Resources, Challenges, and Possibilities in Culturally

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Introduction

The purpose of this report is to explore issues of educational inequity with a focus on schooling contexts within culturally and linguistically diverse communities and, in particular, school districts that comprise a majority Latinx student population. In the state of Washington, approximately 49% of students come from an ethnically diverse background – and 24% are identified as Latinx (OSPI, 2020a). While many ethnic groups face challenges in academic contexts, Latinx students have disproportionally experienced extreme difficulties in the US school system and continue to struggle to access a post-secondary education (Aud et al., 2010; Gándara & Contreras, 2009; Kim, 2011). On a national level, the 13% dropout rate for Latinxs remains higher than African American (8%) and White (4%) students (Santiago et al., 2015). Even more disturbing, the dropout rate for foreign born Latinxs is an astounding 28% (NCES, 2014).

These statistics are especially troubling considering that Latinx immigrants account for the vast majority of US immigration. In 2012, 42.7% of all immigrants came from Latin America, with 28.3% overall originating from Mexico (Migrant Policy Institute, 2014). As a result, Latinx students represent the largest and fastest growing minority group in the US – currently 25% of the nation's students are Latinx (US Census Bureau, 2018). By 2060, Latinxs are predicted to comprise 38% of students between the ages 5-14, as compared to Whites (33%), African Americans (13%), and Asians (7%) (Santiago et al., 2015). Although these demographic trends illustrate the steadily shifting educational landscape of American schools, K-12 classrooms continue to be structured around mainstream, White norms of communication and interaction (Avineri et al., 2015).

These prominent national trends are especially relevant to the educational landscape of Washington State for districts with a majority Latinx student population. For example, in Western Washington, the Mt. Vernon School District comprises 56% Latinx students (OSPI, 2020b). In Eastern Washington, the demographics are more prominent in districts like the Pasco School District (73% Latinx [OSPI, 2020c]), and even more so in rural areas like Sunnyside (92.7% Latinx [OSPI, 2020d]). In many districts with high proportions of Latinx students, a significant number of these students also come from a linguistically diverse background where English may not be the language spoken at home. Considering the challenges facing culturally and linguistically diverse students, school districts are encouraged by Washington's Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) to implement bilingual education services that promote academic development in the students' home language as well as English.

OSPI's office of Migrant and Bilingual Education explicitly states that "English Language Learners (ELLs) will meet state standards and develop English language proficiency in an environment where language and cultural assets are recognized as valuable resources to learning" (OSPI, n.d., para 1). In fact, the OSPI recently proposed that all students should have access to dual-language programs starting in Kindergarten by the year 2030 (OSPI, 2020e, 2021). That said, although numerous school districts in Washington already implement programs that use two languages for content instruction, the vast majority (86%) of bilingual learners are placed in programs designed around a "sheltered instruction" model that uses English as the sole medium of classroom instruction (Johnson et al., 2018). In spite of the lopsided implementation of sheltered instruction programs that are subtractive by nature and only prioritize English language development, all language program models are classified as

"bilingual" programs under the state's "Transitional Bilingual Instructional Program" language policy (Johnson et al., 2018; OSPI, 2015).

Contextualizing this project in terms of the national, state, and local contexts allows us to see the potential for learning from the experiences of individuals who are involved in the schools and communities reflected in the academic and programmatic statistics mentioned above (Johnson & Johnson, 2015). In other words, while the opinions and viewpoints of a small number of educators and students do not represent all teachers and students in Washington, the common experiences described by these individuals provide details regarding the lived reality of many teachers and students in schools that share common linguistic, cultural, and socioeconomic community patterns. For this reason, I have engaged with educators and students from school districts that serve communities with significant proportions of Latinx students to learn how they experience issues of educational inequity, social (in)justice, and potentially promising practices to overcome systemic barriers to academic progress.

Research Focus

As a researcher actively engaged within culturally and linguistically diverse communities across the Columbia Basin region, this work aligns with the overall goal of the project to address and eliminate systemic inequities. My role as a bilingual education faculty member in a teacher preparation program that serves culturally and linguistically diverse school districts across Eastern Washington provides me with extensive access to traditionally underserved communities. My particular focus for this project hinges on two guiding questions:

- What systemic barriers to academic equity are perceived by teachers and students in culturally and linguistically diverse school districts?

- What professional practices contribute to the schooling experiences of culturally and linguistically diverse school districts?

