A Place for Us? Latino Parent and Student Satisfaction in a Cyber School

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Research indicates that traditional public schools are less effective in serving Latino students. Yet Latino students, but not their parents, exhibit greater school satisfaction than do their counterparts. The purpose of this study was to examine Latino student and parent satisfaction with their cyber school and prior traditional public school using results from surveys of students (53.7% response; n=269) and parents (n=232; response = 48.7%). ANOVA indicate that Latino parents rated their cyber school and prior traditional public schools more positively than other parents. Latino students rated the cyber school but not their prior traditional public schools more positively. We discuss implications and directions for further research.

Introduction

Latinos, a broad and diverse category, represent the most rapidly growing demographic census group in an increasingly diverse American public school population. Some analysts predict that by 2050 more than half of American public school students will be Latino (Fry & Gonzales, 2008; Hoffman & Sable, 2006; Kindler, 2002; Planty et al., 2009). An extensive literature indicates that traditional public schools have not adequately served Latino students and parents, who have suffered low graduation rates and levels of post-secondary success, perhaps because of a poor fit between their needs and the institutional norms of schooling (Chall, 2000; Leal & Meier, 2011; Payne, 2008; Thernstrom & Thernstrom, 2003; Valdes, 1996). Further, traditional public schools tend to employ whites in positions of authority. At

least for African American students and parents, there is some evidence that this practice has alienated minorities (Buck, 2010). Similarly, a substantial literature indicates that traditional public schools do not understand or value the culture of or involvement from Latinos (Riojas-Cortez & Flores, 2009; Gordon & Nocon, 2008). Even when receiving the same resources as public schools in the suburbs, schools serving large numbers of marginalized students may lack sufficient resources to carry out their more challenging missions (Grubb, 2009; Roza, 2010). Public schooling does not adequately prepare students from marginalized groups to challenge the powerful, a vital role of schooling in a democracy (Gramsci, 1971; Delpit, 1995). Perhaps reflecting this, Latino parents report *less* satisfaction with their children's schooling than do whites on both mass (Friedman, Bobrowski, & Geraci, 2006) and elite levels (Clarke, Hero, Sidney, Fraga & Erlickson 2006). Generally, marginalized parents may have less comfort with bureaucratic institutions run by elites (Henderson, Mapp, Johnson & Davies, 2007; Lareau, 2003; Valdes, 1996; Cucchiara, 2013). Nonetheless, survey research reveals that African American and Latino students exhibit greater levels of satisfaction with their traditional public schools than do their white peers (Ding & Hall, 2007).

Perhaps reflecting elite skepticism about parent and student opinions, there has been little research comparing Latino and majority perceptions of school satisfaction, and none of this research has explored cyber school parents and students. The purpose of this exploratory study was to examine Latino student and parent satisfaction with their cyber school and their prior traditional public school. We stress that as a single school study, this work is exploratory.

Literature Review

Considerable survey research in the U. S. and internationally has addressed minority parent and student satisfaction with schooling. Okun, Braver, and Weir (1990) and Verkuyten and Thijs (2002) discovered that ethnic minorities were more satisfied with a traditional instruction and environment than ethnic majorities. Okun et al. studied minorities from ethnic backgrounds in the United States categorized as "Blacks, Hispanics, Native Americans, and Asian Americans" (p. 425) revealing no difference; however they did discover a difference between the aforementioned minorities identified by Okun, Braver, and Weir and Verkuyten and Thijs, and the U.S. majority group, categorized as Caucasians. In addition, other minority students including students from Turkey living in the Netherlands, were more satisfied with traditional schools than their Dutch majority counterparts (Verkuyten and Thijs). A more in-depth inquiry from Ding and Hall (2007) reported the highest level of student fulfillment in a traditional school environment came from Latinos, African Americans and Asians.

