

## **Decreasing the Achievement Gap through Increasing Parents' Knowledge and Skills: A Focus on Parent Engagement**

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### **ABSTRACT**

In order to ultimately decrease the Achievement Gap, this study focuses on increasing, specifically Latino parent engagement. Throughout the study I investigated parents' institutional belief of education, their growth in knowledge and skills, participation in their scholar's education, and their relationship with the school, teachers, and most importantly their scholars. The intervention consisted of multiple phases, the first phase being regular communication regarding incomplete homework, incomplete readings logs, tardies, and incidents of discipline with certain focus students. The second phase of the intervention was having focus parents attend a 10-session Latino Family Literacy Program concentrated on building knowledge and skills. Finally, phase three of the intervention was building relationships through visits to focus family's homes. Data collection included pre and post surveys of both parents and teachers, parent reflections, a researcher's journal entries, and numerical data of scholar tardies, reading log incompletes, and homework incompletes over time.

The results of the study varied between the different focus parents, teachers, and scholars. The eight parent participants gained knowledge and skills, specifically focused on English literacy and how to interact with their scholars. The quantitative data tracked the students over time—showing a growth in their homework and reading log completion as well as a decrease in tardies for some. Lastly, all parents made incredible gains in their engagement with their student's education as measured by weekly Kickboard data and end of year NWEA MAP data. One particular parent and scholar pair shifted remarkably in all aspects of the intervention—academics, discipline, attendance, knowledge, skills, relationship and engagement, eventually shifting *the* Gap ever so slightly. Because of the increased engagement from parents and the relationships that were made, Kindred Academy will be continuing the intervention on a larger scale in the future.

## CONTEXT AND PROBLEM OF PRACTICE

Kindred Academy<sup>1</sup> is a public charter school in San Jose, California, part of the McFranklin<sup>2</sup> School District. The school's mission states, "*Kindred Academy prepares scholars in kindergarten through grade six to excel in college preparatory secondary schools and beyond. Kindred Academy provides a structured, rigorous education emphasizing literacy and mathematics that lays the foundation for academic success.*" It serves students, also known as scholars, in grades kindergarten through 5<sup>th</sup> grade, chartered to 6<sup>th</sup> grade, and possibly expanding to K-8<sup>th</sup> grade. Kindred opened its doors in 2010, starting with kindergarten and 1<sup>st</sup> grade scholars, with the intention to provide the best education for scholars in a low income community. The student body was recruited in the summer of 2010 with a demographic makeup of 22.3% Asian and 60.2% Hispanic or Latino. In the summer of 2012, Kindred moved its campus to a nearby neighborhood, located on Lucretia Ave. As of 2013-14 the demographics shifted to 48% Asian and 39.8% Hispanic or Latino, compared to the McFranklin School District: 30.1% Asian and 61.4% Hispanic or Latino.

Overall has performed quite high on state and nationally normed assessments. It continues to outperform schools in its school district, McFranklin. In 2012, scholars scored an overall API (Academic Performance Index) of 933 and then a score of 929 the following year. The achievement gap, as defined by Wikipedia as *the observed, persistent disparity of educational measures between the performance of groups of students, especially groups defined by socioeconomic status (SES), race/ethnicity and gender*, was seen on previous assessments, but

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<sup>1</sup> Pseudonym used

<sup>2</sup> Pseudonym used

more specifically on the CST (California Standardized Test) or STAR (Standardized Testing and Reporting) CA State Exam. Hispanic or Latino scholars average API was 881, while the Asian population of scholars scored an average of 991 API. According to the CALPADS (California Longitudinal Pupil Achievement Data System) reporting system there were 48 Hispanic or Latino scholars and 35 Asian and 8 Filipino scholars. Seventy-one of these scholars are available for free or reduced-price lunch, 64 scholars are designated English Language Learners, and 4 are students with disabilities. This data is one example of the achievement gap that Kindred teachers, staff, and leadership team between the two main demographics, Hispanic and Latino families and Asian families. The NAEP (National Assessment of Educational Process) states that, “A difference in scores between two groups of students (for instance, male and female, Black and White, or Hispanic and White) can only be considered an achievement gap if the difference is statistically significant, meaning larger than the margin of error.” And according to the ACT organization’s data in their March 2012 issue brief, *Do race/ethnicity-based student achievement gaps grow over time?*, “...Evidence of such academic achievement gaps—as measured by College Readiness Benchmarks and other measures of academic achievement—is all too common and persistent.”

CALPADS also informs the school of Parent Education Levels, and in 2013, ninety-nine parents responded to the parent information survey. Thirteen parents included in the survey responded to not being a high school graduate, 30 parents graduated high school, 32 have attended some college, 22 graduated from college, and 3 attended graduate school. This resulted in a 2.72 average Parent Education Level, “1” representing “Not a high school graduate” and “5” represents “Graduate School”. Marc Hugo Lopez states in his article, *Latinos and Education: Explaining the Attainment Gap*, “Less than half (47%) say parents of Hispanic students not

playing an active role in helping their children succeed is a major reason” (Lopez, 2009). During the problem of practice interviews where I began gathering information, the Executive Director of Kindred mentioned the possibility of a pattern with native born scholars versus immigrant scholars--stating that there could be differences in educational beliefs, knowledge, and educational ability. Similarly Lopez names the same gap, “...a second gap is even bigger, and it largely explains the first gap. It is between young Latinos who are immigrants and those who are native born” (Lopez, 2009). Finally, in another more recent conversation with a parent, a father voiced his need for further assistance and information to help his scholar’s academics and behavior stating, “I don’t know what else to do for him. I need professional help.” Multiple scholars in the interview stated, “My mom [parents] doesn’t know how to help me.” This statement has pushed me to move forward with further interviews with parents, scholars, and teachers in regards to the patterns surrounding the achievement gap.

Over the years, Kindred Academy has attempted to address the Achievement Gap in multiple ways. In its first year, Kindred separated the groups into the varying demographics, primarily based on diagnostic assessments. There was a cluster of Latino scholars in 2 rotating classes and a cluster of Asian Scholars in the other set of 2 rotating classes. At the end of the year, the data showed the scholars in the class with the Asian Scholars excel more rapidly than the class with the Hispanic and Latino cluster. The first few years teachers were also given an informal (not given by the GLAD- Guided Language Acquisition Design experts) professional development and were to implement GLAD strategies for all English Language Learners. Some practices were in place, but not used to fidelity or consistently. At end of these years the gap did not close, and if anything still continued to grow. In 2012, as part of an REACH Action Research Project, the Kindred team began requiring teachers to go on at least 12 home visits a year to

begin to bridge the home-school connection in hopes to start to mend the gap. And still, the Achievement Gap did not close. Kindred continued to approach the gap in isolated components, as mentioned above: first academically (small groups, push-ins, pull-outs, double dipping scholars in the content, etc.), then through building relationships with families (home visits), and then academically again (ELL specific strategies), but as of today, we have not tried to tackle the parents directly and adjust their learning, knowledge, skills, and belief in the Kindred mission. The article, *The Role of Latino Fathers in Family-School Engagement*, states, "We know that we can benefit from a deeper understanding of their engagement and "attitudes toward their children's education, including their hopes for their children's futures, the misunderstanding of their participation, and suggestions for improving their involvement" (Quiócho & Daoud, 2006, p. 256)" (Quiñones and Kiyamap, 153).

