UNDERSTANDING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF COMMUNICATION AMONGST ADMINISTRATORS, LATINO STUDENTS, AND LA FAMILIA

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Abstract

Researchers have focused on the best methods for increasing communication with Latino students and their families with their schools; however, reversing the process and looking to see the perspective of the administration is often not conducted. The cultural and linguistic differences are often not discussed when new communication methods are utilized in a school. At Urban High School, a school in Massachusetts that has concerns over its changing demographics, the need to include parents and students in active communication is crucial. Therefore, the primary research question of this doctoral study was to what extent did the communication meet the needs of the Latino students, families, and administration at Urban High School?

This doctoral thesis discusses the results of a qualitative study; the researcher analyzed the effectiveness of forms of communication that affected the administrators, Latino students, and their families in Urban High School. Five members of the administration were interviewed to discuss their interpretation of the communication process at the high school as well as their concerns. It was determined that while some of the communication may be considered effective outreach, they are not meeting the needs of the demographics that are receiving them. As well, the delivery and timing of the communications may not be effective enough for the stakeholders in this system.

*Key Words: Latinos, communication, linguistics, literacy, perception, academics, culture, education*
Dedication

I would like to dedicate my doctoral thesis to Dziadziu for always reminding me that learning has no age and no limits. Thank you for being more than just a grandfather to share bagels with – you are my copilot.
Acknowledgements

My doctoral thesis is in memory of my father, a Mexican who became American and gave us the best that he had. I would like to acknowledge and thank my mother for supporting, listening, encouraging, and cheering me on. Without your endless support, I would not have completed the work to the best of my ability. I’d also like to thank Tricia, my sister, for all the Chapsticks, runs for coffee, laughter, and learning that ensues when we study together. Besides being a study buddy, you’ve been a friend.

I could not have completed this accomplishment without the help of Lynda Beltz, who guided me and encouraged me every step of the way. Thank you for being my mentor, my advisor, and my coach.

I also would like to thank my students and staff for cheering me on and believing in me. They understood that life was stressful, but we were in it together. I especially want to thank my teaching assistant Emily, who reminded me to stop and enjoy the sunshine and to focus on what was important.
Chapter One

Introduction

Incorporated as a city into the Commonwealth of Massachusetts in the 19th century, Urban, the fictionalized community on which this case study is based, was originally a mill town that primarily produced leather products for one-tenth of the American population. It eventually became known as an international port, a common meeting place for immigrants from England, Poland, Lithuania, Greece, and Ireland. The city lost its prominence during the Great Depression because local businesses had not properly upgraded the technology and transportation methods needed for their products—which as a result were more expensive than those of their competitors.

Despite the downturn in commerce, the population of Urban steadily increased during the twentieth century, with the population becoming increasingly diverse. With the promise of further industrialization, the city of Urban began to rebuild its historic mill buildings for housing and community purposes. The immigration population continued to grow, but this time with new faces from the Dominican Republic, Guatemala, and Puerto Rico. By 2009, Urban had one of the highest Latino and Spanish speaking populations in the state, and the numbers of Spanish speaking students in local schools rivaled those in many cities and towns in Arizona, California, and Florida. Inevitably, as the graduation rates of the Hispanic students continued to lag far behind those of non-Hispanic students, attention turned to Urban’s public school system, which seemed to many to be failing its Latino and Hispanic students.
Purpose of Study

By 2010, after Urban High School almost lost its accreditation with the New England Accreditation for Schools and Colleges, it became clear that instruction, leadership, and communication had to improve if the diverse population of students was to receive the best education possible. Many of the school system’s administrators and teachers realized that some of its systems had not evolved because there had never been a need to evaluate them. However, with fewer and fewer parents showing up for Parent Teacher Conferences and MCAS results that were unsatisfactory and apparently continuing to fall, (MCAS, the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System is the state’s standard assessment for academic proficiencies), it was time to discover where, beyond the building and instruction, the school could be more effective.

The Need for a Communication Audit

By the end of the first decade of the twenty-first century, it was apparent that there was an urgent need to assess Urban High School’s communication system to determine if the faculty was meeting the needs of the current Latino community, which accounted for over 23% of the student body. Because communication between parents and school officials is a necessity for student success, it is important to determine to what extent, if any, the documents and school’s communication are effective. The purpose of this study is to explore how language and culture affects communication offered from Urban High School and to determine how effective they were for the Latino students and their families as the students approached graduation.
Understanding how, why, and what official and unofficial communication took place during the 2010-2011 school year promised to offer insight into the culture and behaviors of the members of Urban High School and promised to allow the researcher to make connections with the current educational research.

One method of assessment in this qualitative case study includes interviews with the high school administrators, the people who create the documents and communication for the students and their families; the participants in the study offered information that could be analyzed and discussed in terms of their understanding of communication’s impact on Latino’s students. Another form of data assessment was analyzing sampled documents for their tone, purpose, level of language and readability. By analyzing the information as primary documents, it was possible to discover patterns of textual evidence that affect the communication patterns of the administrators with Latino students and their parents.

Research Questions

1. How effective was the communication that Urban High School offers to Latino Families/students after MCAS scores were released at the beginning of the students’ junior year in 2010-2011?

2. How effective is the protocol for communication about academic achievements such as MCAS, graduation, or preparing for post-secondary education?
   a. The MCAS, the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System, is a series of standardized tests that is a requirement for all public school students in the
Commonwealth. This system evaluates the school, the district, and the student’s ability to meet the state’s expectation of literacy.

3. How effective was the communication that Urban High School offered to Latino Families/students as the students prepared for graduation?
   
a. *Communication* is defined as information exchanged in written and/or oral messages. They may be in English or Spanish. Examples included letters, fliers, district wide alerts and emails, and the school or district websites.
   
b. *Perceived* indicates the understanding of the communication, not the actual amount of documentation sent or received.
   
c. *Latino* was defined as “persons or communities of Latin American origin.” Most of the Latino population in Urban consists of Puerto Ricans, Dominicans, Colombians, and Mexicans.
   
d. Urban High School consists of staff, administrators, and faculty including guidance and coordinators of MCAS and graduation programs.
   
e. *After MCAS scores* suggests a date of October 1 of the junior year; it was at this point that students learned their scores on their MCAS exams taken sophomore year, and their potential paths toward academic achievement.

4. How are protocols understood by the administrators and staff who created these communications?
5. How did the administration’s perspective – those who attempted to inform or contact parents or guardians– influence the language presented in the communication presented to the Latino students of Urban High School and their parents?

**Statement of the Problem**

Over the years, the community of Urban changed because Latinos from surrounding communities relocated to Urban. This change affected all systems in the community: business, social, and school. In a community that had been predominantly Eurocentric but welcoming to diversity for many decades, the inclusion of a demographic with not only different culture but also different languages was difficult.

In the last decade, Urban High school saw a dramatic change in its student demographics. In ten years (2000-2010), the district experienced almost a three-fold increase in the percentage of Limited English Proficient (LEP) students, referred to in Urban and elsewhere as ELL [English Language Learner] students. As Figure 1 indicates, the last decade has seen an increase in the students who fit the definition of an “at-risk Latino student:” a minority student who is low-income and may have one or more other educational concerns such as special needs or English Language Learning. According to a district report, these population numbers continue to grow in the district, and in fact, as of March 2011, the district had increased its free lunch percentage to 42%, which indicates that the population that attends the public school is low or reduced income.
Figure 1. Adapted from the DESE: changes in population in Urban Public Schools

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<thead>
<tr>
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<th>1999-2000</th>
<th>2009-2010</th>
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<tr>
<td>Hispanic or Latino</td>
<td>14.2</td>
<td>22.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First Language not English</td>
<td>11.8</td>
<td>15.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limited English Proficient</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>6.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low-income</td>
<td>26.8</td>
<td>42.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special Education</td>
<td>19.8</td>
<td>20.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Free Lunch</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>35.3</td>
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This table indicates an increase in every subgroup in the district; these changes were originally seen as an anomaly in the district, but it became the norm within a decade. It was important to recognize this change and lack of initial recognition of new demographics because that understanding and attention might have contributed to the strategies and developments for these subgroups in the district.

**Urban High School as Bellwether**

Urban High School is a prime school to analyze for communication because not only does it have a mobile, diverse population but it also is a Level Three District, which means that it is not making adequate progress towards improvement. Therefore, the district intends to seek improvement and efficiency wherever possible. Many school districts across the nation are
seeing similar trends in their own school; the increase of Latino students who are also low income and have low literacy are the same students who have difficulty succeeding in secondary school. Consistently between 2007 and 2011, Urban High School failed to meet Massachusetts’s expectations for Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP), which was to have 90% of each demographic meet proficient or better on the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System, commonly referred to as MCAS. The Latino demographic, the special education demographic, and the low-income demographic consistently miss the standard for AYP, and this deficit is a serious concern because it meant that the school is not only failing state and national standards but also its own mission statement. Urban High School’s lack of Adequate Yearly Progress and position as a Level Three school (a school close to being taken over by the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education) reveals the necessity for effective change in the district, and communication is a strategic tool for increasing the success of Latino students (Crosnoe, 2009).

Identifying communication behaviors between the Latino community and the school should offer insight for administrators and teachers at Urban High School; the observations made in this study might be used in the district to help the Latino demographic reach its academic potential. In order to determine its communication effectiveness, Urban High School administrators must analyze the presentation of their current communication standards and interaction. Analyzing the communications and interactions of Urban High School creates observable qualitative data that helped researchers determine cultural, behavioral, and linguistic connections between the school system and Latinos.
Changes in Languages

One example of the resistance to recognize the change in demographics was the lack of adaptations on all of the local districts’ school websites. Urban Public School’s district website offered some school registration information and PDF documents in Spanish; neighboring communities that have even larger Latino populations were not as accommodating on their websites: the next closest city’s public school’s website had some links, but the links that offer assistance to those who speak Spanish referred to phone numbers to the school’s respective central office – and the information is in English. However, the communities had begun to include the cultures and languages into the local businesses. For example, in surrounding cities, the movie theatres (such as Showcase Cinema and Lowe’s AMC Imax theatre) presented commercials and advertisements in Spanish; the billboards, the business signs, and the fliers distributed by local businesses were in Spanish as well as English. The bilingual communications became part of the inner cities’ culture. As well, the schools slowly recognized the importance of including their Latino students’ culture and language in all efforts to promote student success.

Student success and communication changes are not solely a concern in Urban and its surrounding area: other areas of the United States are learning to communicate with their diverse populations. For instance, at Lebanon Valley College in Annville, Pennsylvania, William J. Brown, vice president of enrollment, adopted webpages that were translated to Spanish for the benefit of the parents. The purpose of the translation and presentation of information was to invite the Spanish speaking parents to participate in their (often English-speaking) students’
education (Hoover, 2011). While this was only one example of how an educational system is adapting to accommodate its community, this accommodation of language and culture is part of a change that is occurring --and not only at public school institutions. Urban High School recognized the need for change and attempted some implementation in a similar fashion.

Some districts, especially in the Southwestern regions of the United States, began the engagement of parents at while the students were young because they realize that there were basics in the education system that Latino families do not recognize. They also set out to establish an early safe environment for the families so that they feel they are free to ask questions and participate in a meaningful way. This program, when completed in this district, not only led to Latino students receiving their high school diplomas but it prepared them for college as well. The parents spoke positively of the reinforced communication because it helped them become part of the academic culture (Turner, 2011).

At Elk Grove High School near Chicago, there were changes to the school’s communication methods that influenced the Latino students’ academic successes. Elk Grove High School has a population of 2100 students and boasts that 94% of the graduates from the high school strives for post-secondary learning. This school saw an 11% increase in the population of immigrant families in five years, so the staff, being proactive leaders in their community, created a safe environment for immigrant families as well as local Latino families to explore and learn about the local school system. Aleman and Sosa, teachers at the school, credited the creation of mentoring programs and Spanish-language parenting classes as sources of the high (79%) Latino graduation rate.
In this school district, the staffs created a specific parent-based English Language Learner curriculum to help the parents become involved in the district. According to Aleman and Sosa, the Latino parents in the district have become more involved in their students’ academic success, and they even implemented a Latino Parent Council. The LPC has a mission statement as well as a consistent monthly meeting held in the school library - and their meetings are promoted as a celebration of the family and future. Elk Grove High School proactively strives toward a safe environment for all members of its community so those members will have access to the academic support their students need.

In California, there were more concerns about the Latino population’s inability to break into post-secondary education, but the conversation focuses on schools that are successful and not on potential factors that could lead to improvement. Hall wrote that “the study by Education Trust-West, an Oakland-based organization focused on issues faced by minorities and low-income youths, determined that African American and Latino ninth-grade students from the Class of 2010 heading to college trailed white and Asian students by up to 30 percent. The rates for low-income students were similar.” Many of the schools attempted to remediate the scores of the Latino students by presenting them with extra math and English courses; however, that did not improve their success rate with graduation or post-graduation plans. The personnel in the district mentioned that preparation for college begins before high school, but there was no discussion of communication and the importance of including family – just attempting to fix the concerns late in the system. The importance of mentioning schools such as the west coast districts is that they recognize the dire need to improve the education of the Latino students so
that they can participate in college, community college, and other programs, but there is little direction in preparing communication for their families or the students.

**Developing Methods of Communication**

In order to increase real time communication with members of Urban High School, the administrators implemented programs such as an electronic alert system and emails while continuing the previous practice of paper documentation and phone calls. However, the Latino parent and student populations still did not respond to the administrators’ communications. Recognizing the concern for active effective communication, Urban Public Schools has the potential to be a pioneer for the integration of Latino cultural and language with communications that lead to Latino academic achievement if there are specific patterns of behavior discovered that may be impacting the previously determined behaviors, cultural and linguistic expectations of Latino families and students.

