

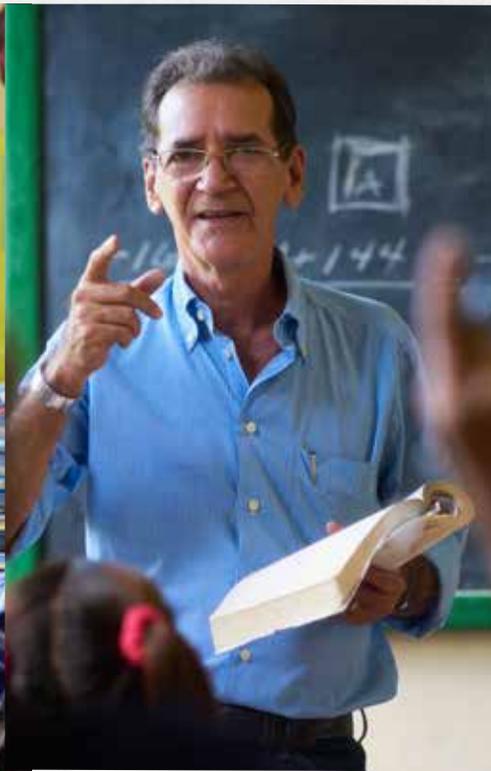
Our Stories Our Struggles Our Strengths

PERSPECTIVES AND REFLECTIONS FROM LATINO TEACHERS



The Education Trust

www.edtrust.org/LatinoTeachers



The findings presented in this project provide a **FOUNDATION FOR UNDERSTANDING** the issues facing Latino teachers, illustrating how multifaceted Latino teachers are, and, perhaps more importantly, **SHEDDING LIGHT ON THEIR DISTINCT ASSETS.**

Our Stories, Our Struggles, Our Strengths: Perspectives and Reflections From Latino Teachers

BY ASHLEY GRIFFIN

If there ever was a time for educators to understand the experiences of Latino students, that time is now. Increases in anti-immigration expressions and sentiments and the very real rollback of federal protections have created an unsafe and unsettling environment in our nation and in our schools. One of the greatest resources to help educators and school leaders help students navigate these times are Latino teachers. Whether they are first-generation immigrants or their families have been in the U.S. for generations, Latino teachers pull from personal experience and a rich and diverse culture to connect with and inspire their students. As one teacher said, they bring *“a different perspective and a different outlook, a different quality to teaching practice that recognizes, values, and honors the legacy that my kids bring with them every single day. ... It creates a whole other kind of teacher.”*

This “whole other kind of teacher” speaks to the unique value Latino teachers bring to their schools and classrooms. Experts have called them “cultural guardians,” more likely to choose to teach in schools with large Latino populations, motivated to advocate for students, parents, and families with similar backgrounds and challenges, and skilled at weaving culturally relevant material into curriculum to help students feel connected to their schools.¹

And yet, many students will never have a Latino teacher in the classroom. Latino teachers make up just 8 percent of the teaching workforce, depriving much of the Latino student population (25 percent) of the experience of having “someone that understands” at the head of the class. Just as unfortunate, many White students (as well as those of other races and ethnicities) won’t have the benefit of learning from someone with a different background that can help interpret both current and past events.

Fortunately, more are recognizing that *all* students can benefit from a diverse educator workforce and more initiatives are being implemented to recruit teachers of color to the profession. But recruiting is not enough. Just as important is retaining and developing these teachers. Yes, Latino teachers are the fastest growing population entering the teaching profession (3 percent to 8 percent from 1987 to 2012),² but they (along with Black teachers) are exiting the profession at higher rates than other teachers.³

If we are to increase the number of high-quality teachers of color in the field, it is vital to understand their unique

contributions to the workforce, as well the conditions in the workplace that help or hinder their success. It is also important to understand the distinct experiences of racial and ethnic groups within the broad category of “teachers of color.” All too often, Latino teachers’ unique contributions, challenges, and successes are conflated with conversations about the attributes of Black teachers. In addition, research conducted on Black teachers or focused on the differences between Black and White teachers is used to understand the experiences of Latino teachers.

With this in mind, our research team hosted a series of focus groups with Black and Latino teachers around the country to better understand their unique experiences: why they teach, what they believe they bring to the classroom and the field, and what challenges they face in the workplace because of their race/ethnicity.⁴ We used data from the Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS, 2012) to target states and districts with high numbers of teachers of color and solicited participants through schools, districts, and teacher organizations. In a previous brief, we shared what we learned from Black teachers.⁵ In this brief, we present findings from our discussions with Latino teachers.

LISTENING TO LATINO TEACHERS

First and foremost, Latino teachers are a diverse group, and the teachers in our focus groups consistently made that clear, expressing their heterogeneity in several ways. Many identified by their country of origin, their immigration status, their language, and their race. It was a continuous reminder that the Latino teacher experience in our country is based on cultural, racial, and ethnic backgrounds, that not only differ from other “teachers of color,” but also from each other. All in all, we found a truly diverse group of male and female educators with varying ethnicities, races, languages spoken, and immigration experiences.