At the end of 2013-2014, the leadership team and a few families met to discuss the major shifts for our school, those shifts being: Common Core/Academic Achievement, Technology, and Family Engagement. This was the first time that the Achievement Gap was recognized by parents and it became clear that there was a knowledge gap in both scholars and their parents. Families, staff, and administration began to think about and discuss what might be the root and underlining problem, such as clarity around expectations, beliefs in the school's mission, and knowledge around elementary education and child development. Many parents and children have mentioned that they, the parents, don't know *how* to help the scholars at home. It is clear in the article, *Playing Fair With Latino Parents as Parents, Not Teachers: Beyond Family Literacy as Assisting Homework*, that there is a struggle for Latino Parents and it is connected to the parents knowledge and skill level. "Homework strikes harder at the parents and children of lower socioeconomic status: Unlike higher class families, they lack the time, school experiences,

resources, and adequate space to do the homework" (Torres, 2011). Based on the patterns seen in the above mentioned data, it is believed that family engagement in a scholar's education directly correlates to the achievement and performance of the scholar. Although without alignment to the school's mission, a knowledge base for elementary education, and clear, consistent expectations for parents, family engagement suffers, resulting in scholars' poor achievement and performance.

So this brings us to the beginning of the 2014-15 school-year, the achievement gap is evident with the trends in attendance, tardies, and overall engagement of scholars and their families. According to our character and academic system, Kickboard, 6 scholars, all of Latino or Hispanic decent, have been tardy anywhere from 15-20 times as September 29, 2014. As of October 21, 2014, 9 scholars have had 20-28 incomplete reading logs and/or homework assignments. There is an overlap in the different data points, which helped to create the focus scholars and families that have been chosen, therefore, **my problem of practice is that Latino parents at Kindred Academy do not have the knowledge and skills to support their scholar's academic performance, therefore resulting in an achievement gap between Kindred's Latino and Vietnamese scholars.** Through analyzing data, specifically number of absences, tardies, incomplete reading logs, and incomplete homework, I will form a focus group of parents and scholars. I need get to the root of the problem which I believe is directly related to family engagement on and off site, cultural beliefs on education, and a gap in knowledge and know-how. The trends in the above data and the focus group also show a pattern of classroom misbehavior and at time multiple trips to the office or referrals. After interviewing parents they state that they do not know what to do and are frustrated. Addressing this achievement gap is an urgent concern not only at Kindred Academy, but in the McFranklin School District, California, and the Nation.

## REVIEW OF RELEVANT LITERATURE

Research shows that “a more than 20-point gap between white and Hispanic students on National Assessment of Educational Progress tests in reading and mathematics has not changed significantly since 1990” (Beatty, 2013). Alexandra Beatty (2013) also states, that “gaps are not “an inevitable fact of nature,”” therefore implying that there are strategies and best practices that will address and help mend the gaps. Among these strategies is the idea of increasing parent engagement and involvement at school and at home (Jeyes, 2011; Lee et al., 2006; Quiñones et al., 2014). Similar to the importance of expectations at school, parent educational expectations significantly affect academic achievement (Lee et al., 2006). Schools, parents, and communities need to realize that they are not alone in ensuring student success; they can work together (Jeyes, 2011).

In this literature review I will examine the barriers that hold Latino families back from having more engagement in their children’s education. Then, I will briefly discuss the challenges that teachers and students face at school, and in the case of students, at home as well. Finally, I will describe strategies that, according to research, have proven to be successful in building family engagement both at home and school. Based on this review I argue that a relationship must first be built with the families and then through questioning one can gain a better understanding to help the families increase the knowledge and skills that will best assist them in helping their children, thus engaging the parents more in their children’s education, which eventually will contribute positively to fixing the ever growing Achievement Gap. I will also contend that providing a family literacy program for parents where the focus is on them building a relationship with their children based on and around their children’s education will help the

families grow more comfortable with the educational setting in a non-threatening environment, therefore again boosting their involvement in the children's academic lives. These strategies along with many others have to take place in school and at home in order for Kindred to start mending the Achievement Gap between the Latino and Vietnamese scholars. Research shows that each piece of this puzzle is necessary to address this problem.

### **Every day barriers that Latino Families face**

Academic achievement both in and out of school can be greatly affected by a parent's expectations on learning and parent involvement (Lee, 2006). Involvement and engagement can be defined in various ways, and with this comes multiple barriers: physically, socially, emotionally, and economically. These barriers stem from inequalities that parents confront on a daily basis. Since so many of these parents are immigrants, often first and second generation, they frequently lack the education, confidence, familiarity of European-American Education, and at times have negative experiences with schooling themselves which can lead them to be intimidated by European-American Education and avoid communication (Lee, 2006; Smith et al., 2011). Therefore, there are variations in parent involvement and engagement in their students' education (Lee et al., 2006; Grenfell & James, 1998).

Many Latino families belong to the low-income and working class groups in society. These groups often face obstacles that ultimately influence the amount of involvement and engagement that they have in their children's education (Lee et al., 2006). Some of these barriers include inflexible work schedules, lack of child care, and inadequate or unreliable transportation (Heymann & Earl, 2000; Lee et al., 2006). Communication is a challenge as well—language being the main obstruction (Smith et al., 2011; Good et al., 2010). I argue that communication is



important because in order for parents to understand the strengths and areas of growth for their scholars, as well as build a relationship with the school and teachers, all parties involved need to be able to speak to each other, learn about aspirations and concerns, work together to solve problems, and provide support where needed. If one of the parties cannot communicate because of language it puts a halt on the whole process, thus becoming a barrier. In addition to this, a parent's social class background can act as a hurdle or it can assist them, e.g. student achievement is seen in European-American parents, parents who don't live in poverty, and more educated parents (Lee et al., 2006). Lee (2006) also describes other obstacles that parents come up against: limited access to resources, economic stress, and low education achievement.

Smith (2011) explains another theme or pattern that can be seen in schools across America: the lack of a common understanding between families and school staff members around what it means to be involved. Previous studies show that some parents believe "being involved and engaged" means that they are arriving to school on time and keep their children safe (Smith et al., 2011; Lawson, 2003). Schools tend to see involvement as visibly being seen on campus on a regular basis, attending events, meetings, and assisting students on assignments. As stated in the quote below, it is important to understand what parents, teachers, scholars, and the community sees as involvement because it's possible that each party involved fully believes they *are* involved. It's a matter of realizing how to leverage their particular type of involvement and its effects.

*"... inequality is prevalent in the educational system through an achievement gap based on poverty and race/ethnicity— Therefore, a greater understanding of the effects of multiple types of involvement across demographic groups at the school level may*

*increase understanding of how to use parent involvement to address education gap"*  
(Copyright (2006) Lee, J.S., and Bowen, N.K.(Lee, 2006)

In a recent study, Good (2010) chose to dive deep in to the barriers that influence Hispanic ELL students from having high academic achievement. After collecting responses from both parent and teacher participants, five themes were revealed. These themes are as follows: communication gaps; culture clashes; lack of a systemic, articulated district ELL plan; lack of teacher preparation in multiculturalism, language acquisition, and ELL instructional strategies; and a lack of support systems for families transitioning to a new environment and new culture (Good et al., 2010). For the purposes of my action research I chose to focus on the culture clashes and the lack of support systems for families transitioning to a new environment and new culture.

Culture clashes, as Good (2010) calls them, can be seen as many of the barriers already listed above. Some examples of these clashes are seen in the definition of education versus educación. (Del Monte, 2012) Education means academics where teachers create the educational experience. Educación translates in Spanish to having good manners and showing respect (Del Monte, 2012). Because of these differences in the cultural definitions parents often do not understand their role on a school campus. According to Del Monte's (2012) research, field trips, school events, plays, and projects do not happen at school in Mexico. Good's (2010) study resulted in both parents and teachers describing misunderstandings and conflicts for European-American United States school culture and Mexican school culture. These culture clashes can cause stress within families; between the language and culture barriers children tend to drift further from their traditional cultural values which in turn causes the parents to feel deprived of

their own culture (Good et al. 2010). This movement of the children conforming to mainstream United States culture can result in a greater struggle which Good's parent group describes as "family chaos" (Good et al. 2010).