Safety is stated as the most significant factor of student satisfaction according to Friedman, Bobrowski and Geraci (2006). The minority parent groups with the lowest reported satisfaction shown to have the least satisfaction with their child's school were Latino and African American; a sharp contrast with the perceptions of their children. Negative exchanges between parents and school administrators who may not accept interaction and contributions from Latino (Valdes, 1996; Leal & Meier, 2011) and African American (Buck, 2010) parents may play a role in the perceptions. In general, the interactions and experiences parents have with their children's schools and authorities within those schools influence their satisfaction (Friedman et al., 2006). Hess, Maranto, and Milliman (2001) find evidence from fieldwork that where traditional public school leaders

insulate themselves from parental concerns, charter school enrollments rise. Moreover, parental satisfaction with school services is affiliated with parental participation activities supported by the school (Laws & Millward, 2001). Said satisfaction is connected with affirmative educational results (Southwest Educational Development Laboratory, 2004).

Latino students continue to express low academic expectations (Anhalt, Allexsaht-Snider, & Civil, 2002; Villegas & Lucas, 2007). Moreover, specific barriers exist with regard to Latino parent satisfaction. Parents face barriers because of language, working schedules, transportation, feelings of poor self-worth and acceptance, educational jargon, parent cliques, and attitudes of school staff (Jacobson, Huffman, Rositas & de Corredor, 1997; Pena, 2000).

Parent and student affect toward school matters, with more trusting and engaged parents and students more likely to work with educators, improving student academic outcomes as well as safety (Laws & Milward, 2001; Henderson et al., 2007; Bryk & Schneider, 2004). There are reasons to think that cyber schooling may increase trust for some parents and students since cyber schooling fundamentally changes the relationships between education professionals, parents, and students, with parents and students playing greater roles in the co-production of schooling (Moe & Chubb, 2009). For example, in most cyber schools parents can monitor both synchronous and asynchronous classrooms, enabling them to more fully understand what goes on at school, perhaps enabling marginalized groups to shape their own schooling. We will explore whether this in fact occurs through quantitative analyses of the perceptions of Latino and other parents (and students) at a cyber school.

Data sources

We surveyed students and parents at a northern cyber school (delivers all course work 100% online) that we will call SunTech. We selected SunTech since it is a large and growing cyber secondary school (grades 8-12) serving many special education students. SunTech students are comprised of 26% in need of special services; 60% higher than the mean of the state selected for this study. We also performed fieldwork at the school during four distinct visits over a period of five years. We observed live classes, board and staff meetings, and interviewed 22 teachers, administrators, and other staff.

The founder of SunTech had an established background in non-profit social services for youth at risk in an urban setting, the state's largest city. SunTech, a cyber high school designed as a 100% online environment of 750 students was established with the mission of using online technology to teach and tutor at risk high school students. School staff report that the median SunTech entering eighth grader reads at a fourth grade level (not counting ELL students). While fewer than 10% of current SunTech students now reside in the state's largest city, the students served are relatively disadvantaged. Data obtained through self-reporting indicated families from SunTech resembled the state population, but reported lower levels of educational attainment. State residents reported 24.8% as obtaining a college degree in comparison to 15.1% of SunTech parents. However, SunTech students self-identified as 85% white, 15% African American, 7% Latino, and 2% Asian, each within the confidence intervals for the state's public school students generally. (SunTech figures sum to over 100% since some students self-identified as more than one race.)

Parent surveys had 67 items; student surveys, 66. These questions were taken from Liu, Black, Algina, Cavanaugh, and Dawson (2010), Chubb and Moe (1990), and Maranto, Milliman, Hess, and Gresham (2001) and all

employed here are on a five item Likert scale (Very Satisfied 5, Satisfied 4, Neutral 3, Dissatisfied 2, Very Dissatisfied 1). An online survey tool, Qualtrics, was used. Once developed, the surveys were sent to seven expert reviewers. Based on their suggestions, the items were revised for consistency of terminology, specificity of questions and responses, and additional items that should be included. As is customary, before implementing the survey the research team secured approval from University Institutional Review Board.

The satisfaction scale itself has been validated in our prior work (Beck, Maranto & Lo, 2014). The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy (KMO) of .86 for parent survey and of .92 for student survey indicated that both factor analyses were appropriate. In terms of retaining the number of factor(s), both the scree test and parallel analysis indicated the extraction of one factor for parent and student survey. Principal factor analysis was used to investigate the latent constructs of the scale. From this, we identified 14 items with factor loading from .38 to .82. Internal consistency was examined for the Satisfaction scale by computing Cronbach's alpha for parents and for students separately. The alpha coefficients obtained from parents was .88 and from students was .90. These correlation coefficients indicated the Satisfaction scale has strong internal consistency reliability.