Survey and interview data were collected from educators across six school districts in Eastern Washington and one district in Northwestern Washington. Survey prompts elicited viewpoints on the educational services within these districts and surrounding communities. Additional perspectives were solicited during semi-structured interviews with teachers, paraeducators, administrators, and students from linguistically diverse backgrounds. Results are described in terms of general themes surrounding systemic barriers and promising practices. This report concludes with a summary of the challenges and promising practices, with a focus on recommendations for influencing policy.

Conceptual Framework

This project eschews a deficit perspective (Hadjistassou, 2008) and prioritizes culturally and linguistically diverse students and families as a resource. While the positive effects of bilingual programs that promote academic development in the students' home language and English are well documented (Collier & Thomas, 2017; Lindholm-Leary, 2014), culturally and linguistically diverse students often face other obstacles that impact their academic progress. Looking at how structural inequalities shape US schools has been emphasized vehemently in recent decades (e.g., Delpit, 2006; Kozol, 1991; McCarty, 2005) with widespread calls for pedagogies that are "culturally relevant" (Ladson-Billings, 1995, 2014), "culturally responsive" (Gay, 2010), and "culturally sustaining" (Paris & Alim, 2014, 2017). Although these concepts are individually nuanced, they all push for a change in the ways in which students from minority backgrounds are engaged in schools. They essentially demand that educators overcome their own deficit perspectives and learn about and build upon their students' "funds of knowledge"

(González et al., 2005; Vélez-Ibáñez & Greenberg, 1992) to enhance academic experiences and learning.

These "funds of knowledge" can be recognized by observing "the wider set of activities requiring specific strategic bodies of essential information that households need to maintain their well-being" (Vélez-Ibáñez & Greenberg, 1992, p. 314). In the context of this discussion, I employ the concept of funds of knowledge to encompass both academic and personal background knowledge, accumulated life experiences, skills used to navigate everyday social contexts, and world view(s) structured by broader historically situated sociocultural forces. Abundant within funds of knowledge research are examples of applying students' out of school interests to classroom content. Additionally, it is important to consider the nuances of how students develop schemas for learning, organizing information, and expressing themselves *within* school settings. Recognizing this gap in the literature, Johnson and Johnson (2016) advance the notion of students' *scholastic funds of knowledge* as "the accumulated set of skills, aptitudes, and habits students draw on when faced with accomplishing academic tasks to facilitate learning processes" (p. 107).

An effective way of determining students' scholastic funds of knowledge is to develop a system for teacher – student collaboration in the development and implementation of lessons that involves personalized learning experiences (Johnson & Newcomer, 2020) and integrating students' academic experiences into the process of designing effective classroom lessons in linguistically diverse settings (Johnson, 2021). To promote student success and adequately learn about their funds of knowledge, it is imperative for teachers to integrate consistent means of authentic family engagement practices. Models of family partnerships are ample in the literature (e.g., Epstein, 2019; Mapp & Bergman, 2020), as well as specific means of engaging families

through home visits (Johnson, 2014, 2016, 2021). All of these approaches demonstrate significant impacts on student academic engagement as well as socioemotional support. For the purpose of this project, significant attention is placed on how school districts with high populations of culturally and linguistically diverse students engage their students in culturally sustaining ways that include building on their funds of knowledge and integrating family engagement efforts.

Methods

Data were collected by conducting narrative surveys and interviews. Participants included teachers, administrators, paraeducators, and community youth from ethnically and linguistically diverse school districts across Washington.

Narrative Surveys

Narrative surveys differ from quantitative surveys that generally rely on multiple choice or scale oriented responses. Narrative surveys allow participants to respond to questions or prompts by representing their experiences in their own words instead of a predetermined set of potential answers (Shkedi, 2004). This method "helps the researcher to identify broad patterns across a wide variety of narrative cases" (Shkedi, 2004, p. 88). For the current project, there were 52 survey participants spanning six school districts: Pasco, Richland, Sunnyside, Walla Walla, Kiona-Benton, and Mt. Vernon. The majority of participants were teachers (71%), nearly one fifth (19%) were paraeducators, and less than 1% were university students enrolled in student practicum placements in a teacher preparation program. All of the participants were provided with a narrative survey that provided them with discussion prompts around issues surrounding systemic barriers and resources in their schools.