The final barrier that will be discussed in this literature review is the lack of support systems. Support can be defined here in several ways depending on what families need. Sometimes it's emotional, social, economical, academic, behavioral, or technological support. In fact, families can lack support in many of these areas combined. Because of various challenges already mentioned above, parents in Good's (2010) study expressed living in a world of poverty and uncertainty. I picture it like a vicious cycle that they are unable to break from. Imagine for a minute having to transition to a new country, learn a new language, and work in an economy with unpredictable wages. The level of stress, anxiety, and emotional upheaval would be insurmountable (Good et al. 2010). This statement vividly confirms that we have to provide families with a support system that is defined by their different needs:

*Celia, a parent in Good's study shared: "There are situations when children need therapy in order to maintain their academic achievement. Loss of a loved one, divorce, and other problems at home affect their performance at school. We need to look for professional help outside of school, which places an additional financial burden on parents." (Good et al., 2010)*

*Parents feel guilty about not being able to help support their children's academic and emotional needs. They, the parents, are in a gap themselves, a sort of limbo, where they are no longer directly connected to the Mexican culture, but are also not fully adapted to the American culture (Del Monte, 2012).*

## Challenges among teachers and students

Many of the research articles that have been written to address and gather information on this problem focus on the teachers and students—or more specifically what is being done at the school level. Where I do find these challenges and strategies to be important I feel that they are only one piece of the bigger puzzle. For the purpose of this literature review I will focus on a few of the challenges that further support my stance of the problem, where I claim that a relationship must first be built with the families and then through questioning one can gain a better understanding to help families to achieve the knowledge and skills that will best assist parents in helping their children, thus engaging them more in their children's education, which eventually will contribute positively to fixing the ever growing Achievement Gap. Such strategies as early intervention and small group or one-on-one strategic support are not enough (Geller et al, 2006)—to ensure academic success for students we must also engage families in the effort.

Teachers are faced with students who need to not only learn English, but they also need to learn *how* to succeed in a new educational system. This happens because of the misalignment in expectations, as mentioned above; Geller (2006) states that “students are losing the value of a quality education.” Students tend to not learn the skills in their main language because they are pushed too quickly into learning English without proper support, when they haven't even fully gained the understanding of their first language (Geller et al, 2006). In result, they don't have any foundation for either language. Overtime students build up frustration, and teachers see this as boredom or discipline issues—sometimes resulting in increased referrals and rebellion (Good et al., 2010). The school is then faced with trying to decipher between built up anger from having to leave behind Mexico and academic gaps because of language barriers and differences

in academic expectations. Additionally, I wonder how much the same feelings of anger and frustration are felt by parents who they themselves are often first generation immigrants struggling with language and changes in culture.

### **Importance of a strong relationship between parent-school, parent-student, parent-teacher, teacher-school, and teacher-student**

Personal outreach and communication are very important when building, or rebuilding, a relationship or partnership between the school, the parents, the students, and the teachers. Parents are afraid, haven't built up trust, and don't always understand the importance of the relationship and the need for communication (Del Monte, 2012). In multiple articles and studies school staff emphasized reaching out and connecting to families to increase student academic success (Geller et al, 2006; Jeynes, 2011; Afifi & Olson, 2005; Davalos, Chavez, & Guardiola, 2005; Jeynes, 2005a, 2007b). Some strategies that have been used are home visits, conferences, daily/weekly phone calls, and attending community events. Relationships among the parties should be encouraging, loving, and supportive. This is more important than providing specific guidelines for how they should be parenting (Jeyes, 2011; Mapp et al., 2008; Sheldon, 2005). Similarly these characteristics should be used with parents and their children, and with students and teachers.

The Latino culture is specifically more relational in comparison to the American culture which is competitive with a focus on independence (Good et al., 2010; Perea, 2004). The students and the families can benefit from ongoing communication which builds a shared understanding, partnership, and continued collaboration (Good et al., 2010; Delgado-Gaitan, 2004; Epstein et al., 2002). Good (2010) declares that parents and teachers cannot work alone and

believe that they can try to mend this gap, but I think that it takes all the relationships, parent-school, parent-student, parent-teacher, teacher school, and teacher-student to work together in collaboration, not isolation to restore the gap that continues to widen.

### **Components of a strong family literacy program**

After taking a look at the culture clashes and barriers that Latino families face, I chose to look deeper into the research that describes that there is a lack of support systems for families transitioning to a new environment and new culture. One common trend is that often times families do not have the support they need in order to read with their children (Chaney, 2014). Many studies concluded that the strongest impact on a student's academic achievement is to have parents discuss school activities and read with their children at home (Smith et al., 2011; Ingram, Wolfe, & Lieberman, 2007; Sui-Chu & Willms, 1996; Van Voorhis, 2003). Therefore the studies proposed a Family Literacy Program as one part of the solution.

Del Monte's (2012) presentation and training on family literacy names four important goals that a strong family literacy program should have: 1) establish and support an family reading routine, 2) Improve English-language skills, 3) Improve Spanish literacy skills, and 4) Strengthen parent/child interaction. This particular program was created in response to the Latino communities and the needs of specifically Latino parents and children (Del Monte, 2012). Another study focused on the works initiated by Freire in 1992, this study described family literacy program as liberating and culturally responsive—they should acknowledge, value, and promote different practices and understandings (Torres et al.; 2011). Similar to Del Monte's program, the practice for parents should encourage genuine participation (Torres et al.; 2011; Del Monte, 2012). What you want to avoid is a program that teaches parents to teach their children

literacy skills when they themselves have not obtained these foundational skills in English, nor their home language. Both Torres (2011) and Del Monte (2012) stress the importance of having parents set the agenda, run particular components, and evaluate the program in the end. As Torres (2011) puts it, “the overarching goal of family literacy programs is to create an environment for the growth of the critical consciousness of the participants.”

In reflection the literature review shows that the school, teachers, parents, and students have to build, or rebuild, a relationship based on trust and clear understandings, and overcome the barriers that continue to affect families in regards to parent involvement and engagement. Based on this analysis, I conclude that the best barriers to tackle are the idea of Culture Clashes and the lack of support systems for families transitioning to a new environment and a new culture. I argue that these are some of the many things that must be addressed to try to begin to mend the greater problem that is the Achievement Gap. Many of the parents’ barriers are out of the control of the school and some of the challenges that students and teachers face at the school are currently being addressed. Creating a partnership that builds trust and understandings, and lessens anxiety about both the Latino and American cultures will ultimately increase parent involvement. Therefore, using key stakeholders and increasing parent involvement both at school and at home are tools or pieces of the puzzle that help reduce the achievement gap (Lee et al., 2006).

Based on the information gathered during the literature review, my intervention to this problem of practice is three-fold. First, I will begin by tracking tardies, referrals, and incomplete reading log and homework. From this data I will pull a focus group of scholars and families that

will be used throughout the intervention. By interviewing the focus families I will gather information on the barriers and Culture Clashes that may be prohibiting them from engaging with their scholars' education in a way that allows Kindred to meet them part way. I will also hold group interviews or check-ins with the focus scholars and their teachers to gather information on some of the challenges that they are facing either on or off site. Finally, I will keep weekly contact with both the scholars and the families in order to hold both parties accountable.

The second part of my intervention is to build a strong relationship with not only these focus scholars, but with their families. I will build this relationship, and soon to be partnership, by communicating regularly, attending parent-teacher conferences, and arranging home-visits. The final step in my intervention is to have the focus families attend a ten-week Latino Family Literacy program that will not only build their knowledge and skills to help their children, but it will hopefully create a new trust and inseparable bond among the school, the families, and the scholars.

