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## Catholic Schools Serving Hispanic Families: Insights from the 2014 National Survey

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*This article draws extensively on data from the National Survey of Catholic Schools Serving Hispanic Families, conducted by Boston College researchers in 2014. The report will be released in 2016 under the title Catholic Schools in an Increasingly Hispanic Church (Ospino & Weitzel-O'Neill, 2016). The report seeks to encourage serious conversation and investment on the part of both Catholic education and pastoral leaders at all levels, across the nation, with respect to serving the needs of Hispanic families.*

### Keywords

Catholic schools, Hispanic families, Latinos, Hispanic ministry, pastoral leadership

Catholicism in the United States, from its very beginnings, has been shaped by the experiences of millions of immigrants and their descendants. New voices bring hope, fresh energy, and, of course, challenges that often require adjustments on the part of ecclesial structures. In the 1800s and early 1900s, immigrants from Europe made incredible contributions to the American Catholic experience, particularly through Catholic schools. Today, immigrants and their children, mostly from Latin America, yet also from Asia and Africa, are transforming that experience. Supporters of Catholic education enjoy a unique opportunity to build upon the best experiences of Catholic education in the United States, while reimagining what this important commitment can be in the 21st century, particularly in a church that is increasingly Hispanic.

In the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, Hispanic Catholics were a small, practically unnoticed minority within the Church. Living mostly in the Southwest with pockets of presence in larger urban settings, Hispanic Catholics constituted approximately 5% of the total U.S. Catholic population. Since that time, Hispanic Catholics rapidly have become perhaps the most significant force

transforming contemporary U.S. Catholicism. More than 40% of all Catholics in the US are Hispanic. Even more interesting is the fact that approximately 60% of Catholics under the age of 18 are Hispanic. Of these, more than 90% were born in the United States (Ospino, 2014; U.S. Census Bureau, 2013).

How are Catholic schools responding to such demographic changes and the challenge of educating the next generation of American Catholics? The National Catholic Educational Association (NCEA) reports that only 15% (296,186) of students enrolled in Catholic schools in 2013-2014 and 15.3% (296,903) of students enrolled in 2014-2015 were Hispanic (McDonald & Schultz, 2015). Given the latest enrollment data, we observe that of the total Hispanic school age population (approx. 12.4 million nationwide), only 2.3% (296,203) are enrolled in Catholic Schools. The numbers are without a doubt sobering. Even under commendable efforts like the Catholic School Advantage led by University of Notre Dame and local diocesan initiatives to increase enrollment of Hispanic children in Catholic schools, which have captured the imagination of Catholic pastoral and educational leaders at the national level (Alliance for Catholic Education, 2013), the total enrollment of Hispanic children in Catholic schools remains almost stagnant.

Researchers, educators, and pastoral agents may be too quick to question school leaders about why Catholic schools have such low enrollment of Hispanic students and do not exhibit more determined efforts to engage Hispanic families. While more can always be done to address these areas, it is important to underline that the exponential growth of Hispanic Catholic school-age children, especially in the last two decades, has unfortunately coincided with a massive decline in the Catholic school educational system and its resources. The total number of Catholic schools in the US has gone from more than 13,000 half a century ago to 6,568 in 2015. Total enrollment has followed suit, moving from nearly 5.2 million students to less than 2 million in 2015. During the last 15 years alone, student enrollment in Catholic schools has gone from 2.6 million in 2000 to 1.9 million in 2015. In the meantime, 26% of Catholic schools closed. This phenomenon has been more pronounced in urban neighborhoods in the last 10 years. Since 2005, enrollment in the 12 largest urban arch/dioceses in the country has declined by 30% (McDonald, & Schultz, 2015).

Multiple reasons have been identified as leading to the closing of Catholic schools and the deterioration of the Catholic educational network that once

educated 55% of all Catholic children in the US. Most of these reasons are largely associated with socioeconomic and demographic changes. Reasons also vary from region to region. Cited most often are the increasing costs of Catholic education, the rise of charter schools, and the declining number of school-age children in Catholic families that traditionally benefitted from Catholic schools. Catholic schools in the not so distant past were run mostly by vowed religious women who lived in small communities and convents, committed their lives to education as part of their mission, and worked practically without the expectation of wages. Today 97.2% of the teaching and administrative workforce in these schools is constituted by lay women and men (McDonald & Schultz, 2015) who require salaries and benefits that adjust to fair practices in the labor market. Also noted is the increasing mobility of young Catholic families from the Northeast and the Midwest to the South and the West of the country. Such pattern of mobility coincides with the fast growth of the Catholic population in these two regions of the country, particularly due to the increasing presence of Hispanics and Asians.

Among other reasons for enrollment decline worth considering are the perception that Catholic identity is not sufficiently integrated into the curriculum and the instructional practices in these schools (Monsegur, 2012); an increasing disassociation between schools and parishes, bringing to an end a symbiotic relationship that for many decades yielded many fruits (Ospino, 2014); and the accelerated process of school closings in urban and inner city contexts—coupled with the closing of parishes in these locations—where predominantly immigrant and poorer Catholic families tend to live, and the negative impact of such closings (Brinig & Garnett, 2014). Not less important are the various dynamics that directly impact the U.S. Catholic religious experience such as major decline in participation in parish life among contemporary Catholic families, the growing influence of secularism in our society, and the negative effects of recent scandals such as the one caused by allegations of sexual abuse of children by clergy and other pastoral leaders. From 1965 to 2015 marriages in the Church have decreased by 56%, from 352,458 to 154,450; Mass attendance has shifted from 55% to 24%; and the number of infant baptisms went from 1.3 million to 713,302 (Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate [CARA], 2015).

Catholics in the United States face a paradoxical reality that oscillates between growth and decline, opportunity and trial. Today we are 79.7 million Catholics, compared to 48.5 in 1965. Unlike past eras, most of the new Catho-

lic faces are neither White nor from Europe. Hispanics are transforming the American Catholic landscape along with Asians, African-Americans, and a substantial presence of immigrant Catholics from Africa, the Caribbean, and other parts of the world. Despite this major growth, the resources that the Church has to meet the educational needs of the new generation of American Catholics are fewer and fewer, as the current number of Catholic schools illustrates.