For my project, the participants responded in writing to questions based on exploring their experiences with (or as) culturally and linguistically diverse students. They submitted their narratives as part of their participation in WSU professional development courses focused on ELL and Bilingual Education endorsements during 2020 summer session[1]. The participants' narratives were analyzed by specific questions/prompts for emerging themes and coded into individual categories. This allowed for specific categories to be identified across all participants for each question. The survey prompts/questions are listed below:

- *Question 1:* What kinds of programs does your district have that are focused on supporting students from culturally diverse and/or low-income backgrounds? In your opinion, are those programs effective in reducing educational inequities? Why or why not?
- *Question 2:* Are students and families given opportunities to advocate for programs and policies to improve educational opportunities in your school district? How?
- *Question 3:* In your opinion, what additional resources, programs, or policies are needed to enhance educational opportunities for culturally and linguistically diverse students and families in your district?
- *Question 4:* What additional recommendations would you make to educational leaders and policymakers about reducing systemic inequities in education?

Interviews

After collecting the survey data,14 semi-structured oral interviews were conducted to expand on the themes that emerged in the survey data. Three types of interviews were

[1] Everyone was informed that their participation on the survey was voluntary and that the information they provided would be used in this project.

conducted: 1) focus group interviews with teachers, paraeducators, and administrators; 2) individual interviews with practicing teachers; and 3) individual interviews with community youth from grades high school to university. I was assisted by different collaborators for each type of interview. For the focus group interview, Professor Manka Varghese facilitated the discussion and highlighted issues involving educational justice. In total, we conducted four interviews with ten participants (5 teachers, 3 paraeducators, and 2 administrators). Seven of the participants work in the Tri-Cities area, two are located in Northwestern WA and one works in Southeastern Washington. All are Latinx and bilingual – Spanish/English. The individual interviews with practicing teachers were conducted by my research assistant to lower any potential anxiety. The two teachers interviewed from bilingual classrooms (Spanish/English) are Latinx, and the other three are White, English speakers who teach in English-medium classrooms. All five were from the school districts in the Tri-Cities area

Five interviews with community youth were conducted by my research assistant who was an undergraduate student at WSU and member of the local community to facilitate a peer-level conversation. The questions for that interview reflected similar issues as with the narrative surveys and teacher interviews, but they were crafted to elicit the perspective of students and community members.

- *Question 1:* What kinds of programs or classes have been most helpful in school? In your opinion, are those programs helpful for all students from culturally diverse backgrounds? Why or why not?
- *Question 2:* How can students and families advocate for resources and opportunities in your school district? Have you ever been involved in activities advocate for more resources? How?

- *Question 3:* In your opinion, what else could your school do to support your education?
- *Question 4:* In your opinion, what kinds of situations cause the most problems for immigrant children and families? What should be done to change those situations?

The participants' current level of schooling ranged from high school (1 participant), and community college (1 participant), to university (3 participants). They also represent four different school districts in Eastern Washington (Pasco, Wenatchee, Mabton, and Yakima), all with majority Latinx populations. Having representation from students at different levels of schooling was intended to elicit perspectives of youth who had a variety of experiences with the K-12 school system and understood the ways in which schools meet (or do not meet) the needs of students to continue their education beyond high school.

Findings

In the description below, I have integrated the survey findings and commentaries collected in the interviews around four overarching themes: supporting students, family advocacy, additional resources needed, and further recommendations.

Supporting Students

Educators were prompted in the survey to describe programs that are focused on supporting students from linguistically and culturally diverse and/or low-income backgrounds and describe the effectiveness of the programs. The vast majority of the educators (37 out of 52) who participated in the survey highlighted language-focused programs like dual language (DL), bilingual classes (BLE), sheltered English transition (SET), and Guided Language Acquisition Design (GLAD). Whereas most of these 37 teachers were able to point to specific programs that support EL students, only 28 were able to describe the difference between bilingual programs

and other programs (e.g., ESL pull out or sheltered instruction approaches). The remaining nine teachers demonstrated awareness that bilingual programs existed, but not necessarily how they are structured. The following commentary is reflective of this trend:

> "Our district is pretty progressive in supporting the needs of culturally diverse and low income students. In our schools, we have a variety of bilingual programs in both Spanish and Russian and a lot of professional development opportunities around supporting students of diverse backgrounds."