My ultimate goal is to reach out to all parties involved seeing that everyone owns a piece of the puzzle that is scholar achievement. In order to bridge a partnership between the school, families, and scholars I have to discover the barriers that are stopping them, form a relationship while also building a structure of accountability, and finally provide the skills and knowledge that begin to address academic supports.



## THEORY OF ACTION

Problem of Practice	Literature Review	Literature Review	Intervention	Literature Review	Expected Outcome
<i>What is the context? What is the problem in that context? Why?</i>	<i>What do you know about the problem?</i>	<i>What has been tried in the past to address the problem? What was successful and why?</i>	<i>What are you going to try? Why do you think it will impact the problem? What is your rationale?</i>	<i>What do we know about quality interventions of this kind?</i>	<i>What do you think will change/ improve?</i>
<p>Latino parents at Kindred Academy do not have the knowledge and skills to support their scholar's academic performance, therefore resulting in an achievement gap between Kindred's Latino and Vietnamese scholars.</p>	<p>Problem in the nation for many years, but has been seen primarily between African-American and Caucasian students, and Latino and Caucasian students.</p> <p>The number of Latino students in America has increased of the course of the last 14 years.</p> <p>No Child Left Behind was meant to be a means to a solution for the achievement gap.</p> <p>Culturally there are differences between Latino and Vietnamese families.</p> <p>There are many types of barriers for Spanish speaking students and families</p> <p>Culturally: -Education vs. Educacion -rural vs. urban -different</p>	<p>NCLB linked to the problem</p> <p>Home-visits: began to address the problem with some, but it did not get to the only root of the problem.</p> <p>Translations for documents</p> <p>On site: Small group pull outs</p> <p>On site: 1:1 attention</p> <p>On site: Parent Conferences</p> <p>On site: Differentiated homework/class work</p>	<p>Analyze the trends in data for tardies, homework, reading log incomplection, and academic/character data</p> <p>Based on the above data create a focus group of scholars and parents.</p> <p>Interview the teachers, parents, and scholars themselves to find out the barriers the parents are facing, what teachers think might be the issue, and finally what scholars believe might be holding them back.</p> <p>Make phone calls to the families on a weekly basis to address the concerns around tardies.</p> <p>Set up a home visit and/or attend parent-teacher conferences to build the connection to the families.</p> <p>Have focus families sign up and attend</p>	<p>We know that it is important to define the types of engagement that exist (parent vs. school) and to find out the barriers that are stopping families from engaging in a European-American Sense.</p> <p>Research also shows that it is important to build relationships with Latino Families because this is extremely important to their culture.</p> <p>Finally, there have been multiple studies done on building Literacy Skills in families in order for them to be successful assisting their scholars. This also builds their own foundation of knowledge and skills for reading.</p>	<p>After implementing this intervention I should see changes in the number of incompletes for tardies, reading log, homework, and, with specific scholars, a decrease in referrals.</p> <p>This is assuming that because of the work I have done with families that the school relationship with the parents has improved, the parents relationship with the scholars academic skills have improvement, and finally their confidence, engagement, and communication has grown. Overall a change in their engagement with their</p>

	definitions of literacy  “The importance of education starts at home.”		the 10 week Family Literacy Course.		scholars’ education— breaking through some of the barriers.
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### **INTERVENTION AND DATA COLLECTION PLAN**

The driving force behind this action research project is that there is a gap between Kindred’s Vietnamese and Latino scholars. Prior to now, Kindred has done many things to try to tackle this problem including homogenous classes, heterogeneous grouping, one-on-one (student-teacher), professional development geared towards teaching English Language Learners, parent-teacher conferences, and home visits. All of which have been beneficial in their own right, but do not quite mend the gap. In fact the gap continues to grow. In order to address this issue in a way that has yet to be done, I decided to focus on the level of parent engagement that specifically the Latino families have. I also organized a plan that brings in many of the things that have been tried in the past, but combines the ideas in order to create a stronger bridge between the gap.

For the purposes of this action research project I gathered data on incomplete homework, incomplete reading log, and excessive tardies using Kindred’s tracking system, Kickboard. From this data, a focus group of students and families was formed. The first step in my intervention is to contact the families of scholars who have excessive tardies. These phone calls will take place every Friday and will be translated as necessary. The families will be informed of the school policy for tardies as stated in the Parent Handbook, they will be updated on their number of tardies, and students will be issued a consequence as necessary. The ultimate goal is to see if

regular conversations help families see the importance of having their scholars attend school on time and complete their homework and/or reading.

The second step in this intervention is to schedule and attend home visits of the focus students and families. During the home visits I will focus primarily on building the relationship among myself, the school, and the Latino focus families. The notion of building this relationship was strongly encouraged in nearly every piece of literature I read. At the time of the visit I also hope to gain further understanding of the barriers that stop the families from being engaged, clarify any misunderstandings, and gain knowledge in regards to the family's hopes and dreams for their student. The data that will be gathered is a journal that I write after completing each home visit.

The final step in the intervention and hopefully the last connecting piece of the puzzle is to have the focus families attend a Latino Family Literacy Program. The program is a total of 10 sessions and will focus on building the knowledge and skills of literacy. A Spanish speaking teacher and myself will be the instructors for each session, but we will empower the parents to be leaders as well. A pre and post-survey will be given for the 10 week program; this survey will focus on the Latino Literacy program as a whole and the parents' level of engagement in their child's education. Post-session reflections will be given that focus on what the parents have learned so far in the program, questions they still have, and things they wish the program had.

Besides creating a foundation of literacy knowledge and skills, another key component of the Latino Family Literacy Program is the building of relationships between the students and their families. After building a stronger relationship with the school and the families, the focus

then changes to the students and the families. In a sense it triangulates the relationship--- school-student, student-family, family-school.

With a multiple step intervention the expected change is that Latino families have a stronger sense of the school's expectations and obtains a knowledge and skill base for literacy, resulting in increased engagement in their student's education, which will ultimately have impact on the ever-growing achievement gap. Throughout this process the school itself changes as well. Kindred will gain information and insight into, as stated in the literature, the barriers and Cultural Clashes that affect the students, the teachers, the school, and the community.

#### *Overview of Intervention*

	<b>Component</b>	<b>Activities</b>	<b>Purpose/Question to be answered</b>	<b>Data to be Collected</b>	<b>Type of Data (process v. impact)</b>
1	Weekly communication to parents which is aligned to the tracker for tardies, homework, and reading log completion --- ultimately influencing the mindset of the families on scholars attending school on time and completing assignments.	B.L. selects and prints weekly tardies  Tardies are tracked by V.D. in Google Tracker for tardies  V.D. and B.L. call scholars families in regards to tardies  M.D. pulls Kickboard data to see the trends of focus scholars over time	Does regular home and school communication improve tardies, homework completion, and reading log completion?	Kickboard data tracked weekly  Phone Calls tracked weekly	Impact  Process
2	Focus parents attend a 10 week Latino Literacy	Meet specifically with focus scholars during parent-teacher conferences to discuss	Does parent education change the level of parent engagement/involvement	Pre/Post Survey for parents regarding Latino Literacy Program and parent	Impact  Process