More than imagining a return to a past that cannot be replicated or stretching resources to meet unrealistic expectations, proponents of Catholic education need to imagine how to best place Catholic schools at the service of the new Catholic populations in the US. It is in this context that this article presents a set of initial findings from the first ever National Survey of Catholic Schools Serving Hispanic Families.

### **Responding to the Need for Research on Catholic Schools and Hispanic Catholicism**

Today's trends vis-à-vis enrollment, socio-economics, and the still undefined future of many Catholic schools indicate that it is highly unlikely in the near future to replicate the experience of the middle of the 20th century, when more than one half of all Catholic children attended Catholic schools. If one were to imagine only 15.3% of school-age Hispanic children (1.9 million) enrolled in Catholic schools today, no child of any other ethnicity, Catholic or non-Catholic, would be able to attend these schools. If Catholic schools aimed to enroll just one half of all school-age Hispanic children (6.2 million), based on today's enrollment patterns and size of existing schools, it would require building 14,428 new schools and exclusively using all 20,995 schools for educating Hispanic students!<sup>1</sup>

Given the data associated with the striking growth of the Hispanic Catholic school-age population and the declining enrollment in Catholic schools, advocates of Catholic education need to be realistic and creative in the planning processes associated with how Catholic schools can better serve this particular demographic in the Church. More than 97% of school-age Hispanics, the majority possibly growing up in Catholic households, do not benefit from Catholic schooling and most of these children do not benefit from Catholic education or faith formation in parishes. Only 10% of Hispanic

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1 These numbers are not adjusted according to empty seats or potential enrollment.

children are enrolled in religious education programs in parishes with Hispanic ministry (Ospino, 2014). This is not to imply that all Hispanic children would be attending religious education programs in parishes identified as having Hispanic ministry since this category is predominantly—and narrowly—applied to parishes offering services in Spanish: one quarter of all Catholic parishes in the entire country (Ospino, 2014). Some of these parishes, nonetheless, have direct responsibility or are directly associated with a Catholic school (Ospino, 2014). It is certainly understandable that these parishes would be expected to serve large portions of Hispanics, yet the fact that 61% of Hispanics are US-born and most are English-speaking suggests that sectors of this population are also being exposed to instances of Catholic education and faith formation in parishes without services in Spanish.

About 78% of Hispanic children attend predominantly minority schools. In large cities in the West, most attend hypersegregated schools (90% to 100% minority). Segregated schools tend to be in poor neighborhoods, have fewer resources to educate, and perform the lowest compared to other schools in the same district (Gándara, 2012). Hispanics have the highest school dropout rate compared to Asian, White, and Black populations in the country (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2015).<sup>2</sup> It is well known that poverty is a major factor reducing the possibilities of educational achievement among Hispanics (Gándara, 2012). In 2013, 23.5% of Hispanics lived in poverty (DeNavas-Walt & Proctor, 2014). Although this figure indicates an improvement compared to 2012, when 25.6% lived in poverty, Hispanics still have the highest poverty rate among all demographic groups in the US. Of interest to Catholic educators is the fact that about one third of all Hispanic children live in poverty (Murphey, Guzman, & Torres, 2014). Whether one's attention concentrates exclusively on Catholic schools or on Hispanic Catholic children attending public schools, one thing is certain: the entire Catholic community in the United States must come to terms with the fact that the education of the next generation of American Catholics may be in peril (cf. Putnam, 2015).

In light of these realities at this historical juncture, those of us involved in Catholic education need to ask: How can current resources (i.e., schools, teachers, buildings, parishes, dioceses, foundations, organizations, universities,

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<sup>2</sup> According to the National Catholic Education Association (NCEA) statistics, 99% of Catholic High School students graduate compared to only 78.2% of students at the same level in public schools. Only 13.9% of students enrolled in Catholic secondary schools nationwide are Hispanic: 80,837 students total (McDonald & Schultz, 2015).

etc.) be best used to respond to the educational needs of Hispanic Catholic children and youth? The answer to this question requires a major analysis of current realities to guide the development of appropriate action plans.

In 2014, Boston College, in partnership with the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate (CARA) at Georgetown University, published the first round of results from the National Study of Catholic Parishes with Hispanic Ministry (Ospino, 2014). This study, the first of its kind, provided important data about Hispanic Catholics in parishes, including information about the relationships that exist among parishes and diocesan offices of Hispanic ministry, and between Catholic schools and diocesan offices of Catholic Education. A second study, the National Survey of Catholic Schools Serving Hispanic Families, was conducted in 2014 by the School of Theology and Ministry and the Barbara and Patrick Roche Center for Catholic Education located within the Lynch School of Education at Boston College, under the leadership of the authors of this essay.<sup>3</sup> The survey was designed to explore current policies and procedures among schools identified as directly serving Hispanic families, while examining and delineating systems, methods, and new traditions that other Catholic schools might adopt. The survey was designed to study local, Catholic school based, intentional practices supporting Hispanic families, by generating data that highlight critical characteristics of these responding parochial and independent Catholic schools.

### Methodology

An initial database of Catholic schools serving Hispanic families based on the outcomes of the research associated with the National Study of Catholic Parishes with Hispanic Ministry (Ospino, 2014) was created early in 2014. A total of 4,368 parishes were identified for this study using existing available databases and contacting all Diocesan Directors of Hispanic Ministry (or their equivalents) throughout the country. The focus of this parent study was not Hispanic families but parishes with Hispanic ministry, a pastoral category used by most dioceses and parishes practically as the equivalent to ministry in Spanish (Ospino, 2014). As indicated above, such nomenclature is limited and requires further examination considering the diversity of Hispanic Catholics in the United States. The majority of parishes with Hispanic

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<sup>3</sup> This study was conceived and designed by Hosffman Ospino and Patricia Weitzel-O'Neill. We wish to acknowledge the invaluable work of our research assistants Erin Huckler and Elizabeth Creamer.

ministry are located in the South (38%) and the West (23%). Only 15% are in the Northeast and 24% in the Midwest. The schools selected for the National Survey of Catholic Schools Serving Hispanic Families were predominantly elementary and initially identified as having a direct relationship with parishes with Hispanic ministry, administratively and/or geographically. This original database yielded more than 1,500 Catholic schools across the United States. Research assistants, under the supervision of the principal investigators, procured contact information including principal names, postal mailing addresses and email addresses. The database updates included the notation of changes in leadership and the removal of recently closed schools. Identified schools were organized by arch/diocese and represented more than 150 Catholic arch/dioceses, about 85% of the 178 Latin Rite Catholic arch/dioceses in the United States. Superintendents of Catholic schools (or their equivalent) in all identified arch/dioceses were also individually contacted by the principal investigators and invited to make corrections to the list of schools in their own ecclesiastical territories, such as adding omitted schools or removing merged or closed schools. Superintendents were invited to reach out and encourage survey participation of Catholic schools leaders in their arch/dioceses. 1,488 Catholic schools identified as serving Hispanic families, 22.7% of all Catholic schools in the US, constituted the final sample for the survey. Most operate in some form of relationship with one or more parishes, though some do not.

