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SCHOOL LEADERSHIP FOR LATINX, IMMIGRANT STUDENTS AND FAMILIES: CENTERING ADVOCACY AND CRITICAL CARE

Adriana Villavicencio
University of California, Irvine

AUTHOR NOTE
Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Adriana Villavicencio, School of Education, The University of California, Irvine, 3200 Education Bldg., Irvine, CA 92697.
E-mail: adrianav@uci.edu

ABSRACT
This paper examines the role of school leadership in centering the rights, wellbeing, and identities of Latinx, immigrant students and their families. It is guided by the following questions: How do school leaders envision and articulate their roles and responsibilities in sites serving immigrant youth? How does this orientation influence the policies and practices they enact in their schools? Drawing on a three-year case study of a public high school that almost exclusively serves Latinx, immigrant students, this paper illustrates how a school's leadership can apply an advocacy approach and notions of critical care to more holistically serve students and their families. As a "site of possibility," this school and its leadership suggest important considerations for policy and practice in other contexts, especially in a political environment that is hostile to immigrants and in the aftermath of a pandemic that has taken a disproportionate toll on immigrant youth and their families.

Keywords: Immigrant students, school leadership, family engagement

Introduction

Immigrant families face a unique set of challenges that can negatively affect the wellbeing and academic success of immigrant children and youth (Olneck, 2006; Patel, et al., 2016; Suárez-Orozco et al., 2009). In particular, immigrant students who are English Learners[1] face higher rates of psychosocial issues (Perreira & Ornelas, 2011; Sibley & Brabeck, 2017), struggle to attain proficiency in English after six years in US schools, and are more likely to drop out of high school (Clark-Gareca et al., 2020; García & Kleifgen, 2018; NCES, 2019). Contributing to or compounding these patterns, schools can often be alienating spaces for immigrant students when they are forced to speak only English and pressured to abandon their own culture, while largely being overlooked and underserved (Contreras et al., 2020; Jaffe-Walter, 2016; Valenzuela, 2005).

In the face of these inequities, scholars have also documented the strength and resilience of immigrant students who are able to apply their own familial, linguistic, and social capital to successfully navigate educational spaces (Enriquez, 2011; Jaffe-Walter & Lee, 2018; Reynolds &

Orellana, 2019; Sánchez & Salazar, 2012; Valenzuela, 2020). In 2020, in fact, 28% of students in U.S. colleges and universities were either first-generation immigrants or the children of immigrants, accounting for 58% of the growth in the total number of students in higher education between 2000 and 2018 (Batalova & Feldblum, 2020).

Still, the inequitable conditions facing immigrant students in schools have worsened since the 2016 U.S. presidential election and under the current federal administration (Gándara, 2018; Pentón Herrera & Obregón, 2018). Amid threats to build a border wall, attempts to end DACA, and a family separation policy, scholars have documented an increase in xenophobia and hostility towards immigrant students (Conchas & Acevedo, 2021; Gándara, 2018; Nguyen & Kebede, 2017; O'Connor & Mangual Figueroa, 2017; Pentón Herrera & Obregón, 2018) and have shown how those forces have shaped the positions and practices of their teachers (Darragh & Petrie, 2019; Dubin, 2018; Jaffe-Walter et al., 2019; Martin-Beltrán et al., 2018; Miranda, 2017). Children of undocumented parents, especially, are experiencing greater fear over the possibility of being deported or facing the deportation of their family members (Capps et al., 2016; Dreby, 2012). As a result, the current political climate is associated with worse outcomes in student mental health, school attendance, and academic performance (Ee & Gándara, 2020).

Under this adverse political context, it is even more important to examine schools that can serve as safe havens for immigrant students and their families. The purpose of this study is to explore a "site of possibility" (Weis & Fine, 2004)—in this case, a public high school in New York City that has produced positive academic outcomes among immigrant students, while attending to their socioemotional and material needs. While prior research has documented how schools can create safe and welcoming learning environments for immigrant students (Bajaj & Bartlett, 2017; Jaffe-Walter et al., 2019; Jaffe-Walter, 2018; Kessler et al., 2018), this paper will focus on the role of school leadership, in particular, because of the prominent role it plays in shaping the experiences and outcomes of students (Grissom et al., 2021). The examination of school leadership, conceptualized here as the formal roles held by the principal and assistant principals (APs) as well as a distributed sense of leadership among other staff, is guided by the following questions: How do school leaders envision and articulate their roles and responsibilities in sites serving immigrant youth? How does this orientation influence the policies and practices they enact in their schools? Drawing on a three-year case study of a high school that primarily serves Latinx, immigrant students, this paper illustrates how the school's leadership applies an advocacy approach and notions of critical care to effectively serve students and their families. Given the school's track record of success for immigrant students, its model of leadership suggests important considerations for policy and practice in other districts.