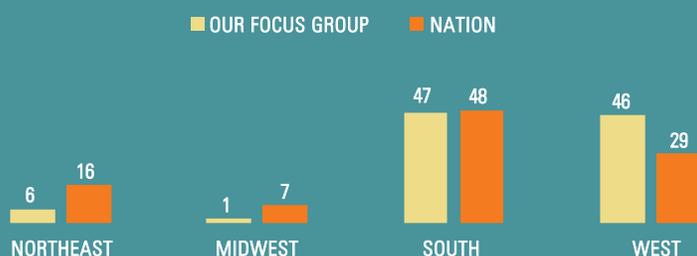
Despite the diversity within the population, however, the Latino teachers in our sample shared experiences that hinge on the idea of being a “cultural guardian.” Glenda Flores, in her book *Latina Teachers: Creating Careers and Guarding Culture*, takes this concept a step further, saying Latino teachers are

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ABOUT OUR FOCUS GROUPS

Our sample included 90 Latino teachers in public schools in five states (NC, NJ, FL, TX, CA) and the District of Columbia. Participants spanned grade levels and experience. Eighty-eight percent of participants were women, nearly one-third were veteran teachers with more than 15 years of experience, and the majority (90 percent) taught in cities. Unlike national data, our sample was overwhelmingly composed of elementary school teachers (91 percent).

Percent of Latino Teachers by Region



Experience Levels among Latino Teachers



Source: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS), Public Teachers Data File 2011-2012

Teachers volunteered to take part in 90-minute focus groups held in classrooms, school media centers, or public libraries. All focus groups were audio recorded and transcribed. We then analyzed the data, creating themes (or codes) based on topics and expressions commonly shared by participating teachers. To be sure that themes were consistent across researchers and that the themes accurately represented the voices of teachers, transcripts were coded multiple times, once per researcher.

more than guardians. They are lifeguards.⁶ She continues by noting that in Spanish the word to guard (proteger) means to protect, to safeguard or save, and to support. The teachers in our study proved this to be true.

We found Latino teachers, both men and women, building relationships with all students regardless of their race/ethnicity, and using those relationships to make connections with both students and teachers across racial lines. We found men and women committed to sharing their passion for giving back to communities and to creating empowering spaces and encouraging students to do the same. We found Latino teachers not just preparing students for postsecondary success, but showing them how to navigate through systems and obstacles in society that so often thwart their achievement.

Yet, despite all of their strengths, there were a number of challenges for Latino teachers. They were often stereotyped as being inferior teachers, or viewed in a limited way as good teachers for Latino students only. This often created situations in which these teachers needed to “prove their worth.” Latino teachers in this study also said they were belittled and at times considered to be aggressive when they incorporated Latino culture or Spanish language in the classroom. Teachers particularly reported being viewed this way when they advocated for Latino students. In addition, Latino teachers said that while they often accepted additional roles, most often as a translator, they were frequently overlooked for advancement opportunities.

To be clear, our findings are not entirely new, but our work does support the limited research that exists in the field. What is new, however, are qualitative findings on Latino teachers that are more representative of the nation. Moreover, this is a direct attempt to add to the literature on the importance of teacher diversity that specifically addresses Latino teachers as a separate and distinct group of educators. Over the years, both quantitative and qualitative researchers have examined the impact of teachers of color.⁷ But too few have examined Latino teachers specifically, and too many have assumed that experiences of Latino teachers can be captured with other teachers of color. Though national data expose retention and hiring trends, qualitative data is necessary to expand and understand attrition trends among Latino teachers.⁸

In the following sections, we summarize themes articulated by Latino teachers in our sample — discussions that illuminate their experiences, challenges, and contributions to the teaching profession. While we don't identify the specific supports needed for Latino teachers, nor the immediate methods to address these issues, our findings do signal a need to understand the existing policies regarding professional development, school culture and climate, and overall working conditions related to race and ethnicity within a school. Our findings can also be used to begin a conversation about diversity and excellence within the

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I said, 'Ok, cool, let's talk about it. Let's learn about it.' And they loved it.

So we talked about it.

I made time every day for like 30 minutes for us to go talk about that stuff."



A woman with long, dark, wavy hair is sitting against a brick wall. She is wearing a green, quilted jacket over a dark top. She is looking off to the side with a thoughtful expression. Her right hand is resting on a surface in front of her.

"It's like there's such an insidious trend, especially in a lot of education research where they talk how like, 'Oh, it's just because you're a minority that you're good [with students of color]'. But [they] forget and [they] discredit. I'm a really good teacher."

teaching profession. As schools, districts, and state leaders look to recruit and retain more Latino teachers, they first need to critically examine both qualitative and quantitative data for this group. That process probably should begin with a deeper dive into hiring, retention, attrition, and teacher evaluation data to understand the nature of the problem, and it should include listening and learning via small focus groups and surveys.