	Program	<p>program and trends in HW/rdg./tardies, face to face</p> <p>Latino Literacy Program Parents learn to read picture books in both Spanish and English</p> <p>Parents learn familiar vocabulary in both Spanish and English</p> <p>Parents learn key literacy standards and knowledge in order to assist their scholars at home</p> <p>Parents work with scholars and read the books that they have preread in class with their scholars</p> <p>Parents create a family photo album of them reading with their scholars</p>	<p>in their scholars' education? (<i>and the level of comfort they have towards European-American education? Charter?</i>)</p> <p>How do parents feel about their participation in the Latino Literacy Program?</p>	<p>engagement</p> <p>Post sessions reflections → 3 things learned, 3 questions, 3 things they wish the program had</p>	<p>Process</p> <p>Impact</p>
4	<p>Translator at Latino Literacy Program sessions to assist in communication</p> <p>Translation of the full program</p>	<p>A Latino Literacy Program that is translated in both Spanish and English.</p> <p>Books that are in Spanish and English.</p> <p>Vocabulary and Literacy skills written in Spanish and English</p>	<p>Does the presence of a translator help parents feel more comfortable with _____ ?</p> <p>Does translation help keep the lines of communication open?</p>	<p>Post sessions reflections</p> <p>Pre/Post interviews surveys</p>	Process
6	Translator to assist in communication of parent accountability	Group and individual interviews → translator for the conversation that is held with parents	Does the presence of a translator help parents feel more comfortable with _____ ?	Post interviews with parents	Process

	in weekly	Meet specifically with focus scholars during parent-teacher conferences	Does translation help keep the lines of communication open?		
7	Home visits with focus parents to build relationships	V.D. and E.Q. (or another Spanish speaking team member) visit the home of focus scholars in order to build the relationship with the families in a place where they feel the least threatened and comfortable.	Do improved home-school connections improve the level of parent engagement/involvement in their scholars' education?	Pre/Post interviews with parents, scholars, and teachers  Write reflection after each home visit (journal?)	Impact Process
8	Translator at home visits to assist in communication	V.D. and E.Q. (or another Spanish speaking team member) visit the home of focus scholars in order to build the relationship with the families in a place where they feel the least threatened and comfortable. Translator is there to support this relationship.	Does the presence of a translator help parents feel more comfortable with _____ ?	Transcribe reflection after each home visit (journal?)	Process

## RESEARCH METHODS

The ultimate goal of this research and intervention was to see if by increasing parent engagement there would be a decrease in the achievement gap for a focus group of students. For this action research I expected to shift family's thinking about the importance of coming to school on time, completing assignments including homework and reading log, and to break down barriers and institutional values by making regular phone calls home. Multiple home visits took place in hopes to build relationships, break down communication and culture clashes, and clear up

expectations for both home and school. Finally focus scholars' parents attended a Latino Literacy Program to build knowledge and skills, address foundational skills for language, and build confidence and family leadership. The primary means for gathering data were: phone calls, home visits, and the Latino Literacy Program. (*see Table 1: Expected Change*)

*Table 1: Expected Change*

Phone Calls to Families	Home Visits	Latino Literacy Program
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Shift family's thinking about the importance of coming to school on time and completing assignments</li> <li>• Break down the barriers and institutional values</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Build relationships</li> <li>• Break down communication barrier and culture clashes</li> <li>• Clear up expectations for both home and school</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Build knowledge and skills</li> <li>• Address foundational skills for language</li> <li>• Build confidence and family leadership</li> </ul>



## Increase Parent and/or Family Engagement

I collected data in six forms: pre and post surveys from parents, pre and post surveys from teachers, mid program reflections from parents, researcher's journal during program, researcher home visit reflection journals, and homework, reading log, and tardy tracking of scholars over time. Before beginning the intervention, I began calling parents to address the excessive tardies that were occurring; I informed the parents of the policy and reminded them of the importance of being to school on time. Some families were contacted multiple times of the course of several weeks. In January, I interviewed scholars and transcribed their responses regarding their incomplete

homework and reading logs. And in February I began the Latino Literacy Program and home visits, collecting pre and post surveys, session reflections, and a researcher's journal.

To triangulate my data I used three sources to strengthen my findings, the surveys from parent and teachers and the session reflections were collected. These were also collected to monitor the process of the intervention to ensure consistency and monitor for change. The post surveys gathered from both the parents and the teachers were to show the impact of the intervention. The parent pre and post surveys were given as printed hard copies that the parents completed. The questions were both, multiple choice and open response. The open response allowed parents to write in either Spanish or English, and the questions were translated. Teacher pre and post surveys were done as a Google form and included both, multiple choice and open response. The Google form allowed the analyzing of data to be immediate, although not all teachers completed the forms in either the pre or post survey—which left some of the data inconsistent.

Along with the surveys, I also recorded my own thoughts and learnings in a home visit research journal. In this journal I noted the details of the home visits. While at the home visits, I spoke to families about their experience before coming to America, the timeframe of which they moved, their experience when first coming to America, their hopes and dreams for their family, and their educational background. The surveys given during the Latino Literacy program focused on new knowledge of parents, their wishes for the future, and communication regarding their scholar's education.

Throughout the intervention I watched and monitored the quantitative data. Teachers inputted homework and reading log incompleteness into Kickboard, an online tracking program that is used by the school. The data from Kickboard was pulled and tracked by a colleague, M.D. In



October, five scholars were determined as the “top 5 scholars” on Kickboard for incomplete homework, reading log, and tardies. M. D. tracked these top 5 scholars every week. As the data came in, I monitored it for an increase or decrease of incompletes or tardies, while simultaneously calling families to inform them of the changes. Scholars discipline was also tracked for one particular focus student. The phone calls to families were tracked each week. Over time, as the number of scholars increased, the phone calls occurred on a bi-monthly basis, eventually becoming a letter that was sent home. I did not anticipate the number of scholars increasing to such large numbers. In order to manage the process, I kept communication, but had to change the type of communication occurring.

For the qualitative data, I collected paper and electronic surveys. Once the surveys were transcribed and inputted into the spreadsheets, I was able to look at the qualitative data. I coded the qualitative data, focusing on the questions I was hoping to answer through the research and intervention. As I was coding more codes appeared and I revised the original set. I settled on seventeen codes (*see Table 2: Data Codes*). I reviewed and coded the pre and post parent surveys, pre and post teacher surveys, the session reflections, and the researcher’s journal.

***Table 2: Data Codes***

Explanation	Codes
Home Communication Tardies	HCT
Home Communication Homework	HCHW
Home Communication Reading Log	HCRL
Parent Knowledge and Skills	PKS
New Parent Learning	NPL
Parent Knowledge Gap	PKG
Knowledge and Skills Teacher Perception	KSTP
Latino Literacy Parent Participation	LLPP
Comfort Level Translator	CLT
Comfort Level Latino Literacy	CLLL

Comfort Level with Reading English	CLRE
Comfort Level Reading with Scholar	CLRS
Parent Engagement in Scholar Education	PESE
Parent-Teacher Communication	PTC
Importance of culture	IOC
Importance of Relationship	IOR
Culture Clash	CC

When reading the pre surveys for coding, I kept my eye out for keywords that indicated culture clashes, institutional values, barriers in communication, and lack of knowledge. In the post surveys I looked for a change in mindset, a breakdown of institutional values, growth of knowledge and skills, increased comfort and confidence with the English language, school work, and areas where relationship increased. The researcher's journals were used to primarily track the relationships, comfort, and engagement of the parents. Once coding was completed, I counted the frequency and quantity of different codes found throughout the data set.

Finally, I took all data set and compared them—looking for trends, patterns, and the components of the expected change. Indicators of change in knowledge and institutional values were gathered from the teacher and parent open responses and the researcher's journals, or qualitative data. A change of actions could best be seen in the quantitative data tracking scholar's tardies and incompletes.

## **DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS**

This study examined how parent engagement can increase by regular communication, building of relationships, and an increase in parents' skills and knowledge. The following set of impact and process questions framed the study:

**Impact**

- Does regular home communication improve relationship, homework and reading log communication, and attendance?
- Does improving home-school connection improve parent engagement?
- Does parent education change parent comfort level, engagement, and relationships?

