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Project Title: **Understanding Latino Parent Engagement: Building Relationships between Home and School through a Community Organization**

My dissertation study examines the educational experiences of Latino families in Chicago's Northwest side through a case study of the Logan Square Neighborhood Association (LSNA)—a community organization that works to build parent leadership and engagement in local schools for the purpose of creating an educational climate where families and schools are in stronger relationships and where student success and engagement is a shared concern and priority. Over the years, LSNA has developed a nationally recognized model for parent engagement that is rooted in community organizing, leadership development, and a long history of experience with the local community (Blanc, Brown, Nevarez-La Torre, & Brown, 2002; Warren, 2005). LSNA's work with parents involves programs that plan home visits among parents and teachers that are focused on literacy skills, the development of Community Learning Centers that provide educational opportunities (ESL classes, GED programs) for adults and child care support, and a program for training bilingual education teachers. At the center of these programs, however, is the Parent Mentor program. Every year, the program trains over 100 parents at eight school sites to become classroom tutors. While this is the program's obvious goal, through leadership development and the supportive networks nurtured by LSNA's organizers, the Parent Mentor program serves as a vehicle for bringing parents into relationship with one another as well as developing their skills and abilities as actively engaged parents and leaders in the school community.

My dissertation research seeks to understand the broader work of the organization and the more focused efforts of the Parent Mentor Program. I use an embedded case study approach (Yin, 2003) with LSNA the organization, its Parent Mentor Program, and one of its cohorts of new parents as three separate but integrally related units of analysis. Relationships are fundamentally at the core of this study, and social capital theory is the analytic framework for the study. Understood as a set of connections across institutions such as schools and community organizations (Putnam, 1993; Warren, Thompson, & Saegert, 2001) or an intersecting web of relationships within an environment such as a school, social capital underscores the resources and benefits that are produced in these relationships (Coleman, 1988). By using social capital theory as an analytic framework for this study, I will explore both the larger social networks between schools, local parents, and the community organization, the more intimate relationships between individual parents, organizers, and school staff that shape trust, reciprocity, and collective action, and the process of building relationships across individuals and groups.

To address the achievement gap in education, we must understand achievement as a multifaceted phenomenon that is influenced by the spheres of school, family, and community. LSNA has already shown that over the years of partnership with local schools, students have made academic gains, parents have become more engaged in the life of school and their children's education, and schools have found ways to communicate with parents and families. These improvements all lead to better outcomes for students and families and could possibly address the achievement gap in education.

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