Literature

School Leadership for Immigrant Students

This paper builds upon prior research focused on school leadership for immigrant, English Learners (ELs).[1] A large body of this research has documented the multiple ways leaders provide linguistic support for EL students. These include expanding the role of ESL (English-as-a-Second Language) teachers (Brooks et al., 2010), increasing teacher capacity in the area of language development (Scanlan & Lopez, 2012), investing in dual language programs (DeMatthews & Izquierdo, 2018), and reclassifying English learners (Okhremtchouk et al., 2018). Other research on leadership for immigrant students has focused on improving collaboration among leaders across schools (Brooks et al., 2010; Theoharis & O'Toole, 2011) and creating opportunities for collaboration between school leaders and their district administrators (Elfers & Stritikus, 2014).

A second prominent strand of research on leadership for immigrant students focuses on the political dimensions of their work. Valenzuela's (1999) work on what she terms "subtractive schooling" has been especially influential in framing the ways schools often apply policies and practices that minimize the culture, language, and identities of immigrant students. Gándara and Hopkins (2010) added to this work by exploring how restrictive language policies reinforce the marginalization of immigrant ELs, while failing to produce academic gains. In light of these conditions, recent scholarship has examined the ways school leaders can disrupt deficit perspectives and assimilationist norms by creating welcoming, authentic environments for immigrant students (Burkett & Hayes, 2018; Crawford, 2017; Crawford & Witherspoon Arnold, 2017). Another body of work has illustrated how school leaders can promote political empowerment among immigrant students and families (Burkett & Hayes, 2018; Crawford, 2017; Liou, 2016; Miranda, 2017). In their case study of a school leader who works in the US-Mexico border region, for example, Lopez, Gonzalez, and Fierro (2006) provide a model of socially conscious and politically informed leadership that recognizes the multiple cultures and languages of their school community, while mobilizing and empowering students, families, and the larger school community. More recently, Crawford (2017) documents how school leaders challenged anti-immigrant state policies that impeded school access among undocumented students. School leaders have also played an important role in negotiating accountability policies to ensure that teachers are better positioned to effectively serve immigrant EL students (Palmer & Rangel, 2010). This paper builds on extant research by focusing on the role of school leadership in building supportive environments for immigrant students in the context of a political environment that is particularly hostile to immigrant students and their families.

Schools and Immigrant Families

Scholars have long established a relationship between family-school engagement and students' academic outcomes, including higher test scores, greater motivation, and lower dropout rates (Ceballo et al., 2014; Cooper & Crosnoe, 2007; Fan et al., 2012; Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Hill & Tyson, 2009; Suárez-Orozco et al., 2010). Yet, immigrant families are less likely to interact with schools than native-born parents (Gaitan, 2012; Sohn & Wang, 2006; Turney & Kao, 2009). While educators may interpret this phenomenon as a lack of motivation or limited educational concern on the part of these families, it is often due to a number of structural barriers that have little to do with interest or motivation (Gonzalez et al., 2013; Jones, 2003; Rodriguez & Lopez, 2003; Walker et al., 2011).

First, limited proficiency or comfort in English coupled with a lack of bilingual staff or translation services can be a major barrier to engaging with schools (Carreón et al., 2005; Delgado-Gaitan, 2004; Gonzalez et al., 2013; Turney & Kao, 2009). Beyond language, there is often a misalignment between the cultural norms of immigrant parents and the white, middle-class norms of their schools that serve to marginalize, exclude, or cast immigrant families and students from a deficit perspective (Dabach et.al, 2017; Flores, 2016; Rodriguez 2015). Because schools typically have narrow expectations about how parents and families should communicate and behave, departures from these hegemonic norms are considered to be lacking or problematic (Carreón et al., 2005; Lareau & Horvat, 1999). In particular, Latinx immigrant parents are more likely to practice some level of deference to school officials and teachers, which may limit how often parents interact with educators or challenge academic decisions affecting their children (Calzada et al., 2010; Ceballo et al., 2014; Gonzalez et al., 2013; Villalba, 2007).

Even when immigrant parents do overcome these barriers and attempt to engage with their

child's school, they tend to feel largely ignored or unwelcome (Auerbach, 2002; Carreón et al.,2005; Hill & Torres, 2010; Hill & Tyson., 2009; Suarez-Orozco et al., 2010). Compounding these responses on the part of the schools are broader racial and ethnic stereotypes about certain immigrant groups. For example, scholars have documented a rise in Islamophobia in schools that establish the "otherness" of these groups, resulting in exclusion and denial of resources (Abu El-Haj, 2010; Bajaj et al., 2016; Jaffe-Walter, 2013; Sirin & Fine 2007). Similarly, this "othering" of and xenophobia of immigrant, Latinx families may be even more visible since the advent of the Trump administration, its anti-immigration policies, and the disparagement of the Mexican community in particular (Costello, 2016).