**Process**

- How do parents feel about their participation in the Latino Literacy Program?
- Does the presence of a translator help parents feel more comfortable participating and engaging?

Participants were asked various forms of the process questions through multiple choice and open response questions. The responses were analyzed and data were gathered on overarching trends and themes in regards to the impact questions. I then coded the data using my initial list of codes that derived from my theory of action. Pre and post surveys were compared, as well as open response reflections and my own research journal.

**TRENDS**

After coding and analyzing the data, the major trends that emerged were around parents gaining new knowledge and skill through participation and comfort with the Latino Literacy Program. With the increase of knowledge and participation there was an underlying growth in the relationship between the researcher, a teacher who participated in and translated for the program, and the parents that were involved. Another trend was the increase in the comfort level that parents had with reading to their students—specifically in English. Overall, the greatest trend that arose was the ever increasing parents' engagement in their student's education. Along with these positive increases, there was also a slight decrease of culture clashes and teacher perception of the parents'

knowledge and skills over the course of the intervention. The presence of both of these trends is the fuel to continue the intervention--- informing the current standings on both of these subjects as well as providing further information and support to continue the study. Through regular communication, the quantitative data also showed a decrease in the number of incomplete homework and reading log, in addition to a decrease in the number of tardies for some of the focus students.

### **PARENTS GAINING NEW KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS**

Earlier in the year J.D., a parent of a current 3<sup>rd</sup> grade student who had been with Kindred since kindergarten and was held back one year, stated, “I don’t know what to do with him anymore. I need help.” This comment was made to me after several phone calls regarding A.D.’s multiple tardies, incompletes on homework and reading log, and the numerous referrals he had received in the last two years. At this moment I felt as defeated as his father, and I realized something had to change.

Based on J.D.’s comment, one area that I had hoped to see significant shifts was in the focus parents gaining new knowledge and skills throughout the intervention, specifically within the ten Latino Literacy Program sessions. It was found while reading previous studies and then later identified in the literature review that the program needed to improve English-language skills, Spanish literacy skills, and create a family reading routine. The program that focus parents participated in did just that. This could be seen in multiple statements regarding the impact of the intervention-- the session reflections and post surveys from the program. The following quotes confirm the success of the program in the intervention:

*“I learned how to read with my son that steps, look that from page, predict what is going to happen in the future, read the title and writer.” –L.H.*

*“What for me was something different is that more parents were interested in this program because of the work at grabbing with us parents is marvelous, has everything you need to achieve a good result.”*  
 –J.D.

J.D., L.H., and each focus parent that participated regularly in the program expressed that they learned more from the program than they had imagined. Their only wish was that the program was opened up to multiple families and would take place multiple times a year. Many of the parents indicated that they would even take the program again.

### **CHANGE IN PARENT COMFORT LEVEL**

One of the greatest findings throughout the intervention was the parents’ comfort level, both with the program as a whole and with reading English. Parents initially were apprehensive and only wanted to read in the language that they felt most comfortable, with 7 out of 8 parents this language was Spanish. By showing my vulnerability and speaking Spanish, even though it was a challenge, parents felt more comfortable doing the same. During the third session they had started to whisper English words when we practiced vocabulary and would ask questions regarding pronunciations and definitions. As time went on, more and more hands would raise—volunteering to read a particular passage or section in English. I too continued to read in Spanish. During the 5<sup>th</sup> session I read a particularly challenging portion of the text in Spanish. When I finished, the group applauded. It was in this moment that I realized that parents and teachers alike were gaining knowledge and skills that would change their life, and that this process was truly affecting them. In every session that followed parents and teachers encouraged and corrected each other.

*“I really liked this class because we learned a lot with teachers. We learned with the teachers and much to read with my girls read in Spanish and English with them is very nice to me and all I do. Thanks.”* – A.S.

The environment truly switched from a nervous silence to an open acceptance of learning and growth. It was a common trend that parents found the corrections to be encouraging and the

program to be a place of comfort. In a reflection regarding the Latino Literacy program, L. B., a parent of a kindergartner and a 3<sup>rd</sup> grade scholar stated, “[What I enjoyed most was to] gather with teachers and parents of students as they placed me to read in English and I like that the corrected me.” Because of the Latino Literacy program, the Latino parents at Kindred Academy gained the knowledge and skills to support their scholar’s academic performance and increase their comfort level overall.

### **IMPORTANCE OF RELATIONSHIPS AND CULTURE**

The intervention contained a large focus on the importance of relationships and culture. It was found during the literature review that Latino families connect strongly to their culture as well as the importance of the relationships in their life. Within the intervention I made sure to include components that addressed both of these topics. Home visits were conducted to establish more of a relationship with the families and to gain further knowledge that was not necessarily academic focused, but also focused on character, family, and the background of the students. Culture was very prevalent within in the home visits as well as the scrapbook that families created during the Latino Literacy Program. As one parent stated, “The activities were grasping for the memory of our children with the folder to decorate.” Both the books and the activities aligned to multiple culturally responsive events such as Día de Muertos (Day of the Dead), immigration stories of opening shops and working for factories, tales of a better life in America, etc. Each book and activity addressed topics that every participant could relate to, whether they were first or second generation. These stories provided a focus on culture and helped build the relationship between the students and their parents. During the sessions, all 8 of the participants commented on enjoying the content of the books and remarked about their students being engaged in the history as well.

After one of the home visits I recorded in my journal about how one “mom talked about how she really wished there were more classes of Latino Literacy because she wanted more books. She also spoke about how she wanted more books that had both the Spanish and English translations” and that “both girls spoke about enjoying the books. This process data, showed that A.H. enjoyed hearing mom read in English and helping her.” J.T.’s mom communicated about J.T. asking questions in regards to the history of their family and being intrigued by their family stories because of the tales that were told in the books. Through the books, the parents of Kindred Academy continued to increase their knowledge and skills which ultimately increased their engagement in their student’s education. Conversations similar to the ones mentioned above show the importance of ensuring that parents have the skills and are comfortable speaking to their children, as well as making sure that the content being discussed is relatable for all parties involved.

The importance of relationship and culture could be seen throughout all of the parent reflections and surveys. They also made many informal comments about the activities that we did stating that they wanted to make sure they had time to work on the scrapbook that focused on their family and culture.

### **IMPORTANCE OF REGULAR COMMUNICATION**

An area that I believe initially began as a large focus during the intervention somehow ended up making some shifts of its own. The impact data showed that, where the regular communication was important, it needed to occur from all parties or stakeholders involved making a greater impact. At the end of the intervention I had teachers and parents complete post surveys where both parties discussed wishing that they communicated with each other more. Two teachers who were more involved in the Latino Literacy Program showed an increase in communication, but teachers who

were not directly involved in the program voiced not having an increase in communication as seen in such statements as:

*“I am not sure the extent of his parents’ involvement with his schoolwork at home. However, at the beginning of the year, D.H. had some behavior issues. When I contacted the family, they were very willing to help correct the behavior and speak with me about what was happening.”—C.D., classroom teacher*

In order for to truly make shifts in parent engagement, I argued in this intervention that you needed to focus on the relationship of the parents and scholars, as well as the parents and the school, but I did not put as much focus on the relationship between the teachers and the parents. As I analyzed the teacher responses it became more apparent that I should have addressed the parent to teacher relationship as well. Teachers needed to be directly involved in the efforts of the study or they needed to have a more meaningful part in the intervention. Having teachers attend the home visits is crucial, but was not required in this study. When continuing this study, teachers, parents, scholars will all be in communication with each other throughout the process.