In June 2014, all identified school principals (or their equivalents) were contacted electronically and received a formal invitation to participate in the survey. Each principal received a link to the survey. After reading and electronically signing a consent form, principals responded to the survey. All survey mailings were followed with monthly electronic reminders, a paper postcard in September 2014, and in some cases follow-up phone calls to answer participants' questions regarding the use of the electronic platform. Data collection formally closed in November 2014. The survey was designed by the principal investigators and uploaded to a Boston College secure site using Qualtrics. The Boston College Institutional Review Board approved all materials and research activity associated with this study. In total, 656 schools responded to the survey, representing 44% of all schools in the original sample and about 10% of the current 6,568 Catholic schools in the country. These responding schools are located in 130 arch/dioceses, which comprise about 73% of all Latin Rite Catholic dioceses in the United States serving approximately 9% of the overall U.S. Catholic school population (174,000 students).



The survey design focused on the collection of descriptive information regarding demographic and educational data that would yield realistic and illustrative results. Many of the questions focused on factual data such as enrollments or tuitions, other questions asked for listings of services, programs and initiatives as well as respondents' perceptions regarding the status of reported programs and initiatives. This data highlights the critical characteristics of parochial and independent Catholic schools, which are identified as serving Hispanic families. The characteristics described include: elements of an inclusive Catholic culture; curricular, instructional and liturgical practices; governance structures and practices; intercultural competencies of leadership and staff; support provided by arch/diocesan offices and parishes, especially through Hispanic ministry; and mechanisms of collaboration between parishes and schools. Each of these is viewed as a key descriptor of the attributes of an effective Catholic school that seeks to serve and engage Hispanic families (Ozar & Weitzel-O'Neill, 2012). Equally important is the data collected and analyzed in the report, which describes the purposeful management of enrollment, marketing, and financial assistance strategies, central to the business of Catholic schools.

## Overview and Snapshot of Participating Catholic Schools

### Geographical/Regional Distribution

School respondents were aligned according to the four regions utilized in the National Study of Catholic Parishes with Hispanic Ministry (Ospino, 2014) to establish a platform for future correlations between the two research efforts. Most parishes with Hispanic ministry in the United States are located in the South and the West (61%) with a smaller group represented by the Northeast and Midwest (39%). The Catholic schools serving Hispanic families in the study share a similar geographical distribution. Of the total surveyed, 37% of all respondents are located in the Northeast and Midwest while 63% are located in the South and the West.

However, nearly two-thirds (61.3%) of all Catholic schools are concentrated in the Northeast and Midwest regions as delimited in this study.<sup>4</sup> Yet the

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<sup>4</sup> The NCEA uses a slightly different regional breakdown. According to NCEA's geographical distribution of schools, 45.8% are located in the Mideast and Great Lakes regions, thus corroborating our finding.

larger percentage of those identified as serving Hispanic families are in the South and the West where the Catholic population is fast growing, particularly school-age Hispanics. While 53.6% of Hispanics in the South and 61.4% in the West self-identify as Catholic (Gray, Gautier, & Gaunt, 2014), these are also the regions of the country with the fewest resources to meet the needs of Hispanic Catholic families.

Most Catholic schools are located in the regions of the country where Catholicism established most of its structures during the 19th and early 20th centuries, but today is declining. This observation does not suggest that, in these regions experiencing Catholic demographic decline, Hispanics are absent. On the contrary, many Hispanic families, among other ethnic groups, are bringing new life to parishes and dioceses. It is estimated that between 2000 and 2010 the Hispanic population increased by 33% in the Northeast and 49% in the Midwest, often exceeding the capacity of existing parish resources. However, total enrollment of Hispanic children in Catholic schools in these regions —11.2% in the Northeast and 7.9% in the Midwest (McDonald & Schultz, 2015) — does not nearly reflect the population shifts or meet the demands of working with Hispanic families.

A responding principal in our study observed: “The Hispanic community feels somehow ‘separate’ from the rest of the Church. There is a co-existence of sorts...” Another indicates, “Because we cannot provide ESL classes, the students have to be fluent in English to be able to succeed.” Another principal echoes a common concern: “The Spanish speaking community is very connected and involved in the parish. Many see the Catholic school as an elite option.” And perhaps the best observation that sums up the challenges of changing demographics in the Church for Catholic schools comes from a principal in our study who said:

...a challenge is when the demographics of the parish have changed over time, and now the school looks different than it did 10 years ago. Change is hard for everyone especially adults... people are afraid of people's difference. How do you help a community see the value of other?

While many individual proactive Catholic schools are meeting the needs of Hispanic families, there are significant differences across regions when comparing availability of schools and the Hispanic student population. For instance, 27% of the total enrollment in the West, 17% in the South, 12% in

the Northeast, and 8% in the Midwest is Hispanic. As we observed earlier, the majority of Catholic schools are located in the Northeast and the Midwest, yet these are the regions where Hispanic enrollment is the lowest. In the South and the West, serving Hispanic children does not seem to be an option since this is the dominant student population, yet the number of Catholic schools and resources are very limited.

### **School Types, Affiliations and Facilities**

The majority of responding school leaders is associated with Pre-K–8 elementary schools, with only 6% serving in secondary schools. Ninety-four percent (94%) reported some form of association with at least one parish, while 16% noted an association with 2 or 3 parishes and 12% with four or more parishes. As expected, the majority of responding schools (91%) are responsible to their arch/dioceses. The remaining 9% are independent or sponsored by a religious order. The vast majority of respondents (99%) reported the presence of an arch/diocesan Office of Catholic Education and 72% reported the existence of an arch/diocesan office for Hispanic Ministry. Catholic schools exist in communion with the arch/bishop and are expected to work collaboratively with the arch/diocese. Key central offices are important and can be a source of support and direction for Catholic school leaders.

