

2023



HERE TO STAY



HISPANIC PARENTS TALK ABOUT SCHOOLS AND LIFE IN IDAHO



BLUUM
LET LEARNING GROW

FDR Group
FARKAS DUFFETT RESEARCH

FOREWARD

BLUUM WORKS WITH IDAHO EDUCATORS; SCHOOL OPERATORS; COMMUNITY AND BUSINESS LEADERS; FEDERAL, STATE AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT; PHILANTHROPY AND FAMILIES TO HELP PLAN, LAUNCH AND SUPPORT PUBLIC CHARTER SCHOOLS AND SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT EFFORTS MORE GENERALLY. IN IDAHO, THIS WORK HAS BOOMED OVER THE LAST DECADE AS OUR STATE'S POPULATION, AND ESPECIALLY OUR STUDENT POPULATION, HAS GROWN RAPIDLY.

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The fastest-growing student demographic in Idaho is Hispanic students. According to the Idaho Commission on Hispanic Affairs, “Hispanic students made up 18% of K-12 enrollment in 2019-20, but accounted for 31% of enrollment growth in the previous five years. From 2014-15 to 2019-20, Hispanic enrollment increased 12% and non-Hispanic enrollment increased 5%.”

Margie Gonzales, Executive Director of the Idaho Commission on Hispanic Affairs, testified to the Idaho legislature in 2022 that, “While some of Idaho’s Hispanics are newcomers to the United States, most have families that have been here for generations...Idaho’s Hispanic population is very diverse. Hispanics are represented at all income and education levels. They contribute to the state’s economy as business owners, employers and taxpayers.”

At Bluum, we believe public charter schools are an important part of improving learning opportunities for our Hispanic students and giving families more and hopefully stronger education choices. We know Hispanic families are choosing public charter schools: in Caldwell, for example, 72% of students who attend Elevate Academy Charter School identify themselves as Hispanic; while 62% of students attending Heritage Community Charter School are Hispanic. We want to better understand – and to help our state’s educators better understand, be they traditional district, public charter, or private school – what Idaho’s growing Hispanic population want from their schools, and from education more generally.

Bluum’s interest in better understanding Idaho’s Hispanic population and how education, especially public charter schools, can more effectively serve our growing number of Hispanic students is both professional and personal. One of us, Ashley Cotton, a Latina Millennial who grew up in a low-income neighborhood in the border town of El Paso, Texas, attended the Alicia Chacon International Charter

School. She credits her success today to the K-8 charter school she attended and learned English, Spanish, and Russian while also training in classical ballet. The other one of us, Terry Ryan, is a Gen Xer from Springfield, Illinois, who was educated in Catholic Schools and has spent his 25-year career working to open, support, expand and defend public charter schools in Idaho, in Ohio, and across the country. His two daughters graduated from Sage International Charter School in Boise.

With all this in mind, Bluum sought to learn more about the experiences of Idaho’s Hispanic parents around their education hopes, concerns, and opportunities. Our first such study was done in 2016 and entitled *Hispanic Parents Speak Out*. This study, *Here to Stay*, builds on the insights from the earlier study and was conducted by the same research team. The FDR Group, led by nationally renowned education analysts Steve Farkas and Ann Duffett, facilitated five focus groups with 45 Hispanic parents from Idaho Falls, Payette, Twin Falls, and the greater Nampa/Caldwell area. (More on the methodology can be found at the end of this report.) The FDR Group’s work has been influential in Idaho and across the country. In Idaho, they have not only conducted research for Bluum, but also for the J.A. and Kathryn Albertson Family Foundation and Idaho Ed News.

In our work at Bluum, we are also fortunate to receive support from the J.A. and Kathryn Albertson Family Foundation, as well as the U.S. Department of Education’s Charter School Program Grant and from other supporters who believe in public charter schools, to grow more charter schools in Idaho. We are committed to ensuring these schools work well in serving all Idaho students.

We are proud to share this work with Idaho’s education stakeholders and hope it can stimulate conversations that lead to more high-quality educational opportunities for our Hispanic families and their children.

TERRY RYAN
CEO & Co-Founder
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ASHLEY COTTON
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Introduction

THE SUCCESS OF IDAHO'S HISPANIC FAMILIES IS ENTWINED WITH THE SUCCESS OF THE STATE—BE IT IN THE ECONOMIC, SOCIAL, OR EDUCATIONAL REALM. THE FINDINGS FROM THIS RESEARCH STUDY CAN HELP IDAHO'S LEADERS BETTER DESIGN POLICIES IN EACH OF THESE AREAS.

For one thing, what Idaho's Hispanic families care about is often no different than what all families care about. Responding to their needs is equivalent to responding to the needs of all families.

For sure, Hispanic parents also have unique perceptions and experiences, and this study tries to capture these as well. One goal of this report is to give leaders an opportunity to “hear” Hispanic parents talk about their lives in Idaho, about their experiences with the public schools, and about the goals they have for their children. If we've done our job right in capturing their voices, then future policies and practices may do a better job of meeting the needs of Hispanic parents and children in Idaho.

There is a pragmatic need to understand the commonality and uniqueness of Hispanic families. But—at least in the eyes of these distinctly non-Idahoan researchers*—the best reason to listen to Hispanic parents transcends pragmatism. It speaks to the essence of what Idaho stands for. Because over the 10 years that we have been visiting the state, enjoying its hospitality, and interviewing its people, we are convinced that Idaho is rooted in good old-fashioned norms and expectations of behavior. We might be naïve, and we might be willfully skipping over the occasional goings-on that trigger national attention. But decency, civility, and respect are what we observe and experience every time we visit Idaho. And decency, civility, and respect are exactly what we saw among the

Hispanic parents we interviewed for this research. When Idaho is true to itself, it is also true to its Hispanic families.