On the other hand, regular communication in regards to incomplete homework, incomplete reading log, and excessive tardies occurred between the school, specifically myself, the Dean of School Culture, and the office assistant, improved student’s progress and parent engagement throughout the intervention. Particular focus students improved over the entire course of the intervention—at the beginning one parent even stated, “Oh, I didn’t realize they could come to school so early!” These trends in the quantitative, impact data proved the importance of communication between stakeholders. Involving teachers in this process would possibly have caused even greater gains. The following chart shows that 11 out of 12 scholars whose parents participated in the intervention met their goals on the NWEA MAP (Northwest Evaluation Association Measures of Academic Progress) Assessment. It is unclear at this point, what may have caused the



one scholar to not meet their goal. There were multiple interventions that were applied throughout the school year and the gains that were needed may have still been too challenging to address completely. Other shifts and gains *were* made for this particular scholar, both academically and socially, but the NWEA MAP data does not represent them.

Name	RIT	Percentile	Met Goal?	RIT	Percentile	Met Goal?
	Math			Reading		
O.G.	202	47	Yes	205	66	Yes
C.H.	121	1	No	140	7	Yes
A.H.	189	5	Yes	181	3	Yes
D.H.	203	82	Yes	205	85	Yes
J.H.	218	65	No	206	48	Yes
A.V.	216	37	No	202	23	Yes
R.V.	204	27	Yes	178	2	Yes
N.V.	177	13	Yes	156	1	No
J.T.	184	15	Yes	194	32	Yes
S.B.	208	65	No	205	66	Yes
D.B.	163	62	Yes	165	73	Yes
A.D.	189	14	Yes	170	2	Yes

## INCREASE IN PARENT ENGAGEMENT

In the literature review I stated that multiple authors including, Smith (2011), expressed that you must identify in what ways parents feel that they are involved in their children's lives and compare it to the school definition or expectations for engagement. The pre-surveys from parents, analyzing the impact data, showed that many parents inconsistently read with their students and more than half did not engage with their students during homework time, but simply asked the students if it was complete. Majority of the teachers expressed that the work was complete, although it was not done correctly. They stated that they had hoped parents actually checked over the homework for more than just completion. Due to the intervention of weekly phone communication

and discussions in the Latino Literacy program, I was able to find that there were two conflicting views of what is expected for homework. In further implementation of this process I would insure that the parents and teachers had a shared understanding of the expectations.

After completing the 10-session Latino Literacy Program, one hundred percent of parents in the Latino Literacy Program responded to the survey, resulting in the following process data:

This class helped me to...

- Establish a reading routine with my children
- Improve my English-language skills
- Improve my Spanish literacy skills
- Interact more with my children
- Communicate more at school
- Increase my children's interest in reading

In class I learned to...

- Start reading a book with my children by looking at the cover first
- Read the author and illustrator's name
- Allow my children to ask questions
- Ask my children questions
- Retell the central idea of the story
- to spend more time with them reading
- to have more patience when they read

Seeing the feedback from the parents, I absolutely know we are on the right track. Parents began to understand, with increasing ability, ways to interact and engage with their students, specifically in reading. S.S., a focus parent, became emotional during the last session and described how the program had changed how she worked with all three of her children even those that are older and don't attend Kindred. She indicated on the post-survey that what she enjoyed most was, "Learn[ing] English and try[ing] to talk and build my son. [Also] one way to read different with the eldest son and my oldest daughter got to trust me as the home teacher and to live as students." Statements like this, which were seen throughout the transcribed data, show that engagement increased with not only the focus siblings, but also other members of their family.

Parent engagement truly shifted for one particular parent and his student. J.D., the inspiration for this study, spoke emotionally about not knowing what to do anymore. He had reached a breaking point with his son and felt as though things were spinning out of control. A.D. did not complete his reading or homework, he was often late to school or absent, and had an abundance of referrals that reflected his struggles in and out of the classroom, but over the course of five months, so much changed. J.D. and A.D.'s home visit was, like so many of them, powerful. A segment from my research journal makes this clear:

*“During a recent fight, A.D. said he wanted to be “just like his cousins”--- according to dad his cousins have amounted to nothing and sit around playing video games all day. He wants A.D. to realize that this is not a good choice in life, and that getting into a college and starting a career is hard work and requires a lot of determination. Dad spoke with such passion and was clearly emotional, with tears in his eyes. He spoke of wanting more for his son than he feels he can provide, but he's willing to fight for it... Dad had missed the last class of Latino Literacy because of a new work schedule, but has requested to read the books with Alex on his own. He said he really missed the class and the people and would switch his schedule for the last 3 sessions. He wondered if he could repeat the class next year. We also went over how to help A.D. read at home, as well as provided some websites for reading. The family just bought their first tablet, but they do not have a computer.”*

I feel that as a school we can continue to provide resources to help parents like J.D. work with his son. As I stated in the literature review, there is a lack of support systems for families that are transitioning into the European-American education system. In order to increase the parents' engagement we have to help bridge this gap as well.

## **OVERCOMING THE BARRIERS, CULTURE CLASHES, AND PERCEPTIONS**

The most inspiring moments and those showing greatest impact during the intervention were those where the families spoke about and connected to their Mexican culture. We bonded in ways that I didn't imagine. We, the parents, the teacher, and I laughed a lot, and even cried as parents told stories about Mexico. These stories and moments happened because of the connections

that the families had to the Latino Literacy Programs books and the impact that the intervention had on them. Each book focused on different events, celebrations, and traditions in the Mexican culture. The data show a small decrease in the culture clashes and barriers, but both are still prevalent. The language barrier is number one. Where parents showed a lot of growth in being able to read English in a storybook more comfortably and having the ability to practice and discuss important vocabulary words, conversational Spanish to English was still a problem.

In order to ensure process and prevent the language barrier from influencing the intervention, I had a translator for each event—home communication, home visits, and the Latino Literacy Program. The translator was an essential component to all phases of the intervention and proved to be incredibly helpful. Parents were more comfortable expressing their true feelings, answering questions more completely and engaging in the process. Ninety percent of the parents wrote their answers to the open reflections in Spanish so their responses had to be translated as well. Having the exact phrases translated appropriately was definitely challenging. Often times the words did not translate from Spanish to English accurately using Google Translate, so I had multiple native speakers help me get the most closely matched response.

A clash that I was surprised to witness, although I knew it was a possibility, was the culture clash that occurred among the students themselves, more specifically within the generations of family. They seem to be floating in another layer of the limbo that I wrote about in my literature review. The students are so strongly seen as Mexican in their families and are expected to speak Spanish as much as possible, but the students identify more with American culture seeing as they are immersed in it with the European-American Education they attend. Thinking about the problem of practice, it is clear that in order to increase parent engagement, both parents and scholars must relate to each other on a particular level. Focusing on building the parent-scholar relationship is so crucial

in both the process of the intervention as well as showing impact. This phenomenon in impact data can be seen in my research journal notes that I recorded after a home visit:

*“Mom spoke about how she wants A.H. to go to Mexico and meet a man. A.H.'s literal response was, “Why mom? I don't want to. I am American.” A.H. spoke about how she is beginning to lose the Spanish she knows and needs to practice it more.”*

Another trend that became apparent in the process data was the involvement of the teachers. Two of the teachers who were more directly involved in the intervention showed a shift in their thinking, more than those that were not as involved. There was improvement regarding teachers’ perceptions as a whole, but there wasn’t as large a shift as I had hoped to see. With further analysis I realized that I did not focus on the teachers enough and that they too should have attended some of the Latino Literacy Program sessions as well as the home visit. I chose to focus on parents and scholars, although the trends showed a need to also include the teachers. I am curious the changes that would have occurred if the teachers were the ones making the phone calls to families regarding homework, reading log, and tardies instead of the Dean and Office Assistant.