That said, merely demonstrating an understanding of different language support programs does not indicate that teachers have an awareness of the overall process of language acquisition or expectations for language use. In the following case, a teacher expresses frustration that a student who recently arrived from Mexico seemed resistant to using English in spite of being in an ESL program:

> "I know of the bilingual program, the dual language program, and ESL program because I have worked in the schools that offered them. I think the dual language is the most effective because not only are students learning the new language, but also still maintaining their first language. When I worked at [the] high school, the ESL program seemed to work for high schoolers, but for some odd reason the students in the ESL classes would not speak English unless they were asked to do so. I am not sure if it's because they were older students ***or if they were just trying to refrain from really learning English.*** I had a student, his name was Pablo, and he had just moved from Mexico and I would try so hard to talk to him in English so he could practice and get better at it, but every time I would ask him a question in English he would always respond to me in Spanish." [Emphasis added.]

Here, the teacher did not understand that their student seemed to have been acquiring receptive English skills (i.e., comprehension) and could have just been insecure about productive abilities. Instead, this was seen as the student not just refraining from speaking English, but not wanting to learn English. This response illustrates that even though teachers may know about certain programs in their districts, they are not necessarily aware of different factors involving language acquisition, acculturation, or even the social dynamics surrounding newly immigrated students. Although not something that was frequently mentioned in the data, this point emerged numerous times during conversations in their ELL endorsement training. This point suggests the need for additional professional development around more than just pedagogical practices with English learners, and in fact, more support for teachers to learn about the broader process of language acquisition and acculturation. This is a point that is reinforced by the participants below when describing potential resources to support their professional growth.

As with the survey responses that focused on student support programs, the interviews with the teachers demonstrated an awareness of different language programs (e.g., dual language, bilingual, GLAD) and the overall impact of working in low socioeconomic status communities. That said, many of the student support systems mentioned by the teachers were framed by the schooling context stemming from COVID-19 restrictions. Not surprisingly, the most prevalent discussion topics that surfaced involved engaging students (or the lack thereof) due to these circumstances, including the lack of access to technology, difficulties contacting students, and challenges with the logistics of teaching online (i.e., even when the students were able to access devices and Internet services). These are all important points and contribute to our understanding of fundamental inequities in educational access among different socioeconomic

groups. Essentially, the COVID context has highlighted the need for deeper exploration into fundamental issues of educational justice that extend beyond the classroom.

One point that was emphasized in the survey responses and interviews (across multiple questions) involved the importance of family engagement and home visits. In one interview, a bilingual elementary teacher described the way that the distance teaching has influenced parent engagement practices. In the following extended commentary, the teacher walks through their journey of professional self-actualization regarding how her view of home visits and family engagement has shifted due to COVID:

> "But I've interacted with more parents than I ever have, I think, like, we're starting to really see this as like a partnership between the parents and the student and how we can work together to make sure that they're successful…like in March, I had to go to their houses, like…I didn't have a choice. And then I was like, wait, this is not, this is not that bad, and you know you can…I was able to communicate with all of the families…People say like, it's so helpful to get to know the families and to help them but I didn't actually start doing it until I had to. And I was like, this is something we should do every year, until, like, why don't we visit their houses every year at the beginning…And I think to like that's a big part of like educational justice reform…And I think of how much we lacked that prior to COVID, it and it makes me really sad. Like how many parents and families could we have impacted if we were to just take the extra step to go and get them involved."

These comments demonstrate numerous important points. First, this teacher highlights the difference between being taught/told that home visits are impactful and actually being required to do them out of necessity – and the positive influence that they have on relationship building

and communication. Next, she also points to the ways in which families are more open and engaging with educators after they do home visits. And most importantly, she points out how engaging families should be a significant part of educational justice reform. Whereas the survey data described above illustrate a general agreement around the need for more parent engagement and home visits, these comments highlight the lived experience of what that process entails.

The emphasis on family engagement was also mentioned in the student interviews. A university student who attended K-12 schools in the Yakima School District explains the need for building relationships with parents:

> "Schools need to build that relationship with parents, they need to go out of their comfort zone, out of their daily routines and connect with parents to have a good relationship where parents are wanting to attend meetings in a comfort space."

This commentary also connects to the subsequent theme of parent advocacy, but it is especially reflective of the ways in which an emphasis on family engagement and establishing relationships surfaced across multiple themes in this project. The student further expands on this point by describing the way they feel as a member of a minoritized community – both in school and the broader society in general.

> "So my family has been in and out of trusting the White man the White society, and trusting them has been a rough road. …And you grow up with a hate to grow in the back of your mind, but when you go to school and majority of the teachers do not look like you, don't have similar names, or can't even pronounce your last name…I'm sorry, but you know it's going to be hard to trust the teachers or open up or frankly get your parents involved, …. So, if we had more teachers that came from a more diverse background

we'd solve a lot of problems, [teachers who] didn't punish students for speaking their native tongue at school, things would be different."