Although Urban High School sends out information, many parents do not receive the communications by phone, email or mail as the school anticipates they will. The school utilizes an alert system, which is a school-wide email and phone call service that provides simultaneous release of important information to all students, and the administrators also releases fliers, emails, and webpage updates with the intent of communicating with Latino and non-Latino students and parents within the district. Communication with Latino parents is difficult because many of the parents do not understand Urban High School’s protocols and are not fluent in
English or fluent with the cultural traditions of the school. In many Latino cultures, parents do not typically anticipate interacting with the secondary school, nor do they plan to speak with the teachers; this is the opposite in American school culture where the parents are encouraged to communicate and participate with school and teacher functions.

There are caveats to the systems that were chosen for this district’s use. There are numerous reasons as to why Latino families (and non-Latino families as well) may not receive the communications intended for them – phone numbers may be disconnected, blocked, or wrong; many low-income households do not have computers or smart phone technology, and often times, many students intercept the information and discard it before the parents review it. The lack of control that the administrators’ have on the receipt of the message greatly affects the ability of the intended receiver and blocks a possible response.

In addition, language concerns also burden the communication system. With a variety of fonts, symbols, and letterheads, the message, which is usually reported in English, can appear overwhelming and difficult to people who do not fluently speak English. Furthermore, as explained by one of the elementary principals, the Spanish versions often appear insulting because they appear automated and contain literal translations – which may be perceived as ignorance or insult. The discussion of the language in the communication – so early and noticed by the administrators even in other buildings and at other grade levels – indicates that there is a need for further dissection of the communication and understanding for the entire Urban population.
Creators of Communication

Urban High School’s faculty and administrators, although many residing in Urban, often unknowingly participate in the disconnect of communication. The actual process of mass communication and the language used may concern school administrators because not all of the members of the audience receive the intended messages. One concern that might have affected the communication to and from Urban High School is the education and language divide. The level of language utilized by the administrators and faculty is entirely different from that of the diverse populations within the community; it is rather academic and formal English. There are also cultural expectations – such as expecting parents and community to recognize school events as common place – that do not align with the cultural expectations now present in the Urban community.

The cultural expectations and behaviors that the faculty and administrators perform daily also do not align to the various expectations of the community. At Urban High School, only a handful of teachers are of minority decent, and nearly all administrators are non-Latino alumni from the school. Many of the administrators who develop the communication hold graduate degrees in education or equivalent majors and have participated in the school for years. Often, these faculty members were high school graduates here as well. The difference in education level and cultural background consequently may prevent Latino members of Urban High School from grasping the significance of the messages intended for them. One of the key points of this study is to examine the purposes and audiences of the documents created by the staff and
administrators so that it can be determined if the language and presentation would be effective for the actual audience.

Significance

Communication is a key tool for developing adolescents into productive members of not only the school but also society, and it is a necessary connection between parents and school. Creating a learned student is a community effort, and all involved people must receive feedback in a timely manner so that they can effectively plan and develop for success (McNulty and Besser, 2011). Research reveals a correlation between parental involvement and student success; the connection at the high school level might influence the dropout rates and education-based difficulties present in this high school (McNulty and Besser, 2011). Communicating influences the academics of the Latino student: his maturing into a citizen is stifled without the full support system that should exist and often does exist; in an urban school it might be difficult to locate the social support systems (Brint, 2006, Fullan, 2007). The communication between school, Latino students, and their parents influences the educational process at Urban High School and influences the effectiveness of feedback and further student development. With feedback and implemented strategies, administrations, teachers, and students can build visions for success.

Brint (2006) states that educational systems are not only for teaching curriculum but also for developing empathetic citizens who are capable of producing and assisting in their society. Without the proper connection to the complete system of parents, other teachers, and community, students will not have the ability to practice proper social cues and learn from successful citizens.
Latino students will not be able to participate in society or interpret social cues properly to make such connections. They must be aware of the vastness of their potential support system and trust it so that they can understand the impact that they will have on their society as members.

It is important to notice that, Brint’s focus is on the students, not on the adults in the learning community; similarly, the mission statement at Urban High School states that all students will learn to “read, write, and speak in effective English.” While the school’s focus is on the students, it is important to recognize that some parents simply cannot meet those expectations, and that is a fact that the school must factor into their own communication. Some parents have different levels of ability and language; some of those differences occur in languages that are not English; therefore, assuming their literacy in any language may create a miscommunication about the Latino parents’ and students’ level of comprehension. Assumptions about the cultural and linguistic differences may cause conflict in developing the Latino students’ abilities to achieve their academic goals.

Besides cultural assumptions, Brint (2006) also mentions that social systems, such as a public high school, containing hidden curricula that many non-Latino members of the community may understand, but the pattern of behavior and presentation of behavior might not be noticeable to those who are unfamiliar with the system. This thought returns to the idea of the faculty and administrators who graduated from Urban High School; for them, the cycle of conferences, report cards, and letters from the school is commonplace. However, it is possible that some forms of traditional communication and outreach were available but the annual cycle
of expected communication (such as conferences and report cards) was not interpreted by Latino families as important or necessary for success.

Over time, many students at Urban High School anticipate receiving their report cards and progress reports in homeroom, and there is no check in the systems that examines whether the parents (regardless of the demographic) have seen the reports and understand their implications. There is an urban legend of sorts at the school that surfaces occasionally; there is talk of a Latino student whose mother confronted a guidance counselor for not contacting her about report cards. There is confusion until she finally realizes her son has failed his classes; she thought the F meant “fantastico” – and while this anecdote may be false, it emphasizes some of the concerns at Urban High School. Some parents are unaware of the events and communications from the high school, and the lack of information for these parents and inability to communicate in a timely, effective manner deters the student’s ability to succeed.

Creating Clarity

Urban High School has an open system that recognizes its need to forge a connection amongst the members of the community. As discussed in *Theories of educational leadership and management*, Bush would see that the open social system, or the connection of people from the school, administration, and community as well as the students and family, must connect on a basic level. Bush (2007) recognized that a “vision must be communicated in a way which secures commitment among members of the organization” (p. 6). The dropout rates, at 13.5% for the Latino community, a number that was double the state rate and the lack of Adequate Yearly
Progress, is acknowledged by Urban High School, and the school recognizes that it has to understand the concerns of the demographics in order to envision the students’ academic achievements. Recognizing the changing cultures within the school might promote positive behaviors and expectations at Urban High School on a truly altruistic, social level.

**Theoretical Frameworks**

The major connections amongst the various theoretical researchers reveal one important connection to understanding and creating a true learner: humanity. In order to effectively communicate in or out of an educational system, the educators must take into account the students that they teach and how actions and attitudes influence them; in certain situations, the parents must also be considered learners as well. The theoretical discussion determines that it is necessary to understand the person, the emotions, the context of the situation, and the leadership developments so that educators might understand and strategize to help the person develop a commitment to lifelong learning and achievement.

**Individualism in Education**

Rousseau (1762: 1979) explained in *Emile* that he believed in the freedom of the individual in society. He argued that education is a naturally occurring process and had to happen in “simplicity” “adapted to the developing needs of the individuals” (p.49). The important development was the “individual awareness in social relationships” and developing “social virtue” – and most importantly, helping others and creating an “awareness of the common good”
(p.49). Essentially, educators and parents must remember they share a goal for the common good: creating a solid, learned individual. Creating such an individual depends on direct interaction and communication.

Rousseau also clearly discussed the separation of members of society and the exclusion of foreigners. His words were far stronger than what many would use to describe the situation at Urban High School, but his point was clear: citizens are often more apt to take care of their own before helping foreigners – even if the foreigners wish to become, as he called them, patriots. This contradiction clearly juxtaposes with Brint’s (2006) argument that public schools create democratic, productive citizens. Both must be taken into account: human nature suggests people leave out the foreigners, but school philosophy wishes to adapt them to the environment to make them productive workers. Rousseau redeemed his idea by explaining “the great thing is to be kind to our neighbours” (p. 10). Regardless of what is presented by the members of the incoming community, it is important to remember the different experiences are what creates a well-rounded individual.

However, the evolution of society affects the development of students. Maddock (1999) argues when “the state has failed to resolve current economic difficulties,” then the people “lose their motivation to engage in social activities,” and this “loss of morale” influences the “schools and lies at the base of their major failings.” If there was a lack of morale and lack of communication, it might permeate through the staff and students at Urban High School.
To continue the concept of easy fixes and loss of humanity, Freire’s *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* reminds educators of a very important concept that could be forgotten easily: students are not objects. Even though educators want to see the students as a whole “student body” or “clientele,” at the core, they are humans; educators are developing young humans who will affect humankind. Appropriately, Freire pointed out that the oppressed were not outside of the society but in it. They recognized that they did not fit the expectations of the society in which they resided – but also that society should not expect them to fit. These students should be allowed to become individuals while still maintaining their crucial roles as learners and citizens. One of the major goals, then should be to help the student embrace his culture while learning to participate in the culture of others: acceptance.

Students, then, need to be accepted as well; Freire also explained that students cannot be treated as “‘containers,’ or as ‘receptacles’ to be ‘filled’ by the teacher. [The preconceived notion was] that the more completely she filled the receptacles, the better a teacher she is. The more meekly the receptacles permit themselves to be filled, the better students they are” (p.33) Therefore, part of the larger problem is that “education thus becomes an act of depositing, in which the students are the depositories and the teacher is the depositor” and the students are not only not learning to critically think and develop as a learner, but also they cannot necessarily process the information in the manner that many educational systems expect them to. He demanded that students be treated as people who can learn and develop as critical thinkers – not just adopt the style and ideas of those around them.
Including the Individual

In order to educate a student, the educators must not look at him as a person who only exists for six hours a day. They must consider who he is and where he is in life as well so that they can help that student realize and strive for his goals. Vygotsky’s (1978) zone of proximal development suggested that people can only learn what is presented to them and what is at their developmental level. Most high school students should be in the later stages of Piaget’s findings: that is, they should be able to make abstract thought and determine consequences, but many students are not fully matured to an adult level of critical thinking (Piaget, 1958). One crucial concern is that many new students from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds might not be in the same zone of proximal development as those of their age group, which is how they are classified at the American high school level (Hirsch, 1987).

The zone of proximal development is important for creating knowledge and learning beyond what the student can do by himself; with others, he is able to learn more: Vygotsky (1934:1997) suggests that “this difference between the child’s actual level of development and the level of performance that he achieves in collaboration with the adult, defines the zone of proximal development” (p. 209). One of the concepts that Vygotsky (1978) shared about his concept of zone of proximal development is that children learn from the adults in their lives; they learn through example and action.

Tharp and Gallimore (1988) suggested that the proximal zone goes beyond education and testing students – it extends into their social development as well. While educators might supply
them with content and education experiences, the adults in the child’s personal life would also influence his or her own zone. Vygotsky (1962) also mentions that social context and learning cannot be separated; that is, in order to understand what a person knows, one must also understand the social context in which he learned. The student’s perception of what he learned and experienced might differ because of his prior knowledge (Hirsch, 1987).

Therefore, with at-risk families, there may be a chance that the educational learning might need to include the family in the zone of proximal learning; the parents may not be able to teach the students the appropriate responses and learned behavior because they are not aware of the proper responses. This misconnection may occur if the family has migrated and the context of the information and the culture of learning have significantly changed from the original zone. It might be necessary for all of the members of the school faculty to assume a role of an educator not only to the students but also to the family to help them understand the maturity and necessity for a complete secondary education.

**Critical Theory**

One other theory that clearly exhibits the aspects of the humanity was critical theory. This theory relies on understanding the emotions and perceptions of the demographic in the learning environment as well as those surrounding it. If school systems replicates real life social statuses and cause biases, and if school systems also caters to those who developed them, then there is a need to recreate the learning environment so that all people and all demographics have
a chance to succeed (Maddock, 1999). According to Maddock, it is not the original plan that has a flaw; people failed to see that the input to the plan – the students and parents–changed and therefore do not necessarily meet the previous expectations set forth for them. It becomes increasingly difficult for these members who do not fit the society’s perceived expectations to succeed when they do not have or know the requirements to do so.

Social statuses were not the only concern; Callahan (2004) explained that as well as positive emotions, the most prevalent were “fear, pride, anger, disappointment, embarrassment, humiliation, excitement, and anticipation” and he warns that “oppression, silencing, inequality, and injustice can also occur in any learning context” (p. 76). He stated that “a primary goal of critical theorists is to empower the oppressed to transform the inequalities and injustices inherent in current social systems and structures” (p. 77).

Empowering the oppressed is necessary work in an urban community. The perception of the behavior will cause “the power or status differences” and possibly remorse or other behaviors motivated by emotion (p. 79). Whilst negative emotions can often cause withdrawal and discord, positive behaviors can create bonding and further cultural development (Ramirez, 2003).

The students and parents were not the only members at Urban High School who needed to discover techniques for understanding; the internal conflicts and triumphs of the learners must also be applied to the leaders and therefore faculty of the school. The leaders have to understand and learn the strategies of critical theory – requiring them to understand, interpret, react, and strategize for different emotional responses to changes and learning. Callahan (2004) reasserts that “the importance of not individualizing and internalizing conflictual emotions, recognizing
the appearance and meaning of emotions as they appear in relationships, and providing a concrete process to address how to make constructive change are all vital” for academic achievement (p. 82). The purpose then was to create a positive experience out of every interaction and communication.