This report is based on five focus groups with Hispanic parents conducted in Fall 2022, one each in Idaho Falls, Twin Falls, and Payette; and two in Nampa (one of which was conducted in Spanish). A total of 45 parents were interviewed. To prepare for the focus groups, we also conducted 11 in-depth telephone interviews with leaders in Idaho's statewide Hispanic community. (The research methodology is included at the end of this document.)

The findings in *Here to Stay* are remarkably consistent with a similar focus group study with Hispanic parents that the FDR Group conducted on behalf of Bluum in 2016. Some observations are understandably new—parents' concerns about student loan debt or the schools' over-reliance on communication technology, for example. But there is an uncanny congruence between the two studies, despite the fact that we developed the 2023 lines of questioning from scratch and did not re-read the previous report until after this one was written. Perhaps the consistency in Hispanic parents' voices makes it even more important to pay attention to them.

[1] *Although the two principals of the FDR Group have visited Idaho many times and have conducted many statewide public opinion research projects over the past decade, we are based in New York City.

“one goal of this report is to give leaders an opportunity to “hear” Hispanic parents talk about their lives in Idaho”



Key Findings

- **FINDING 1:** Hispanic parents communicated a straightforward agenda of must-have goals for the schools: teach our children the academic basics; have high standards for respect, discipline, and self-sufficiency; hire teachers who care about kids and communicate well with parents.
- **FINDING 2:** Hispanic parents want their children to speak Spanish, but many also think this may be more the family's responsibility than the school's.
- **FINDING 3:** Many reacted positively to the notion of seeing Hispanic staff and students in school buildings or having Spanish-speakers on staff. Still, what's most important to Hispanic parents is that their child attends a top-notch school—regardless of its demographic make-up.
- **FINDING 4:** Hispanic parents recalled episodes when schools made mistaken assumptions about language fluency. For example: English-fluent students being placed in ESL classes; parents receiving communications from school in Spanish even when English is their first language; Hispanic students' special needs being overlooked because of assumptions about language capability.
- **FINDING 5:** Hispanic parents are often dissatisfied with the state of communication from schools to parents. They feel ignored when they reach out to discuss problems, and they described schools that are more concerned with providing logistical updates than providing information about a child's learning. Finally, some schools appear to be using so many communication platforms that parents are getting lost.
- **FINDING 6:** When it comes to life after high school, some view college as non-negotiable; others emphasize the importance of learning a trade or marketable skills. We heard repeated concerns about student loan debt, an echo of a national trend. And we heard Hispanic parents talk about education as a privilege for which they are grateful.
- **FINDING 7:** Our conversations with Hispanic parents mostly dealt with education and the schools. But the direction of the discussions inevitably flowed into their sense of place in Idaho—how Hispanic Idahoans see themselves, how non-Hispanic Idahoans see them, and how things have changed over time.

Implications

BASED ON THE FOCUS GROUP FINDINGS, WE BELIEVE THERE ARE SOME IMPLICATIONS FOR LEADERSHIP AT THE SCHOOL, DISTRICT, AND STATE LEVELS.

- Having a variety of communication platforms may be invaluable for updates on logistics, but Hispanic parents still need direct and personal conversations with educators—especially when their child is struggling academically.
- Across the nation, student learning in mathematics has been a consistent problem area for the schools, and the experience of Hispanic families in Idaho is no different. Parents described seeing their kids struggle and feeling frustrated about being unable to help. Is there a better way that leaves fewer kids and parents behind?
- Schools need to be precise when implementing programs such as English as a Second Language (ESL). They must respond to the language needs of Hispanic students, but their decisions cannot be simply based upon Hispanic surnames.
- When schools are dealing with sensitive issues—for example, a possible learning disability, a behavioral problem, an academic struggle—extra care and awareness on the part of school leadership could help Hispanic parents trust educators and forestall suspicions of indifference or bias.
- Hispanic parents need to hear that college is more affordable than they might think. They need reassurance that financial aid may result in less student loan debt than imagined. Like other families, Hispanic parents also want education options that prepare students for careers in skilled trades.

Acknowledgments

The FDR Group is especially grateful to the Hispanic parents who so thoughtfully and generously shared their experiences and participated in the research. We are also grateful to the trusted sources in the Hispanic communities in Idaho Falls, Nampa, Payette, and Twin Falls who recruited participants and hosted the focus groups; without them, this important research would not have happened. In particular, we would like to thank: Ana Esquivel, Migrant Family Liaison; Sylvia Medina, President of Green Kids Club; Hugo Mendoza and Roy Villasenor from the Community Council of Idaho; Carina VanPelt, Principal of Holy Rosary Catholic School; and Genoveva Winkler, Regional Migrant Coordinator, Migrant Education Program. Finally, we thank the staff at Bluum for trusting us with this important research effort, for sharing their knowledge and expertise on the issues, and for giving us free rein to analyze the data and report the findings.



FINDING 1

HISPANIC PARENTS COMMUNICATED A STRAIGHTFORWARD AGENDA OF MUST-HAVE GOALS FOR THE SCHOOLS: TEACH OUR CHILDREN THE ACADEMIC BASICS; HAVE HIGH STANDARDS FOR RESPECT, DISCIPLINE, AND SELF-SUFFICIENCY; HIRE TEACHERS WHO CARE ABOUT KIDS AND COMMUNICATE WELL WITH PARENTS.

