

Latina/o Families Study: Needs Assessment and Family Integration



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Overview

The University of Wisconsin-Extension, Cooperative Extension conducted a study on Wisconsin Latina/o families. The purpose of this study was to better understand how Latina/o families are integrating into local communities and to assess their educational needs. This summary highlights selected key findings and offers recommendations informed by analysis of the project data collected between February 2015 and June 2016.

Key findings

Aspirations and optimism about the future

Latina/o parents held high levels of optimism and aspiration for their children's future. In almost every case, including for those with undocumented children, Latina/o parents felt that their

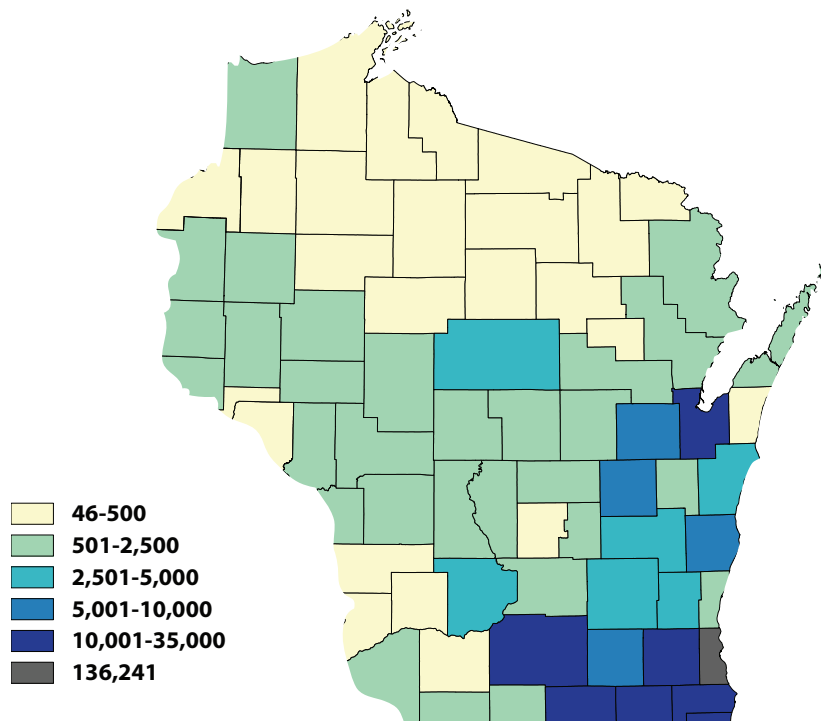
children had a good chance at achieving a promising future if they were successful in school.

- *Immigrant parents expressed a sense of personal sacrifice for their children.* Many consider themselves to be a sort of "sacrificial generation," and feel they must do whatever necessary to help their children get ahead. Parents expressed concern that if they do not "sacrifice," their children will suffer a fate similar to theirs and be relegated to a life dictated by low-paying jobs at the margins of society, and suffer a loss of dignity.

Association with non-Latina/os

- *Most associate with other Latina/os more than with non-Latina/os.* This was the case regardless of who their close friends were, or who they visit or choose to interact with in public social gatherings. Most prefer this ethnic association because of the sense of connection they felt due to shared cultural traits and language. They also interact with non-Latina/os on a daily basis at work, children's schools, while shopping for household goods, and in other public areas of their communities.
- *This strong sense of association diminishes in the second generation and beyond and amongst those with a college education.* Latina/os that fell within this group tended to be multi-cultural and multi-lingual (some primary English speakers) and able to easily navigate between Latina/os and non-Latina/os in personal, social and public spaces.

Latino population in Wisconsin counties in 2014



General barriers to integration for Latina/os

- *Language barrier:* Language restricts employment opportunities and results in lower paying jobs; presents barriers to communication with everyday service providers and school personnel; limits opportunities for educational advancement; strains parent-child relationships; and impedes official business such as seeking recourse or obtaining U.S. citizenship.
- *Poverty:* In urban areas, many laborers work multiple jobs, while in rural areas many work excessive hours. Despite working full time, poverty persists in many households. For the undocumented population in rural areas, the rescinding of drivers licenses precludes their ability to migrate in the off-season to find work and has caused hardship during winters for these families. Poverty is acutely felt in the immigrant population. Youth must take on family responsibilities instead of focusing on school and being active in extracurricular activities.

- *Discrimination:* Whether in public or at the workplace, many Latina/os experienced discrimination when interacting with service providers, employers, and law enforcement.
- *Immigrant status:* Undocumented participants cited the previous points, as well as fear of deportation, as factors causing familial strain and financial crisis, social isolation, and lack of recourse in seeking justice in instances of wrongdoing. The inability to obtain a driver's license means participants drive in fear to complete everyday tasks and participate in the community. Many families headed by an immigrant are often mixed-immigration status families, meaning that there are undocumented family members, authorized immigrants and U.S. citizens in the same family. Both unauthorized and mixed-status families share a constant "deportation anxiety" directly caused by fear of deportation of unauthorized immigrant family members.
- *Social interaction and civic participation:* Immigrant parents have low levels of social interaction with non-Latina/os outside of work settings and little civic participation. Second-generation

Latina/os are more integrated into their local community and interact with non-Latina/os at a much higher rate than both recent and long-term immigrant Latina/os.