Brint (2006) explained that the American school system was originally designed to develop agricultural students. They were all of the same background and class. Massachusetts school systems are not used to the multicultural demographics that require a variety of accommodations to meet academic expectations; the original school systems were based upon the state’s early educational curriculum of agriculture and core subjects such as mathematics, grammar, and classics. The American school system has not evolved over time to consider its new students who are not of the same societal class, of the same academic ability, or have the same feelings that decades of students had developed. The teachers were trained on the previous system and were not initially taught to adapt to their new students. Critical theory is a necessary development for the American school system because educators need to evolve and understand their new graduating classes; through this research proposal, Urban High School educators might find this opportunity to create new forms of communication with their demographics.

**Understanding Change and Leadership**

Change and leadership in organizations often created more of a reaction than was anticipated. In order to understand how the members of the organization would react to upcoming changes, one must consider the repercussions, the attitudes, and the behaviors of each person within the open and the closed system (Fullan, 2009). Currently, the change in the school
climate and demographics might create different perceptions within the building, and this change must be analyzed so that leadership could determine how effective it will be at the high school level and how each group affected by change will react. All members of the faculty, all families, and all students must be considered.

Szabla (2007) explains that perception, the person’s interpretation and understanding of a situation, is clearly relevant to that person’s behavior, attitude, and performance. The “cognitive, emotional, and intentional response differences” of the members of the organization - not only the students but also the teachers and administration -- are greatly affected by any change; the person’s perception to the change and the implementations by leaders can greatly affect the development of further work within the system.

Currently, reform and redevelopment of curriculum and leadership in education affects all parties in the system, and this change is often presented as corrective, but often it was not presented to the members of the organization as rewarding for all members. Chinn and Benne (1969) developed the types of leadership that could essentially cause change; currently, the plan to work with Latino students who fit the at-risk category has been treated as “the application of power in some form, political or otherwise” and that need for “compliance” might be one of the reasons that “strategies might appeal less” (p.25). Understanding how effective communication was between the school and the Latino parents and students in the community helped researchers understand attitudes toward academic achievement.
Leadership will be a key role to developing students who learn for the sake of learning and who are part of the community. It is the leader’s responsibility to be sure that everyone in the system understands how understanding effective communication will benefit all members of the system; for example, the teacher will benefit with an eager student who is willing to learn, the community will later benefit, with a hard, innovative worker, and the student will be able to continue his achievements on his own personal level. Politically, the school will hypothetically meet educational standards and raise the academic standards for the students of the organization.

Summary

Communication with administrators and the school system is a concern with Latino families and their students; it is an important tool for helping the students meet academic goals, and determining the effectiveness of the communication may have results that conflict with the expectations of the district. Urban High School had a previously established system of communication, but with the change in demographic, it was important to analyze and determine how and why it the information might have been perceived as it was – especially by the newest demographic.

There is no doubt that Latino families are capable of creating lifelong learners, as they often have the support systems at home and cultural expectations for self-respect and education (Hugo, 2009). The students believe they are receiving a good education and wish to continue it; however, often it is the systems outside of the school such as employment and money that prevent them from giving their best at school (Brint, 2006, Fullan, 2007). When the students are
in need, it is most important for the family, the student, and the administrator (as well as teacher) to communicate, but it might be the cultural and linguistic differences at home that allow the student to fumble.

Although the student might have adapted himself to the surroundings of the school, the school system has not adapted itself to the new cultures in its district. If the school system wanted to include the students and their families while creating a new pattern of behavior for citizens, then it needed to establish the behavior early and often (Brint, 2006, Maddock, 1999). There was a possibility that a change in the school’s behavior would influence the community that was unsure of how to reach out to the school (Hirsch, 1987).

This exploratory case study sought to determine how effective the communication at Urban High School was for Latino students and families. Literature was reviewed (Chapter two) to grasp the foundations already created by previous qualitative and quantitative studies. Then, using theories about perception, linguistics, and cultural differences, the researcher organized and analyzed the documentations from the district and interviewed the administrators most responsible for creating them to understand how they interpreted their communications with Latino families and students. The methodology was discussed in chapter three, and the data, findings, and conclusions were discussed in chapters four and five.
Chapter Two

Introduction

In order to understand how effective the communication has been with Latino population at Urban High School, one must understand the expectations of the demographic as well as understand the importance of perception and presentation in communication. This literature review focuses on understanding the academic achievement, behavior, and social patterns of Latino students in the United States. In order to conduct an appropriate review of the effectiveness of communication amongst Latino students, their parents, and Urban High School administrators, one must understand what cultural and linguistic concerns greatly affect both the family and the school system. Determining the biggest obstacles for these families as well as the cultural enhancements offered by the families helped researchers understand how many Latino students perceive their academic experience and how to help them succeed.

Next, the research delves into the importance of perception because the view that people place on the information they are receiving greatly impacts their interpretation and reaction. Research indicates perception affects behavior and attitude. Finally, there is discussion of the perception of the visual and linguistic presentation of communication and how it can greatly affect shared communication and its impact.

A Larger Closing of the “Gap”
The achievement gap is not exclusive to Urban High School; in fact, this is an educational trend that is a constant focus of researchers and school districts. The achievement gap between Latino and non-Latino students had slowly decreased in the United States, but the cultural and communication differences still influence the actual progress Latino students make (Hugo, 2009). According to the Pew Hispanic Center’s research, over the last nine years, there had been a 3.2% increase in the Latino population in the United States. Hugo (2009) reported that according to the National Assessment of Educational Progress, “Latinos who are in middle school have a significant gap in reading and mathematics achievement with their non-Hispanic white and Asian student counterparts.” This significant gap could have a great effect on a Latino student’s ability to achieve, his morale in school environments, and the likelihood he will continue his education at the post-secondary level.

Post-secondary education is a dream that many Latino students wish to achieve. Hugo (2009) reported that 89% of “Latino young adults say that a college education is important for success in life, yet only about half that number—48%—say that they themselves plan to get a college degree.” While many Latinos hope to advance to a post-secondary education, these same students struggle to achieve high school graduation; it is important to recognize that many Latino students expressed a strong desire to continue their education and become lifelong learners because the dream contradicts the societal stereotypical expectations thrust upon them.

Nearly three-quarters (74%) of all 16- to 25-year-old Latino survey respondents who cut their education short during or right after high school say they did so because they had to offer
financial or emotional support to their families. Other reasons given for dropping out of high school included poor English skills (cited by about half of respondents who cut short their education), a dislike of school, and a feeling that they didn’t need more education. Latino youths, at least 66% of them, believed they are getting a good education at their high schools; they believe that their teachers were interested, willing, and able to help them achieve their goals toward graduation (Hugo, 2009).

Latino students believed that they received thorough education that will help them meet their future goals, and their goals often include postsecondary education. The Pew Hispanic Research Center states that “more than three-quarters (77%) of Latinos ages 16 to 25 say their parents think going to college is the most important thing to do after high school. Just 11% say their parents think getting a full-time job after high school is the most important thing to do.” This data was important to consider as American school systems reflect on the changes in Latino and non-Latino school cultures because the general consensus shows both post-secondary education and high school education were considered important elements of academic achievement.

The Latino Reality

Although there are many different cultural aspects to the population, Latino students are grouped in the same category when reporting in studies. However, there are great differentiations in culture, language, and location: Latinos are not a monolith. The reality in the national public education system was that in 2007, the U.S. Census Bureau reported that 42.7% of all Latino students between the ages of 16-24 did not achieve any high school credential: credential is
defined as receiving a high school diploma or earning a General Education Diploma (GED). Somehow, the expectations and perceptions that were discussed in the research on Latinos (such as the surveys by the PEW organization and the US government) were not reflected in the statistical data. Both parties – the high school and the Latino family - wished to see success, but the obstacles impeding graduation and post-secondary education had yet to be fully identified.

High schools and Latino families wished to see improvement in their Latino students, but on a state and regional level, specific data showed that school communities’ ability to meet their own expectations and achievements for Latino students was underdeveloped. Throughout the United States, minority and special education subgroups have difficulty meeting the expectations of No Child Left Behind (2001), and because of these difficulties, they were often unable to meet the levels of academic achievement such as high school graduation. Other factors of their lives, such as early pregnancy rates and necessary employment, might also impede their success. The Pew Research center stated that 66% of Latinos residing in the United States were born here and might migrate to different parts of the United States. Because of the migration, moving during the school year or relocating to a new district might disrupt a student’s learning, and it might cause apprehension for both the students and the parents; while this was a consistent concern for all parents and children who move, many Latino students were more likely to face this concern and face it more often than once, as many Latino parents relocated as needed to provide for their families.
Another disruption in a student’s learning process might be the cultural barriers between the American school system and his own family culture. Many of the Latinos born in the United States speak English as their first language, but their parents speak Spanish as their first language and they might have difficulty interacting with the English speaking administrators and faculty in the school system. At Urban High School, it was common to hear a Latino student retort to a teacher that calling his parent “won’t matter” because the parent would not understand what was reported; the Latino students sometimes use reactive responses such as this example as a form of defense mechanism. There were cultural and linguistic gaps occurring not only at school, but also at home.

**Local Concerns, Growing Interests**

Throughout the state of Massachusetts, Latino students did not reach what Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) considered adequate yearly progress in English Language Arts or Mathematics; these results were based on the sophomore level of the MCAS. Massachusetts had been using the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System as its assessment, and a score of proficient required 90.2% of a percentile to meet the goal in order to claim progress. Since 2003, every high school student performed a series of standardized exams that DESE utilized to assess the achievements of not only the individual students but also the schools on the national standards in the No Child Left Behind Act (2001), as well as the state’s own curriculum frameworks.
In Massachusetts, there was growing concern for the education and achievements of the Latino population. Across the state, 14.8% of the students (out of 957,053) are Latino. Researchers speculate that this percentage would double by 2020. Some of these students also fall into other subgroups that have not performed well; 32.9% of the students in Massachusetts also qualified as low-income (DESE).

The state’s data shows that out of 10,471 Latino students in Massachusetts, 20.2% drop out of high school and do not graduate or receive any sort of academic achievement. This number was extraordinarily high when compared to the state average of non-Latino students who drop out, which is 8.2% of 76,308 students. The state recognizes the discrepancy in numbers and need for improvement, and therefore, Latino education became a current theme in the discussion of No Child Left Behind.

**Exceptional Traits in Latino Students Who Succeed**

It has been proven that Latinos can make the same achievements as their non-Latino student counterparts (Hein, 2003; Olivos, 2009; Ramirez, 2003; Ryan et al, 2010). For the sake of the literature review and research, Latinos will be defined as Smith et al (2008) defined Hispanics: “by the National Center for Education Statistics (N.C.E.S., 2002) as persons of “Cuban, Mexican, Puerto Rican, Southern or Central American or other Spanish culture or origin regardless of race” (p.1). He also predicts that they will “have become the largest ethnic group in the U.S. (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000)” (p. 8). This rising demographic needs to have strategic plans for achievement.
Support Systems

Nesman (2002) produced a qualitative study in which he interviewed Latino focus groups; the students discussed their different reasons for losing interest and eventually dropping out of high school. This researcher worked with the Latino Coalition in Florida (a nonprofit organization that helps research and develop policies to advocate for Latinos) to produce the information and brainstorm how to improve the Latino student’s chances of graduating from high school. The research revealed that as well as having a strong family support system that communicated with the school, there were also external obstacles that could easily influence the student’s development and academic achievement.

In the focus group with at-risk students, Nesman (2002) mentioned that negative peer pressure influenced their ability to stay in school. Most of the male students had expulsions that stemmed from behavioral issues, and the researchers found that their consistent bad behavior in classrooms spiraled out of control because of lack of communication and little understanding of the school’s expectations. Often times, the students found that their external behaviors would interfere with their school work and school environment.

External concerns were often reasons for not completing high school or continuing to further education. The students explained that money was often more important than education, and that when learning became hard, they became disengaged. They mentioned that if their parents had been aware of the difficulties they were experiencing at school, then they would have wanted to assist their children and intervene with the administrators’ help. However, the parents
would often lack the knowledge and communication skills necessary to collaborate with the administrators at the school. The students also mentioned a distinct lack of community support and the lack of necessary communications and motivation from all members of their social system.

There was immediately a mention of a communication barrier, as 55% of the students who participated in the focus groups spoke Spanish at home. The Latino students perceived that the staff and administrators viewed the Latino students as “being nobody” and that faculty did not understand their needs; they admitted to wishing the school had more available communicators and more interaction with the students and parents. Nesman’s research proved that not only was there specific concern that the students had about the school’s communication with them and the families but also that their frustrations grew out of the lack of communication.

This research revealed the importance of the communication with the students as well as with the Latino parents; it will be necessary to determine how the communication provided by Urban High School’s staff and administrators includes the Latino community to include them in the school learning environment. If communication is happening, then it needs to be analyzed and its effectiveness and consistency should be determined.

**Optimal Performance from Latinos**

In the best social and academic circumstances, there are effective consistent traits of Latino students who show consistent academic performance. These traits contribute to optimal
performance in grades and achievements such as high school graduation and standardized testing; they can also improve lifestyle as well (Smith, Stern, and Shatrova, 2008). Smith et al (2008) focused on fifteen Latino parents who were able to pinpoint specific cultural traits that help their Latino students meet academic achievement: family support, literacy, and emphasis on education all led Latino students toward graduation success. These traits, along with strong communication and leadership from the school, can essentially lead the students to become lifelong learners and important members of the community.