As immigrant families continue to experience avoidance, slights, or outright hostility, they are over time less likely to connect with school staff, thereby reinforcing the stereotypes and deficit-oriented views educators hold of the immigrant families they are supposed to be serving. This paper illustrates a decidedly different model of establishing authentic engagement with families that extends beyond parent-teacher conferences and parent volunteers—one that is grounded in advocacy, allyship, and care for the rights and humanity of immigrant, Latinx families.

Advocacy Leadership and Critical Care: Conceptual Framework

This paper is informed by a conceptualization of leadership that centers authenticity and advocacy (Anderson, 2009). Leaders that center these dimensions of their work recognize systemic inequities that are manifested in the daily lives of their students and families. They are conscious of the material realities of their communities—access to health care, food, safety, and shelter—and assume the role of advocating for these basic needs when they are unmet. Beyond conceptualizing social welfare as a human right (Berliner, 2006), advocacy leaders are inherently political and approach their work from their ideological commitments. They are also motivated by more than student achievement. Rather, they use their buildings as sites of possibility to reimagine a more just society. Anderson (2009) explains:

> At a broader level, they know that some causes, such as inequitable social policies, may be beyond their immediate control, but they have a deep belief in the power of education to foster not just kids with high tests scores, but also powerful and informed democratic citizens with influence over those very policies in the future. (p. 23)

To that end, these leaders are willing to take risks, be transgressive, and act adversarial in the face of existing policies and power structures to advocate for those communities that have less access to certain resources or channels of power. At the same time, advocacy leaders do not work alone. They inspire and empower multiple stakeholders, including teachers, students, and families, to challenge existing inequities as leaders in their own right. Leadership is also shared via alliances with external organizations rooted in the community or focused on its needs and assets (Gold et al., 2004; Shirley, 1997). These conceptualizations of advocacy leadership—both its political nature and its focus on achieving justice through partnerships—help us understand the beliefs and practices of the leadership described in this paper.

In tandem with advocacy leadership, another lens through which to interrogate the school leadership in this case study is the role of care in schools. I draw especially on scholarship that challenges or expands on notions of care for marginalized groups. The work of Nel Noddings (1992, 1998, 2002) established the ethics of care and trust as essential dimensions of teaching and building relationships with students. In this conceptualization, teachers develop curriculum of care, schools organize themselves around personalization and supportive structures, and educators strive

to see and serve the whole child. Extending beyond these principles, however, a number of race-conscious scholars have challenged colorblind theories of care and called for considering the racially grounded political issues that affect the experiences of students of color (Alder, 2002; Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2002; Katz, 1999; Noblit, 1993; Thompson, 1998; Valenzuela, 1999). This work has pushed us to think beyond care within interpersonal relationships and center the racialized dynamics of those relationships.

Moreover, these scholars challenge us to investigate the ways notions of care have been coopted by educational reformers who aim to express "care" by commodifying social emotional learning, focusing on the assimilation of students into circumscribed modes of being and achieving, and centering narrow metrics of student "success" over their overall wellbeing. Rolón-Dow (2005), for example, sought to understand how caring and teacher-student relationships were situated in the specific sociocultural context of a particular school and the racial relations therein, finding that teachers' care narratives actually normalized racism in schools. Similarly, Jaffe-Walter (2016) illustrated how teachers use discourses of care and concern to further alienate students by pressuring them to assimilate into the norms of the dominant culture. Presenting an alternative to these models, other research has documented the approaches and practices of leadership rooted in critical care (Antrop-González & De Jesús, 2006; Wilson, 2016).

In this paper, I envision the integration of advocacy leadership and critical care as a set of concerns for and corresponding actions that address the structural and political inequalities faced by marginalized, minoritized students and families. Leadership that enacts both advocacy and critical care for immigrant families and students is unconcerned with reproducing white middle-class norms, but rather with preserving students' languages and identities, promoting student agency, and developing critical consciousness across the wider school community. As a site of possibility, this school provides a leadership model for meeting these aims through external partnerships with advocacy organizations, authentic relationships with families, and asset-based, culturally relevant learning experiences that leverage students' native language.

Methods

Research Context and Site Selection

This paper draws on a larger study of the Internationals Network for Public Schools, an educational nonprofit organization founded in 2004 that supports public secondary schools designed to serve immigrant youth who have been in the country for fewer than four years. Most of the Network's 23 high schools are located in NYC, while a few are located in California, and the D.C. area. Students who attend Network schools come from over 100 countries and speak 90 different languages. A majority of the Network's students have high economic needs (e.g., eligible for public assistance, living below the federal poverty line, or living in temporary housing) and many are undocumented or live in mixed-status households.