⏏ In many ways, the educational priorities of Idaho’s Hispanic parents mirror those of other parents. Hispanic parents want their children to be happy at school; they want students to learn the basics such as math, reading and writing; and they want their kids to develop key character traits such as responsibility, respect, and independence.

I want them to learn the things that they can use in life. Math, writing, reading, English. Responsibility.
—Nampa

I would expect them to teach children how to deal with emotions and reading. I would do reading.
—Idaho Falls

Math, I want my kids to be good with it, everything’s numbers. I put history and then I put reading, language arts as the most important subjects.
—Idaho Falls

Yes, school work, but then you have to teach them other stuff that goes along with it too. Manners. Responsibility.
—Payette

⏏ They especially want to see good teachers who care about kids, who communicate clearly, and who pay attention when students are struggling.

My daughter was really shy, and the teacher did make her feel comfortable, and now she’s actually speaking up. She forgot all her English in Mexico, so when we came back it was hard for her to start all over, she was just too shy....But here, now she’s opening up.
—Payette

She’s excited to get up for school, she really enjoys her teacher this year. And she’s in fifth grade, so I see her attitude and I just see her more motivated. I think it’s the teacher. I got to meet her and she’s a younger teacher and just very vibrant.
—Idaho Falls

⏏ They have concerns about things like overcrowded classrooms and overwhelmed teachers.

I’m not really happy because right now the schools are pretty overloaded with kids. You got one teacher that’s actually trying to educate at least 30 to 35 or maybe even more kids. It’s really hard to work with the kids one-on-one. Especially if it’s one of the kids that are struggling academically. My grandson is struggling because they don’t have the one-to-one time.
—Nampa

Our schools have grown so much that they’re overcrowded, and they’re just overwhelmed and say, “We can’t deal with this anymore. We’ll get back to you.” And hopefully, you’ll forget about it.
—Idaho Falls

Many of these findings are supported by survey data. In a 2021 statewide random sample poll conducted by the FDR Group for Idaho Education News, 92% of Hispanic respondents said it was “absolutely essential” for the public schools to teach basic reading, writing, and math; 75% said teaching computers and technology was absolutely essential; and 55% pointed to teaching practical job skills. Three in four (75%) believed it was just as important for the public schools “to teach the value of hard work, persistence, and responsibility” while only 25% said schools should “mostly focus on teaching students academic subjects.” Non-Hispanic respondents responded in similar fashion.

Social-emotional help would be really helpful, especially right now after COVID and that was one of my concerns with our oldest. We had a meeting at the school and I asked the counselor, “Can you check in on him just 10 minutes and see how he is doing?” And she said, “I have 300+ students that I need to check on.” And I said, “I’m not asking you to have an hour-long meeting, but just can you check on him.”
—Twin Falls

I’ve seen a lot of teachers that do not have patience at all. I’ve seen them be very aggressive with the kids, not listening to the students. Like not helping them with their life skills. And when students ask them for help, I’ve seen them have a hard time helping the students.
—Payette

⏏ An unusually large number of parents in the focus groups spontaneously talked about their children’s struggle with mathematics. Parents described feeling frustrated, puzzled by new math techniques that make it difficult for them to help their children—a common complaint shared by parents across the country.

My daughter, she struggles with math, a lot. Who could not struggle with 9-year-old math? Have you seen their math? Oh my gosh. It’s so different.
—Idaho Falls

Math, the way it’s being taught now compared to how it used to be taught, you can’t help your child. We can’t help our kids with the math that we know. The division, even how you add, it’s totally different. The kids struggle, and parents struggle because we can’t help them the way that they’re being taught in school.
—Nampa

He’s really struggling a lot with math. He hates math. So he is trying to fit into normal homework, and just what the teachers are teaching him, but he’s not catching everything, so it’s really hard for him. They’re trying to work to see where they can help him with, but right now he’s struggling a lot.
—Payette

My oldest is taking advanced algebra right now, and he’ll come home with all these math problems and I already forgot how to do. So me and my wife have to get online and research, okay, how do you do this?
—Twin Falls



FINDING 2

HISPANIC PARENTS WANT THEIR CHILDREN TO SPEAK SPANISH, BUT MANY ALSO THINK THIS MAY BE MORE THE FAMILY'S RESPONSIBILITY THAN THE SCHOOL'S.

There are several ways in which the perceptions and experiences of Hispanic parents are unique and especially important to understand, most of which have to do with the Spanish language.

For example, the parents in our focus groups want their children to know how to speak Spanish, but they are of two minds whether it is the responsibility of the schools or of parents themselves. They think of Spanish as not only a helpful skill to get a leg up in the workplace, but also as important for maintaining contact with family and the old country—it connotes pride in one's culture and history. Yet, when it comes to teaching Spanish at school, many would not deem it a top priority (nice to have, yes, but not a top priority). It was telling that virtually no parent spontaneously talked about the importance of teaching Spanish when asked an open-ended question about what the most important priorities of the schools should be. When the moderator introduced the topic for consideration, the most common response was to say that teaching their children Spanish was a parent's own responsibility at home.