WE ARE A 'DIVERSE' GROUP

As we traveled around the country listening to Latino teachers, we heard unequivocally about the importance of recognizing the diversity of Latin American culture. Our sample included teachers from many of the Census classifications for Latino. According to the U.S. government, being Hispanic or Latino refers to “a person of Cuban, Mexican, Puerto Rican, South or Central American, or other Spanish culture or origin regardless of race.”⁹ As such, a variety of cultures and races were represented in each of our teacher focus groups.

Over and over again, the importance of recognizing diversity surfaced in our conversations. This shaped discussions everywhere we went, and not just the diversity within the Latino teacher workforce, but also between Latino teachers and their students. Along the way, three key issues emerged: cultural and ethnic differences, race and ethnicity conflation, and immigration status/experiences.

Latino teachers in our sample felt that non-Latino educators often make the assumption that all Latinos are from the same country and therefore have the same cultural heritage. One teacher noted, “There is a whole gamut of diversity [among Latino teachers], and for us to just say, ‘Well, I get it because I’m Hispanic. Well, actually, making a pupusa, for me that’s a foreign concept.” Here, a Mexican teacher, highlights the cultural difference between being Mexican and Salvadoran. Census data drives this point home. Though Mexico is the country of origin for most Latino people living in the United States, there are still large contingents from Puerto Rico, Cuba, El Salvador, the Dominican Republic, etc., that make up our teacher population.¹⁰

Teachers also discussed the interplay of race and ethnicity. For our study we recruited teachers based on the categories most used in education policy conversations — Black and Latino. During our focus groups, we found that Latino teachers often self-identified using both their race and their ethnicity. Teachers not only indicated they were Black and Latino, for example, but often went further to acknowledge their country of origin. It was not uncommon during the focus groups to speak to a teacher whose racial identity was Black and whose ethnic identity

was Dominican. While race and ethnicity are often conflated, they are very different. As noted by Beverly Tatum in her book *Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria?: And Other Conversations About Race*, a race is “a group that is socially defined, but on the basis of physical criteria,” including skin color and facial features. Ethnicity, on the other hand, is a socially defined group based on cultural criteria, such as language, customs, and a shared history.¹¹ By self-identifying as Black and Latino, or, White and Latino, our teachers challenged society’s preconceived notion of what it “looks like” to be Latino.

The duality of race and ethnicity allowed teachers in our sample to feel they could better understand different races/ethnicities of students, as well as build relationships and make connections across racial and cultural lines. As one teacher said:

“I have three strengths. The African Americans aren’t immediately intimidated, because they think, ‘Oh, she’s African American,’ until they listen to me speak Spanish. And then they’re like, ‘Oh, no. Wait. She’s Spanish.’ Just your physical appearance, just your ethnicity can be an influence. You know, when the kids look at you and they see, ‘Oh, look at that,’ she’s Black and Spanish and she’s a teacher. Yeah, I could be a teacher.”

The diversity discussions went beyond race and ethnicity to the immigration experience. Teachers in our focus groups represented a number of immigration statuses, including some undocumented teachers. For Latino teachers who were first-generation immigrants or had themselves been undocumented, this experience emerged as one of their key strengths. According to one teacher, “It definitely helps, because I can share bits of my life and my story with students, not as a way to say, ‘See, I did it. I was undocumented. I got to go to college,’ but to build solidarity.”

Perhaps even more important than being a model for success, teachers often expressed being able to understand the life of an undocumented student: “I’m a first generation immigrant too. I came here from Mexico when I was a young child — “having somebody who looks like you, who’s been through the same things as you, that understands that it hasn’t been easy here for you. You were promised this dream when you came here, and then the reality of it is around you with helicopters and police sirens all the time.”

A NOTE ON TERMINOLOGY

The term “Latinx” has emerged recently as an alternative to “Latino/a.” In Spanish, all nouns have a gender, with masculine nouns ending in the suffix “-o” and feminine ones ending in “-a.” By substituting the gendered suffix with an “-x,” Latinx proponents argue that the term allows for gender neutrality. Opponents argue that “Latinx” is linguistically imperialistic, imposing American values onto the Spanish language. We do not use “Latinx” in this report because the term is still under debate and many educational organizations continue to use “Latino/a.”

In this role, Latino teachers felt they could provide an understanding of students’ anxieties about the future, who they can trust with knowledge about their documentation status, and the constant fear of being deported. Such anxieties were heightened recently for both students and teachers when the Trump administration rescinded the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program, an Obama administration initiative created to protect undocumented immigrants brought to the United States as children. There are an estimated 20,000 teachers eligible for DACA, 90 percent of whom are Latino.¹² These teachers, among a group of nearly 700,000 individuals, face the reality of losing their protected status.