Unfortunately, these types of sentiments are not unique – as I've highlighted elsewhere (see Johnson & Newcomer, 2020). Conducting home visits and other family engagement practices are integral support mechanisms to help educators build relationships that mitigate the types of fears described by this student. And as the teacher points out, taking the time to engage students and families in contexts where authority hierarchies are reduced, like a home visit, is one step toward educational justice reform.

Family Advocacy

The next theme focused on avenues for parents to advocate for educational opportunities in the school districts. The survey responses for this prompt were varied and included a number of critiques – of the districts and families. The most common response involved the traditional parent teacher organizations (n=17). There were three additional comments about a "parent advisory council," which is not the same as the PTO, but it could be considered similar (i.e., 20 out of 52 teachers pointed to parent organizations as the primary way for parents to advocate for themselves and their children). The next two categories are more concerning. The second most frequent reply (n=13) indicates that teachers were not aware of any opportunities for parents to advocate for educational opportunities, and the third most prominent category (n=10) suggests that some teachers believe that families either do not or cannot participate in school-based organizations and programs.

In general, teachers who described parents as non-participants in family programs pointed to factors like work schedule or intimidation as barriers to parent advocacy. The following

example illustrates how a lack of advocacy is couched in terms of a deficit perspective, as this teacher described in responding to the survey:

> "I think, however, it is a struggle to find parents who are willing to add their ideas and this is due to a number of reasons such as language barriers, lack of time due to work schedules, lack of knowledge about how important parent insight is to the district, lack of confidence due to limited education of the parents, etc., to name a few."

Another common point emphasizes families being unfamiliar with US school systems:

> "I would say that I don't see avenues for students and families to be advocates unless they know ***how to play the system***. Many of our families from culturally diverse backgrounds that don't know how the US school system works." [Emphasis added.]

This particular teacher even framed the disconnect between parents and school system as a lack of familiarity of how to "play the system" – highlighting an understanding that many teachers have that there is a specific systemic structure that is hard for immigrant parents to understand. Unfortunately, absent from these types of comments is an alternative approach for engaging parents or even providing support to help familiarize them with *how* to "play the system."

Although issues involving work schedules, language access, and/or unfamiliarity with US school systems are legitimate concerns, very few teachers articulate the onus of responsibility on the school. In the following commentary, the teacher demonstrates an awareness of this point, but falls short of pointing out that it should be the school's responsibility to schedule opportunities around the parents' availability:

> "I think students and families are given the opportunity to advocate for programs and policies to improve educational opportunities but I don't think when given these opportunities they are done where parents can attend."

There were four additional responses indicating that the districts had limited opportunities for parents to advocate. In total, the survey responses for the three categories pointing to challenges (teachers are unaware, families can't/don't participate, and parents have limited opportunities) comprised the most overall responses (n=27). The trends mentioned in these responses shed light on the need for different approaches to engaging families and educating teachers on how to help parents access district resources.

The interview commentaries concerning avenues for parents to advocate for educational opportunities reflected the points mentioned in the surveys. In all five interviews with individual teachers, the conversation revolved around why culturally and linguistically parents tend to not show up to meetings. In the following exchange, an elementary teacher in a mainstream English medium classroom states:

> "I know our [PTO], we would advertise it, but that day, I'll pass out the slip to the students and we'd get like three or four parents or whatnot to show up…I don't know if it's like, they don't know about it. They don't know what it's for. There's that disconnect between home life at school because in their culture, they don't really go to the school to ask questions. It's not what they do in their home country…I don't know that a lot of parents saw the value of it or that they understood."

As with the survey comments that pointed to PTOs as the primary vehicle for parents to advocate, this teacher is left wondering why culturally diverse parents do not attend. This also

reflects a limited view of parent engagement that is common in schools (Epstein et al., 2019; Johnson, 2014). Instead of considering alternative means of providing parents with avenues to engage and voice their concerns, educators often focus on why parents do not attend such meetings (school board meetings are also discussed in the same light). While it might be true that issues like the parents' work schedules, childcare obligations, or lack of familiarity with the system do in fact disrupt opportunities for parents to go to school-based meetings and events, rarely do educators acknowledge that school-based meetings and events might be the factor that needs to be modified (Epstein et al., 2019; Johnson, 2014, 2021; Johnson & Johnson, 2016)

In a focus group interview, an elementary school administrator highlighted the disconnect between teachers and parents as a primary concern of his. He explained that he encourages his faculty to engage in practices that are not mainstream and described how he approaches teachers in his building around this topic:

> "I'm going to ask you to do some things, as a teacher, as an educator, that are may be uncomfortable for you, but I'll never ask you to do anything unreasonable…and I think social justice equity in schools is not unreasonable…it's uncomfortable for folks, but it shouldn't be unreasonable for us as human beings."