It's not their responsibility—it's ours. If we want our kids to learn a second language like Spanish, because that's what we know, then you have to teach your kids at home.
—Idaho Falls

I think that a lot of those things are covered at home, like art. We just constantly speak Spanish at home.
—Twin Falls

We're very strictly Spanish at the house. It would be cool to see our kids come into school and just go over things, reinforce it a little bit. But that's not our main concern. Because even when they bring homework to us and they want help, if it's in English, we'll read it to them in Spanish and they have to answer in Spanish. And that's just the way we do it. At school, they could learn Chinese or German or something.
—Idaho Falls

I want the teachers to focus on English. If my son's not getting it in English, then he's not going to get it in Spanish. Focus on one language with him. We'll work out the Spanish at home. I say it from experience....My Spanish is not a hundred percent proper. At my job, it doesn't need to be exactly proper. When you talk to another Hispanic, their Spanish is not going to be proper either.
—Nampa

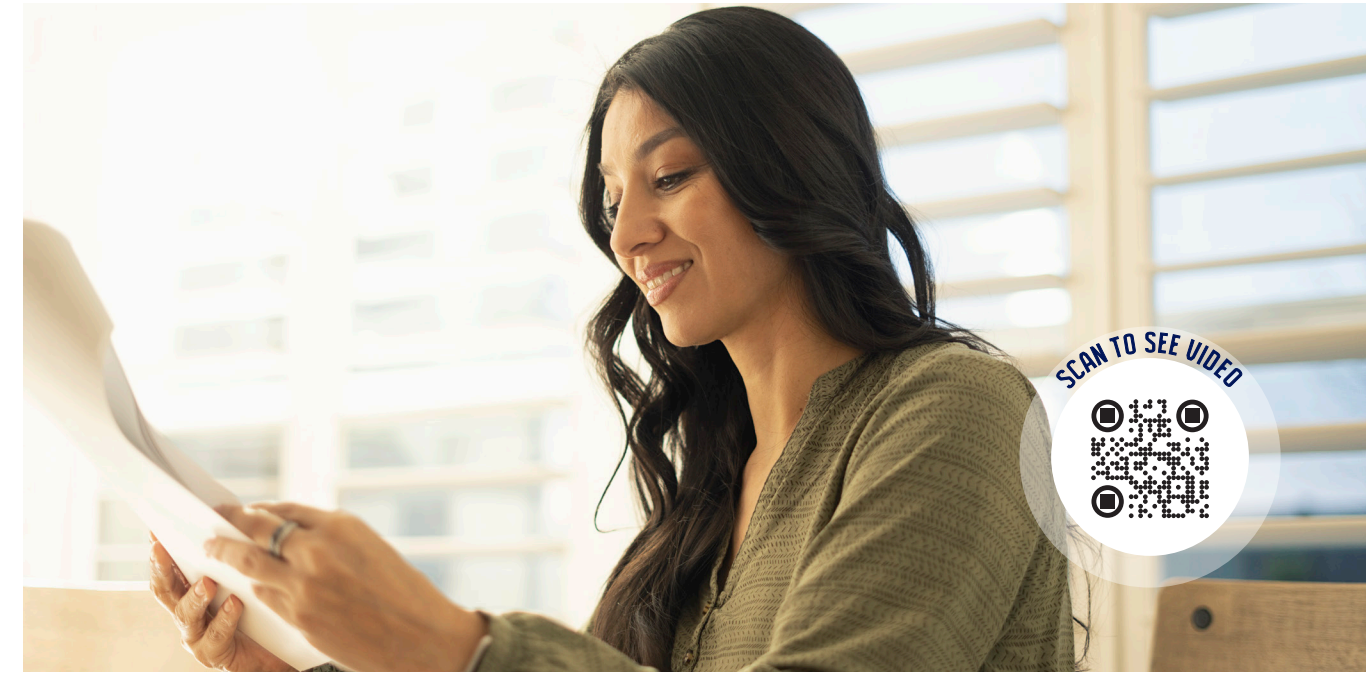
Spanish is an elective in school. It's a choice, because we can't force also the white people. Excuse me if I offend anybody. I don't want to say we should require people to take Spanish.
—Nampa

But some did believe that teaching students Spanish is important for schools to do, because they believe that having a second language is a marketable skill for a child's future.

I think you will succeed if you know both languages better than if you know one. Because a bunch of jobs, they will give the job to the one who is the bilingual.
—Payette

It's just an add-on skill for anything, for jobs. I have two kids that work in hospitals, and to be bilingual is a huge plus.
—Nampa

“They think of Spanish **as not only a helpful skill** to get a leg up in the workplace, but also as important for maintaining contact **with family and the old country**”



To complicate matters, several parents talked about feeling guilty because their own Spanish was inadequate or because they failed to teach their kids Spanish at home. To these parents, questions about language triggered tension about identity and whether they've lived up to their values.

I've gotten yelled at by my in-laws and by my parents saying, “Your kid is turning into a no sabo kid.” Meaning he doesn't know Spanish. I even tell my son, “We've got to speak more Spanish.” And his thing is like, “No one speaks Spanish at school. Why are we going to speak it here?” And I'm like, “Well, we're Mexicans.” And I feel bad because when I just want to get things done, I speak to him in the language that he most understands. And that's my fault.
—Twin Falls

There are a lot of kids that are ashamed to speak Spanish or they're embarrassed by their parents.
—Payette

I think both languages should be taught equally, because these days there are a lot of kids that are ashamed to speak Spanish or they're embarrassed by their parents speaking Spanish. That way your child isn't embarrassed to speak Spanish, to translate, to help someone else. I think it should be equal, so that way everybody gets that equal opportunity to learn the same way. Even people that are only Americans.
—Payette

I knew Spanish very well up until I got into middle school and I got involved in sports and clubs and all my Spanish went out the door. I decided it was one of the most important things, to make sure my kids were in dual immersion, because I didn't want them to be like me where we didn't know proper Spanish. It means my child will have a better opportunity. And it's also a pride thing. I want my kid to know his roots. I tell him, “Dad was born in Mexico, Mom was born in the US. You are a Mexican American.”
—Twin Falls



FINDING 3

MANY REACTED POSITIVELY TO THE NOTION OF SEEING HISPANIC STAFF AND STUDENTS IN SCHOOL BUILDINGS OR HAVING SPANISH SPEAKERS ON STAFF. STILL, WHAT'S MOST IMPORTANT TO HISPANIC PARENTS IS THAT THEIR CHILD ATTENDS A TOP-NOTCH SCHOOL—REGARDLESS OF ITS DEMOGRAPHIC MAKE-UP.