These traits are highly difficult to find in any one Latino student, but the more qualities that a student has, the more likely he is to succeed. Migrant students are often more likely to fit into the category of “at-risk,” which means they are often male, English is often their second language, their family is often low income, and they might receive special learning services (Nesman T. et al, 2001). Migrant students, regardless of their gender, are also at higher risks of not knowing the protocol and expectations, nor are they often confident and understand the structure of the school expectations.

**Autonomy and Achievement**

The paradox of adolescence is a difficult time of transition at the high school level: although the student wants autonomy and desires to become independent, it is still critical for the parent to be involved in his development academically and socially (Brint, 2006). But, good students have good structured habits. Ruiz (2009) mentions that her quantitative self-reports completed by Latino students reveal “Latino academic achievers are distinguishable on a set of
school behaviors that include more regular attendance, less tardiness, more homework completion, greater preparation and participation in class” (p.421). Ruiz (2009) also found that creating communication that allows a transfer of information and questions amongst the school, the families, and the teachers was an important factor in creating successful students. She showed concern that there was bias in her reporting because it did not reflect every nationality covered by the term Latino, but the general response of the self-reports from the Latino students was that the students felt they earned better grades and performed better at school when communication between all three parties occurred.

Regardless of the student’s consistency in attendance, it takes time for the Latino student to establish the confidence in the classroom and the communication with staff and administrators (Ramirez, 2003; Ruiz, 2009). In Crosnoe’s (2001) research “Family–school connections and the transitions of low-income youths and English language learners from middle school to high school,” he discusses the quantitative results of his longitudinal research; he found that there was a difference in scores based on the Latino parents’ interaction with the child and school. That is, students performed substantially better when there was communication between the school and the family in regards to the student’s achievements and concerns.

**Expectations of Structure**

Latino low-income families expected and needed a variety of structured communication models for success. Language barriers were a marginal problem for the Latino students in science and mathematics classes; however, there needed to be communication to provide the proper support system for the student to achieve. Yet the one advantage that Crosnoe (2001)
noticed was the interaction between the family and the school – and the family’s dedication to seeing the student achieve and attend provided motivation and encouragement despite their difficulty communicating with the school. The emotional support provided by the family, even if they cannot assist in the academic subjects, is one of the most important supports for success to a student.

Family and a structured home life also enhanced the Latino’s student’s ability to do well. Ruiz (2009) explains that these students have “familial processes that contribute to Latino academic achievement including strong parent commitment to the importance of education, parent support and encouragement” (p. 421). Many of these nuclear Latino families consist of strong mothers or sisters who had an influence and interest in the student’s academic achievement (information that was consistent with the research of Garrett, Gonzalez, and Valez, 2010). Villanos (2008) states that “anecdotal reports from teachers will tell you what a 2002 study by SEDL (formerly the Southwest Educational Development Laboratory) confirmed: Students with involved parents are more likely to attend school regularly, earn higher grades, and have better social skills” (para 3). Urban High School’s population has many low-income and single parent households who have different cultural backgrounds and expectations of the students; low-income is defined as near the poverty level, which for a five person family in Urban City would be $25,000 annual income (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services). It will be important to recognize whether the administrators and creators of the communication effectively reach out to all members of this diverse community.

**Latino Confidence**
Garrett et al. (2010) conducted qualitative interviews with Latino students (specifically Puerto Rican males) to determine what support systems they utilize to achieve their goals at the high school level; their support systems connect beyond the classroom and home and into the local community. Their mentors varied, often being members of the church, or from their work as well as at home. Latino students who succeeded in graduating were also interested in other activities besides their education. These students are also often engaged in social activities such as religious community groups or community based extracurricular activities (that is, they might have had activities that were not offered at the school as well, such as volunteering or community groups) (Garrett et al, 2010). Latino students who did well in school as well as participated in community groups had means of communication that had been developed and stayed consistent over time; even if there was a delay in the communication, the cycle would be completed and the responses would fit the needs of the people involved in it.

**Want of Education**

Villenos (2001), in *Education in the New Latino Diaspora*, explains that Latino parents want a great education and high standard of living for their children so that they, like Brint (2006) suggests, can be productive members in a democratic society. Villenos expands the concept of cultural expectations of Latin culture and fuses them with behavior and expectations of the American high school; Latino culture holds integrity, respect, and virtue in high regard, and these traits can be honed to propel academics (Hein, 2003; Olivos, 2009; Ramirez, 2003; Ryan et al, 2010). Students as well as their parents wish to see great achievements in their education; however, the expectations might be difficult to maintain for a variety of personal
reasons (such as family, employment, or cultural barriers). There might be implied or stated concepts that prevent Latino families from participating in the academic processes with administrators or educators at Urban High School. It might be possible to determine what cultural expectations are presented through the language and the purposes through an analytical review of the written documents’ diction and language.

**Understanding the Cultural Differences of American High Schools**

Many Latino students feel confident in their personal identity and their cultural identity (Phinney, 1992, Newman T. et al, 2001, Ramirez 2003). Phinney (1992) conducted a quantitative study with the Multi-group Ethnic Identity Measure (MEIM); this quantitative study found self-identification of Latino students was often positive, and the behaviors that are “expected” of their specific culture rarely conflicted with their surroundings (p. 171). Furrer, & Skinner, E. (2003) support his findings and state that “decades of research show that children’s self-perceptions, such as self-efficacy, goal orientations, or autonomy, are robust predictors of motivation and performance in school, both concurrently and over many years (p.148). The study revealed that Latino students were comfortable with their own culture and could recognize their own behavioral traits; often, negative peer pressure was a trigger for disciplinal issues or setback. The positive identity Phinney discusses can be used as an insight into the Latino student’s confidence and comfort with his own identity as well as with the American school system culture that is presented at Urban High School. In fact, there might be a correlation between behavior, attendance, and self-identity that influences the effects of communication (Gastic et al., 2010; Nesman T et al., 2001).
The cultural background of the Latino student and his family might not coincide with the developed expectations of the school system. The school’s culture and morale have a great influence on the development of the student; the student will learn behavior cues, courtesies, and social expectations from the behavior of the staff. The specifics, such as the “socio-economic status, race, age, country of origin, the nature and timing of their immigration, and the degree of their acculturation,” greatly impact the student’s knowledge and development of culture and understanding of social norms; It is important to understand the specific Latino subgroups because individual Latino cultures might have different reactions to different attitudes and behaviors (Smith et al, 2008).

Differences in Schooling

The New York City Department of Education created a manual to assess the differences in foreign transcripts, and the information provided gives insight into the different expectations that some Latino families may have when entering the school system. When compared to the United States’ grading system and standard school system (elementary, middle, and secondary), it’s possible to see where the discord in understanding and culture may form.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Grade system</th>
<th>Compulsory Grade Levels</th>
<th>Expected Age of High School Diploma</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>United States</td>
<td>A letter based system</td>
<td>1-12</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
where A+ = 100 and
an F can equal a 59 or
lower.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Grading System</th>
<th>Age Range</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dominican Republic</td>
<td>Uses Excellent-Good- to Fair-Poor-Failure with a 100 point grading system.</td>
<td>“until age 13”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mexico</td>
<td>Uses Excellent-Good- to Fair-Poor-Failure with a 10 point grading system.</td>
<td>1-9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guatemala</td>
<td>Uses Excellent-Good- to Fair-Poor-Failure with a 100 point grading system.</td>
<td>1-6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Puerto Rico</td>
<td>A letter based system where A+ = 100 and an F can equal a 59 or lower.</td>
<td>1-12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ecuador</td>
<td>Uses Excellent-Good- to Fair-Poor-Failure with a 10 point grading system.</td>
<td>1-9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Fair-Poor-Failure with a 20 point grading system. educations can be academic or vocational training.

It appears, at a glance, that many students have the opportunity to complete their education at an earlier age because the compulsory rates are lower; however, many of the students also are offered a chance to gain interest and expertise in their career field of choice. One of the most distinct differences in the school systems is the transfer to vocational or academic paths in the final years of school. Many Latin American school systems have provided programs that will supplement the students’ careers regardless of the path he has chosen; the United States’ program, unless specifically a vocational school, often relies on an academic program with elective classes serving to introduce vocations. It seems as though the American school system may appear harder than the Latin American systems because there are at least three more years’ worth of academic classes that the student must pass before focusing on a major or career direction.

Furthermore, the grading system varies. While each school may have individual expectations (for example, an F may start at a 64 or a 59 depending on the school), the presentation of the grades is not consistent from country to country. The word for “fail” varies: “No suficiente” “Aplazado” “Malo” all indicate failure but are not consistent on the report cards in Latin American countries. Furthermore, because those countries do not use the letter system
that is present on the American report cards, it is possible to cause confusion. These details, which may seem minor, can be difficult to handle for a person who has low literacy and does not understand the system in which they are participating. The American school systems and administrators may wish to consider these differences when presenting to the Latino parents because the variation in grade, schooling, and presentation may cause some break in communication and success.

Wainer (2006) reports that because American high schools have been generally unprepared for this change in culture, “the result in many cases has been a growing ‘de facto’ segregation of immigrant students in terms of standardized test scores, drop-out rates, and resources vis a vis mainstream students” (p.137). In his case studies that focused on southern states and the changes in Latino demographics, he discovered that many of the high schools reviewed in his research did not follow federal guidelines for providing proper education to communities with multiple subgroups, and some of the legislation that the states tried to institute was considered unconstitutional. In Arkansas, Georgia, and North Carolina, more than two-thirds of the Latinos were aware of the undertones of racism and were willing to fight for their children’s right to education. Furthermore, many of the Latino parents in the case studies studied by Wainer perceived that the communities saw bilingualism as a disadvantage, not as a positive diversity; this perception contributed to Latino parents in the focus groups believing that the schools could do more for their students in regards to communication.

Urban High School has the opportunity to reflect and review on their own communication to determine how effective it is in reaching all members of the community as
well as how perceptive the staff members are in including the diversity in their documentation and learning community. The changes to the local demographics have developed over some time, but the school has to determine whether they have met the needs of the necessary adaptations to the communication and cultural expectations. This determination could create a shift in the communication dynamics and therefore in the outreach ability in the district – not only at the high school level but also at the grammar schools as well.

**Developing Personal Communication**

Researchers discovered a familiar pattern in Latino students’ learning that might not coincide with American school expectations. Smith et al (2008) explain that originally, “American schools often stress competition within schools and individual achievement over cooperative behaviors, [Latino] children often get mixed messages” (p.9). Latino students often refrain from offering their full participation in class or reaching out to the teacher until they feel comfortable on a respectful, personal level; however, the American school system often encourages teachers and students to operate on a more formal level than the students are accustomed to (de Anda, 2009; Furrer, C., & Skinner, E., 2003; Ruiz, 2009; ). This is not to suggest that the teachers and the students should be friends, but it does mean that the differences in behavior and culture might be misinterpreted and therefore responded to in unexpected ways.

These interpersonal relationships amongst teachers, Latino students and their parents are necessary for individual development and communication before academic achievement. Furrer & Skinner, E. (2003) found that “feelings of relatedness tapped by measures of school climate and quality of teacher–student relationships, as well as feelings of belonging, inclusion,
acceptance, importance, and interpersonal support, have been linked to important academic outcomes, including self-efficacy, success expectations, achievement values, positive affect, effort, engagement, interest in school, task goal orientation, and school marks” (p. 149).

The behavior of the staff, or the way they interact with students and family, can help increase the Latino student’s performance and expectations. Latino parents often feel that the teachers are professionals, and interfering with the educational process (and the teacher’s expertise) is often frowned upon (Ramirez, 2003). The relationship that teachers offer and what the students expect might differ as well. Furrer & Skinner, E. (2003) mention that “relationships to teachers are considered especially potent because of the many roles teachers play, for example, as a potential attachment figure, as a pedagogue, as a disciplinarian, and as the final arbiter of a student’s level of performance” (p. 150). By building communication and rapport with students (of any demographic), the administrators and teachers of the school system have a great potential to affect the development of morale and learning for all.

Latino students do hesitate to create relationships at the high school level. Garrett, Gonzalez, and Valez (2010) found in their in-depth interviews of high school Latino students that many of them often felt disconnect: the Latino students did not “feel compelled to seek or maintain meaningful relationships” with many of their teachers, and therefore, there was a break in the teaching and communication (p.112). This passive and introverted style of learning can sometimes lead to a misinterpretation by the instructor who feels that the student is not engaged or enthusiastic about learning or the subject matter. This separation in expectation is a common anxiety amongst Latino students. The students have a “clear definition” of what they would like
to see in a caring teacher; however, their definition and the development of the culture of the school might not and often do not coincide, thus creating an interpersonal gap in the system.

**Latino Parental Concerns**

Occasionally, the hidden curriculum and structure of the school system creates confusion and discord in the students’ learning and communication, especially when they are new to the culture (Brint, 2006). For example, Latino parents are often not familiar with the customary Meet the Faculty and Parent Conference nights; the written communication often does not contain enough information for them to interpret the titles, nor are there accessible sources to which the parents can ask questions (Ramirez, 2003). Wortham (1997) conducted an ethnographic study and found that structure of the communication and hidden curricula made a difference in the development of the student’s achievement and participation. When the Latino student felt that he had the ability to clarify, question, and comment with a teacher who responded in a clarifying, involved manner, not only was he also more likely to improve his attendance in that class, but the student better performed academic and social tasks. The positive reinforcement in the learning led the student to become more personally motivated to achieve (Nesman T. et al., 2001).