His point on asking teachers to be open to being "uncomfortable" reflects his understanding that parents in high minority and low income communities need to be engaged in ways that differ from mainstream, middle class views of education. On the other hand, he also expressed the challenges he faces as an administrator when dealing with teachers who seek support from their union when asked to do things like home visits or other alternative approaches to family engagement.

The notion of comfort/discomfort mentioned by the administrator above also surfaced in the student interviews. As emphasized by a university student,

> "Schools need to build that relationship with parents, they need to go out of their comfort zone, out of their daily routines and connect with parents to have a good relationship where parents are wanting to attend meetings in a comfort space."

It is clear that parents do want to engage with schools but their personal and professional contexts are often not considered as valid reasons to change common practices (i.e., if different than mainstream norms of parent engagement activities). Unfortunately, it also seems that administrators face significant challenges when promoting alternative means of engaging families. More examples of successful practices in schools with administrators would be beneficial to promote as models.

Additional Resources Needed

When teachers were prompted in the survey to think of additional resources, programs, or policies that are needed in their district to enhance educational opportunities for culturally and linguistically diverse students and families, the most common response (n=26) was the need for more parent/community engagement programs. This could be related to the previous survey prompt (i.e., since many of the teachers directly pointed out a lack of parent engagement in those responses). As one teacher stated, "I believe we need to provide more to our students and parents to understand all the programs-activities that are available and then teach them how to advocate for their children." Other prominent categories that stood out include a need for more professional development on language, diversity, and equity (n=10), more bilingual programs

(n=8), additional bilingual teachers and staff, and curriculum that emphasizes cultural diversity (n=3).

While the emphasis on needing more parent engagement programs is promising, the specific rationales brought up varied. In some cases, the responses reflected a traditional school-centered form of family engagement where parents are expected to come to the school to be perceived as "involved" (see Johnson, 2014):

> "I feel that there does need to be more parent involvement. I feel that parents should/could come volunteer at the schools just like they do in elementary. Why? Kids like to have their parents involved plus they would make a difference in the culture of the school as a whole. Parents actively in the schools would help kids learn more and fight less."

As described in the comments above, the point of having parent volunteers is viewed as a means to promote student learning and mitigate school violence. There were other responses that highlighted engagement strategies like conducting home visits, which may demonstrate a deeper understanding of engaging families outside of school and the importance of developing relationships.

Whereas hosting more parent volunteers was described as essential for "making a difference in the culture of the school as a whole" above, the following narrative points to the fundamental role of relationship building and acknowledging students' funds of knowledge:

> "I have seen the benefits of a school district implementing district wide expectations for teachers to make home visits. The concept of visiting families in their homes and connecting with them on a more personal level became the norm, so much so that

> families came to expect and look forward to the time with new teachers. Students relished the chance to show their teacher their home and their interests outside of school and teachers gained essential information about their students' funds of knowledge. I would like to see home visits become the norm in [my] school district. The research is out there to back up the benefits of this practice and it is, for me, a logical step for the district to make. If they would create the opportunity and support all teachers in making home visits, we could see some truly amazing growth from our students and create a powerful partnership where families feel welcomed and like they have a say in the education of their child."

As encouraging as the above reflection is, many teachers also communicated the challenges with promoting and sustaining effective programs. In the following case, the teacher describes the challenges with funding extra programs to support families:

> "In my opinion, there should be programs for students after school, for parents, and any additional resources that students and parents can use to help them become successful. I feel like we are given grants to give parents and students these resources only to be taken away after a few years because there is no more money."

This comment clearly demonstrates the challenges surrounding funding and sustaining supplemental programs; however, it also suggests that schools should be considering alternative approaches that aren't based on large grants and prolonged funding (e.g., home visits).

Other responses to this prompt elicited the need for additional professional development on issues of language, diversity, and equity. One teacher even acknowledged demographic disparities between the student population and educators. This account seems to extend the

notion of diversity training beyond how to integrate culturally oriented curriculum into classrooms:

> "I think teachers who teach in schools and districts like ours need extensive training on language development and working with culturally diverse groups, especially since demographics show that a majority of teachers are white women."