The variation between the two teacher participants can be seen below:

Teacher that did not participate in the Latino Literacy Program: *“I think she wants to be and she is trying as best she can to be a part of her daughters' education... When I met with his mom previously it seemed like she wants to help her boys but is unsure how to help them.” –N.Y., classroom teacher*

Teacher that participated in the program: *“The parents are always asking how they can better support their scholar. Mom has also participated often in school events... I have also communicated with his parents on what he needs to do to get to the next level.” –E.Q., classroom teacher*

In both cases the teachers were in communication with parents although one participated in the Latino Literacy Program, was the translator for the event, so he speaks Spanish fluently, and he attended each of the home visits. The teacher that did not participate speaks very little Spanish, did

not go on home visits, and did not attend the Latino Literacy Sessions. Ironically, the teachers do have one very important similarity: their students are siblings. This further proves how one perception of a parent can be different based on the relationship and communication between the parent and teacher.

## IMPLICATIONS

The results of this data analysis suggest that there are many ways to improve parent engagement and that it truly takes all stakeholders involved to partake in the process. In order for parent engagement to increase the stakeholders must first identify the difference in engagement expectations and address this directly. Parents need to be provided with support systems that will help them transition from different institutional beliefs, as well as the school should offer supports that establish key knowledge and skills to help parents work with their students. With many barriers working against the stakeholders, the school has to alleviate some of these by offering the proper time, money, and translation when needed—which I found to be *very* necessary, so make sure to prioritize this. Finally, in order to address and break down the culture clashes and other obstacles that hold parents from engaging, stakeholders must communicate regularly and truly form relationships or partnerships.

Shifts were seen in parents that participated in the whole program and were not established in the parents who did not attend regularly or dropped out. Seven out of the eight parents who attended at least 80% of the sessions showed interest in continuing the Latino Literacy Program next year and asked if we could open it up to all of the Latino Families.

*“[I would like to see] school programs in which I can participate and gather more with teachers.” – L.B.*

It is crucial to involve parents, students, teachers, and ideally school leaders in the whole process. Teachers, much like the parents, stated that they wished to further increase their communication with each other. N.Y., a classroom teacher, stated in her post survey, “I would like to find more time to meet with the parents of my students to make plans to make sure both of these students are on target,” showing that time is still a barrier. School leaders need to make the time for this communication and relationship building to happen more often, which is why the plan for next year is to have an Ice Cream Social for parents, teachers, and students to meet before the school year even starts.

The study did not involve the teachers directly, but rather indirectly. It would have been helpful to make each of them a key part in the intervention, attending home visits and possibly partaking in a few of the Latino Literacy Sessions. Addressing the stakeholders independently does not help address the issue to the degree that is necessary. In order to begin to mend the Achievement Gap that is so easily identified, school leaders, the staff, parents, and students have to have a strong hand in the process. Working on one independently of the others is like trying to complete a puzzle with pieces missing.

This action research project set out to decrease the achievement gap by increasing parent engagement and involvement in their student’s education. The goal was to focus on breaking down barriers and address culture clashes, while building the relationship between the stakeholders, and further expand the knowledge and skills of the parents. One of the strengths was that the intervention approached the parents directly, something that has not been tried in the past at Kindred to address this issue. The issue was school based, but also something that has come to be a challenge nationwide. As a school leader and founding teacher, I was able to use the relationships that I had already established with some of the students to then begin the communication with their

families. Parent participants in the research grew to be more comfortable and aware than I had ever anticipated. I watched very nervous, unsure families blossom right in front of my eyes. During the home visit of one of the families, a student said it best, “I’m so proud of my mom. She and I practiced English and Spanish together for the first time. We were both learning.” It is clear that engagement increased, relationships increased, and most importantly eleven out of the twelve scholars whose parents participated in the intervention reached their reading goals. As Nelson Mandela once said, “It always seems impossible until it is done.”



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## APPENDIX

### Action Research: Teacher Survey

#### February 2015

Purpose: to find out the teacher's opinion on the focus student's focus and being on-task, student homework completion, student reading log completion, student's ability to arrive to school on time, parents' level of engagement, and finally the amount of communication that the teacher has with the parent(s) of the focus student.

1. To what extent do you agree or disagree with this statement: "The focus student is here and on time every day."
  - a. Disagree
  - b. Agree
  - c. Don't know

Please explain:

2. To what extent do you agree or disagree with this statement: "The focus student is focused and on-task during the school day"?
  - a. Almost Never
  - b. Often
  - c. Very Often
  - d. Don't Know

Please explain:

Continued on next page.

3. How often does the focus student complete their homework?

- a. Almost Never
- b. Occasionally
- c. Often
- d. Very Often
- e. Don't Know

Please explain:

4. How often do the focus students complete their reading log?

- a. Almost Never
- b. Occasionally
- c. Often
- d. Very Often
- e. Don't Know

Please explain:

5. How often do you communicate with the focus student's parents?

- a. Almost Never
- b. Occasionally
- c. Often
- d. Very Often
- e. Don't Know

Please explain:

6. Did the parents of the focus students attend parent-teacher conferences?
  - a. Yes
  - b. No
  - c. Scheduled, but did not show up
  
7. To what extent do you agree or disagree with this statement: "The focus students' parents are engaged in their student's academics"?
  - a. Strongly Disagree
  - b. Disagree
  - c. Agree
  - d. Strongly Agree
  - e. Unsure

Please explain:
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Please explain the efforts you have made or would like to make to insure this student's success in academics and their education.

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## Latino Literacy Parent Participant

**Pre-Questionnaire / Pre-Cuestionario**

**Name / Nombre:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date / Fecha:** \_\_\_\_\_

- ① How much time do you spend reading with your children each day?  
¿Cuánto tiempo lee con sus hijos cada día?
- None / Nada     5-10 min.     10-20 min.     20-30 min.
- I read randomly, not daily / Leo de vez en cuando, no diario
- ② In which language do you read with your children?  
¿En qué idioma lee con sus hijos?
- Spanish / Español     English / Inglés    Other / Otro \_\_\_\_\_
- ③ What do you read with your children?  
¿Qué lee con sus hijos?
- Children's Books / Libros para niños     Magazines / Revistas
- Newspapers / Periódicos    Other / Otro \_\_\_\_\_
- ④ Where do you find books to read with your kids?  
¿Dónde consigue los libros que lee con sus hijos?
- School / En la escuela     Public Library / Biblioteca     Bookstore / Librería
- I don't know where to find books / No sé donde conseguir libros
- Other / Otro \_\_\_\_\_
- ⑤ Do you have a library card?  
¿Tiene credencial para la biblioteca?
- Yes / Sí     No / No
- ⑥ Do you know how to use a dictionary?  
¿Sabe usar un diccionario?
- Yes / Sí     No / No
- ⑦ Do you know your children's reading level?  
¿Sabe cuál es el nivel de lectura de sus hijos?
- Yes / Sí     No / No
- ⑧ Have you spoken with your child's teacher about their reading skills?  
¿Ha hablado con los maestros de sus hijos acerca de su nivel de lectura?
- Yes / Sí     No / No

## Latino Family Literacy Session Reflection/ Sesión Reflexión

Name/Nombre \_\_\_\_\_ Date/Fecha \_\_\_\_\_

What are **three new things** that you have **learned so far**?  
*¿Cuáles son **tres cosas nuevas** que ha **aprendido hasta ahora**?*

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

What are **three things** you still **hope to learn**?  
*¿Cuáles son las **tres cosas** que todavía **esperan aprender** ?*

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

What is **one thing** that you have **enjoyed** about Latino Literacy so far?  
*¿Qué es **una cosa** que usted haya **disfrutado** sobre **Alfabetización Latino** hasta el momento?*

- 1.

What is **one thing** that you wish could be **different**?  
*¿Qué es **una cosa** que usted desea podría ser **diferente** ?*

- 1.