The importance of including all students and families in the society is a common theme in recent studies. In a ethnographic qualitative study in low-income Latino schools, Patchen (2005) revealed the trend that Latino students who felt they had a personal, direct way to communicate with the instructor were more comfortable in the learning environment; furthermore, in a classroom environment, Latino students preferred to be spectators until they
felt they were comfortable and understood the culture and expectations of the classroom. The research seems to imply that Latinos tend to be consciously passive and introverted when communicating until they are confident in their understanding of the system, be it the classroom or the entire high school.

The Latino parents often have different reasons for their reactions to American school systems. Perna and Titus’ (2005) examination of support systems and academic achievement showed that there are more components in the student’s life than just academics; parents need to be aware of the social and academic expectations of the school system (p. 3). Some of the concerns that Latino parents do not understand and therefore cannot express to their children (not for lack of understanding but because of the difference in culture) might be disciplinarian actions and academic expectations such as school requirements for credits (Ramirez, 2003; Ruiz, 2009). One other example of disconnect in expectations occurs when Latino students try to apply for further education. The chances of a student furthering his education – including vocational institutes – is dependent on the family’s understanding of the process and its understanding of which networks in the school to use to access these advancements (de Anda 2009; Perna and Titus, 2005). These networks might be unavailable to students because of socioeconomic status, language barriers, or lack of education; however, they are often hidden in the school curriculum.

High schools do attempt to be proactive in their inclusion of Latino students and parents. Perna and Titus (2005) published a conceptual table with their research that reveals the importance of two way communications. They show the relationship between specific behaviors of the staff, such as proactive phone calls to the family, and behaviors of the students, such as
requests for extra help; these efforts encourage the students to meet the expectations of college level learners (p. 494). Despite some proactive movements from the faculty, there are still some cultural stipulations that prevent the parents from actively participating in their student’s education.

Urban High School’s staff and administrators make efforts to communicate and educate with the families and students who attend the school, but the effectiveness of the communication might impact their abilities to respond in an influential way. Knowing the school’s demographics, it will be important to understand how the administrators are communicating and what they are actually communicating so that the members of the community as well as the faculty can determine how to proceed in helping students reach their academic best.

Research suggests that Latino cultures appear to need specific modifications to successfully participate in the school community (Ramirez, 2003; Ruiz, 2009). Because of the differences in culture and expectations of the school systems, there are different expectations between the school and the parents. In addition, parents of Latino students are not often acclimated to the various types of information that are disseminated from the American high school. Therefore, many schools believe that there is a need to create a different set of communications for Spanish speaking members of the community; this is a false pretense, as the members of the community do not need another version of the information but education on how to utilize the information to their benefits.
Barriers in Language

The language barrier might make learning and understanding curriculum and school culture difficult for not only the Latino student but also his parent. Beyond the classroom, the student’s misinterpretation and learning of the language creates a psychological barrier and might change the student’s understanding and perception of the school system. That is, what is actually happening and stated might be skewed by the Latino student’s linguistic understanding of the situation. As well, Latino parents might also misperceive, misunderstand, or even ignore important information that affects their student because of a lack of literacy or lack of language understanding.

Many high school faculty and staff do not have a thorough understanding of the Latinos’ cultures in their region; therefore, they may not have amended their normal means of communication (Bagin et al., 2008; Ramirez, 2003). Ramirez (2003) points out that many schools make the assumption that because Latino families cannot communicate, they do not wish to do so; his qualitative focus groups with Latino parents revealed that both the school’s administration and the parents were aware of this assumption. The parents explained that they had little understanding of the documentations provided for the parents by the school. Bagin et al. (2008) reminds that communication is a give and take process, and it cannot be complete without the response from the receiver; the cycle is broken. Many of the cycles are rather one way informative. Also, high schools that do offer fliers in multiple languages do not necessarily offer any more support to the parents than those in English as the parents still lack the essential
details and cultural comprehension (Chrispeels and Rivero, 2001; Lucas et al., 1990; Olivo, 2009).

While it is also crucial for schools to consider the differences in language as well as the presentation of it, there are further steps in specializing the culture and language of communication to help meet the literacy expectations of different demographics. Smith et al (2008) state that Latino “subgroups in communication styles and socialization practices might be greater than the overall differences between Hispanics and non-Hispanics” and they emphasize that the diversity in the culture and language in the subgroups can further complicate communication (p. 8). For example Puerto Rican Spanish is not interchangeable to Guatemalan Spanish: meanings and definitions might not be interchangeable, nor are connotations are the same because of culture or history. While the same grammatical and syntactical language still exists, some of the verbs and nouns have different localized connotations, and the regionalisms might change the meaning of the message. Universal Spanish might exist as a standard grammatical form, but it is not the same as colloquial regionalist Spanish.

Furthermore, Smith et al (2008) warn that “commonly used computer translation programs [such as Google translator] produce unintelligible materials that need to be checked by someone fluent in Spanish” (p.11). In fact, receiving such poorly translated information implies a lack of concern and effort on the part of the school and can be insulting to Latino members of the community.

Levels for Outreach
Goldring and Bauch (1993) discuss that different schools – especially those with choice – offer different levels of communication and outreach. They suggest that the bureaucratic school does not meet the communication needs of the Latino students or the teachers. However, there is also a lack of communication because of the language barriers; Villenos (2001) offers that “even some of the most caring teachers at best ignore cultural or language differences.” Fullan (2007) suggests, as does Elmore (2004), that with professional development and coaching, the staff would be able to assess the different situations and utilize a variety of strategies to help promote the leadership in the school and the strategies for better communication and school culture. However, it is important to remember that some families are unable to utilize computers and technology to reach the supplementary information – therefore nullifying the attempt to offer assistance; in addition, some of the information is not translated into Spanish and therefore would be difficult to comprehend (Livingston, 2011; Mayes, 2006).

Many of these factors that were mentioned in the studies about language, communication, and schools greatly impact Urban High School’s population. The effectiveness of the communication from Urban High School might be greatly impacted based on the local literacy levels of both the Latino parents and the students; the Spanish translations that are presented might have a different impact on the community as well and from where the Spanish is derived will also have an effect on the communication. Whilst it might not be possible to address every Latino family’s needs for communication, it might be possible to determine whether the information currently provided to them makes an impact of their approach to their student’s academics.
Preparation for the Changes

Some schools are ahead of the curve and have prepared for the changes in culture and communication. Lynch (2009), Olivos (2009), and Patchen (2005) explain that some schools offer communication in native languages as well as English so that parents might comprehend the standards and expectations of the school. Bagin et al. (2008) explains that “it is reasonable to assume that parents who speak and read a foreign language in the home might experience some difficulty in understanding report cards, school notices, and school news in the local dailies” even in a native language (p. 19). With the development of different platforms and technologies that advance communication, schools will need to understand the needs of their communities to best take advantage of new delivery methods for information.

Even though the schools are beginning to understand the need for various forms of communication, there is still a distinct misunderstanding on both sides of the communication: Latino parents often feel isolated even when the opportunity to participate in school functions arises (Ramirez, 2003; Carreón et al., 2005, Crosnoe, 2009). There are different methods of interacting with the Latino parent population, such as the ones discussed in Olivos’ (2009) “Collaboration with Latino families; a critical perspective of home-school interactions” that can be utilized to make a school system more friendly to other cultures (not necessarily just Latino at-risk families). In fact, some studies recommend allowing members of the community who wish to volunteer and can empathize with the Latino parents and school to be assets during parent conferences and school celebratory events, because they can offer a bridge between the languages and offer a point of comfort to nervous parents (Edmonds, 1979). Offering such
community input allows for two important themes to develop: the importance of including diversity and culture and the importance of communication regardless of the language concerns.

In order to conduct research but meet the needs of the community, Ramirez (2003) discussed how he created a friendly seminar-like setting when interviewing Latino members of the community for methods of communication improvement; with interpreters, refreshments, and a small setting, the Latino parents were able to discuss their concerns about the lack of communication in their children’s Californian school and shared their concerns in a safe environment. In this situation, in order to communicate the friendly and open environment – the willingness of the school and researchers to learn and experience with the other members of the community – Ramirez had to strategize for the event and create the least restrictive and threatening environment for his already apprehensive audience. In fact, Ramirez’s strategies for creating a festive, friendly, inviting environment are now some of the first steps communities take to invite Latino families in for school participation (Turner, 2011).

**Establishing Communication**

Learning to establish communication and understand the perception of the Latino members of the school community will be a necessary step for schools to improve their communities; communication between at-risk families and the schools can lead to better futures and development (Hein, 2003; Olivos, 2009; Ramirez, 2003; Ryan et al, 2010). In Reglin’s (2002) study, he states that “91.3% of the high-risk parents perceived that home visits would help them better support their children's education and increase their involvement in the school.” His goal is not to emphasize the negatives but provide support and basic discussion of what
lessons and concepts were being presented and how the family could help to understand and support the student’s learning.

Crosnoe (2001) explains that parental involvement must include both the parents and teachers in a reoccurring manner for it to actually affect the progress of a student. Therefore, it is crucial for Latino parents and students to discuss the student’s abilities and the topics in class as it helps them prepare and develop; this method was also effective for low-income students even when the parents were unable to understand the information. They were allowed to offer consolation and support for the student, which helped the student succeed (Carpenter, 2008). Having the emotional support is as necessary as the educational support (Hugor, 2009).

**Administrators and Communication**

Bridgeland (2010) cited that “Research puts the national graduation rate at between 68 and 73 percent, which means that almost one-third of all public high school students, and nearly half of minorities, in the United States fail to graduate with their class” (p. 102). For most students, dropping out is a process, not an instantaneous event. However, at risk students indicate that with better communication between the school, their parents, and themselves, they most likely would have seen a rise in achievement (Bridgeland, 2010).

Administrators and their approach to communicating with the students and parents in the school system can greatly affect the morale and academics. Epstein (1987) reported that many of the communications are institutional interactions, a term that refers to those that involve all
families such as “parent–teacher associations, open houses, newsletters, or general invitations to a school play or activity” but most teachers, parents, and students would prefer to see a personal interaction occur (p. 27). It is necessary to utilize more than one form of communication as well (Epstein, 1987). Although communication is an important part of the job and an important skill in leadership, training in it is not often presented by educational programs; while many graduate programs do require a completion of a globalization or diversity course, that course may not discuss communication. It is “imperative the secondary-level principal be cognizant of his or her personal attitudes as they relate to the issue” (Epstein, p. 28). Also, the physical presentation can greatly influence the receiver’s ability to respond or share the message of achievement the administrators wish to share; the one way method can also stunt the relationships between parents and school.

The state of the school can have an effect on how administrators share their communications. Edmonds (1979) mentions that administrators in declining schools often place more emphasis on the public relations aspect of communication than on the actual meaning of the message or the improvement of the students. However, the same seminal article’s author explained that parent involvement is not necessarily an indicator of school status, but involved parents who wish to initiate or continue contact can be a sign of a successful school system. Epstein (1987) mentions that the attitude, tone, and practices of the administration can greatly affect the level of parent involvement as well as the reaction of the students. Parent involvement can also be jilted by perception; institutional communication can appear as an invitation to meet rather than a real opportunity to communicate (Halsey; Snow, 1999). One of the general
assumptions is that the parents receive the communication and interpret it as an invitation, but the parents often only see it as the administration informing them of activities (p.62).

**Importance of Understanding Perception**

Perception is a difficult element to study because there is no necessary right or wrong response or reaction to an event; people’s emotions and behaviors are often hard to grasp and understand. Paradoxically, it’s necessary to understand the perception and attitudes of people because those are what affect the development of their behavior (Szabla, 2007); that information is necessary to strategize and create further developments for the school and the members of both closed and open systems (Burke, 2010).

Asch (1940) was one of the first researchers to discuss perceptions; in fact, he suggested that it was a response to group expectations and standards. He noticed that people are willing to make incorrect assumptions even when they realize the truth – but will do so because of what they believe are social expectations. While Asch (1948) did not have a process determined as to how this behavior change happens, it does help explain some of the perception concerns and behavior patterns that could occur at the high school level. Asch noticed the importance of the difference in impact and how people assessed it themselves – from internal and external cues.

Dooley and Harkins (2010) mentioned that some of the perception might be based on a holistic, contextual, or cultural perspective; they reviewed an example of Asian doctors who were far more holistic than analytical in their findings than their American counterparts. This study was important to discuss because it clarified some of the possible cultural differences that might
occur within a profession; it was important to notice that cultures have different rationalizations for their behaviors, and these decisions might not be understood by other cultures that interact with them.

**Perception and Its Impact**

Perception at the high school and family level can be quite different than that of the educators in the system because the information and behavior can greatly affect each member of the system differently. Smith, R. A., & Boster, F. J. (2009) explain that “social pressures and motivational goals, such as rejecting a strongly disliked group identity (Wood, 2000) or engaging a sense of rivalry (Smith & Boster, 2002), emphasize the importance and relevance of particular consequences or attributes over others” (p. 334). Hypothetically, there is a possibility that Latinos might feel oppressed because of the local perceived dislike and disapproval of their inclusion in the community. It’s highly important that the Latino students, parents, and school be aware of the perceptions and understands how they are formed, why they are formed, and who forms them. Therefore, it is essential that all members involved are honest and consider the language and behavior in which they present their perspectives and how they interpret those of the others involved (p.335).

Some of these perceptions and understandings of the local culture, however, are truly based on ideas and not fact, such as the comments made in the local press or grumblings of neighbors. Smith and Foster (2009) reviewed the importance of the impact of messages and shared the example that “people might have heard about a message from others before they have
a chance to process it for themselves” and would therefore take on another perception other than their own (p. 334). This retelling then skews the original information in the message and can affect behavior and attitude toward the information in the message. This realization is crucial because Latino members of the community might reinterpret the information presented by the school improperly; what the information might say and the interpretation of the message from other members of the community, the students, or the faculty might influence the understanding of the message the parent internalizes.