Network schools have established a positive reputation for graduating students that are typically underserved in other schools (Gross, 2017; Hernández et al., 2019; Stavely, 2019). In the first stage of our larger study (a quasi-experimental analysis), we found that attending a Network school has a positive impact on the academic outcomes of immigrant students when compared with those attending other high schools in the same district. The second stage of the larger study was designed to explore *how* these Network schools produce positive results for immigrant students. To create a rich picture of the policies and practices of these sites as well as the perspectives and commitments of their educators, our research team conducted qualitative case studies in two of the Network high schools with the strongest academic impacts on graduation

rates (though they also exhibited positive impacts on attendance and credit accumulation). This paper specifically draws on the data from the case study site that predominantly serves Spanish speaking students in the interest of exploring effective schooling for the Latinx community.

This high school site—which I will refer to in this paper as La Paz International[2]—is located in the Bronx and serves a Spanish speaking population of newcomer students, 15% of whom are undocumented. What is obscured in the population description is the diversity of cultures represented by the student body, who have recently arrived from Central and South America as well as the Caribbean (see Table 1). Nearly all speak Spanish, but a small number of students speak a dialect from a region in Ecuador. More than 50% of their students exhibit low levels of literacy in their native language when they enroll in the 9th grade, often due to interruptions in their formal education.

Table 1

School Characteristics of La Paz International

Borough	Enrollment	Student Demographics (%)	Economic Need Index[a] (%)	English Learners[b] (%)	Special Education (%)	Impacts on 4-year graduation rates (%)
Bronx	426	99 Latinx <u>Country of origin (n)</u> Costa Rica (1) Dominican Republic (279) Ecuador (40) El Salvador (6) Guatemala (25) Honduras (48) Mexico (9) Spain (3) United States (12) Venezuela (3)	97	88	3	+22

Source. New York City Department of Education Administrative Data and authors' calculations.
[a] The Economic Need Index is based on the percentage of families (with school-age children) in the student's census tract whose income is below the poverty level, as estimated by the American Community Survey 5-Year estimate.
[b] All students entering the ninth grade at these schools are classified as English learners. These numbers reflect that some students are reclassified before graduation.

Despite these challenges, La Paz's graduation rate is 84%, higher than that of the city average (76%). More importantly, Table 1 shows the substantial *impact* the school has on graduation rates, a measure that captures student gains over and beyond what they might have achieved elsewhere. La Paz also received the highest designation (i.e., "excellent") on nearly all of the district's Quality Review measures (i.e., rigorous instruction, supportive environment, strong family-community ties, trust, and student achievement) in the 2018-2019 school year. In addition, 97% of families who responded to the City's annual parent survey reported that school staff regularly communicate with them about how families can help their child learn (compared to the city average of 88%).

Data Collection

Data sources for this case study (Yin, 2014) include interviews, focus groups, observations, and a review of documents over a three-year period from the fall of 2017 to the spring of 2020 (see Table 2). Over this time period, we conducted 45-60-minute formal, semi-structured, one-on-one interviews and focus groups with 35 members of the school community including: three school leaders (i.e., principals and two assistant principals), two guidance counselors, the parent coordinator, as well as teachers and students from across grades 9-12. In addition, we interviewed all school leaders a second time near the end of our data collection. We also conducted informal interviews by phone and correspondence over email to ask clarifying questions and follow up on certain themes as they emerged in the data. Interviews and focus group protocols were designed to elicit understanding of the school's mission and vision, organizational features, professional conditions of its teachers, learning environments for its students, and collaboration with families and external partners.

In addition to interviews and the focus group, we also conducted 10 classroom observations across different subjects and six observations of professional meetings (e.g., grade level teams, coordinating council, restorative justice committee) to learn more about how the school's learning environments and professional conditions supported immigrant students. Observations typically lasted the length of a class period and were documented with a running chronology of the observed activities (Creswell, 2013) followed by field notes that described classroom activities, participants' actions, important dialogue, and included reflective notes (Emerson et al., 1995). In addition, we followed up each classroom observation with an interview of the classroom teacher. Finally, we also collected and reviewed relevant documents, such as school mission statements, handbooks, professional development agendas, parent meeting agendas, and resources created for families to provide further context for the data collected across observations and interviews. Though this particular paper draws largely on interviews with school leaders and teachers, the sustained time at this site and the triangulation of multiple data sources helped deepen our understanding of the school's culture as well as the ethos and practice of its leadership.

Table 2

Data Collection

Interviews with school leaders	Interviews with other support staff	Focus groups with teachers	Observations of	Observations of classrooms	Focus groups

				professional meetings		with students
Number of activities	6	3	4	6	10	2

Data Analysis

To analyze the data collected in our fieldwork, our six-person research team applied a multi-step process (Hruschka et al., 2004). First, we relied on deductive and inductive approaches to create a coding scheme (Miles et al., 2014). Based on a combination of the research questions, prior literature, the interview protocol, and reflection memos generated after each school visit, we created 12 distinct categorical codes (Saldaña, 2016). We then applied this initial coding scheme to the same random sampling of transcripts and observation notes, which generated additional codes, revisions to the codebook, and more precise code definitions. The team conducted multiple rounds of this process until acceptable levels of reliability were met (e.g., better than 80% of kappas > 0.9). Our final codebook included 25 distinct codes.