The majority of schools in the West and the South were established in the 1950s, while in the Northeast and Midwest the median start date was between 1917 and 1924; this illustrates important regional differences regarding the age of these schools. Further research might focus on the likelihood that schools in the Northeast and Midwest need to devote more resources to update building structures, thus inhibiting investments in resources to support welcoming environments for all children and incorporating programs that meet the needs of the new Catholic demographics.

### **Emerging Realities and Challenges**

Nine defining characteristics of Catholic schools are presented in the *National Standards and Benchmarks for Effective Catholic Schools* (NSBECS) (Ozar & Weitzel-O'Neill, 2012). They are: (a) the centrality of Jesus; (b) academic excellence; (c) a Catholic world view; (d) the authority of the bishop; (e) committed to the education of the whole child; (f) sustained by Gospel witness; (g) accessibility; (h) evangelization; and (i) shaped by communion and community. When looking at the culture of a Catholic school,

three characteristics are essential to consider. First is the need to be inclusive and accessible to all students. Second, by reason of its educational activity, a Catholic school participates directly and in a privileged way in the evangelizing mission of the Church. Third, the Catholic school emphasizes its identity as a community—an educational community of persons and a genuine community of faith (Ozar & Weitzel-O’Neill, 2012). These characteristics are essential to creating a genuine culture of welcoming, rooted in the faith and actively building out toward the larger community of the Catholic Church.

To achieve the articulation and lived reality of these characteristics requires a commitment to mission and Catholic identity ([NSBECS 1–4](#)) by those who govern and lead the school. Visible signs and symbols of this commitment are manifested by those schools that authentically respect and embrace the diversity of today’s students’ cultures and incorporate these cultures as they build out their vision and plan for the future. The Catholic school is different because it is Catholic and strives to be inclusive, and celebrate its Catholic identity. Today, Catholic schools are challenged to provide academically excellent curricular experiences that are established in instructional practices designed to integrate and support all learners, regardless of socioeconomic, language, and cultural differences ([NSBECS 7–9](#)). Often, providing an inclusive school culture is considered to be countercultural by those who seek to minimize differences. The operational vitality of effective Catholic schools is inextricably linked to solid enrollments supported by mission-driven marketing strategies and tuition assistance programs ([NSBECS 10–13](#)). The responsibility for ensuring a strong Catholic culture, academic excellence and operational vitality rests with those who serve as the school leaders (principals/presidents) and on governance boards coaching and guiding these efforts. This is why the responses of principals are so critical to understanding the culture of schools. ([NSBECS 5–6](#)). We provide authentic and effective Catholic schools because we are Catholic (Ozar & Weitzel-O’Neill, 2012).

The articulation of the Catholic school mission drives the work of all who serve on behalf of a school that seeks to serve Hispanic families. It is important to recognize the centrality of mission and Catholic identity in the life of a Catholic school. In particular, as we reference three key characteristics of Catholic identity: inclusivity, evangelization, and community, we focus on an analysis of the data from several key areas noting the impact of leadership on these areas. Analysis and presentation include: Catholic school culture(s); school leadership; interculturally competent staff; governance; and structures

of ecclesial collaboration. Additional areas such as marketing, enrollment, and financial assistance, among others, are addressed in the full report (Osipino & Weitzel-O'Neill, 2015).

### Catholic School Culture(s)

Catholic schools are called to be spaces with a robust Catholic culture and worldview. As noted in the NSBECS (Ozar & Weitzel-O'Neill, 2012):

All curriculum and instruction in a Catholic school should foster: the desire to seek wisdom and truth, the preference for social justice, the discipline to become self-learners, the capacity to recognize ethical and moral grounding for behavior, and the responsibility to transform and enrich the world with Gospel values. (Ozar & Weitzel-O'Neill, 2012, p. 9).

Students and their families also bring their own cultural worldviews and convictions. The Catholic school, thus, becomes a place where the culture of the Church and that of the community meet. Culture is embodied through signs, symbols, and ways of thinking and behaving. Key areas in which the commitment to mission is often reflected and visible are the expressions of genuine hospitality extended to all families and an excellent curriculum deeply rooted in Gospel values. Culture is always mediated by the practices, convictions, symbols, and languages of those who embody it. Accordingly, our research examined the extent to which Hispanic cultures are acknowledged, integrated, and celebrated in Catholic schools serving Hispanic families. We looked closely at the signs and symbols of the environment, liturgical/worship practices, and programming to support and welcome Hispanic families in the school community.

**Signs and symbols.** Upon entering a school, the guest is surrounded by signs and symbols, often representing identity and mission. One fourth (25%) of responding principals reported that prominent school symbols are intentionally culturally diverse and inclusive. Twenty-one percent (21%) indicated that the school signage is displayed in Spanish as well as English.

**Worship life.** When asked about prayer and liturgical experiences, more than one-third of respondents (36%) reported the inclusion of Spanish language components in school liturgies, and one-third (35%) reported that school prayers are written and shared in Spanish. Principals and school lead-

ers who (a) are fluent in Spanish, (b) have participated in Hispanic ministry and theology training, or (c) have participated in cultural competency training to work with Hispanic Catholics in the United States, were substantially more likely to say that their school's liturgies included Spanish language components and that prayers are written and shared in Spanish. Overall, 60% of all respondents reported that school liturgies and prayers reflect and embrace the Hispanic culture in some manner.

**Academic culture.** An inclusive academic culture is central to providing a culture of welcome in the school and is marked by intentional programming designed to support and advance a diverse student population. Catholic schools often build on the principles of Catholic social teaching, which emphasizes human dignity and the common good, to develop service delivery systems that welcome all students (Scanlan, 2009). An inclusive approach is necessary where service delivery is integrated into the "heterogeneous school community" and where students' needs are met in ways that keep them included, rather than in manners that exclude them (Scanlan, 2009). A principal reported:

We think that parents want their kids to have roots and wings. Therefore we offer our immersion program in Spanish/English ...Hispanic families/students are interested in a school that offers Spanish and other Hispanic cultural events that the children will not lose their roots.