CONNECTING WITH LATINO STUDENTS

Latino teachers in our sample felt they were able to use their cultural similarities to create a classroom environment where students felt welcome, comfortable, and familial. This often went beyond just physical similarities, but was linked to both teachers’ and students’ upbringing and their family ties. According to one teacher, knowing a simple lullaby can build the connection:

“*One of my kids was singing one of the canciones de cuna. I remember all those songs, and I started singing with them. My mom used to sing that song when she was little, you know, so I make a connection to the family. I think that brings also, you know, a closeness. [Students] don’t feel threatened to come to talk to us, because [we] make them feel at home.*”

This example not only builds trust among students, but also among parents. Building solidarity and trust with students and their parents can also come from discussing shared experiences.

As they built relationships with students and knocked down barriers to trust, teachers noted that one of their key strengths was being a role model and showing students the possibilities life has to offer by highlighting their own success. Whether Latino teachers were immigrants or not, many felt their success could be used by students as a guidepost to their own success. In fact, serving as an example for students was actually the reason many teachers got into the field. Many of them also said they go above and beyond what they believed many White teachers might do when working with students of color. They felt it was their unique role to be a living display for what was possible and that motivated them to continue to do their jobs.

“*So, for me, that’s a big driving force professionally, serving as a role model to students, because I went through their same experience growing up. I’ve gone back to graduate school, and I got a doctorate degree. And I always tell my students ‘I did it not because I wanted a new job. I did it because I didn’t know anybody. I didn’t even know a master’s degree existed much less a doctorate, and I didn’t know anybody with those degrees. And I want you to know somebody with that degree. I want you to know what’s possible for you’. And I don’t think it exists for every teacher.*”

As role models, teachers of color believe they can motivate and inspire students and contribute to improvements in academic outcomes. Recent studies not only support their beliefs, but document the benefits of having diverse teachers for all students. One study, for example, found that students of all races perceive teachers of color more favorably than they do their White teachers.¹³ Another study found that just having one Black teacher in third, fourth, or fifth grade substantially reduced the chances of dropping out for Black male students.¹⁴ So far, experts have focused their research on the impact of Black teachers. There needs to be similar research for Latino teachers.

BEING AN ADVOCATE

Latino teachers remembered experiencing racialized aggressions during their schooling and recognized that in the current political climate, Latino students face the same, if not worse, treatment in schools. Caring about students and understanding their experiences lead to another distinct role for Latino teachers in our sample — being an advocate. This often meant Latino teachers helped students deal with discrimination, mistreatment, and microaggressions, not only from other students, but also from teachers and school leaders. Latino teachers felt the need to be a voice of power to protect students from other students as well as misguided and/or misinformed teachers and leaders.

“*[Students] were experiencing a lot of racist microaggressions from teachers. If this teacher didn't care, then they weren't going to care, either, and they just failed on purpose. I talked to the principal, and I told him that I wanted to do a lot of work around how to work with students of color, and what microaggressions were, and how detrimental they can be to students, and to start conversations about that.*”

In our study, Latino teachers overwhelmingly expressed a sense of *familism*, where it is not enough to care for the individual, but one must care for the needs of the family.¹⁵ Often, teachers expressed having a familial tie to Latino parents and treating parents like extended family members. This was particularly cogent when they shared similar cultural experiences. Misconceptions held about Latino students often resulted in a devaluing of Latino parents and their contributions in their children's lives. As such, Latino teachers felt obligated to advocate for parents just as much as they advocated for their children.

“*No matter what ethnicity you are, you need to be able to see these children as humans. You need to understand that their parents are probably doing the best they can. And if they're not perfect, don't call them and tell them the first thing about how awful their child is. They're still a parent.*”

But being an advocate had consequences for Latino teachers. They were often perceived as adversarial and aggressive.