The codebook and data were then uploaded to Dedoose, a web-based qualitative data analysis software program, to facilitate coding of the remaining data. We continued to check interrater reliability regularly throughout the coding process by having pairs of coders double code 10% of transcripts and observation notes. After the first round of coding, each member of the team generated a coding memo based on initial reflections of salient patterns in the data and code frequencies. We discussed these memos in depth to identify focus areas for second level coding (Miles et al., 2014). Our second level coding generated 14 thematic analytic memos in total, which delineated emerging themes and identified illustrative examples of those themes from the data. A prominent theme that emerged early on was the relationship between the school's leadership and the current political context. This analysis established how the school leadership engaged immigrant families and young people through advocacy and critical care.

Our collective analysis was informed by our individual identities as well as our familiarity with Network schools. Two of our members (including myself) come from immigrant households and thus, our perspectives helped center our questions and analyses on the lived experiences of immigrant students and families. In addition, two of our members had done prior research in Network schools, which provided the rest of us with a strong foundational understanding of the historical and organizational context of these schools. While the Network schools are unique in that they are designed to exclusively serve newcomer students, the focus on the findings below center on perspectives, approaches, and practices that can be applied in other educational contexts serving immigrant students.

Findings

Our fieldwork illuminated a number of school dimensions that reflected the tenets of the Internationals Network model, including the focus on experiential learning, collaborative teaching environments, and the integration of language and content. At the same time, spending time in this particular setting revealed the ways its unique student population (nearly 100% Latinx and Spanish speaking) and the primary role of the principal also set it apart in ways that offer helpful insights

into how school leadership can serve Latinx, immigrant students with commitments to their. The school's formal leadership consists of the founding principal and two assistant principals (APs); however, throughout this paper, I will make clear when I am describing beliefs, dispositions, or practices by these individuals, as well as those that reflect a more distributed sense of leadership across various school members. While the teaching staff includes a number of first- and second-generation individuals from South America, the Dominican Republic, Puerto Rico, and Europe, all three school leaders are white women born in the United States. Given their whiteness and the privilege it affords them, their operating principles and subsequent actions represent the work of allies or approaching the role of "co-conspirators" in the fight towards freedom and justice for marginalized communities (Ally or co-conspirator, 2016). The school leader(whom I will refer to here as Marylyn Woods)delegates large dimensions of the school's operations and planning to her assistant principals, leads the school through a collaborative committee, and supports teacher autonomy (Villavicencio et al, 2020). At the same time, takes ultimate responsibility for serving the school community, empowering her APs and teachers to do the same and building external partners to address their needs when the school cannot.

The Personal is Political: Protecting the Rights of Immigrant Families and Students

When we first met Marylyn (who asks teachers, families, and students to call her by her first name), she was entering her 10th year as principal of Laz Paz. Within minutes, it became clear that she is an authoritative leader who rarely minces words. In particular, she spoke candidly about the current federal administration and its assault on the rights of immigrants—both documented and undocumented. Her work at La Paz is informed by a deep and historical understanding of the treatment of immigrant communities, how policies have changed over time, and the effects of those policies on the lives of the families served by her school. For Marylyn, the "personal is political" and the politics of today inform how she thinks about the school's mission and her role and responsibilities as a school leader.

Working from this political conceptualization of her leadership, she sees her role and that of her teachers as frontline advocates for their families and students. This has been especially true in the last few years, as the current political context poses additional risks for immigrant students and families. Many of the school members described that since the 2016 presidential election, stories about raids by Immigrant and Customs Enforcement (ICE) and random checkpoints throughout the city have created a climate of fear and a greater distrust of institutions and authority figures, including schools and school leaders. The principal reported, "I've definitely had parents tell me that they're fearful of any kind of state or city official places—just fearful that they'll be revealed in some ways." The fear and anxiety are justified: several teachers and some students reported that ICE officials are now more commonly spotted, especially near train stations and around schools in particular geographical areas. This includes the South Bronx, where the school is located and where nearly 60% of the community is Latinx.

These are not merely passive observations or empty expressions of sympathy, but rather they motivate concern, empathy, and action around protecting the rights of the school community. In particular, the principal has ensured that the school proactively helps to arm the community with knowledge of their rights as undocumented and documented immigrants, strategies for dealing with immigration officials, and legal supports when needed. After the 2016 election, she invited local immigration advocates to run multiple "Know Your Rights" seminars for families in Spanish. Representatives from these organizations shared practical information about a range of issues related to legal status, immigration fraud, housing laws, and access to healthcare. At every

monthly parent meeting, an immigration lawyer is available to advise parents on individual cases pertaining to documentation status and other legal issues. In addition, information, pamphlets, and representatives from other local advocacy organizations can often be seen near the front door during these meetings.