Methods

Potential respondents, studying with SunTech for a minimum of one year, were emailed notifications to implement the research design as is standard (Dillman, Smyth, & Christian, 2009). Additionally, beyond email notifications, SunTech administrators contacted the community of parents and students via e-mail in early Fall requesting participation in an upcoming digital survey in exchange for $10 gift cards. An additional email with an online link using the online survey

tool, Qualtrics, was sent to all parents and students. To reach non-respondents and encourage participation, two additional follow-up emails were sent by SunTech administrators, as well as an automated call from the school. For any participants who did not have access to Internet or email, surveys with self-addressed and stamped envelopes were mailed. SunTech representatives received no access to any raw data, assuring confidentiality and anonymity of the respondents. Two hundred sixty nine students (53.7% response rate) and 232 parents (48.7% response rate) responded; providing some assurance of internal validity. Such response rates are considered exemplary for digital surveys (Dillman et al., 2009; Manfreda, Bosnjak, Berzelak, Haas, & Vehovar, 2008; Shih & Fan, 2008). Digital surveys with half the replies have been published by social scientists (e.g. Yancey, 2011).

Results

Through ANOVA, we measured the dependent variables of parent and student grade assigned to the school (A=5, B=4, C=3, D=2, F=1), and an overall satisfaction with the school (Tables 1 and 2). There is no significant difference between the grades given by parents of different races to schools their students attended prior to SunTech. Latino parents graded SunTech significantly higher than white or black parents, and results reached statistical significance ($p < .05$) despite the small n of cases. Interestingly, using our index of school satisfaction, Latino parents rated their prior school higher than did parents of other races, with the differences marginally significant ($p < .10$). There is no difference, however, in how parents rated SunTech using the satisfaction index. Latino students, in contrast, only positively rated their satisfaction with SunTech, but not their prior school, with difference marginally significant ($p < .10$). In their use of school grades, there is no significant difference between

Table 1. Parent Race ANOVA.

	Rating using school grade				Rating using satisfaction			
	df	*F*	*η*	*p*	*df*	*F*	*H*	*p*
Previous School								
Caucasian	1	0.03	0.05	0.86	1	0.47	0.49	0.49
Latino	1	2.07	3.23	0.15	1	3.4	3.54	0.07
African American	1	0.01	0.02	0.92	1	0.01	0.01	0.94
SunTech								
Caucasian	1	0.52	0.24	0.47	1	0.06	0.02	0.80
Latino	1	6.21	2.83	0.01	1	0.09	0.03	0.76
African American	1	2.14	0.97	0.15	1	0.22	0.06	0.64

Notes: **School ratings range from A=5, B=4, C=3, D=2, F=1. Satisfaction ratings are an index created from responses regarding satisfaction with various school domains using likert-like items with 5 being very satisfied to 1 being very dissatisfied.**

Table 2. Student Race ANOVA.

	Rating using school grade				Rating using satisfaction			
	df	*F*	*η*	*p*	*df*	*F*	*H*	*p*
Previous School								
Caucasian	1	0.00	0.00	0.96	1	0.05	0.05	0.83
Latino	1	0.35	0.53	0.55	1	0.13	0.13	0.72
African American	1	0.37	0.57	0.54	1	0.16	0.15	0.69
SunTech								
Caucasian	1	0.07	0.03	0.79	1	0.28	0.10	0.60
Latino	1	1.99	0.88	0.16	1	2.96	1.01	0.09
African American	1	0.93	0.41	0.33	1	0.02	0.01	0.88

Notes: **School ratings range from A=5, B=4, C=3, D=2, F=1. Satisfaction ratings are an index created from responses regarding satisfaction with various school domains using likert-like items with 5 being very satisfied to 1 being very dissatisfied.**

groups of students in how they rate SunTech or their previous school.