Such an approach is somewhat ideal, yet our research reveals that the more dominant model among Catholic schools serving Hispanic families is not necessarily one of integration where the needs of Hispanic students and their families are intentionally engaged by the school community, but one that relies much on separation and the assumption that a second language is a deficit and these families will find elsewhere what they need to succeed in the school environment.

When asked to identify program offerings available to students who speak Spanish at home, 58% of all respondents reported offering at least one or more programs. There was no single program offered by all respondents. The percentages of respondents offering different programs included the following: tutoring (43%), remedial instruction (40%), before and after school instruction (20%), pull-out programs for every grade (17%), and English as a foreign language programs (14%). Forty percent (40%) reported in-class assistance and 13% noted other programming. Only 4% of respondents indicat-

ed participation in a bilingual program, which research shows as one of the better instructional models for ensuring academic achievement for Pre-K–8 grades (Scanlan & Zehrbach, 2013). There are also regional differences to be acknowledged. Responding schools in the Northeast have the highest percentage (50%) of remedial instruction initiatives, 30% of second language programs, and 26.7% of pull-out programs reported. Only 20% of respondents in the Midwest provide before and after school instruction for students who speak Spanish at home. Forty-six percent (46%) of respondents in the West offer tutoring and 44% providing in-class assistance to this student population.

Respondents who indicated “other” available programs shared a variety of approaches. The following is a summary of what the respondents listed. Some explained that there is no need to provide such programs because the majority of their Hispanic students are bilingual and speak English. Others reported that their school offers or requires Spanish classes, ranging from advanced Spanish to Spanish instruction for pre-K students. Some school leaders described the use of Title I funding to support initiatives such as extended year summer programs or extra tutoring. Other offerings included the use of instructional software to facilitate language learning (e.g. Rosetta Stone, Tell Me More). Others provide reading programs or resource programs and partner with public schools to obtain services for ELL students.

**Supporting families.** Environments with little or no sense of hospitality or acceptance lead to situations where people feel disconnected and marginalized. Unknowingly, some Catholic schools exhibit what has been described as a “chilly climate” for Hispanic families. Respondents to our study reported a number of efforts in their programming that aim at making a difference in the creation of responsive school cultures and, as a result, enhance enrollment patterns among Hispanic families. Targeted programming for families and intentionally working to establish a sense of community among them is often cited as a desired effective strategy. A principal reported: “The school for its part needs to work on providing a culturally welcoming environment and move Hispanic parents into positions on the school board and parent guild that give the Hispanic population a voice in the school.” Another principal shared: “at our school we have started a Spanish PTO...” Other respondents allude to the overwhelmingly positive response to personal invitations, presenting information in Spanish and English, and being present and speaking at Masses in Spanish.

When asked directly about support for Hispanic families and the provision of bilingual materials the responses varied. Overall, schools reported providing bilingual liturgies (21%), second language classes for families (7%), and other initiatives (14%). These other initiatives included: prominent school signage displayed in Spanish as well as English and hosting Hispanic religious and cultural celebrations on occasions such as the Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe, Día de los Muertos, or Cinco de Mayo; international/Spanish Masses; specific parent programs such Parent Teacher Organizations in Spanish. If language is a barrier, respondents were asked if they provided language development programs for families. Thirty-one percent (31%) of the respondents reported that they do offer some variation of these programs at their schools. Other school leaders indicated that language development programs are offered through their affiliated parish, but not directly at the school.

It is clear from these examples of programming that there is a sincere intention to create a more open and inclusive environment, however these efforts take place in only a small percentage of the responding schools. Since a key defining characteristic of Catholic education is community—“an educational community of persons and a genuine community of faith” (Ozar & Weitzel-O’Neill, 2012, p. 9)—these findings remind us that more Hispanic families need to be welcomed into Catholic schools and invited to collaborate with school leaders to achieve genuine community. This is important because these are the schools identified as serving Hispanic families and many are located in parishes with Hispanic ministries and sizeable numbers of Latino parishioners.

### **School Leadership**

Catholic school leaders are expected to be spiritual, instructional, and professional guides, working closely with all the members of the community they serve. The following profile highlights the strengths, according to our study, that educational leaders in Catholic schools serving Hispanic families bring, yet also identifies possibilities for the recruitment of a new generation of leaders for these institutions. These new leaders will be more intentionally prepared to serve, culturally and linguistically, the populations that are transforming the American Catholic experience, in this first part of the twenty-first century.

The majority of responding principals in our survey across all regions are female (70%). The youngest of all respondents was 25 and the oldest 65. While only 6% of respondents are between the ages of 25 and 34, 52% are



older than 55. Ninety-one percent of principals (91%) in our study are US-born. In terms of language skills important to better serve Hispanic families, 17% of respondents speak Spanish fluently. Yet there are regional differences. The West has the highest percentage (28%) of principals in our study who are fluent in Spanish, while the Midwest has the lowest (8%). Twenty-five percent (25%) have lived or worked in another country, including 7% who lived or worked in at least one of 17 Spanish-speaking countries. In terms of ecclesiastical status, 89% of respondents are laywomen and laymen, 10% are religious sisters, and 1% is ordained—priests or deacons.

When asked about their ethnic background, only 14% of the responding school leaders in Catholic schools serving Hispanic families, namely 94 of 656, self-identified as Hispanic. Seventy-seven percent (77%) of these responding Hispanic school leaders (77 of 94) are US-born, 75% reported being fluent in Spanish (70 of 94), and 80% are women (75 of 94). Among these Hispanic school leaders, 92.5% hold graduate degrees (87 of 94), 23% have received training on Hispanic Ministry and Theology (22 of 94), and 22% received cultural competencies training (21 of 94).

Responding school leaders are clearly well trained for their jobs and to meet the traditional needs of their school environments. Ninety-three percent (93%) hold graduate degrees with 80% having earned a Master's. However, only 17% have received any training in areas related to Hispanic ministry and theology. Excluding the 14% of responding leaders who self-identified as Hispanic and are likely familiar with Hispanic culture and traditions, it is evident that most Catholic school leaders are not trained to fully engage and meet the needs of the largest non-traditional population that is transforming the American Catholic experience. Looking more closely at the 17% of responding school leaders who received some training in Hispanic ministry/theology, nine in ten participated in a traditional classroom context (93%) while the remaining (7%) were trained online.