Barriers to attending Cooperative Extension Programs¹

- *Low familiarity of UW-Extension, Cooperative Extension and programming:* Most study participants had little or no familiarity with UW-Extension or Cooperative Extension. Some recognized the name "Extension." Others had more familiarity with Cooperative Extension programming than with the institution itself. This points to an associational gap between programs and institutional recognition.
- *Barriers to attending programming:* Large proportions of the study participants reported the following barriers to attending Cooperative Extension programs:
 - language in which the program is delivered
 - lack of trust of the institution
 - personal schedule availability and length of program
 - lack of childcare

Identified educational needs²

- *Cooperative Extension personnel should have language and cultural competencies as they are critical components to build recognition of and trust in the institution.* Educators who are currently effective in addressing the educational needs of the Latina/o population possess many of these skills. Study participants also shared that educators often go beyond their job descriptions to help assist adult learners who are in need.
- The following are the highest priority programming choices identified by Latina/o parents for themselves and their children:



For parents

1. English literacy
2. Education and career pathways
3. Knowledge of personal rights

For youth in the household

1. General educational skills
2. Spanish and English literacy
3. Education and career pathway

Recommendations for UW-Extension

Institutional recommendations

We present the following as a means for Cooperative Extension to help facilitate positive integration of Latina/os into Wisconsin communities.

1 Create an institutional ethos that embraces Latina/o cultural and linguistic competence.

There is a need for UW-Extension to become more culturally and linguistically competent in order to effectively meet the needs of a growing and diverse Latina/o population. UW-Extension should commit to a long-term plan that transforms and institutionalizes basic Latina/o cultural norms and linguistic competence practices within the organization's ethos. Educators, Latina/o community members, key community stakeholders, and organizational partners noted that this is one of Extension's greatest areas of need and must be met in order to appropriately engage with this population.

2 Conduct meaningful and strategic outreach and marketing.

There is little to no recognition of UW-Extension or Cooperative Extension in the Latina/o community and with many Latina/o community-based service and religious organizations. This is especially the case in the non-urban areas where there is a



lack of personnel and organizational capacity to reach the Latina/o community. There is a need for Extension to conduct strategic, meaningful, and continuous outreach and marketing that targets Latina/o adults and youth. UW-Extension has traditionally conducted outreach and marketing with the use of flyers, word of mouth, and with the assistance of organizational partners. We learned that this population receives much of their primary information about services, educational opportunities, and community activities from trusted friends and peers, social media, religious and community organizations, and from radio programs (where available). It would benefit UW-Extension and Cooperative Extension to have trained regional staff who can engage with Latina/os in Spanish and English with the use of Spanish through social media (Facebook, Twitter, etc.), conduct outreach to Latina/o service organizations, and offer regular radio shows that highlight the activities of Cooperative Extension.

3 Community partnerships are vital to UW-Extension's mission and success.

Partnerships are an important component of UW-Extension's community outreach and engagement efforts. Partners are central to collaboration and help build a presence, extend the network of service, and establish a framework for Extension to carry out the Wisconsin Idea. The study revealed that almost half of Latina/o adults are involved in some sort of community, sport or religious organization. UW-Extension can capitalize on this involvement and continue to build or begin new relationships with the identified organizations. In this manner it can become a trusted and sought-after partner when adult and youth community educational opportunities and community capacity-building projects arise.

Specific programming recommendations

1 English and Spanish language programming for adults and youth

The most requested educational need for Latina/o immigrant adult learners was multi-level English literacy: learning to read, write, and communicate. English literacy is foundational and necessary to access most programming currently offered by Extension, for positive personal and familial social and economic integration and community capacity building. Latina/o parents also expressed the need for programming to assist their children to retain Spanish language and aspects of Latina/o cultural heritage and traits.



2 Educational pathways for parents and youth

Parents are aware of the social and economic benefits of education for their children and themselves. The study found that many parents are unaware of how their local education systems operate. They have little idea about how to be helpful in their children's education or how to achieve their own educational aspirations. Programming that teaches about local K12, state-wide higher education, and career development systems for adults and youth (technical colleges, UW system, and private colleges) would be valued, beneficial, and well used. Parents also expressed that one of the ways they could help youth succeed in K12 is to

offer programs for parents that teach basic education skills and support.

3 Civic and personal rights

There is little understanding of local and statewide governance and decision-making processes within the study population. This is the case for Latina/o immigrants and, to a lesser extent, with native born parents in both urban and rural areas. Most have not engaged in the civic or governance processes of their cities or counties. There is also limited interaction between local publicly elected officials and Latina/o communities.³ Culturally and linguistically competent civic and governance programs for adults are needed for the Latina/o community. These programs could be modeled after current youth governance programs. UW-Extension could also leverage its 100+ years of experience and relationships with counties and elected officials to serve as a liaison that provides opportunities for dialogue between Latina/o community members and public decision makers.

Knowledge about basic personal, worker and immigrant legal rights is an area of programming of great interest in the Latina/o community. Most immigrants have limited contact with formal government structures and are unfamiliar with their basic rights as members of the community. Programming to expand knowledge in these areas would be highly valued and would serve as a means to engage with and build trust, leading to smoother integration of Latina/o immigrant communities.

For more information:

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Notes

¹ Based on Survey data; reflect one-on-one and focus group findings.

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³ In urban areas there has been organizational activity and success in electing local and statewide representation. Milwaukee has elected a Latina to the State Assembly and in Milwaukee and Madison, Latinas/os have been elected to City and County Councils.