» We asked parents if it was important that the demographic make-up of their child's school—whether staff or students—had Hispanic representation. Some thought it would be useful to have Spanish speakers so that there would be an adult in the building who could communicate with new parents whose primary language is Spanish. Many said that it could be reassuring to see Hispanics in the building—"a teacher that looked like me"—even remembering times in their own schooling where it would have made a difference. Many felt that this consideration might be more important to Hispanic parents or children who are newcomers. But another theme was that having good teachers and good schools was the most important consideration, regardless of Hispanic background.

When you walk in, if you don't see somebody that looks like you, you might feel a little bit like an outsider. When I first came to this school a couple years ago, I didn't see a lot of Mexican-looking kids. I didn't know how my kids were going to make friends. But it worked out. We made a decision. It's not all going to be based on what the people look like. If it's full of Mexicans but they're all bad teachers, I wouldn't want my kids there. We'd still go through the steps to get to know the teachers, see how they work, see how the kids do in that school. It's not all going to be based on what the people look like.
—Idaho Falls

I went to school here years ago and there were only five Hispanics and I literally felt left out....So that's a very sensitive subject for me because I experienced that and I don't want my kids to experience that.
—Nampa

That was one of the reasons that we actually switched my son's school. There was no diversity, very few Hispanic kids, maybe four or five in the whole school. And that was one thing that he mentioned over and over. He said, "Dad, there's no kids like me." And he had a hard time making friends there, and I said, "Well, son, you have to get along with everybody." He says, "I understand that but I try to make friends and they're just kind of like, no—they have their own little cliques." And honestly, in that school, I don't remember any Hispanic teachers either.
—Twin Falls

If I think back to me as a child when I came here from Guatemala, yes, if I saw a teacher that looked like me, I felt more connected. So it did matter to me, because I was coming from a different country. I felt safer. But now, my kids have grown up here, so I think it's all perspective of your background.
—Idaho Falls

With Spanish-speaking parents it would make a lot of difference, because they would be able to communicate with them more and stuff like that.
—Payette

When it comes to education, it doesn't matter who is the teacher, Chinese, French, Italian, Mexican—I don't care. If I see my kid is growing, learning, I don't care who's the teacher.
—Idaho Falls

Many said that
**it could be reassuring to see Hispanics in the building—
"a teacher that looked like me"**

FINDING 4

HISPANIC PARENTS RECALLED EPISODES WHEN SCHOOLS MADE MISTAKEN ASSUMPTIONS ABOUT LANGUAGE FLUENCY. FOR EXAMPLE: ENGLISH-FLUENT STUDENTS BEING PLACED IN ESL CLASSES; PARENTS RECEIVING COMMUNICATIONS FROM SCHOOL IN SPANISH EVEN WHEN ENGLISH IS THEIR FIRST LANGUAGE; HISPANIC STUDENTS' SPECIAL NEEDS BEING OVERLOOKED BECAUSE OF ASSUMPTIONS ABOUT LANGUAGE CAPABILITY.

Some parents talked about ways in which they believe the schools have mishandled the Spanish language issue by making assumptions about English fluency. For example, several English-speaking parents complained about receiving emails written in Spanish—even though they do not understand Spanish. More serious problems were caused when the schools placed English-speaking children into ESL classes based solely on surnames; at least one parent suspected that this was done to increase school funding rather than to help students learn.

I feel like these school districts want to label a lot of the Hispanics and push them into the ESL programs. And I think it's due to the fact that the state is giving them more money when the kids are in there. They tried to do it with all my kids just because they knew they came from Hispanic parents. But both of my two oldest are pretty smart. They've been doing really well in school. So we asked them, "Well, how come you guys want to put them in ESL? They've had pretty much all As and Bs, help me understand." And we refused. No, they don't need it. English has always been their primary language. I'm assuming because our last names are Hispanic, that they assume that they needed to be in those programs.
—Idaho Falls

They took him out of regular classes to a class with just kids that were learning English. And they didn't notify us as parents. We were having dinner one night and he brought it up and I'm like, "Wait a minute, they took you out of class?" So I approached the school on it and they couldn't give me an explanation. And I said, "Is it just because of his last name?" And they said, "Well, we just felt like it would be a good fit for him." And I said "No, I don't want my son taken out of regular classes into ESL when he speaks English just fine. If I hear that he's being taken out again, then I'm going to come back and we're going to have some issues." And it stopped from there. It stopped.
—Idaho Falls

They send out these mass emails and we always get them in Spanish and I can't ever understand them. So I went to the school one day and I said, "Hey, can you send them to me in English? I'm not understanding these Spanish ones that you're sending out." And they stopped for a while and then this year they started again sending them in Spanish.
—Twin Falls

Some of our focus group participants were parents of children with learning disabilities, and the challenges faced by these parents had an added layer of complexity. Several who were U.S.-born complained that the schools failed to recognize a child's learning disability in a timely manner because they wrongly assumed that learning English was the problem. Other parents acknowledged that it took time, but in the end their child got the necessary help.