It is also interesting to note that the perception of family members can vary by generation, which also impacts the students and the changing climate of the school. De Anda (2009) mentioned that the parent/adolescent dyads often had varying relationships and perceptions. It was stated that “parents and adolescents shared a common perception regarding the needs of the youth of the community. A contributing factor to this consensus might be the fact that this is an economically depressed community, which translates into very evident needs and poor resource availability” (p. 426). The behavior, assets, attitude, community and culture of the city might greatly influence the perception the Latino students and parents have on their education in this urban city. However, the focus always remained the same: both the faculty and the Latino families were concerned about the important issues that needed to be addressed to meet the needs of their students in their community.

**Linguistic Perceptions**

Language plays an important part in perception because the connotation and denotation of words vary per culture and language. Words can help forge perceptions and ideas that might
be unintentional from the writer and the reader; therefore, they can accidentally skew the message and purpose of the communication.

Higgins and Rholes (1978) created a seminal study in which the participants read a description of a character that, depending on the inferences and connotations of his behavior, could be seen as a pest or a rambunctious but harmless person. When the participants discussed the character, they adjusted their own perceptions to meet the expectations of the other participant; they did not necessary agree, but their use of language changed. The actual discussion and interpersonal communication made a great difference in the understanding and perception of the message; hypothetically, increasing the level of person to person communication at the high school level could be more advantageous than communicating through paper or email.

It becomes difficult, however, to break oneself of the habit of accidentally stereotyping when creating communication. It’s clearly easy to assume “All White is English; therefore, all Latino is Spanish” when that is a stereotype perpetuated over time. Lowry, Hardin, and Sinclair (2001) explained that perceptions can develop from stereotypes with “long-term exposure to particular associations” but it is possible to consciously break the habit of making general stereotypes (p.842). Devine, Plant, Amodio, Harmon-Jones, and Vance (2002) state that “even with changes to social norms, which now discourage expressions of prejudice, and changes in many people’s self-reported attitudes, prejudice is still a major factor in contemporary American society.” Devine et al. mention that “many but not all low-prejudice people report that they
sometimes respond with more bias toward members of stigmatized groups than they believe they should. When these people violate their nonprejudiced values, they feel compunction or guilt” (p. 836).

One of the key factors in the research with Urban High School administrators will be to determine their perception of writing communication. The people who create the documents that are sent out to the masses have a purpose with the document, and in order to understand how they develop and plan the communication, interviews will need to be conducted. The perceptions that the creators might have of Urban High School’s population might affect the development of the communication; it will be important to understand how and why the creators of the school’s communication do so as they do.

**Visual Perception of Presentation**

Word choice is not only affected by verbal comprehension but also by visual comprehension. Regardless of a person’s race or ethnicity, there are certain psychological cues that can impact the comprehension of the message. Oppenheimer and Frank (2007) revealed that many people have subjective feelings when they are trying to comprehend and process information. The experience that a person has while doing so can influence their judgment and decisions (p. 3).

Presentation is one of the elements that is often overlooked but very important to the communication of a message. Bernard, Liao, Chaparro and Chaparro (2001) found that font sizes over 12-point are perceived as easier to read and more attractive to males and females. All participants also perceived sans serif fonts as easier to read, but the percentage of preference was
determined so small that it is almost negated. Using a variety of fonts, sizes, or clarity can also affect the reader’s perception and understanding of ideas; the communication becomes difficult because the reader can become frustrated.

Alter and Oppenheimer (2009) found that participants in their study, which was to determine perception of printed articles and the accuracy with which people read them, believed and understood more information when it was printed in a clear, contrasting manner, such as black on white. They had more difficulty comprehending and had a harsher judgment when the information was not as easily deciphered.

In addition, Alter and Oppenheimer (2009) literature reviews revealed that “statements written in easy-to-read font inspire confidence” and “texts that contained words that were more obscure and less familiar were harder to process” (p.25). Diction and syntax also affect the person’s ability to process and judge the message.

Reactions to Beliefs

It will be important to recognize that any findings of research might trigger a response and to remember that any communication will cause a reaction, and this reaction will greatly affect the entire system with the people’s attitudes, beliefs, and behavior (Bagin et al., 2010; Szabla, 2007). Reviewing and researching the perceptions of others will require specific, unbiased language that will lead to an honest review of the statement. The context must be kept neutral and conscientious of its audience and its connotations to prevent data skewing, misunderstandings, and then possibly causing conflict.
Concerns for Literature

One of the first implications in the field of research on Latinos is that there is no defined lexicon for this field of research. Phrases such as “academic achievement” and “fail” do not have denoted meanings and are therefore often open to interpretation. It becomes difficult to determine if the standards of academic success are constant, and it becomes difficult to measure the levels of success communications have when there is a shortage of longitudinal studies on its impact on cultures. It becomes difficult to determine if all researchers are in fact studying the same points or if they are examining separate points but relying on similar phrases to offer connection. It will be important to clearly describe how such terms are defined so that other researchers will be able to review and compare their work.

The lack of national agreement on what qualifies as proficient or expected adequate yearly progress will also greatly affect the development of literature. Not all testing is created equal; what Massachusetts does to assess student competency might greatly differ from the expectations in the state of California, but they might both meet the national guidelines. For example, Ramirez (2003) studied and researched in Latinos in education, but some of his information will not be applicable in Urban’s research because he studies specific communities on the west coast while the Latino cultures within a culture in Urban are east coast and have different lifestyles and dialects. It will be essential for researchers to be more specific in their definitions so that comparisons and contrasts can be efficiently and fairly made by other researchers.
There is a cultural difference when comparing coast-to-coast research as well. Ramirez (2003) composes the literature based on a society that has incorporated Latino styles into their culture; California, New Mexico, and Arizona are rife with Spanish influence. However, in puritanical New England, the Latino immigrants are a new resource that are unfamiliar to the local culture – there is a difference in the attitude of the researchers, as New England researchers might view this change as a new adaptation, but out west, this demographic is incorporated in their history. Urban High School might be one of the first communities in Massachusetts to actively recognize the need to examine the effectiveness of communication with Latino members of the community; this task might be monument on the eastern coast, yet this discussion already exists in communities where Latinos have been predominant members of the community for decades. The difference and inclusion should be taken into account, as the researchers located on the west coast have an advantage of cultural inclusion.

Furthermore, it’s difficult to differentiate Latino versus Hispanic in the literature. One student explained that he preferred to be called Latino because his language was derived from Latin, but another student explained that the Hispanic name was historically important. Both are often used in the literature, and it seems as if they are phrases that are treated almost interchangeably. This seemingly nonchalant diction is distracting and insulting: Latino or Hispanic should be defined at a more specific level to respect the diversity of the student. Mexicans do not act like Puerto Ricans who also do not act like Venezuelans – there are specific cultural and linguistic differences, and these differences could make a great impact on the understanding of their academic achievement. These words also indicate different connotations
and political meanings in different parts of the United States: Alcoff (2005) explains “For example, Puerto Ricans in the United States are known among sociologists for generally ‘refusing the hyphen’, preferring the plain ‘Puerto Rican’ to ‘Puerto Rican-American’, thus signaling their affective and political loyalties to ‘mi viejo San Juan’. And it was not until the political resistance among Mexican-Americans became organized and mobilized that the term Chicano even came into existence, emerging as a self-conscious appropriation of a negative term (connoting low class) as a declaration of pride and class consciousness” (p.398). Therefore, Latino is a broad word that covers ‘all’ demographic ethnicities but paradoxically defines none.

Summary

Latino culture offers traits that can be utilized to enhance students’ ability to learn and succeed, but research indicates that schools must continue to work to include them in their communities. Latino students wish to be autonomous and are often seen as passive or introverted learners, but behind the quiet student, there is a large support system made up of not only family but also community.

However, many Latino families and students lack self-confidence in their ability to communicate with the school and therefore wait for prompting by the system. There are cultural differences between the communication and expectations of the American high schools; Latino parents expect more communication and want to participate but find their cultural and linguistic barriers often prevent them from doing so. Likewise, schools often perceive their absence as apathy. However, both parties are striving for the same academic achievement. It is difficult to
establish communication between a high school and a Latino family because the variables of language, culture, and connectivity vary.

The different perceptions of the administrators as well as the families and students might be strained further by the differences in perception. Often, communicators fail to consider how their communication will appear visually or linguistically; these details, although seeming small, can have a great impact on the audience regardless of its demographics. The intended message might be misconstrued, which can then change the intent and the reaction of the receiver.

Chapter three and four will discuss the methodology used to analyze the documents from Urban High School as well as analyze the processes used by the administrators. Because these are the documents and procedures that are used at Urban High School on a regular basis, it will be possible to determine what impact the hard copy communication is intended to have on its audience: the Latino population, which will be discussed in Chapter Five.
Chapter Three

Methodology

The goal of this doctoral thesis was determine the effectiveness of the communication amongst Urban High School Latino students, their parents, and administrators as the Latino students progress toward their final academic achievement of graduation. The researcher analyzed the standard communications and the protocols administrators used to create and distribute information to the Latino families, Latino students, and the staff at Urban High School. The following questions were explored in this doctoral research:

Research Questions

1. How effective was the communication that Urban High School offers to Latino Families/students after MCAS scores were released at the beginning of junior year?

2. How effective was the communication that Urban High School offered to Latino Families/students as the students prepared for graduation?
   a. Communication was defined as information exchanged in behaviors, written and/or verbal messages. They might be in English or Spanish. Examples included letters, fliers, district wide alerts and emails, the school or district websites.
   b. Perceived indicated their understanding of the situation, not the actual amount of documentation they sent or received.
c. *Latino* was defined as a word “which in Spanish means "Latin" but which as an English word is probably a shortening of the Spanish word *latinoamericano*—refers more exclusively to persons or communities of Latin American origin.”

Most of the Latino population in Urban consisted of Puerto Ricans, Dominicans, Colombians, and Mexicans.

d. Urban High School consisted of staff, administration, and faculty including guidance and coordinators of MCAS and graduation programs.

e. *After MCAS scores* suggested October 1 of the junior year as the beginning of major communication; it was at this point that students learned their scores on their previous MCAS and their potential paths toward academic achievement.

3. How effective was the protocol for communication about academic achievements such as MCAS, graduation, or preparing for post-secondary education?

   a. *Protocols* referred to the process that Urban High School instituted to deliver and receive communication.

4. How were the protocols understood by the administrators and staff who created these communications?

5. How did the administration’s perspective – those who attempted to inform or contact parents or guardians– influence the language presented in the communication presented to the Latino students of Urban High School and parents?

**Strategies of Inquiry**
While surveys and interviews revealed the key clues to understanding the Latino parents’ concerns about communicating with schools, there was little on the reverse: there was little discussion about the actual, already created forms of communication that continued to annually take place within school districts. Understanding the effectiveness of communication that already existed, and this research, at Urban High School, allowed perspective on how the administrators perceived the members of the community and students’ families in the process of their students’ academic successes.

**Qualitative Dissertations in Latino Studies**

Latino research has been flourishing because academic performance of diverse demographics is an educational trend in the United States. One of the examples of immediate need for linguistic and cultural inclusion was studied by Lindsey (2006) who found that it was necessary to include bilingual communication in Texan communities to incorporate the Latino communities (such as business and family) into the schools. Lara (2006) researched the technological divide that prevents Latinos from being able to communicate through technology and discovered their need for modification and inclusion. Ventura (2010) and Fuller (2010) researched the importance of including Latino parents and students in the communication process; doing so, they believed, would help increase academic achievement and develop better school morale.

Qualitative research is important because it focuses on human behavior and patterns because it shapes the questions asked and the type of data collected. This qualitative case study,
although it touched upon the concepts mentioned in the other studies, specifically addressed the Urban High School administrators and the artifacts they created; rather than focus groups of Latino students or surveys with the Latino community, this study recognized the needs of the Latino community but relied on the perceptions and artifacts from the administrators to determine the effectiveness in their communication. It was understood that Latino students experienced communications in a different way – the current system needed assessing.

Qualitative research methods supported the collection of data and guided the researcher toward a discovery of patterns and behaviors. Qualitative data, which is anthropological information, was crucial to understanding human behavior and artifacts; it offered the researcher information that allowed reflection on the interpersonal and intrapersonal aspects of society that mathematical quantitative data overlooked. In this research, noticing the patterns of language, the visual interpretations of communication, and the behavior of creating communications required reflection over a variety of artifacts as well as direct interviews with the creators of them. Qualitative methods were the necessary methodology because quantitative surveys and responses would not have offered enough insight into the language and process of communication amongst Latinos, their parents, and administrators at Urban High School (Cameron, 2009; Creswell, 2009).

Qualitative methods, especially case studies are anthropological by nature; case studies are advantageous for not only the study of human behavior and policies but also the researcher’s human perspective; when reviewing language, it is important to reflect not only on the concrete factors but also the abstract such as connotation and tone. Myers (2001) explained that
qualitative research allows the researcher to study “complexities and processes” and explore “where and why… local knowledge and practice are at odds” or even explain phenomena and experiences (p.91). In qualitative research, the researcher could review the actual events rather than focusing on the planned and stated strategies or focus on specific demographics or populations.

Wiggins (2011) explains that this case study methodology, when it focuses on language and culture, is interpretivist because it relied on “linguistic methods and data (broadly conceived) as the purest representations of meaning” (p. 47). Kelle (2006) explained that because a qualitative study might be cultural and linguistic, it might be easier for the researcher to understand the language constraints and to create thematic generalizations and correlations that mathematical data might not interpret.