Other comments also recognized the need for more culturally and linguistically educators, as well as policies that prioritize language and diversity. As one teacher points out,

> "I think more teachers need to receive diversity training and be required to take ELL course. For example, if all teachers are going to teach ELs and are required to teach sheltered instruction, then they need to receive that specialized training before stepping foot in the classroom."

Further Recommendations

Teachers were also invited to make recommendations to educational leaders and policymakers. The responses to this prompt were diverse and, in many cases, reflected points that were previously mentioned in the first three questions. In some cases, the recommendations are less of a specific suggestion and reflect an impassioned call to educational justice. For example:

> "I would recommend that policymakers, educators, politicians, administrators, district personnel, and community members stop assuming they know what's best and actually get to know the people that they represent and the people that surround them. Stop all assumptions about education and see what's happening in the trenches with their own

eyes. Only then, can we have a true understanding of how we can close achievement gaps and disrupt systematic inequities."

These comments are important and demonstrate how emotionally engaged teachers tend to be with these issues. Unfortunately, a single formula for overcoming the issues pointed out here doesn't exist. Such a broad call to action requires a combination of political and programmatic efforts tailored to the needs of each community. Figure 1 below displays the array of recommendations provided by the teachers.

Figure 1

Recommendations for Educational Leaders and Policymakers

Recommendations	# of Teacher Responses
Professional development on diversity and language	11
District administrators must focus on diversity	8
Increase family and community engagement	5
Increase diversity of employees	4
Provide extra supports for students	4
Reduce emphasis on standardized testing	3
Offer parent education programs	3
Revise assessment to consider culturally diverse students	3
More culturally responsive curriculum	2
Provide additional resources for low income families	2
More L1 options for classes in high school	1
Require clock hours for training on inequity	1

Salary stipend for Bilingual and ELL teachers	1
Require ELL endorsement	1
Revamp bussing maps	1
Confront bias and inequities	1
Reduce additional professional duties for teachers	1
More emphasis on DL programs	1

Whereas the top response had been mentioned earlier (i.e., increase in professional development on diversity), the second most frequent category emphasizes the need for educational leaders to prioritize diversity. This suggestion highlighted the role of administrators in the analysis of data, promoting diversity oriented training, and seeking mentorship from experts in the field. The following comments illustrate the breadth of responsibilities involved in this suggestion:

> "In order to address and reduce systematic inequalities in education I would recommend that first and foremost educational leaders facilitate conversations and encourage others to research and learn about the inequalities found in educational policies. That they would seek out experts in the field to address and educate teachers through high quality professional development. I would recommend that they build up leaders in schools to facilitate conversations at the school level as well. From there educators and policy makers must be in the business of reconstructing and removing harmful policies. As well as carefully analyzing new policies to ensure that they are inclusive and supportive of all learners regardless of race or home language. Educational leaders also must analyze the curriculum and assessments that are given to students and ensure that the curriculum is

culturally responsive, and the assessments are accurate and do not harm marginalized or minority students."

From my experience at Washington State University and working with school districts in Eastern Washington, it seems that these comments are particularly relevant to leader preparation programs. Whereas teacher preparation programs generally involve coursework on issues involving culturally and linguistically diverse students, it is not common for administrator credential programs to have such a focus; even less common is training on supporting culturally and linguistically diverse faculty and staff within a school. Whereas all of the recommendations contributed by teachers here should be considered, acknowledging the need to support professional development for educational leaders and policymakers is particularly cogent.

The types of recommendations posed in the interviews with individual teachers yielded two general categories of recommendations. First, the need for professional development around cultural competency was made evident:

- "I would suggest that our educational leaders and policymakers not make assumptions regarding the classroom." (elementary bilingual teacher)
- "Culturally relevant teaching [is important]. Another recommendation that I would make to educational leaders and policymakers is to integrate educational resources in a way that content and language factors align with the students' funds of knowledge." (elementary bilingual teacher)

Several teachers mentioned the need for providing more learning opportunities and experiences for students to address issues like access to technology and more contextualized learning experiences. An additional recommendation was contributed by an elementary teacher who

encouraged the use of teacher surveys by the district administration as a tool to gather information on what teachers need.

From an administrator perspective, being able to make strategic hires and recruit the types of faculty members that can help incite changes in the education system can be difficult. An administrator calls out the need for allies in the process of changing the system.

> "To really blow up the system like I'm not very…revolutionary but...there are some things structurally that we have to get rid of…the only way we can do that is if we have people in the system."