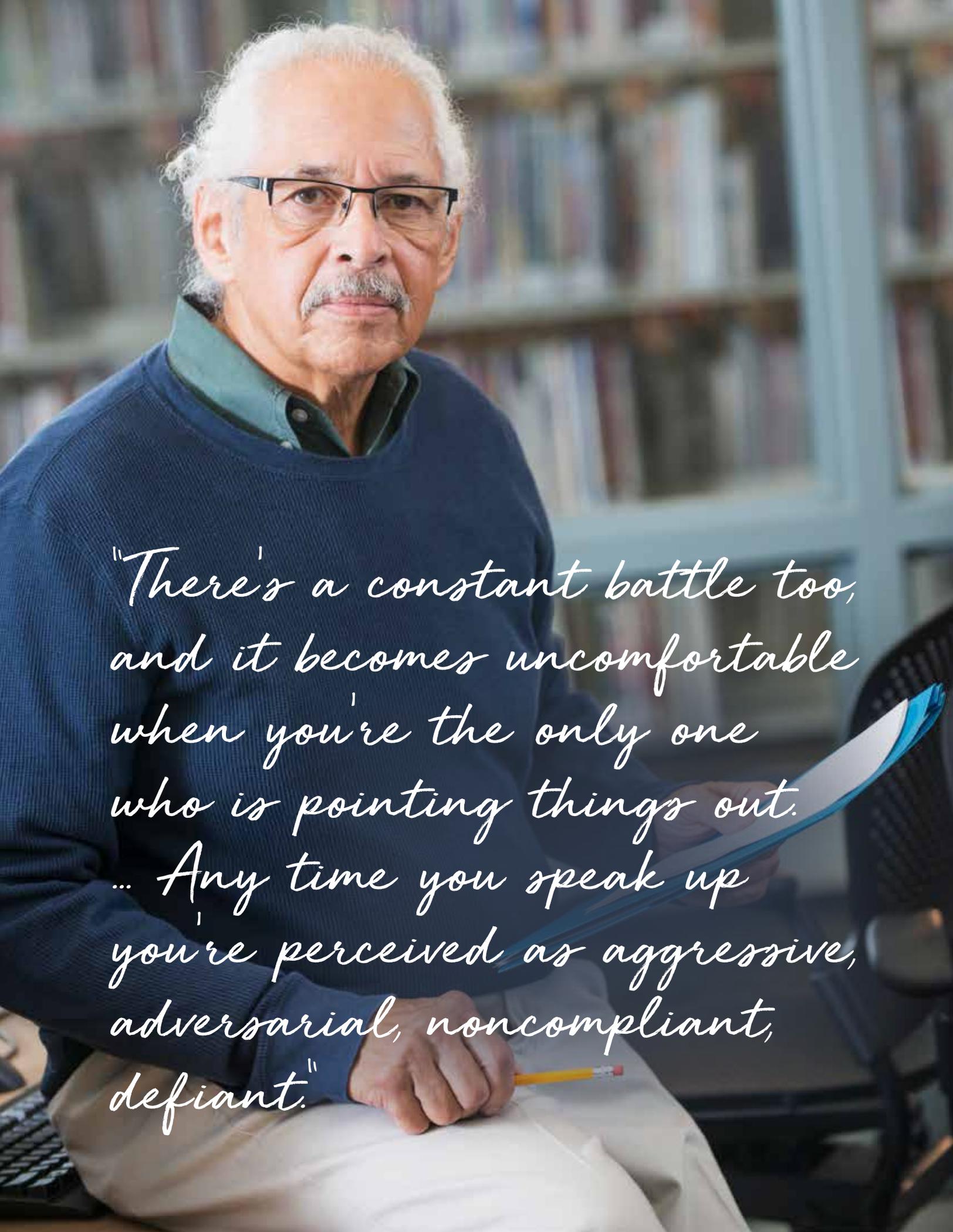
“*Well, we also become advocates for the parents because a lot of them don't speak English and so [parents] feel like, 'Well, Señora M. is the only one who can understand what I am saying and who will be my voice.'*”

“*There's "a constant battle too, and it becomes uncomfortable when you're the only one who is pointing things out. ... Any time you speak up you're perceived as aggressive, adversarial, noncompliant, defiant."*

“*The day that we stop complaining is the day we need to get out, because that's the day we just don't care anymore.*”

Still, even when Latino teachers chose not to speak up, they faced judgment -- just because they were Latino and expected to defend other Latinos at all times. “*And when you don't speak up, there's always the White teacher that's like, 'You're going to let them get away with that?' We used to have a nurse here who said that [Latino] kids don't brush their teeth. So I had another teacher say, 'Well, are you going to let them say that about the kids?' So then they tell you when you should be offended also.*”

As one teacher said simply but powerfully, “*It's risky because you have to advocate.*”



"There's a constant battle too, and it becomes uncomfortable when you're the only one who is pointing things out. ... Any time you speak up you're perceived as aggressive, adversarial, noncompliant, defiant."

HONORING LATINO CULTURE

Latino teachers discussed honoring and valuing students' home lives by embedding culture and language into their pedagogy. In doing so, teachers indicated they bring something different into the classroom. This type of teaching required expanding the curriculum to include multicultural materials and culturally relevant pedagogy that recognizes and honors the legacy kids bring into the classroom.

“ I had some students a couple of years ago ask me, just randomly, ‘What’s the difference between a Chicano and a Latino?’ I said, ‘Ok, cool, let’s talk about it. Let’s learn about it.’ And they loved it. So we talked about it. I made time every day for like 30 minutes for us to go talk about that stuff.”