This case study was also historical qualitative research, because the investigator developed a system to collect artifacts and information through interviews and reviewed all collected as data. This data, then, was utilized to determine the answers to research inquiries. With the collection of school artifacts (documentation) and active interviews with the people who created such artifacts, the research found insight into the use of the language and culture present in the communication; it explained how effectively administrators communicated with Latino families and their children from Urban High School during the 2011-2012 academic year. While it might seem like a small subset for a study, qualitative research focuses on specific groups, and the discussion from the research might lead to other instructions and researchers developing similar studies on similar demographics.
Urban High School as the Site Location

Urban High School was one of five urban high schools in a Northeastern region of the United States, and because of its location and changing demographics; it was a representation of the changes that had been occurring in local school systems. This region now has one of the highest Latino and Spanish speaking populations in the state, but it is not clear if the schools have fully acknowledged the demographic changes that have occurred in recent years when Latino populations grew by leaps and bounds.

Between 2007 and 2011, Urban High School failed to meet Massachusetts’s expectations for Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP), which was to have 90% of each demographic meet proficient or better on the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System, commonly referred to as MCAS. The Latino demographic, the special education demographic, and the low-income demographic were consistently missing the standard for AYP. Urban High School’s lack of Adequate Yearly Progress and position as a Level Three school (a school close to being taken over by the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education) revealed the necessity for effective change in the district.

A recent review of the city in Urban’s Level Three District report, which is documentation from the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education that identified the concerns that classify Urban has such a district, mentioned that “this movement is now reflected in the cultural and linguistic heritage of Urban’s student body. Currently, 15.6% of Urban’s Latino students first learned to speak a language other than English (FLNE). In ten years, the
district experienced almost a three-fold increase in the percentage of Limited English Proficient (LEP) students, referred to in Urban and elsewhere as ELL [English Language Learner] students” (p. 4). In the last decade, there has been an increase in the students who fit the definition of an “at-risk Latino student:” a minority student who was low-income and had one or more other educational concerns such as special needs or English Language Learning. These population numbers grew in the district, and in fact, as of March 2011, the district had increased its free lunch percentage to 42%, data that indicates a change in demographic and population.

The increase in Latino students have been noted by the Urban High School staff because according to the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education Level Three Review of Urban Public Schools, “administrators, principals, and teachers saw what they perceived as the lack of an adequate response to the increase in the number” of differentiated students in the city (p. 31). The review mentioned that “the district has another very serious deficiency in staffing for the growing population of English language learner (ELL) students, and its services for these students are often limited or lacking” (p. 31).

This deficiency in services had been noted since 2007; however, many of the concerns were “still not well addressed, with causes including insufficient staffing and provision of services and delays to recording and filing assessment data” (p. 34). The delay in recording data and releasing communication had been noted as a serious detriment to the educational system at Urban High School and seemed to affect the Latino students’ academic achievements.

**Latinos and AYP**
Latino students had been struggling to make Adequate Yearly Progress in English Language Arts, Science, and Mathematics on the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System. In the DESE Level Three Review of Urban Public Schools there was a mention that “10 percent of the district’s ELL students were proficient or better in English Language Arts, as opposed to 55 percent of all district students; 4 percent of the district’s ELL students were proficient or better in mathematics, as opposed to 42 percent of all district students” (p. 34). Urban High School administrators acknowledged they are still missing components for success because of time, staffing, and communication.

**Site Participants**

The participants of this study were chosen with purposeful sampling because these members of the Urban High School community created the majority of the communication that was distributed to the students. The following members of Urban High School were interviewed to assess their understanding and perceptions for creating communication that was distributed to the juniors and seniors of Urban High School:

- The MCAS coordinator, who distributed the letters and helped the students through the process of passing or failing MCAS.
- The assistant principal to grades 11 and 12, who helped the students through the process of graduation; he was also the main contributor to the school handbook.
- The principal, who explained how they determined their input in the communication process and the standards they believed students were expected to meet.
The associate principal, who had the control over whether communication was released to the students and how the communication was sent, especially in regards to special education.

The head of guidance, who released information about failures, attendance, and graduation to students who might have been in danger of not meeting school requirements.

Site-sampled Documents

Sixteen separate documents (included in the appendix) were analyzed to determine to what extent they have a substantial impact on a student and family’s communication about academic status during his last two years of high school. These documents were the actual sampling of documents that were kept on file for a school year. There were four types of documents sampled for this study. The first type of document was the informational handout, which might include agendas and the student handbook; these items informed the student and parent of Urban High School’s general school schedules and protocols. The second type of document included letters released from the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, and these letters referred to MCAS and school evaluations.

The third types of document specifically related to academics: report cards, progress reports, and letters from guidance, teachers, and the principal that reflected the student’s overall academic achievements or encouraged contact about the student and his academic standing.
The fourth and final documents were the school’s website and the AlertNOW calls, which have been included in the list of documents because they offered immediate information to the parents through electronic services. Although these services were not be available to all Latino families, they were offered by the school and therefore should be examined for their impact. While many Latino families did not have access to technology, these specific documents had been integrated in the system and were considered standard communication for Urban High School.

Qualitative data relies on understanding and interpreting the behavior and responses of others (Creswell, 2009). In this particular study, the formal communication given to 11 and 12 grade students in regards to their graduation and achievements was analyzed; these documents and websites include:

- The September 2010 letter to a parent/guardian from the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education explained the results and eligibility requirements from the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System and the graduation requirements.

- The September 2010 parent letter (available only in English) explained the new Alert Now Notification Service and how it will help students and parents receive important information in the future was released by the Superintendent of Schools. This letter was written in English only.

- The September 2010 invitation to Meet the Faculty Night. It was available in English.

- The September 2009 invitation to Meet the Faculty Night. It was available in Spanish.
• The November 3, 2010 Urban High School Administrative Failure Warning to Parents, which was handed out in homeroom, explains the absences and the school policy. It was available in English only.

• The November 17, 2010 memo for parents about First Quarter Report Card Conferences was distributed in homeroom with report cards. This memo was English only.

• The February 2011 letter to a parent/guardian from the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education explained the results and eligibility requirements from a retake test. It was available in only English.

• The March 28, 2011 letter to parents explained the school’s “report card” in regards to teacher qualifications, student achievement, and school accountability. The letter was available in both English and Spanish, but the data was available in English only.

• The April 28, 2011 letter from guidance that reported a student was failing and might not meet graduation requirements was a letter than of high importance to students and families who were at risk. This letter was in English.

• The April 28, 2011 letter from guidance that reported a student was failing and might not meet graduation requirements was a letter than of high importance to students and families who were at risk. This letter was in Spanish.

• The June 2, 2011 Alert Now Message was the transcript of the district wide phone call that occurred to inform the families, staff, and students of regulations for the graduation ceremony. This email alert was available in English only.
• The standard form letter sent to a student who did not pass the MCAS that they might retake it to attain a diploma. This letter was sent by guidance and was only available in English.

• The standard letter sent to a parent whose child might need extra services. “Whom It Might Concern” that MCAS tutoring was available for your child and when it was available. This letter was in English only.

• The standard parent/guardian letter that discussed the changes to the MCAS and the development of an EPP. This was released by the principal and only available in English.

• A fourth term report card. This was available in English only; it was the standard report that comes on the back of the grades; it was embossed on paper.

• A fourth term progress report. This was available in English only.

• The Urban High School Website main page was printed and archived on June 7, 2011. The main page and the parent and student links were printed out. These are available in English only.

**Procedures**

**Document Collection**

In order to gather the samples for analysis, the researcher attained permission from the school to utilize these documents. In addition, the researcher requested any Spanish versions of the document so that the language could be compared because although English borrows many words from the Latin-based language, the actual translation presented by Urban High School might vary. The documents had been kept in a folder in the main office for the duration of the
school year. Once the documents were attained, they were edited to maintain the school’s anonymity; these new files were scanned into a PDF file and numbered for discussion purposes. Furthermore, the original documents were either requested in .doc form or scanned to create a text file.

Document Data Analysis

With these documents, the researcher set out to determine how effective the communication was between Urban High School and its Latino population. The diction and ease of reading was categorized to determine whether language and word choice influenced the perception and understanding of communication between Latino parents and the faculty at Urban High School. A review of the documents revealed the purpose and possible effects these communications might have had on the Latino students and their families; an organization of the level of language used in the communications determined whether the presentation and diction were appropriate for the level of literacy and culture in Latino students and families.

The readability of the documents would be determined with the Flesch-Kincaid models for analysis. The Flesch-Kincaid Scale for Readability was a standard tool used by the United States’ government to determine the level of readability in their public documents. McGlure (1987) explained that many states require legal documents to pass the readability standards set by the government, and therefore, this test was a standard and one for reading analysis. Kouamé (2010) explained that “for evaluators, readability statistics can be solid predictors of the language difficulty level of particular documents.”
The Flesch-Kincaid Scale based the level of difficulty on syllables and word count; therefore, it was important to note that because the Flesch-Kincaid model utilized syllables and sentence length, it could be used with Spanish documents as well. Microsoft Word produced both the Flesch-Kincaid Reading Ease Score as well as the Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level in their readability reviews.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Test</th>
<th>Score</th>
<th>Interpretation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level</td>
<td>1-</td>
<td>The corresponding “grade level” shows hypothetically what level of learning the reader should have to understand and properly interpret the information provided.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flesch-Kincaid Reading Ease Score</td>
<td>0-</td>
<td>The determined number reveals the level of difficulty of a text. 100 is the easiest level to read; a college degree is argued to be a 30 or lower.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flesch-Kincaid Reading Ease Score</td>
<td>100</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

While the Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level model’s grade increased with the complexity of the syllables and the length of the sentences, the Flesch-Kincaid Reading Ease Score decreased with the complexity. These two scores should check each other, and they offered similar ways of examining the level of complexity of the language.

Because the Flesh-Kincaid readability models were a standard accepted unit that indicated the level of reading and literacy that was necessary to comprehend the documents, it was decided that each document would be analyzed for that standard using the Flesh-Kincaid
reader in Microsoft Word. Each document was entered verbatim: any spelling, grammar, or other usage issues were ignored, and the readabilities were recorded to a chart.

In addition, manually categorizing and counting the jargon in the text revealed readability. It was important to check the actual language in the document and not rely on syllables and sentence length because even the simplest sentences can contain complex ideas. Counting the number of phrases, the usage of jargon, and level of sentence complexity gave a statistical review of the level of complexity in the document as well.

The documents that the Latino students and their families received in regards to MCAS, academic progress, college information, and senior events (including letters of failure), were analyzed for specific themes, language, tone, purpose, and cultural expectations in the writings of the English translated letters. The worksheet located in Appendix A helped the researcher organize the evidence in each document from Urban High School. This worksheet organized the basic traits of a nonfiction document that seventh grade level readers should be able to identify (according to Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks).

By methodically reading and gathering evidence to support the analysis, the researcher was able to determine patterns in the structure, which was how the information was presented, and the organization, or overall design of a work. The subject, what or who is actually being discussed was identified and then the intent of the document, which is the purpose, was identified; there was a difference between the subject and the purpose because purpose suggested an intended outcome. The expected audience was identified as well as the actual audience.
A chart also was a useful tool for organizing the information in the documents. It was important to determine the average of the Flesch-Kincaid results to see the general level of writing Urban High School most likely produced and to tally which words were consistently used in the communications. Repetition of words and phrases might offer more insight into the development of these documents because while the words might have easily understood definitions, the connotations or specialized definitions of them might not exist in the lexicon of the average reader of the document. The researcher created the chart in Appendix B to maintain organization and patterns in the language.

When considering language, determining the tone of the document, which was the attitude the author takes toward his subject, was necessary to identify and describe examples from the actual text. As well, a brief discussion of the connotation (the emotions, values, or images associated with diction and syntax) and examples of diction (choice of words) and examples from text to support analysis was necessary to determine any bias or understandings of cultural expectations within the document.

**Data Collection: Interviews**

The researcher initially contacted the participants at the location site and scheduled meeting times for the interview. It was a neutral location for all members of the school community as it was considered to be a meeting place that was not governed by any particular person or group within the school. This location was essential to the interview process because it was hoped that the participant felt less apprehensive about the discussion and his opinions in a
setting where he felt confident to speak freely and without fear of repercussion from other members of the school (Bagnoli and Clark, 2010).

It was highly important to safeguard the participants to maintain the integrity of the interview and the future responses from other participants, and the content of the interviews. Confidentiality and privacy during the interview and no interruptions was absolutely necessary; “Please Do Not Disturb: Interview in Progress” signs were be placed on the doors to the conference room, which was sound proofed. While this sign did not prevent people from interrupting, it did require them to knock before entering and therefore would pause the interview.

When the administrator chose to participate, at the beginning of the meeting in Urban High School’s conference room, the researcher explained the purpose of the study, the importance of confidentiality as well as the participant’s rights, and the process by how the information would be utilized in the research. The participant was then asked to read over the consent forms and, if he had any questions, they were answered. All participants were informed that they could withdraw from the study at any time and under no penalty.

The interviewer asked open-ended questions and conversed with the participants in one-on-one interviews that were limited to fifteen minutes. It was important to utilize open-ended questions because those questions allowed for personal reflection and revealed opinions and behaviors. There were two questions that relied on artifacts: the letters used were the Administrative Failure letter and the Graduation Warning letter.
The samples letters that were chosen were the Third Term Failure Letter (9) Administrative Failure Letter (5). The letter that was selected was one that required a response from an adult; these letters were distributed to students in their classroom as a means of delivery. The questions for these documents allowed room for speculation and discussion from the participant. The Urban High School administrators, especially those who presented these forms of communication to the students, were asked to share their perception and understanding of communication with Latino students in regards to their participation and academics.