It may be that students are less discerning of the differences between schools in self-reports than their parents or they have a greater tendency to share the views of their peers, thus not indicating differences between groups.

As is common in empirical work, we employed a robustness check (Liu, 2015) for structural validity to determine whether relationships found using ANOVA remain when using different techniques and removing regressors; this could increase (or reduce) confidence in our findings. As a robustness check to our ANOVA findings, we conducted Pearson Correlations for our variables of interest (Tables 3 and 4). While simple correlations do not allow us to control for covariates that may influence our dependent variable, they do offer another, and somewhat simplified way of answering our question. Our ANOVA findings are similar to what we find in these correlations regarding a positive relationship between identifying as a Latino parent and a higher grade given to SunTech ($p = .03$). Similarly, Latino parent reports of school satisfaction in their previous school are statistically significant ($p = .07$), just as found in our ANOVA results. In contrast, relative to other students, Latino students only showed satisfaction with SunTech, and results were highly significant ($p = .008$). On the other hand, white students graded SunTech lower ($p = .09$) relative to minorities and with a negative correlation to their overall satisfaction with the school ($p = .04$). In short, the correlations reinforce our ANOVA findings.

Interestingly, students with higher GPA's seem to have a positive relationship with their prior school both through their grading of the school ($p = .05$) as well as satisfaction rating ($p=.08$); there is no such relationship between GPA and how they rated SunTech. This may reflect the curricula and instruction implementing SunTech's mission

Table 3. Parent Race Correlations.

	Caucasian	African American	Latino	SunTech Grade	Previous School Grade	Previous School Satisfaction	SunTech Satisfaction	Fall GPA Spring GPA
Caucasian	1							
African American	-0.608 (0)	1						
Latino	-0.149 (-0.075)	-0.101 (-0.228)	1					
SunTech Grade	-0.084 (-0.338)	0.097 (-0.268)	0.186 (-0.032)	1				
Previous School Grade	-0.04 (-0.649)	-0.021 (-0.817)	0.118 (-0.183)	-0.091 (-0.304)	1			
Previous School	0.048 (-0.602)	-0.079 (-0.394)	0.166 (-	-0.108 (-0.246)	0.754 (0)	1		

Satisfaction			0.073)						
SunTech Satisfaction	-0.093	0.092	0.029	0.616	-0.196	-0.227	1		
	(-0.319)	(-0.319)	(-0.759)	(0)	(-0.036)	(-0.016)			
Fall GPA	0.019	-0.041	0.076	0.163	0.167	0.14	-0.032	1	
	(-0.86)	(-0.702)	(-0.478)	(-0.124)	(-0.12)	(-0.214)	(-0.773)		
Spring GPA	0.041	0.029	-0.018	0.254	0.146	0.173	0.014	0.854	1
	(-0.727)	(-0.807)	(-0.877)	(-0.029)	(-0.218)	(-0.162)	(-0.908)	(0)	

Notes: School ratings range from A=5, B=4, C=3, D=2, F=1. Satisfaction ratings are an index created from responses regarding satisfaction with various school domains using likert-like items with 5 being very satisfied to 1 being very dissatisfied. P-values are in parentheses. Correlations between races is due to the small number (8%) of parents who identified as more than one race.

Table 4. Student Race Correlations.

	Caucasian	African American	Latino	SunTech Grade	Previous School Grade	Previous School Satisfaction	SunTech Satisfaction	Fall GPA	Spring GPA
Caucasian	1								
African American	-0.432 (0)	1							
Latino	-0.244 (0)	-0.111 (-0.042)	1						
SunTech Grade	-0.106 (-0.086)	0.083 (-0.176)	0.1 (-0.105)	1					
Previous School Grade	0.049 (-0.431)	-0.044 (-0.472)	-0.034 (-0.583)	-0.115 (-0.063)	1				
Previous School	-0.062 (-	0.05 (-0.435)	0.036 (-	0.18 (-0.005)	-0.72 (0)	1			