Latino teachers said that incorporating Latino culture into the classroom also bolstered students' confidence and instilled pride. As one teacher explained, “We are acknowledging where they come from and who they are, because when we do that I think it gives them more confidence.” Moreover, research points to other positive outcomes for Latino students. In Tucson, Arizona, for example, K-12 students enrolled in a Mexican American studies program experienced higher test scores, better graduation and attendance rates, and had better disciplinary records than those who did not participate.¹⁷

For Latino teachers in our sample, acknowledging who students are and where they come from included not only allowing, but encouraging, students to speak Spanish. Teachers told us that honoring culture through the use of language was important for students. Recent studies also show that when students who lack English fluency participate in a bilingual program, their reading proficiency improves in both Spanish and English.

Embedding a curriculum rich in Latino culture meant Latino teachers sometimes felt they had to stretch school rules and/or policies to better serve their students, and it often required them to think unconventionally. But “thinking outside the box” also drew objections and criticism from other teachers and even school leaders.

Many of the complaints were direct attacks about curriculum alignment that left teachers feeling discouraged about continuing to embed the cultural elements they felt were so critical to educating Latino students. Latino teachers in our study, however, expressed that culturally relevant materials were not incorporated at the expense of the standards, but in reality were a creative way to teach students the standards.

“ So you’re told to think outside the box, to get your students vested, and then when you think outside the box and get them interested in something, ‘Oh, but that doesn’t align to the standard.’ But you could take them to the museum to see the Corky Gonzales display, and tie it into a lesson, and it could be something that is relevant.”

“ Some [other] teachers, [ask,] ‘Well, what are you doing this time?’ This White teacher was like, ‘Well, what are they reading and how does this align with everything else?’ I said, ‘They’re invested, they care about it, and they’re learning something that’s important to them.’”

BEING THE TRANSLATOR

Latino teachers in our sample spoke about their role as a resource for the entire school and the community it serves, and how they are often taxed with negotiating relationships between parents, students, and school staff. As bilingual intercessors, teachers who spoke Spanish felt a need to go above and beyond their professional duties to provide educational resources for Latino children and their parents. “It’s another job on top of teaching. Every single year I am pointed out as someone who speaks Spanish, to be a resource for the entire school.” And, as cultural guardians, Latino teachers in our study said they translated both language and cultural interactions for teachers unfamiliar with the Spanish language and/or Latin American culture.

Being the primary communicators for their entire school required teachers to not only serve as translators at parent-teacher conferences and student-teacher conferences, but for everything in between. Latino teachers felt acutely aware of this additional responsibility and spoke of it often. They took on the responsibility of ensuring Latino students and their families would feel welcomed in the school building. However, this often meant a Latino teacher would be responsible for all Latino families in their school. For some who worked in schools with more than one Latino teacher, the responsibilities were split. For others, the responsibility was theirs alone. One teacher notes:

GROW YOUR OWN PROGRAMS

As schools and districts across the country grapple with recruiting and retaining more Latino teachers, some may have found a solution in the form of Grow Your Own, or GYO, programs. These programs look beyond recruiting teachers the traditional way and recruit them from their own “backyards.” Paraprofessionals, teacher aides, classroom assistants, and school volunteers are often people of color, making them an untapped pool of potential applicants. Grow Your Own programs often provide tuition assistance and wrap-around services to support prospective teachers personally and professionally as they grow into the teaching profession. Numerous GYO programs have developed across the country in places like Illinois, Minnesota, Texas, California, and Georgia, and they are beginning to make a difference. In Illinois alone, the GYO program has successfully created a pipeline of Latino teachers. Thirty-seven percent of GYO applicants in Illinois are Latino, representing a decisive step toward the creation of a more diverse teacher workforce.

“I think of even student-teacher conferences [that leave] parents and families feeling unwelcome. . . and no one’s going to [help] the families that they can’t communicate with. Suddenly, I’m in charge of every Hispanic student that we have in sixth grade, which is the majority of all of our students, and it’s an extra job on top of my job to communicate with all those families and to have that relationship with the families and the students.”

This created conditions where teachers were responsible for translating and editing materials for their school and at times the entire district. *The whole school could fill out a paper, or email the other Spanish teacher and myself, and we were in charge of doing it, talking to the parents, and so it was our extra job... But it’s not like a favor, it’s like you’re it for the whole school.*”

According to teachers, the impetus for Latino teachers to be translators comes from both administrators and teachers. Being able to translate the language and answer cultural questions for Latino families was something bilingual Latino teachers were passionate and committed to doing. Many of them said they wanted to be a resource. At the same time, they said translation services were frequently required of them by the administration. When asked about the balance

of administration requirements to personal desire, a teacher replied, *“It’s a bit of both. I mean, we want to do it because we care for our kids, but then also it is expected of us to find good resources for our kids that are up to the rigor level that they expect.”*