One in four (23%) of all respondents reported participating in training focused on cultural competencies related to Hispanics. These opportunities consisted of formal professional workshops, conferences, and seminars related to diversity, Hispanic/Latino culture, recruitment and retention of Hispanic families, and Hispanic Spirituality. A small group reported completing university classes which addressed cultural competency training and a few principals described expanding their knowledge through on-the-job learning, personal study, and travel to Hispanic countries via language immersion programs or missionary trips.

The overall number of bilingual (English and Spanish) principals in our sample is very small, especially considering the value that such skill adds to creating truly welcoming places for Hispanic children and their families—many of whom happen to be immigrants. That less than one quarter of responding principals in our study—principals who are leading Catholic schools intentionally serving Hispanic families throughout the country—have received some form of cultural or religious training to work with Hispanics points to a major gap in training programs, as well as a gap in the recruitment of educational leaders prepared to meet the demands of the new demographics.

School leaders are critical to the success of all schools and responsible for the implementation of a mission that embraces a vision adaptable to change and addresses the needs of all families. Assessing who our leaders are today and planning for the recruitment of a more diverse and culturally competent leadership pool is necessary for Catholic education to thrive in a global society. Since more than half (52%) of all principals in these schools are 55 and older, and many will likely retire within the next decade, ecclesial entities, Catholic institutions of higher education, and Catholic schools must work together to identify, mentor, train, and support the next generation of Catholic education leaders and teachers, providing them with the bilingual and bicultural skills needed to best serve an increasingly Hispanic Church. This observation is in line with the recommendation in the NSBECS (Ozar & Weitzel-O'Neill, 2012) for schools to have defined leadership succession plans in place, as they plan for the future. Increasing online opportunities for such training seems imperative, especially since the geographical areas where Catholicism is growing the fastest, namely the South and the West (Ospino, 2014), are not where most Catholic institutions of higher education are located.

### **Interculturally Competent Staff**

Success in serving Hispanic families in the context of the Catholic school cannot be seen as the sole responsibility of the principal. Qualified and committed staff with similar professional training, skills, and vision, as described above, is necessary. Data collected in this regard are significantly revealing. Only 7% of teachers across responding schools self-identify as Hispanic. There are major regional differences. While 24% of teachers in responding schools in the West self-identify as Hispanic, the percentage drastically

diminishes in the South (4%), Northeast (3%), and the Midwest (0%). Very few non-Hispanic teachers speak Spanish, with the median percent for all teachers in responding schools at 3%, with a range that goes from 0% in the Midwest to a high of 8% in the West. The hiring of part-time Hispanic teachers appears to be an uncommon practice in most responding schools (overall median of 0% for all respondents), except for the West where 8% of schools have done so.

Instructional assistants and volunteers are known to make a difference in Catholic schools. However, the median percentage of Hispanic instructional assistants across responding schools is only 6% and 19% for Hispanic volunteers. Efforts are being made to change this picture. Seventeen percent (17%) of principals from responding schools reported the use of targeted recruitment strategies to hire bilingual staff. Again, regional differences are notable with 27% in the West, 18% in the Midwest, 13% in the Northeast, and 11% in the South. The strategy most often cited is the addition of the clause “bilingual preferred/required” to available job descriptions. Other strategies include: résumé screening, publicity in Hispanic communities, and word of mouth recommendations.

Professional development opportunities for second language acquisition are provided by 26% of all responding schools. The Midwest has the largest percentage of reporting schools offering support for foreign language professional development opportunities (38%), followed by the West (25%), the South (23%), and the Northeast (17%). Paradoxically, the region of the country with schools reporting the most opportunities for foreign language professional development for staff is the Northeast, the one with the least number of Hispanic and Spanish-speaking teachers and administrators. This observation calls for more in-depth assessment of the impact of these opportunities and the existing funding and programs, as well as how school personnel can use the acquired skills to better serve Hispanic families. Most of the responding schools offering language acquisition opportunities for staff and teachers provide opportunity in the form of financial support to achieve this goal. Other opportunities reported to encourage language acquisition among staff and teachers are: access to language learning software, language instruction led by the school or parish staff, courses at area colleges, professional development through the public school system, and ELL/ESL pedagogical training as alternative paths for teachers to improve their second language skills.

Establishing bridges of communication is important and critical to success in educational settings. This is even more urgent when there are major differences of language and culture between school personnel and families, as is the case of Catholic schools serving Hispanic families. A responding principal observed: "We recently hired a teaching staff member that is Hispanic. This has helped tremendously with communication with our Hispanic families. This teacher is trusted by the Hispanic community and he has helped bring more Hispanic families to our school." The ability to communicate with Hispanic families, particularly immigrants, is inhibited when language proficiency among school staff and faculty is limited.

Responding school leaders highlighted the need to address the challenge of intercultural competency with more extensive professional development for teachers and staff. Several indicated that they needed more support from their arch/dioceses to engage in intentional recruitment efforts. Also highlighted was the well-known competition with public schools for skilled bilingual teachers and the need to provide comparable, competitive, just wages for Catholic school professionals (Scheopner, 2010). Catholic institutions of higher education training teachers to work in Catholic schools may well provide and require bilingual training/certification necessary today for all teachers. The full report for this research (Ospino & Weitzel O'Neill, 2016) further reviews parish and diocesan levels of collaboration with Catholic schools to recruit, train, and offer second language development competencies for faculty and staff.

### **Governance**

Without a doubt, school leaders, faculty, and staff are essential to the successful operation of Catholic schools. Nonetheless, their work is often supported or inhibited by the reality of the governance structures currently in place. Standard 5 in the NSBECS asserts that effective school governance is vital to the success of an excellent school (Ozar & Weitzel-O'Neill, 2012). The vast majority of responding schools in our study (84%) has a governing board. For 69% of the schools with a governing board, such a board is advisory and for 16% the board is consultative. This data mirrors the national picture (McDonald, & Schultz, 2015). In this structure, the canonical leaders, most often pastors, are actively involved in the governance dynamics. These canonical leaders are solely responsible for final decisions. If they are assisted with an advisory board they may seek the advice but are not required to do so.