Satisfaction	0.339)		0.582)						
SunTech Satisfaction	-0.13 (-0.043)	0.034 (-0.601)	0.169 (-0.008)	-0.613 (0)	0.16 (-0.013)	-0.26 (0)	1		
Fall GPA	0.073 (-0.285)	-0.058 (-0.395)	-0.09 (-0.19)	-0.078 (-0.276)	-0.138 (-0.055)	0.054 (-0.469)	0.055 (-0.463)	1	
Spring GPA	0.152 (-0.042)	-0.036 (-0.629)	-0.118 (-0.114)	-0.035 (-0.659)	-0.153 (-0.051)	0.143 (-0.081)	-0.039 (-0.632)	0.857 (0)	1

Notes: School ratings range from A=5, B=4, C=3, D=2, F=1. Satisfaction ratings are an index created from responses regarding satisfaction with various school domains using likert-like items with 5 being very satisfied to 1 being very dissatisfied. P-values are in parentheses. Correlations between races is due to the small number (3%) of students who identified as more than one race.

of educating students who have fallen behind academically in traditional public schools. We find evidence in fieldwork that this mission may be less efficacious for academically proficient students.

Conclusion

Latino parents give both SunTech and their prior school relatively positive grade and satisfaction ratings compared to other parents. But this positive impact is particularly apparent for SunTech. Indeed, Latino students, report greater satisfaction only for SunTech. The relatively high grades which Latino parents give SunTech fits into a broader literature suggesting that alternative programs including certain charter schools may empower parents who have been disempowered by hierarchical school bureaucracies, providing their children with more democratic and effective schooling (works within Fox & Buchanan, 2014; works within Rofes & Stulberg, 2004). Similarly, Jasis and Marriott (2010) find evidence that Latino parents enrolled in a community-based adult education program had improved relations with school personnel, and more favorable academic outcomes for their children. Interestingly, however, no notable relationships are found for African American parents or students.

Recall that SunTech was set up to serve students whose learning styles did not fit conventional school settings. Interestingly, data indicate that SunTech students with higher GPAs rated their prior schools, but not SunTech, more highly. This may be due to the fact that SunTech's curriculum was designed to enhance learning opportunities for students who were marginalized in conventional school settings. For Latinos, the relatively higher ratings for SunTech may also reflect the value Latinos place on broader relationship building rather than mere academic achievement, contrasting dominant American approaches to schooling (Auerbach, 2008; Riojas-Cortez & Flores, 2009). We should also note

that fieldwork indicates that Latino students in SunTech are concentrated in urban settings, where safety may be a dominant concern, as the literature cited above suggests (Friedman, Bobrowski & Geraci, 2006). Finally, there is still a digital divide between Latinos and White Americans (Lopez, Gonzalez-Barrera & Patten, 2013; Perrin & Dugan, 2015). SunTech provides computers, Internet connections and technical support for families, which in some cases served as Latino students' first computer and Internet access at home. This too may play a role in the relatively positive ratings Latino parents and students accord SunTech, though more research is needed.

We must again stress two caveats: this study comes from a single school, and the sample includes a relatively small number of Latino students and parents; hence results must be considered exploratory. As an exploratory study, we do not test hypotheses, but rather report findings, which may lead to further more systematic empirical research developing and testing specific hypotheses. The tentative conclusions reached here must be validated through substantive research using large n quantitative analyses.

Generally, cyber education has the potential to revolutionize schooling (Moe & Chubb, 2009; Vander Ark, 2012). Yet, at least as regards measuring student learning, results from cyber schooling have generally been negative (e.g., Woodworth et al., 2015). Notably, some education reformers (Ouchi, 2009) and skeptics (Horn & Wilburn, 2013) contend that test scores alone fail to measure school quality. Accordingly, we need more nuanced discussions about school quality including measures of parental and student satisfaction. Parent, student, and staff satisfaction with a school may capture dimensions of educational quality not measured by test scores and other metrics privileged by policymakers. Further, parents and students cannot be considered as an undifferentiated mass; rather, policymakers

should value schools which successfully differentiate instruction to multiple groups based on student characteristics and needs. This study was exploratory research highlighting the need for more nuanced and multifaceted approaches to measuring school quality, particularly as regards traditionally underserved populations.

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