On the other hand, Latino teachers expressed that some translation is unreasonable and unrealistic. At times, completing an English to Spanish translation was almost impossible, and frequently there was little to no oversight of teachers fulfilling the translator role. One teacher noted, *“This reading program was created for an English speaker who is learning how to read in English. Because we didn’t have anything in Spanish, they just literally translated all the whole curriculum, all of the materials into Spanish. So it’s imposing the English language and the structure of the English language on the Spanish instruction. So I’ll give you a quick example. There’s a lot of emphasis on just one-letter sound at a time in English. You don’t do that in Spanish.”*

Several teachers expressed a tension between wanting to serve as a bilingual resource and a tendency on the part of schools and districts to be overly dependent on teachers to fulfill the role of translator. After all, translating school or district curriculum materials can create a substantial additional workload for Latino teachers. Being the translator for the entire building takes away from planning time and other responsibilities, something non-Latino teachers did not have to face.

“So how is [teaching] different from my partner? Well, she does everything in one language. I have to figure out a way that if you don’t get it in English, then you have to get it in Spanish. If you don’t get it in Spanish, you have to get it in English. So it’s like double the work, you know. It’s what it is right now. You have to work with what you have and move on from there.”

While our sample was overwhelmingly bilingual, we had many Latino teachers who did not speak Spanish. For them, translation was impossible, but it was assumed that because they were Latino, they could complete the task. This made these teachers feel awkward and uncomfortable about doing their job.

PROVING THEIR WORTH

Despite being role models, advocates, and resources for the school community, Latino teachers in our sample still felt they had to validate their teaching ability. They expressed that their intellect and opinions regarding classroom strategies and education were challenged simply because they were Latino. Several teachers expressed that they were often not viewed as knowledgeable, particularly by White (Anglo) colleagues. Latino teachers often felt that there was an assumption that they held subordinate positions as teaching assistants or paraprofessionals. One teacher described a common interaction: *“When I say, ‘Oh, I’m a teacher,’ and their first answer is, ‘Oh, like a TA?’ ‘No, like a teacher. I have a TA, but I am the lead teacher.’ ‘Like you have your own kids?’ ‘Yes, I have my own kids and my own classroom.’”*

Several teachers told stories about being questioned about how much they knew. *“My intellect isn’t always valued. The strategies that I use aren’t always valued, because folks fall back on the ‘Well, you’re Mexican, like them, so that’s why you do better. If you weren’t Mexican,’ then I wouldn’t be this good. ... It’s really frustrating”*

“I went to a conference recently, the majority of the people in the conference were Anglo, and there was sort of this preconceived notion that I didn’t know as much as they did.”

Another perception that Latino teachers revealed is that they, much like other teachers of color, did not have the ability to teach all children. This false assumption not only undermines the strengths of Latino teachers, but discredits the reality of Latino teachers as qualified professionals.

“It’s like there’s such an insidious trend, especially in a lot of education research where they talk how like, ‘Oh, it’s just because you’re a minority that you’re good [with students of color].’ But [they] forget and [they] discredit. I’m a really good teacher.”

In our study, we heard numerous Latino teachers say they experienced forms of discrimination and stereotyping that often made them feel as if they were unable to become educational leaders. Based on the most recent data from the Schools and Staffing Survey, only 6 percent of principals across the nation are Latino — evidence that their perceptions aren’t wrong.

“I have two master’s [degrees]. I consider myself to be an educated person because I push and I drive for it. And I know I can bring something to the table. And, when those leadership opportunities come, I don’t feel like — I mean, I literally have to prove myself. Whereas, another person doesn’t have to. And I’ve seen that firsthand.”

WHY DOES THIS MATTER?

Teachers of color are not a monolithic group, and understanding differences among them is critical for diversifying the workforce. The findings presented in this project provide a foundation for understanding the issues facing Latino teachers, illustrating how multifaceted Latino teachers are, and, perhaps more importantly, shedding light on their distinct assets. This dedicated group of Latino men and women educators represents a multitude of ethnicities, nationalities, and races. They serve as community resources, advocates, role models, and educators, creating empowering spaces for parents and strengthening educational opportunities for students.

Despite their strengths, however, Latino teachers face discrimination and stereotyping that leave them feeling discouraged and perceived as unqualified to be professional educators. This can prohibit Latino teachers from advancing to leadership positions and from staying in the teaching profession. The discrimination perceived by the teachers in our study undermines the growth and development of Latino teachers and highlights the need for district and school level personnel to challenge their assumptions about Latino teachers and students. All Latino teachers will not “look” a certain way, they may or may not speak Spanish, and they may or may not have similar experiences as Latino students in their schools. What we do know is they all have the potential to be dynamic educators for all students, regardless of their race, ethnicity, or immigration status.

By examining and building an acute knowledge of the dynamic experiences of Latino teachers, all educational stakeholders can begin to develop supports and working environments aimed at increasing the number of Latino teachers in the workforce and retaining them as well. This is imperative for building a truly diverse workforce capable of serving an increasingly diverse student population.