These external partners have also educated teachers on who is allowed to come into the building and what types of credentials need to be shown to enter. The teachers, in turn, have delivered units to their students on the rights of immigrants and undocumented individuals in New York State and the country. Overall, these efforts were born out of the fears incited by the current political context and a commitment to protect the rights of students and families. One of the assistant principals described:

> These aren't things that I've ever had to deal with prior to this political environment, so that's hard, but we had someone come in and just talk about, "Here's what happens if they come to your door, how you should act, what you ask to see," and assuring our students, "You stay calm. You ask to see this. This is the only time you have to open your door." I think most of the agencies know that the schools and other institutions are wise to them. They're more successful going to a person's home and harassing them there. Because a person who's scared is going do whatever the big, bad guy in the uniform says.

Her description makes vivid the ways in which students and families are made to feel unsafe in their own homes and the responsibility she and the staff have taken on to provide support in this type of situation.

In one particularly frightening incident, a 12th grade student reported to the principal that he was taken in by what he deemed to be immigration officials. He ended up jumping out of the moving vehicle, coming back to school, and telling the front office, "I don't know where they're taking me. They're taking me to New Jersey. I'm never going to see anyone again!" Marylyn recalled the boy being "scared for his life." After that, the school received multiple phone calls from Homeland Security, which accused them of hindering the justice process and threatened that the student would report as a runaway. We can imagine a scenario in which a school's leaders are justifiably intimidated by the involvement of a federal office, but Marylyn and one of her APs reacted with—if not outright resistance—a refusal to merely follow orders. She recalls replying to someone from Homeland: "If these people are going to be taking this child out of state forever, I need the proper discharge forms. I'm doing my job." While many school leaders are told to avoid any actions that may be interpreted as political, Marylyn positions her opposition to these types of authorities as a critical part of her role, part of what it means to be a school leader.

Entre Familia: Creating a Culture of Community and Care

If the leadership at La Paz is ready to be confrontational with the outside world on behalf of students and families, it is because they regard them as members of a family. That is to say, the school leaders, teachers, and students collectively create a culture focused on relationships entre familia. As an educator with over 30 years of experience, Marylyn attributes some of her leadership style—as head of family—to her experience as a student and later professional in South America:

> The kids have a relationship with us, the same kind of relationship I used to have with my teachers when I lived in Venezuela. The teachers call me by my first name. The kids here call me by my first name. The kids know that that doesn't mean that they don't respect me. It's just that school in our country (and here) is like a family, and so I think the kids understand that this is their second home.

To wit, Marylyn and her APs relate to students—who may tower over them—like mothers. They switch fluidly between Spanish and English mirroring the speech of "their kids," they ask them if they have eaten and nag them if they insist on having chips and soda. They give out hugs freely, offer students their offices when they need to talk or when they just need a few moments to put their heads down. They practice an open-door policy with their families and know many by their first names. Their care and warmth are situated within the context and cultural backgrounds of the families they serve and function as the foundation for understanding their experiences, responding to their needs, and recognizing their value to the school community and society at large.

As an extension of community that she wishes to cultivate, Marylyn and a team of teachers have recruited and hired a diverse teaching staff who in many ways resemble the student body. She said, "[Students] get to see professionals who come from countries they've come from," thereby providing students "windows and mirrors" among the teaching staff. Many of the staff reported being able to relate to students because of their own immigrant backgrounds, while staff who did not share that background highlighted the ways these perspectives were useful in their own practice. For example, one of the assistant principals, a white woman born in the U.S. said:

> I think it helps onboard people more quickly when you have so many people of different backgrounds, and different Latino backgrounds on your teams. They're able to just offer a perspective that I think—someone like me, I just didn't have coming into it. That's been really helpful.

This is not to say that teachers who are native to the United States cannot apply empathetic stances towards immigrant students or create welcoming classroom environments, but their teaching composition and hiring practices do highlight just one of the multiple ways Marylyn considers the care of her students across multiple aspects of the school's policy and practice.

She has also placed in prominence certain roles and responsibilities that provide concrete sources of support, including that of the school's parent coordinator (a former student of the school), the guidance counselor, and its two social workers. The parent coordinator uses her own background and familiarity with the community to inform her outreach to parents and inspire a range of supports offered on Saturdays, including classes in English and computer literacy, as well as workshops in banking and stress management. Moreover, partnerships with local community-based organizations allow the parent coordinator to help meet some of the families' medical and mental health needs. Marylyn also obtained a grant to hire a social worker—a position that is sometimes a luxury in a small school. The social worker almost exclusively works with long-term absences and chronic tardiness, acknowledging that these are typically symptoms of underlying hardships facing newly arrived immigrants. The guidance counselors, who have both served as teachers in other schools prior to taking on this role, work as intercessors between teachers, students, and parents in addition to providing mandated counseling for those students with Individualized Education Programs (IEPs).