When I was getting my son tested, we didn't really know if he had autism or a learning delay or what, but the district said sometimes there can be a six-month delay where the child doesn't understand because you taught him Spanish. But my son spoke English. I kind of took offense to that. I knew as his mom that he was behind in both languages. But the school wasn't seeing that, right? And eventually, we figured out that yeah, he was delayed—in both languages, he was delayed. Maybe it's just a lack of cultural awareness on the school's part. I felt like my son was looked down upon.
—Twin Falls

They created a 504 Plan for him, but I felt like it was never really enforced. We had a meeting, and only two teachers showed up. And they're like, "Well, everybody else is busy."
—Idaho Falls

We were kind of treated like second-class citizens when my son first got tested for speech and stuff. I mean his therapists are amazing. But at first they looked at me and they just assumed you speak Spanish at home. My husband doesn't even speak Spanish. And they would dumb stuff down for me because they felt like I wasn't going to understand it if they used the proper terms. And it was like they just assumed that I was an uneducated Mexican.
—Idaho Falls

Some parents acknowledged the schools as "God sent," grateful to their school for rescuing their child's learning. They described times when educators—through professionalism and compassion—drove progress for their child. Several new immigrants were especially grateful, because they believed that the schools in their country of origin would not have supported students with special needs at the same level.

We struggled to get my son help. He speaks Spanish but he is diagnosed with hyperactivity. And we changed three schools, because he was very restless, and they kept calling every time, your son is sick and now your son did this and now your son did that. But thank God here at this school they helped him. Right now he's in a program where we come every so often to meetings with a special person who comes and takes him out of class if he gets angry and starts hitting, and talks to him, and they help him.
—Nampa

When my son was in first grade, he was angry all the time. He was having an attitude, talking back every time. He didn't want to do his homework, was causing problems in school. The way that they handled the situation, I felt so good. They call me and we sat in a room like this with the teacher, the counselor, the principal, and, it was like, "How we can help him?" And for me it was new, all this situation, and I'm really grateful. They had a list and "Okay, this is the problem. This and that and this is what we can do to help him and this is what you can do at home to help him." And we worked on that and it was really helpful. The situation, I think they handled it perfectly. I felt supported.
—Nampa

I am very satisfied actually with the help that he's getting. My son, he's autistic, and he's a special needs student, so he has a lot of trouble. He can't read. Right now he's at a second grade level, and he's in sixth grade. But they are helping him a lot, and the school's doing great with him. Like a lot of progress with him. He's actually succeeding. I think they're doing awesome. I really do.
—Payette

Something very positive is that autism is respected here, they make the children feel that they are not discriminated against...my son has felt loved, he has felt respected, he has felt supported. It is something that I never saw in Colombia and I appreciate it, because in such a short time we have felt those doors open.
—Nampa



FINDING 5

HISPANIC PARENTS ARE OFTEN DISSATISFIED WITH THE STATE OF COMMUNICATION FROM SCHOOLS TO PARENTS. THEY FEEL IGNORED WHEN THEY REACH OUT TO DISCUSS PROBLEMS, AND THEY DESCRIBED SCHOOLS THAT ARE MORE CONCERNED WITH PROVIDING LOGISTICAL UPDATES THAN PROVIDING INFORMATION ABOUT A CHILD'S LEARNING. FINALLY, SOME SCHOOLS APPEAR TO BE USING SO MANY COMMUNICATION PLATFORMS THAT PARENTS ARE GETTING LOST.

Many Hispanic parents were dissatisfied with the way their school communicates with them. Some felt ignored or brushed off when engaging the schools about their children's academic or social problems. Others complained that the schools were better at updating them about logistics and procedures than reporting what is truly important to parents—their children's academic progress, especially if a child is struggling. Finally, some said the schools use so many communication platforms that parents have a hard time keeping track. The reliance on technology is adding noise rather than clarity to communication.

If I have a concern, they just disregard it. I don't feel like I get answers from them. I want to transfer him to a different school. Just because I believe that there's bullying happening, because he showed up with his broken glasses. He said that it was an accident, but it's been too many occurrences. And I addressed the school, and the principal, they're like, "We'll get back to you. We'll get back to you." And I got no response.
—Twin Falls

Where I think we need improvement, is to have better communication when our kids are failing. Parents are expected to go on Power School. Some people don't know how to navigate the app and then your kid has missed too many days of school or they're not on track for graduating....And that's the biggest time it comes up.
—Twin Falls

They have so many platforms....They have four different places that you can go and get this information for homeworks, grades, attendance, but there's four different places instead of one place. It's the same kid. They have PowerSchool, they have Parents Square, they have Otis.
—Nampa

The staff or the school district itself is lacking communication with the parents. They think, "Oh, you have the device, you can log in, you can check it." No. Sometimes there's passwords. There's stuff that we don't know. I have trouble and I know good English. I was expecting a report card last year and they said, "Oh, you have to log in and get them. We no longer email that out." And I'm like, "Oh, okay. That would've been nice to know." The schools rely fully on the kids are going to tell their parents. No, the kids aren't going to tell us.
—Nampa

He really struggled with the social piece. The teacher would send pictures of the kids doing something on Class Dojo and my son was never in the pictures or he was in the background. I would ask and she would never give me feedback. And my son, of course, doesn't say much, so he can't really tell me. But I had to really dig, I had to basically say, "Hey listen, I noticed that when you send pictures my son's never sitting, or my son's never doing what the class is doing." And she finally said, "Oh well, if he doesn't feel like participating, I just let him go play." I would like to know that, as a parent, that my son's not participating, and you're not figuring out a way to get him involved or to get him the help. I've seen a big difference in the new school, he doesn't have that problem anymore.
—Idaho Falls

“The reliance on technology is adding noise rather than clarity to communication.”



