpp.org/publications/report/school-funding-in-new-jersey-a-fair-future-for-all/>
- <https://www.njpp.org/publications/report/new-jerseys-black-students-suffer-a-decline-in-access-to-school-mental-health-staff/>

NJCIC/ELC/NJTESOL Report:

- <https://www.njpp.org/publications/report/separate-and-unequal-racial-and-ethnic-segregation-and-the-case-for-school-funding-reparations-in-new-jersey/>

# Appendix B- Participants

Beatriz Patino- Sherard (Lakewood)  
Calandria Ortiz- Resende (NJ Coalition to End Domestic Violence)  
David Matos (Latino Action Network)  
Debbie Esposito (SPAN)  
Francesca Baroni (Latino Action Network, LANFoundation)  
Jesselly De La Cruz (LANFoundation)  
Jose Laureano (Latino Action Network, Mercer County Community College)  
Kimberly Valle (Imm Schools)  
Lady Jimenez Torres (New Jersey Consortium for Immigrant Children)  
Mark Webber (New Jersey Policy Perspective, RUGSE)  
Nicole Rodriguez (New Jersey Policy Perspective)  
Raven Diaz (Rutgers student)  
Ronald Chaluisan (Newark Trust)



**New Jersey Consortium  
for Immigrant Children**

This policy agenda was a collective effort between the Latino Action Network Foundation and the New Jersey Consortium for Immigrant Children.

This report was authored by Francesca Baroni, MSW, LSW, with contributions from Lady Jimenez Torres, MPA.

Sofia Rosa, Digital Strategist for LANF, provided translation and graphic design.

We would like to thank the Fund for New Jersey, the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, and the Dodge Foundation for their generous support of our policy in-action Latinx Perspectives series.

**CONNECT WITH US:**

[www.njcic.org](http://www.njcic.org)

[www.lanfoundation.org](http://www.lanfoundation.org)