Aside from these specialized roles designed to provide authentic care and individualized support, the school's leadership has also made it a priority that every adult in the building (including teachers, paraprofessionals, school aids, administrative assistants) receive training related to trauma-informed care. In addition to the heightened trauma stemming from the anti-immigration rhetoric and policies of the Trump era, this professional development is largely a response to growing accounts of suicide ideation, students running away from home, and conflicts between students and their families. A common source of trauma among the students they serve is family separation and reunification. While the students at La Paz are from many different countries whose migration experiences vary greatly, separation from parents is a common hardship. In many

cases, reuniting with parents can also present serious challenges, especially when young people have experienced feelings of abandonment or isolation. In other cases, a family's pressure on students to work or give up aspirations of college can present an equally complex set of dynamics. While the school's leader is clear that trauma-informed professional development alone cannot solve these issues, it does provide a set of tools to address the emotional fallout of separation and reunification.

Don't Let It Go: Preserving Culture, Language, and Identities

While Marylyn believes her work (and that of her staff) entails advocating for the rights of their families and providing critical care, they do not relate to the community only through the struggles they may experience. Rather, there is an inherent and explicit value placed up on their cultural backgrounds and their language as an expression of their collective identities. Deepening their knowledge of the diversity within the Latinx community they serve, the staff display artifacts of the history, language or dialects, cultural practices or traditions of the students' various countries of origins around the school's hallways and inside of its classrooms.

These visual signals help create an environment in which students do not have to check their identities or home languages at the door. The AP reflected:

> I think really celebrating and highlighting the culture is important because some of our kids come in thinking, "I've got to hide it or put it away, because I'm in the U.S. now. It's all about English and blah, blah, blah." We just want them to realize, "This is a beautiful, amazing thing you're bringing to us, and we want you to share it and be proud of it, and not let it go."

To that end, the school is fully immersive in Spanish and English. There is no stigma around speaking Spanish in class with peers or teachers; in fact, on the contrary, framed as a tool to help students socialize in a new place and ultimately support their learning goals. "There's no rule for how much language can be spoken at which time," Marylyn states. "I refuse to do that because that's not normal or natural. That's not real life."

In contrast to the sole focus on English acquisition present in many schools serving English Learners, the principal explained that one of the school's missions is that students graduate being able to read and write equally well in both languages. As part of this model, the school offers math and science in Spanish in the 9th and 10th grades. In addition, 9th and 10th graders take all their classes together within smaller cohorts, so newly arrived 9th graders can benefit from the social and academic support of their peers in the 10th grade. One of the primary assumptions behind the principal's decisions around language development is the separation of language skills from outcomes related to content. This allows teachers to acknowledge the content-related skills students may bring even if they have not yet mastered the second language. In other words, the school does not allow students' level of English to make invisible their knowledge sets and abilities. The other AP explained:

> That's why we've separated them because we don't want language and skills to hinder them getting credit, which they deserve, because they have technically passed all of their content outcomes. We're not forcing them to all of a sudden speak English their first year. …. The way that we separate our outcomes into content, language, and skill, so it delineates the idea that language is not inherently connected to content. Students can be highly successful in their content, but maybe not yet on their language.

The school's approach to language not only rejects deficit narratives, but it also creates unique opportunities for students to excel in their native language, while exposing them to rigorous

curriculum and instruction. One of my most vivid experiences at La Paz was observing a 9th and 10th grade class reading and analyzing the 15th century Spanish play, *La Celestina* by Fernando de Rojas. Though Spanish is my first language, I was struck by the sophistication of the prose and the vocabulary the students used to discuss the work. The fluidity with which they grappled with themes of misogyny, prejudice, and religion within the historical context and its connection to contemporary events made obvious that their language was not perceived as a barrier but as a vehicle towards learning and self-actualization.

Discussion and Implications for Policy, Practice, and Research

The U.S. foreign-born population is 13.7% and steadily rising. Moreover, the growth of newcomer destinations in geographical regions that have not historically served immigrant students suggests that districts and schools across the country will need to adapt to effectively serve these communities. By examining a school that has made positive impacts on the academic outcomes of immigrant students, this paper contributes empirical scholarship towards understanding approaches that effectively support a growing, but historically underserved community. At the same time, the limitations of this study raise critical questions about the capacity for other schools to enact these policies and practices and sustain them over time. Though we collected our data over two years, the principal retired the year after and there was some tension between the remaining assistant leaders. How likely is it for schools to maintain an ethos established by a school leader who leaves? How do schools like Le Paz remain committed to their central mission in the face of principal and teacher turnover? Another limitation of the study is the singularity of the site itself. The case study site was uniquely created to serve Spanish speaking immigrant students, setting it apart from other schools in the district. Moreover, schools in its Network have been able to negotiate, over several years, certain district mandates and practice "creative compliance" (Tienken, 2020) to better serve immigrant ELs. How difficult might it be for other schools in the same system to apply these lessons when they do not have some of the affordances or community of a Network school?