A canonical leader assisted by a consultative board is required to listen to the advice. Whether the board is advisory or consultative, the canonical leader makes the final decision. A small percentage of schools (10%), all sponsored by religious orders, reported other governing models: 4% report to Boards of Trustees and 6% report to Boards of Limited Jurisdiction (boards of lay leaders with official authority over school policy, finances, and governance) (Geruson et al., 2013).

In several dioceses new models are emerging, which allow the pastors to participate in the life of the school, while boards assume the responsibilities of overseeing the schools and holding school leaders accountable. The dominant advisory board model is presently being reviewed as relationships between Catholic schools and parishes, dioceses, and religious orders change due to the merging of schools, the configuration of new finance and governance models, and the decline in the numbers of priests. The steady decline in the number of priests in the country is requiring a reassessment of the role of the pastor in the life of the school. For instance, the number of parishes without resident pastors has steadily increased in recent years. Today 20% of all U.S. parishes are without a resident pastor (CARA, 2015; Gray, 2015).<sup>5</sup>

One immediate consequence of this reality is that increasing number of parishes and schools are being consolidated thus giving rise to models where multiple parishes share one pastor and sponsor one school. Twenty eight percent (28%) of responding schools are supported by two or more parishes. Fifteen percent (15%) of respondents indicated that their schools experienced some merger or realignment, most of these (53%) in the West and the South. It is important to note that these are schools identified as serving Hispanic families, which explains the larger number of schools in these two regions. About half of these realignments reported occurred between 2008 and 2015. This pattern mirrors national trends reported by the NCEA, which in 2014-2015 identified 13% of all schools in the country as inter-parish schools (McDonald, & Schultz, 2015).

Governance boards are important because they oversee policy, school finances, and leadership accountability, among other responsibilities. The NSBECS calls for the membership of these boards to be diverse and to represent the population served (Ozar & Weitzel-O'Neill, 2012). On average

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5 The number of parishes without a resident pastor in the United States went from 549 in 1965 to 3,448 in 2015. Today there are more parishes (17,324) in the country than active diocesan priests altogether (16,462) (CARA, 2015; Gray, 2015).

the boards of responding schools throughout the country have nine members, with only a few schools indicating boards of more than 30 members. Only 23% of the schools report that their boards have three or more members who self-identify as Hispanic/Latino, 33% one or two members, and over 35% indicate there is no member of Hispanic/Latino background.

Securing a diversity of voices on the board increases the level of awareness about issues that may ordinarily not be evident to board members who share a very similar background. A case in point is the question asked about specific financial/enrollment activities undertaken by the board. Only one in four schools serving Hispanic families responded that their board raises funds to support tuition needs for Hispanic children and their families. Most of these few schools (36%) are located in the South and the smallest percentage (14%) in the Northeast. Increasing the representation of Hispanic leaders in governance structures of Catholic schools is crucial. When asked whether their local arch/dioceses encouraged the recruitment of Hispanic board members, the majority (58%) responded that they “did not know” and only 7% answered “yes.” Nonetheless, several principals reported that when that occurred, it was most likely the arch/diocesan Catholic Schools Office was the unit that provided programs to support the recruitment of Hispanic board members.

Considering the particularity of this sample, namely Catholic schools serving Hispanic families, this study confirms that current leadership and governance structures in Catholic schools have not decisively adjusted to the new student demographics and thus may be missing opportunities to develop new venues for advocacy and service, as an extension of their Catholic identity and mission. A review of current governance structures, strategies for board member recruitment, and the development of agendas that take into consideration the educational needs of school-age Hispanic children may well constitute a new set of priorities for further research by Catholic institutions of higher education and other organizations.

### **Collaboration with Parish and Arch/Diocesan Structures**

#### **Collaboration at the Parish Level**

According to the National Study of Catholic Parishes with Hispanic Ministry (Ospino, 2014), parishes with Hispanic ministry are among the most natural and strongest allies to advocate for Catholic education of Hispanic children. The study offers evidence that parochial offices of His-

panic ministry, their directors, and bilingual and bicultural pastoral parish staff committed to working Hispanic families, particularly pastors, are great advocates for these families to access Catholic education. Pastors of parishes associated with Catholic schools serving Hispanic families play a significant role given their power of advocacy as well as their still-prevalent decision-making ability. Ninety-one percent (91%) of responding principals in our study said that at least one pastor from an affiliated parish is involved in the life of the schools school. Such involvement ranges from pastoral presence (45%), board member (28%), day-to-day administration (11%), to teaching (10%). Eighty-five percent (85%) of responding principals of Catholic schools serving Hispanic families said that at least one of the parishes affiliated with their school provides pastoral care and presence, and 54% indicated to know that at least one of the parishes affiliated with the school has an office of Hispanic Ministry.

These data corroborate the finding of the National Study of Catholic Parishes with Hispanic Ministry (Ospino, 2014) that 45% of parishes with Hispanic ministry have or share some form of administrative and/or ministerial relationship with a Catholic school (Ospino, 2014, 37). Of the responding school leaders who said that at least one affiliated parish has an office of Hispanic ministry, 69% are aware that that parish office has a director of Hispanic ministry. Thirty-eight percent (38%) of respondents are aware of the existence of a parish director of Hispanic ministry and said that this director is involved in the school. Such involvement most often includes serving on planning teams/committees, acting as a member of the school board, interpreting or translating (English and Spanish), and teaching. Though the number of Catholic schools that have engaged in collaboration with parish offices of Hispanic ministry and intentionally involve the director of Hispanic ministry in the dynamics of school life is small, the ones that do are breaking ground in the creation of bridges that can strengthen the relationship between the schools and Hispanic families, leading to increasing enrollment and support of Hispanic students. This remains a promise to be fulfilled, nonetheless, since our study did not find any statistically significant difference regarding Latino enrollment in schools that involved the parish director of Hispanic ministry in the life of the school and those that did not. High levels of Mass attendance among Hispanics in parishes in direct relationship with Catholic schools seems to have more impact on enrollment. According to the National Study of Catholic Parishes with Hispanic Ministry (Ospino, 2014), schools directly associated with parishes where a majority of Mass

attendees are Hispanic have, on average, 133 Hispanic students. By comparison those schools that associate with parishes with fewer attendees enroll an average of 35 students who self-identify as Hispanic (Ospino, 2014).