These comments reflect challenges that extend beyond tangible resources like professional development trainings, modified curriculum, or funding for field trips. Instead, he is talking about systemic shifts in the way schools operate – from hiring policies to community engagement.

A university student who attended K-12 schools (in the Wenatchee School District), explains the need for more language resources:

> "The lack of language access creates problems for immigrant families, children should not have to translate for their parents at a young age, when materials and/or presentations can be made in their language by staff members. Cultural competency courses should be mandatory for staff members, so they are equipped with tools to better understand the lives of immigrant youth and be of more help. This can be accomplished by hiring staff for those roles and by asking parents to chime in and express their concerns and ideas."

In addition to providing more communication opportunities and points of access in the community languages, suggestions offered by the student interviewees included having more

school faculty and staff that reflect the demographics of the community, providing multiple points of communication for parents (and letting them know how to access them), using community languages in district communications, and having community liaisons to engage parents with information at large farms, processing plants, and other popular areas where parents are employed.

Implications and Recommendations

The commentaries collected in the surveys and interviews provide a glimpse of the contexts surrounding schools with majority Latinx populations, significant numbers of recent immigrants, elevated rates of poverty, and high numbers of students learning English as an additional language. The contributions made by the participants help paint a picture of the types of challenges facing students, families, and educators in these communities. Based on the experiences and perspectives illustrated in the surveys and interviews, I have summarized the points that are most relevant to my research questions according to three categories: 1) barriers to educational justice, 2) promising practices, and 3) additional recommendations. I have listed examples below each heading.

Barriers to Educational Justice

- Teachers expressed a lack of understanding of programs and resources available to their students and families.
- There is a lack of emphasis on family engagement outside of traditional strategies (e.g., PTOs and parent-teacher conferences).
- Many teachers point out institutional barriers for families based on language differences.

- There is a lack of professional development on supporting culturally diverse students and families for teachers, staff, and administrators.
- There is a lack of consistent language support programs other than bilingual and dual programs.
- There is a lack of linguistically diverse teachers, administrators, and staff.
- Students and families are likely to feel marginalized and do not identify with their teachers.

Promising Practices

- There is a consistent recognition of the importance and effectiveness of bilingual programs that build on the students' home languages.
- There is a good understanding of the difference between various language programs for EL students.
- There is consistent support for professional development activities that increase educators' awareness of language, culture, and low-income communities.
- There is an understanding of the difference between constructive models for parent engagement and traditional models that are less effective.

Additional Recommendations

- Require the ELL (or Bilingual Education) endorsement for all teachers who work in classrooms with students who are learning English as an additional language.
- Develop coursework requirements in linguistic and cultural competency for candidates in administrator preparation programs.

- Integrate family engagement practices into the job description of all teachers and provide appropriate training and access to state sanctioned resources (e.g., Johnson, 2016).
- Develop a family communication plan that reflects the languages spoken in the district.
- Provide families with multiple explicit options for advocating and voicing concerns.
- Integrate student voice/participation on school boards and faculty committees within individual schools.

Moving Forward

It is my hope that this report helps to illustrate the issues facing students, families, and educators in culturally and linguistically diverse school districts across Washington and beyond. Acknowledging that the perspectives of teachers have been (re)produced within a school system that has been historically structured around the norms and expectations of middle and upper class groups who come from an English-speaking background is important. This point is easily illustrated when teachers describe why parents do not attend meetings at school. Through such descriptions, we can see that the system has been structured in such a way that expecting parents to come to school and participate in hierarchically planned events (like PTO meetings or parent conference) in the norm. In other words, why wouldn't teachers cast blame on parents and emphasize reasons why *they* don't participate or why *they* aren't involved?

A more equitable approach to educational justice and reducing barriers for traditionally minoritized communities requires shifting from a "why don't *they*…" to a "why don't *we*…" orientation. This process entails a deep look at common points of disconnect between teachers and students, educators and families, as well as between educators within a given school district. Once common areas of challenge are identified, then the process of addressing the professional

and social practices that produce those challenges can begin. The current era of quarantines and health insecurities has forced educators to rethink approaches to instructional delivery and communicating with students. It has also demonstrated innovations in ways to engage with parents as partners in the schooling process. As schooling patterns begin to return to pre-COVID expectations, school districts can capitalize on the shifting norms of pedagogy and family engagement to rethink practices that are focused on promoting equitable educational opportunities for culturally and linguistically diverse communities. Hopefully, this report has provided insight into what that might look like.

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