FINDING 6

WHEN IT COMES TO LIFE AFTER HIGH SCHOOL, SOME VIEW COLLEGE AS NON-NEGOTIABLE; OTHERS EMPHASIZE THE IMPORTANCE OF LEARNING A TRADE OR MARKETABLE SKILLS. WE HEARD REPEATED CONCERNS ABOUT STUDENT LOAN DEBT, AN ECHO OF A NATIONAL TREND. AND WE HEARD HISPANIC PARENTS TALK ABOUT EDUCATION AS A PRIVILEGE FOR WHICH THEY ARE GRATEFUL.

What do Hispanic parents want for their children after high school? Several of the leaders we interviewed for this study posited that for Hispanic parents, what's most important is to get their children to enter the workforce early. But a much more nuanced picture emerged when we listened to Hispanic parents themselves talk about the aspirations they have for their kids.

Their overarching goals will sound familiar to any parent: get a good job; be self-sufficient; do better than me; be happy. To get there, many of the Hispanic parents in our focus groups expressed a non-negotiable attitude about the importance of college, saying that they drill this expectation into their children's heads. Others emphasize learning a skilled trade, seeing it as the key to good-paying jobs and self-sufficiency. Echoing a national trend, we heard a significant number of parents—even those with college degrees—express alarm about student loan debt and questioning the value of a college education today.

*You need to be going to college. There's no discussion. I'm sorry about that. This is the rules...
He's not going to have an option.*
—Nampa

For me, you have to be in college for sure. I mean I think that is my dream.
—Nampa

I'm not so interested in them to go to college as I am interested in them to do what they love and what they like to do and support in that way.
—Idaho Falls

I want them to be independent and to be able to support themselves and not depend on anyone else. And not to be working in the fields and not to be living check to check for the rest of their life. It doesn't have to be college. It can be a trade school, it can be hands-on, it can be military, it can be anything that they choose to do. But sometimes, if you don't have that degree, if you don't have that certification, they're not going to pay you.
—Nampa

Okay, you can go to school, get your degree. But they're also getting into so much debt that they're going to have to pay off. I see people with college degrees that make less than what I make. And I'm like, "Dude, I don't have that 40 grand in debt that you guys have."
—Nampa

It's crazy expensive and then they have this debt. It's crazy. Maybe he wants to go to college to learn whatever. I feel like I just want him to explore his talent, his skills, into something that makes him successful, independent, responsible, a good man.
—Nampa

I do feel like college is important to me and that they keep empowering themselves to learn.
—Twin Falls

I have older sons. My oldest one, he got a trade, he's a commercial plumber. He's making \$35 an hour and he went to a trade school for about two years. My younger one, he academically struggled, so college was not in his future. I told him, "You can still get a trade." He goes, "No, Mom, I just want to get a regular job." He found a good job making 25 bucks an hour.
—Nampa

Parents relied on comparisons to describe how they see education as not only a lever toward a better future, but as a privilege. Some talked about how their own experiences with hard labor in agriculture taught them the value of education. Some noted that newcomer generations often work just to survive, while long-established families could afford to think more broadly because they had achieved economic security. Others compared Idaho's schools to those in their countries of origin, where inequity and corruption are rampant.

We all come from a Hispanic community, so we know how hard of a challenge we had growing up. When I was growing up, I would go out and work in the fields, doing the beets, the beans. I remember how hard it was. I just don't want to see my kids in my place.
—Twin Falls

When we first got here, I was a single parent and my son had to work. He went to the field for four months, and he's like, "Mom, I can't do this." I told him, you need to finish school so you get a better job. Because only jobs like this will hire you on the spot. Even McDonald's these days, you need at least a GED. You want to work in this all your life? Being in the sun? Being dehydrated, not eating well, for so many hours? It was a hard lesson for him, but now he knows. He's back in school.
—Payette

It depends on the generation of Hispanic that you're speaking to. If you're talking to a first-generation Hispanic then yeah, their family's new to the country, they're going to work. They're trying to do everything they can to help their family make it. Somebody that's fourth, fifth generation, they're obviously established in this country. My parents put a lot of emphasis on education after we graduated. We didn't work when we were in high school. My parents also didn't work when they were in high school. But their parents did work.
—Idaho Falls

I think it's a stereotype that us as Hispanics don't really focus on education, and don't really focus on our children going to college. I could see this being more true of my mother. But this generation....As a Hispanic, I see more people my age wanting our kids to go to college. Back in the day it was more like, you just got to work.
—Idaho Falls

I have higher expectations on my kids than their friends because they're American. My kids say, "Mom, they do things different. Their parents really don't care if they do their homework." I tell my kids, "It matters to me and it shouldn't matter to you if friends don't do their homework. But we expect you to do your homework." I think us as Hispanics, we have higher expectations. We have to prove ourselves because we're always feeling like you're being judged because you're Hispanic.
—Nampa

Hispanics, our culture, see education as a privilege. Which is why I think we're more involved in the education of our kids, to where I don't see white parents seeing that education necessarily as a privilege and something to take advantage of.
—Nampa

“Echoing a national trend, we heard a significant number of parents—even those with college degrees—express alarm about student loan debt”



FINDING 7

OUR CONVERSATIONS WITH HISPANIC PARENTS MOSTLY DEALT WITH EDUCATION AND THE SCHOOLS. BUT THE DIRECTION OF THE DISCUSSIONS INEVITABLY FLOWED INTO THEIR SENSE OF PLACE IN IDAHO—HOW HISPANIC IDAHOANS SEE THEMSELVES, HOW NON-HISPANIC IDAHOANS SEE THEM, AND HOW THINGS HAVE CHANGED OVER TIME.