This is certainly a sign of hope that needs to be measured against a worrisome trend identified by the National Study of Catholic Parishes with Hispanic Ministry (Ospino, 2014) as a “disquieting gap”:

the larger the number of Hispanic parishioners active in a parish, the less likely that community is to have or share responsibility for a Catholic school. Only 34 percent of those parishes where half or more parishioners are Hispanic have or share responsibility for a school. In contrast, parishes in which Hispanics are less than a quarter of the active parochial population constitute 60 percent of all parishes with Hispanic ministry that have or share responsibility for a Catholic school. These numbers reveal a disquieting gap between parishes with large Hispanic populations and Catholic schools. (p. 37)

Such a disquieting gap must bring Catholic school and pastoral leaders to the table, along with supporting organizations to find ways to strategically respond, in order to avoid the widening of a gap that may isolate schools from the largest body of Catholics in the United States; perhaps rendering many Catholic schools irrelevant to the population for which they were created in the first place, and in turn prevent Hispanic families from benefitting from the quality education offered by these schools.

### **Collaboration at the Arch/Diocesan Level**

Given the intimate relationship that exists between most Catholic schools and diocesan structures in the United States, it is crucial for schools leaders to work closely with particular diocesan offices –and vice versa –to advance initiatives that truly benefit Hispanic families. The two diocesan offices that are mostly referred to in this study are the arch/diocesan Catholic Schools Office and the Office for Hispanic Ministry (or its equivalent).

Data collected in our study indicates that support for intentional programming in responding schools serving Hispanic families is provided predominantly by the arch/diocesan Catholic Schools Office or Catholic Education Office. Nearly every responding school leader (99%) indicated that there is a Catholic School Office in their diocese. When asked whether the director of such office is Hispanic/Latino, 10% of respondents said yes, 75%



said no, and 15% were uncertain. Uncertainty increased significantly when asked whether the director of the Catholic Schools Office spoke Spanish. Half (49%) were uncertain, 28% said no, and only 13% said yes. Respondents seemed to be more aware of at least one staff member in this office being of Hispanic/Latino descent: 45% said yes, 27% said no, and 28% were uncertain. Catholic Schools Offices or Departments in the West with at least one Hispanic/Latino staff member is substantially higher (61%) compared to the overall average (45%). One-third of respondents (33%) in the Midwest indicated that at least one staff member in their Catholic Schools Office speaks Spanish. A similar percentage of respondents (46%) indicated that at least one Catholic Schools Office staff member spoke Spanish, with the West having the largest percentage of personnel with this skill (57%). However, 41% were uncertain and 13% said no.

Though most Catholic schools in our study confirmed the existence of a Catholic Schools Office in their arch/diocese, and most work with them in various areas, only half (50%) indicated that within the past two years someone from that office reached out to their school to discuss matters associated with outreach to Hispanic families and students. Forty-three percent (43%) said that such contact had not occurred and 7% were uncertain. Respondents who said yes to having had someone from the arch/diocesan Catholic Schools Office reach out to them to discuss matters associated with outreach to Hispanic families and students were asked to further describe such interactions.

Most respondents in this group indicated that the Catholic Schools Office has offered professional development opportunities related to Hispanic students or that the Office has provided assistance with marketing and recruitment efforts. Others explained that their interactions consisted of informal discussions related to Catholic school access for Hispanic families. Twenty-nine percent (29%) of respondents in the entire survey indicated that they had worked with the Catholic Schools Office on a project involving their school and Hispanic families/students, while 71% said that they have not participated in such joint project. The majority of the joint projects identified focus on marketing and recruitment initiatives. In fact, 34% of respondents indicated that the arch/diocese provides support for the development of marketing strategies targeted at welcoming Hispanic families to Catholic schools, mostly through the Catholic Schools Office. The offices of marketing, development, and Hispanic ministry were also mentioned, though much less frequently. Twenty-four percent (24%) of respondents reported that the

arch/diocese does not provide support for marketing strategies and 42% did not know. Other initiatives mentioned as part of the support received from Catholic Schools Office include tuition assistance, professional development opportunities, and implementation of a parent ambassador program.

Diocesan Offices of Hispanic Ministry (or the equivalent) exist in nearly all arch/dioceses throughout the country to support and advocate for pastoral care of Hispanic Catholics, supporting parishes and offering diocesan-wide programming. According to the National Study of Catholic Parishes with Hispanic Ministry (Ospino, 2014), 97% of all Diocesan Directors of Hispanic Ministry are aware of the existence of a Catholic Schools Office, yet only 51% indicate having advanced any intentional collaborative work to promote access to Catholic schools among Hispanics or support Hispanic families enrolled in these institutions. When school leaders were asked in this study whether the arch/diocese in which their school is located has an Office of Hispanic Ministry, 72% responded yes, 7.5% said no, and 21.5% are unsure. Lack of awareness about the existence of Diocesan Offices of Hispanic Ministry (a full one-fifth of respondents are in this category) and scant efforts to work collaboratively with these entities point to a major weakness in the use of resources to work on behalf of Hispanic families in arch/dioceses across the country.

### **An Open Conclusion and an Invitation**

Much of the analysis and data shared in this essay comes from the report from the National Survey of Catholic Schools Serving Hispanic Families (Ospino and Weitzel-O'Neill, 2016). We invite scholars and practitioners to read the full report. The present and future of U.S. Catholicism in the 21st century are intimately linked to the fast-growing Hispanic presence and Catholic schools cannot be the exception. Though efforts to increase enrollment of Hispanic students in Catholic schools are very important and a number of initiatives are proving to be successful in this regard in various arch/dioceses, enrollment is not enough. The study that grounds this paper aims at a much bigger conversation in response to an overarching question: how can Catholic schools in the United States remain Catholic (Mission and Identity) and grow sustainably (Operational Vitality) while providing the best education (Academic Excellence) and creating healthy environments (Governance and Leadership) that fully serve Hispanic Catholic families today? Welcome to a conversation that demands serious investment on the part of both Catholic education and pastoral leaders at all levels, across the nation.

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