The distinctive qualities of the case, however, may actually uncover some of the way we may reimagine traditional school settings. Situated alongside scholarship that documents promising practices for immigrant communities, this paper provides a conceptual model—an integration of advocacy and critical care—through which to understand and interrogate educational spaces that serve immigrant students. By focusing specifically on the school's leadership, this paper also adds to an existing body of work on transformative leadership, as embodied by individuals and a school's very ethos. To that end, this work offers a rich description of school leadership grounded in advocacy and critical care, which in turn inspired policies and practices to more holistically serve Latinx, immigrant students and their families. Moreover, by illustrating how the principal of this site helps to protect the rights of undocumented and documented families (especially in an increasingly hostile political environment), provide critical care through her staff and external partners, and preserve the culture and language of her students, this paper reveals concrete approaches that can be adopted by other school leaders who serve immigrant, mixed-status communities, and other marginalized populations.

This paper also suggests considerations for leadership programs that typically focus on skills related to operations, school budgets, and academic instruction, but may not spend sufficient time on political contexts, social justice, and racial consciousness nor how these factors may intersect with the roles of school leaders today. Practically speaking, that might involve integrating a historical and sociopolitical lens into the courses and content of a program, professional

development focused on anti-racism and racial justice, and mentorship or apprenticeship with experienced leaders of color. It may also entail reexamining accountability frameworks in which "care" is enacted through a colorblind lens and focused on reductive measures of social emotional learning. While leadership programs and school districts may discourage school leaders from engaging in politics, not doing so may signal to immigrant families and communities of color more broadly that their daily realities aren't seen and don't matter. This is especially true when federal policy and political leaders cast aspersions on immigrant groups, further disintegrating their trust in authorities and institutions like schools. This article may also raise important, critical questions about the model of the strong leader. What will happen, for example, in the wake of Marylyn's departure? To what extent will the policies and practices she established continue without her leadership? It is thus important that leadership programs also build leaders' capacity to empower other members of the larger school community to take on roles of advocacy and create structures and systems that are sustainable beyond inevitable transitions in leadership.

Based on this work, districts and schools may also want to consider policies around bilingual education and creating asset-based, rigorous learning opportunities to leverage and further develop students' native languages. Moreover, the way language policies are framed should reject deficit perspectives that explicitly or implicitly push students to give up aspects of their culture and identity, including their language. Given La Paz's track record for producing positive academic outcomes for immigrant students, this model also suggests that centering the cultures and identities of students and their families is not antithetical to student achievement, but rather goes hand in hand with effectively educating and graduating students. Since we know that immigrant ELs are half as likely to graduate from high school, it is critical to study sites that have been able to "beat the odds," especially for newcomer students. Future research should provide empirical evidence of the approaches taken in sites that have proven to be effective, while establishing more explicit linkages between these approaches and a range of student outcomes.

Conclusion

The lessons learned from this study will be especially important during the era of COVID-19 and its aftermath. The pandemic has had a disproportionate effect on immigrant families (who are more likely to work outside the home and less likely to have healthcare), while the move to remote and hybrid classrooms may leave many English Learners and non-English speaking families further disenfranchised from the system. In the face of these material realities, schools will have the responsibility to forge relationships with families, understand their needs, establish external partnerships with community-serving organizations, and better integrate home lives and funds of knowledge into curriculum and instruction.

The national policy landscape is also shifting once again under the leadership of a new federal administration that has already reversed a number of Trump's anti-immigration executive orders (including the "Muslim ban" and the border wall). While these acts may result in some cautious optimism among immigrants and allies, we should neither forget nor ignore the xenophobia and white nationalism that continues to thrive in this country and around the world. We should also recognize that most of the policies that have historically harmed immigrant families were enacted and enforced long before Trump. It will continue to be incumbent on policymakers, researchers, and educators to keep immigrant students and families at the forefront of our work, while we reimagine education in the wake of a pandemic; let us not return to "normal" but let us aspire towards an educational system grounded in the humanity of our students and justice for our communities.

NOTES

[1] In this paper, I use the term "English Learners" or "ELs" to be consistent with how respondents in the study referred to students who are learning English as a second language. In more recent years, the schools in the study (and the Network of schools they belong to) have adopted the term "multilingual" to recognize the ways that students' bilingualism is a social and cognitive resource.

[2] While most English Learners are actually native born, a majority of immigrant students are also ELs (Migration Policy Institute, 2015).

[3] In this paper, the school's name and the names of individuals are pseudonyms.

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