According to these focus group participants, the Hispanic population in Idaho is increasingly aware of how they are treated and served in schools, in workplaces, and in daily life. They described a range of experiences—from being hurt by prejudice and mistaken assumptions, to being helped by neighbors and complete strangers; from transitioning from unseen outsiders to confident members of the community, fortunate to be able to call Idaho home. Some spoke of the progress their families had made since their arrival as struggling agricultural workers. Some feel that newcomers today still have challenges and may be wary of making waves in their new home. Those who have been here for several generations sometimes expressed nostalgia for simpler times when familial relationships were more traditional. Idaho's Hispanics are members of a demographic group that continues to find its voice. They have changed, Idaho has changed, and both are still changing.

I don't feel like an outsider anymore, but I think back in the 1990s, there wasn't as many Hispanics in this area, so at that point you did feel like an outsider because it was mostly white people around this area. It was rare to see another Hispanic family around.

—Twin Falls

There's a saying: when you're Mexican-American, you have to be more American than Americans and then more Mexican than Mexicans, if that makes sense. That's off the movie "Selena." I struggle to be like that.

—Twin Falls

I feel privileged, I feel blessed, and I feel very, very thankful for my parents who got us here. My mom's from Mexico, my dad's from Texas, but we migrated here working in the fields. I'm very thankful that my dad didn't want to go back to Mexico, because my mom did. And thankful that I'm here, that I was able to go to school and learn the language and learn skills for working not just in the fields.

—Nampa

My husband's white and I'm Hispanic....When we started dating, people just assumed because he grew up LDS that he brought me from his mission. And it was weird, I felt like people looked at us different. I have a group of friends from church and we would go to dinner on Friday nights. Everybody's Hispanic and my husband's the only white guy. They didn't treat us bad, but there was an obvious difference with the way that he was treated versus the rest of us. At one point I said to him, they probably think you're our boss...."Hey, here's a white guy with a bunch of Hispanic people. He must be important."

—Idaho Falls

I feel a lot better now. When I was growing up, when I was 14, 15 years old, they used to call out to me, "Hey you Mexican, go back where you came from." And these were adults. Idaho had a lot of racists back in the eighties and seventies, it was really bad....But things have changed since I was growing up. We're growing.

—Nampa

I really love living here now. I now feel part of the community. It's something that I've kind of grown into in recent years. Now I see more people like myself. And my perception of things has changed. It was a lot about me not feeling comfortable with myself. And now I am.

—Nampa

“transitioning from unseen outsiders
to confident members
of the community”

Methodology

These findings are based on five focus groups with Hispanic parents of school-age children. The focus groups took place in person in September 2022, one each in Idaho Falls, Payette, and Twin Falls, and two in Nampa. A total of 45 parents participated.

To recruit parents, the researchers first reached out to contacts in the Hispanic community who they believed would be trusted resources. These local contacts then reached out directly to recruit parents who fit the criteria for participation: of Hispanic/Latino/Spanish origin; have school-age children; currently live in Idaho. Participants included both mothers and fathers, but they were mostly mothers.

Four focus groups were conducted in English with an English-speaking moderator; most of the participants were bilingual Spanish and English, so in a few instances where a participant felt more comfortable speaking in Spanish, the other participants helped to translate into English. One focus group was conducted in Spanish by a bilingual (Spanish and English) moderator and featured mostly migrant parents who were relatively new to the state. The four focus groups conducted in English were moderated by Steve Farkas of the FDR Group; the Spanish-language focus group was moderated by Ashley Cotton of BLUUM.

Each focus group lasted approximately two hours and took place at a local school or nonprofit organization.

Refreshments and child care were provided, and each participant was given a cash honorarium at the conclusion of the group to thank them for their participation and time. The discussions were recorded and transcribed; direct quotes from the transcripts are used throughout the report. All participants were assured of confidentiality, and thus quotes are not attributed to named individuals.

To encourage frank discussion, we assured the participants that the conversations were confidential and that their participation was anonymous. The focus groups followed a semi-structured interview protocol that generally followed the moderator's guide but also allowed for conversation to flow such that not all questions were asked of all participants and new lines of inquiry were pursued as necessary. The goal was to reveal first impressions, to get a deeper understanding of parents' points of view and experiences in their own words, and then to probe to elicit further responses and encourage interaction among participants.

To prepare for the focus groups, 11 in-depth telephone interviews were conducted by the FDR Group with leaders in the Hispanic community in Idaho, including community liaisons, educators, representatives from the business community, a migrant family coordinator, nonprofit staff, and school board members. Information gathered in the in-depth interviews helped to inform the lines of inquiry and themes to explore with parents in the focus groups.



“we believe public charter schools are an important part of **improving learning opportunities for our Hispanic students** and giving families more **and stronger education choices.**”

A few words of caution about the nature of qualitative research in general and the interpretation of the findings in this report. Focus groups are a valuable tool for exploring people's spontaneous views on a given topic and for uncovering underlying values that help explain why people feel the way they do. From a policy or communications strategy standpoint, they provide information on how to frame information to appeal to the values and mindsets that underlie people's beliefs. Focus groups are tremendously helpful for listening to people talk about issues, for uncovering the sources of their opinions and motivations for action, and for generating hypotheses for further research, but they cannot determine how many people hold a particular view, and their findings cannot be generalized to the population as a whole. Thus, the findings in this report describe the views of these Hispanic parents and are not meant to represent the views of all Hispanic parents across the state.



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