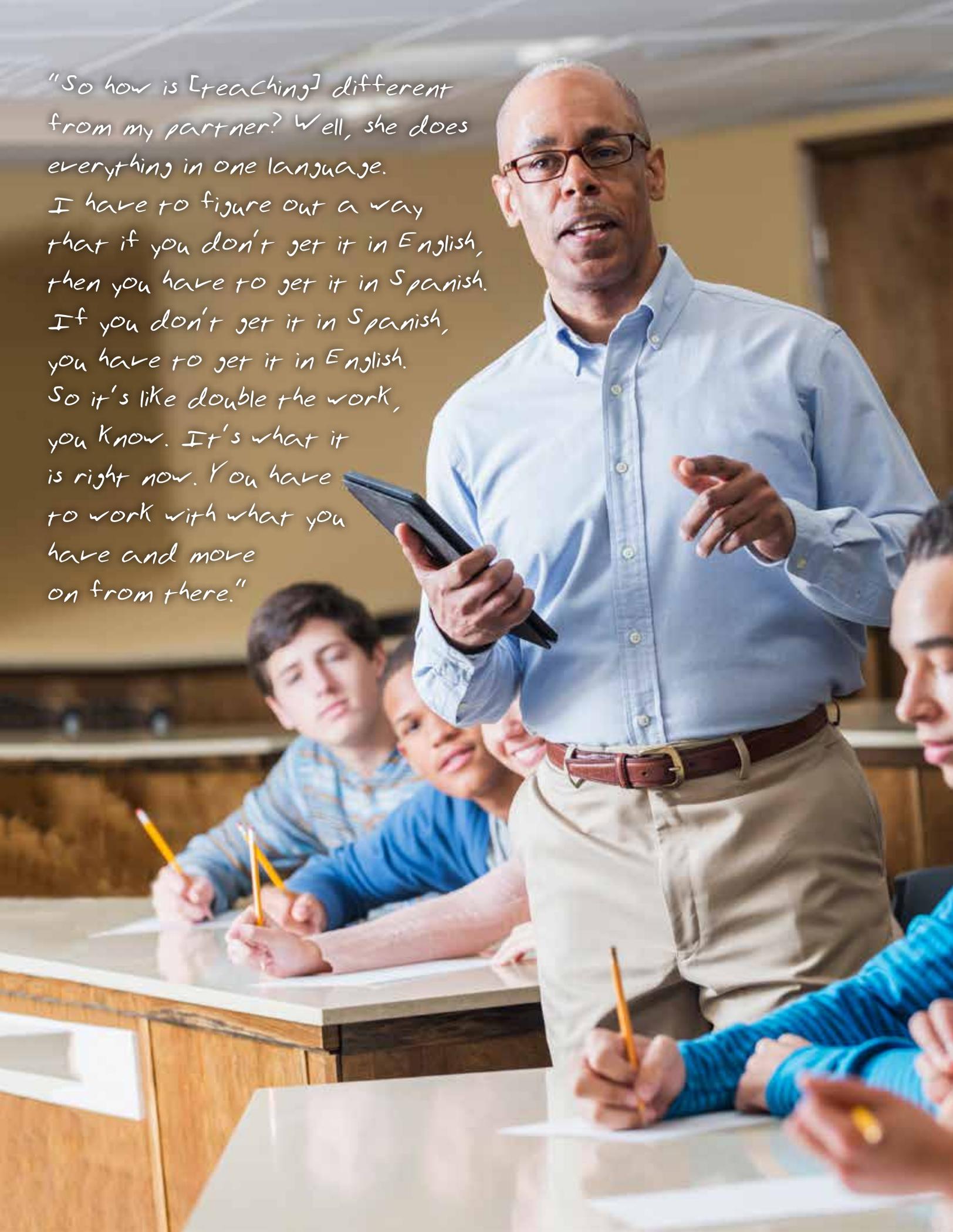
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NOTES

1. Glenda Flores, *Latino Teachers: Creating Careers and Guarding Culture* (New York: New York University Press, 2017).
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The Education Trust promotes high academic achievement for all students at all levels — pre-kindergarten through college. We work alongside parents, educators, and community and business leaders across the country in transforming schools and colleges into institutions that serve all students well. Lessons learned in these efforts, together with unflinching data analyses, shape our state and national policy agendas. Our goal is to close the gaps in opportunity and achievement that consign far too many young people — especially those who are black, Latino, American Indian, or from low-income families — to lives on the margins of the American mainstream.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We are grateful to the many colleagues whose insight and expertise helped shape this work. A special acknowledgment goes to Davis Dixon, research associate at The Education Trust, and former Ed Trust research assistant Hilary Tackie. We are also immensely grateful to all of the teachers who participated in our focus groups and provided their unfiltered and candid insights about their experiences and reflections, as well as the many principals and organizations that helped us to recruit teachers for these focus groups.



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