During the interview, the researcher observed the body language and vocal tone of the participant. The interviews were audio recorded for accuracy and transcription purposes. The interviewer needed to notice the body language and tone of the participant and record in the notes. According to Onwuegbuzie, Dickinson, Leech, and Zoran, (2009), interviews should have structured open ended questions; in fact, Onwuegbuzie et al. suggested that it was important to review vocal tone and behavioral response as well while in an interview to determine the person’s level of understanding and comfort.

Within 24 hours of completing the interview, the researcher transcribed the interviews. Every participant was asked the same guiding questions (Appendix X) which allowed there to be some continuity to the data collected. A chart (Appendix Y) was created to compare their answers and determine if there were any similar themes that became apparent. The analysis of these interviews was organized in two parts. The first part analyzed each participant’s understanding and perception of the communication and the process. Reviewing the transcripts
and charts of their language to determine if there were key words in this conversation allowed
the researcher to make any comparisons and contrasts in theme and behavior. By combining their
words and their behaviors, it was possible to determine a generalized opinion and understanding
of the perception and use of communication with Urban High School.

Data Analysis of Interviews

The goal with this information was to understand the participants’ perspectives of the
communication offered and determine how it affects the development of communication. With
the information from the interviews, the previously mentioned document charts were to compare
and contrast reactions to protocols, expectations, and about word choice and language in the
communication. The notes from the individual sections were examined for similar themes,
behaviors, and possibly language used by the interviewers.

With the analysis of the literature and the information from the interviews, it was possible
to compare and contrast the information to determine if the purpose and tone of the literature did
have an impact on the communication and process. With the analyses completed, the researcher
determined where there were certain agreements between different focus groups and/or the
literature. It was be possible to determine to what extent, if any were communication and
protocols of Urban High School effective.

Confidentiality and Ethics
In order to maintain the anonymity of the school in documentation, each article of information was labeled with a number. Then, the researcher analyzed the document for symbols, names, addresses, websites, or logos that indicated specific location or names that were associated with the school district. Identifying information was blacked out, and the documents were carbon copied before being scanned to prevent identification of the files.

Not only was anonymity of the documents important but confidentiality was also important to the participants. The researchers asked the participants to be part of this study because they were administrators at an urban high school that actively created communication for the students and their families. Their part in this study was confidential. Only the researchers on this study reviewed the information they supplied, and the data to the interviews (the recorded sessions) was not kept at the high school; also, the data will be destroyed a year after the completion of the research. No reports or publications used information that could identify these participants, the school, or any individual in any way.

All members in this research were informed that participation was completely voluntary. They were informed that they were free to withdraw consent and discontinue participation in this project at any time—even during the interview--without prejudice. Their decision to participate or not had no effect on their standing at work. It was reinforced that information was not released to any member of the Urban High School, and names and positions were not revealed in the final research: that is, the researcher gave each participant a pseudonym and did not reveal specific details of professional positions. Each member received a consent form as well that specifically
stated the participant’s rights and possible concerns; these were also kept on file in case he or she requested another copy.

**Research Biases**

One concern was the provider of the score (Burton-Jones, 2009). It’s important to note that as the researcher, I noticed my own biases. As one of the only Latino members of the Urban High School faculty, I tended to have a better understanding of the social and family breakdowns of the students in our district. In this instance, it was very important for me to arrange the information but maintain an objective frame of mind so that I did not implement my own information and perception into the situation. Knowing some of the students and knowing that they identify with me was one of the reasons I explored this topic; I was passionately exploring connections in education for Latino students. However, focusing solely on the communication and not on the inferences I might assume would be crucial so that I do not involuntarily put information into the study and derive more from the situation than an unbiased researcher should.

**Positionality**

I am the daughter of a Mexican legalized immigrant and second generation American. I grew up in an upper middle class environment and attended a school system that was 95% Caucasian. My upbringing was not unusual, but I saw some cases of racism towards my father and occasionally myself that reminded me that regardless of the location, it seemed that there was a difference between the cultures. However, growing up in a close family helped me meet
my academic achievements and plan for my future as an educator. I do not meet the criteria for
the Latino I’ve described in previous parts of my research.

It was not until I taught in an urban system that I realized the extreme differences in
education and support that could and did occur on a regular basis. In the first few years of my
teaching, I was educated myself – I realized that there was a completely different process in the
public school system other than the one I was used to and that the system that I knew well was
actually foreign to many students. Knowing that many of the students I encountered did not have
the same support system and means that I did changed the way that I thought and prepared for
learning and teaching. I decided that my goal would be to use my research as a tool to help
Latino students become integrated into the education system in Massachusetts.

The community in which I conducted research is an interesting paradox: they are made
up of primarily Latino families but choose to adhere to their previous way of life which did not
include cultural newcomers. I am aware of the racial, cultural, and classist issues in the
community in which this research was conducted; however, my interest in exploring the needs of
the Latino community is also an interest of the many school communities. To explain it in
Villenas terms (1996), I am a biracial member of a community but a student at an affluent
university who is also a member of a predominantly Caucasian administration that serves an
immigrant and Latino population in a low-income community. I do not feel as if I identify as a
member of this at-risk community; I appear more as an outsider because I do not have the
community ties and have further education a different experience than many in Urban City.

I think that my ability to not be included in all aspects of the groups of stakeholders gives
me an advantage. Ellsworth’s (1989) discussion of critical pedagogy, which was also discussed by Villenas (1996), discusses that critical theory discusses education as if everyone is on an equal level: that all members of the community can see every aspect and understand the complexities of the problems. The fact that my research is based on the effectiveness of communication suggests that there is already a need for someone to understand complexities that occur on both sides of the conflict. While I by no means believe that I have answers for every problem that crosses Urban City, nor can I understand all of them, my insight and research gives me a greater understanding that I can use to bridge the concerns and needs for effective leadership in Urban High School. While planning this research, I realized that it was likely that the answers and hypothesis formed around the data might not be desired. I also knew that some situations needed to be explored for better or worse so that a plan could be created; therefore, I went ahead with the research even though many people in the community have chosen to ignore the initial concerns.

I have chosen to write the research in chapters four and five in third person so that I can practice an unbiased, objective opinion of the data presented. My focus is not on the participants but on their words and the language presented in the documents; the words’ impact and possible perception – therefore, I do not wish to indicate any personal opinions or reflections of the people within the work. I do use pseudonyms for the participants so that the people are still people but are not those with whom I interact.

Reliability
Creswell suggested triangulating data to prevent misinterpretation (2009). Triangulation of data required “building a coherent justification for themes. If themes were established based on converging several sources” then this could be considered valid and reliable (p. 191). The information from the various documents as well as the information from the interviews was compared for similar patterns and themes.

Threats to validity might include what Creswell (2009) would describe as “mortality” but might actually consist of dropping out, transferring, or leaving before an interview could occur; that is, if clarification is necessary, and the person cannot be reached, the data might be invalid or skewed. Urban High School has a high turnaround of faculty and therefore can be unstable in information and opinion. However, all participants expressed interest and participated in the interviews during the month of April 2012; all were available for question follow ups.

The participants might also skew the data by answering as they believe they should -- not as they honestly believe or interpret. Therefore, participants were briefed on the importance of honesty and confidentiality. The waiver indicated that they understand the importance of maintaining integrity and honesty when answering interview questions; however, they had the option of not answering if they so choose.

Also, in order to protect the instrument and its procedure, “to reduce rating bias, instruments and procedures [should be] validated and pretested, and raters [should be] assured that their responses [will] remain anonymous” (p. 459). Open-ended questions asked the participant to identify and then describe as well as evaluate. The Massachusetts State
Frameworks specifically required these members of the faculty to have knowledge of tiered open-ended questions and therefore they had the capacity to analyze the question and it respond to all aspects of it. There was no question that was out of the administrator’s ability to comprehend or explain.

Summary

The researcher to analyzed language, behavior, and thought process, as a qualitative case study was chosen as the procedure for this research. Conducting interviews at Urban High School about the levels of communication with Latino families and students as well as analyzing the documents provided to the students helped determine the effectiveness of the overall processes applied.

Through the careful collection of documentation and interviews, the information could be analyzed through worksheets, data analysis of the Flesch-Kinkaid Readability, and reoccurring themes in transcripts. In order to maintain the integrity and confidentiality of the research, consent forms were explained and distributed to those who would be candidates for interviewing. Furthermore, the data was not kept at or returned to Urban High School.

The possible biases, including the researcher’s own background and relation to the members of the community, were discussed and clarified with strategies used to prevent biases. It was determined that the author would keep third person in the work to prevent combining personal information and school accessed information from tainting the actual data.
Understanding the procedures for the analysis would be essential for researchers who wish to replicate the study with other districts. The findings of the study were discussed in chapter four, where the researcher reviewed the process and data.
Chapter Four: Findings

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to examine the effectiveness of Urban High School administrators’ communication with Latino families and students. The overarching goal of this study is to identify strategies that would improve school practices in communication within a demographically diverse community. The researcher explored the perceptions of the administrators who create the most communication for students regarding academic achievement and graduation. She also analyzed the language in the documents that are sent out to students, the delivery of documents to students, and the visual presentation of the documents.

Two essential questions were the overarching concepts for this project: 1) How effective is the communication between administrators, Latino families, and their students at Urban High School and 2) What possible messages are being perceived by the receivers of the documents that the administrators are creating and delivering?

Three major themes were discovered in the data: language, attitude, and behavior. These three themes, which receive different reactions from each community represented in this research (Latino families, students, and administrators), are key factors to understanding why most communication at Urban High School is ineffective.

Participant Factors and Interview
Interview participants (all introduced with pseudonyms) in the interviews gave testimony that although they created and delivered communication, there was little to no response from the intended audiences. The participants gave examples of positive reactions but could identify concerns that they had about the levels of communication with students and families at Urban High School. Through discussion, it was possible to determine the results organized here. The administrators at Urban High School were eager to participate when asked for an interview; four of them wished to be interviewed within forty-eight hours of being asked. Everyone agreed that completing it before the spring vacation would be beneficiary because the next academic stretch of time was busy with social events and graduation protocols.

The principal, Mr. Austin, encouraged the research to be conducted because he recognized that the diversity in the school had changed. As a principal of Urban High School for five years and a person who had changed careers from business to education, he noticed the changes and saw the school through a New England Association of School and Colleges recovery; he also was the writing of the school improvement plan. Through examining data as well as being a member of Urban community, he recognized the changes and implemented some fixes for the communication. School rumor was that he was planning to retire within the next three years, but that did not deter his efforts for improvement.

Ms. Greene, the second principal of the high school, had only been at Urban High School for two years. Around age 50, she had worked in this community for decades as an elementary teacher, a middle school assistant principal, and now she was at the high school. Her degrees
were all from state universities – the highest a Certificate of Advanced Graduate Study in Administration. She aspires to create a learning community where the students are self-directed, but often she is discouraged by the lack of communication from the staff, the students, and the community.

Mr. Graves, the assistant principal in charge of leading the juniors and seniors, was rarely seen in the main office; his office was on the complete opposite side of the building. Mr. Graves was actively looking for a position closer to his home and was often overly frustrated with the behavior and decorum of the students and staff. Communication from his office was often short and terse, and it was difficult for any member of the school to hold his attention because he was constantly being interrupted.

In the center of the building Ms. Ryder and Ms. Stephen. They both worked from the guidance office. Ms. Stephen was a newly appointed head of the department and wished to improve the methods in which the school members communicated; however, being new to the position, she was still in the point of her tenure where she was observing and forming opinions and strategies. Ms. Ryder, the director of MCAS, had specific goals in her position: one was to execute MCAS in an efficient manner by the state’s expectations; the other was to prepare the students for retesting so that they could make proficient.

Every administrator is a stakeholder in this school, as their work is contingent on the success of Urban High School. Without their contributions to the school, the school is not efficient for students and staff; however, all were aware that there was a need for organizational
transformation, and that includes analyzing communication amongst themselves, Latino students, and families – as well as every other demographic in Urban city.

**Protocol for Creating Communication**

One of the first questions asked to each administrator was “Please describe your process of creating a communication for the students?” This question was open ended and did not require any specific response; it did not focus on any specific type of communication (written, verbal, electronic) so that each administrator would focus on what they perceived was the most important to explain. Each administrator created a varying number of communications meant for the staff, families, and students, so each administrator answered the question with a unique response.

Ms. Greene, the associate principal, explained that the development of communication varied depending on the purpose of the information. Often, she had an estimated 50 communications sent from her office each month. In order to prepare a written communication, she mentioned that she utilized “a template” and that it was possible to use the letterhead in electronic communication as well as in print. This standardized format would be preferred because this format was easily duplicated and quickly released.

Mr. Graves and Ms. Greene had similar concerns when creating communication and preferred to have input from other knowledgeable faculty members when creating a message. Ms. Greene mentioned that
I usually get help from someone like [technology teacher]. Um, and then when we’ve created them I try to send one to check for editing, and then we have it printed and sent out. Like the program of studies, (chuckles) that was a bigger deal. That was edited by several people. So I – so I usually work with someone else who is the expert unless it is just a letter I am sending to a kid.

Mr. Graves, the assistant principal who works specifically with grades 11 and 12, also determined that some specific documents “need to solicit input – broad-based input – from other members of the leadership committee” especially when it was “requiring a more broad based support I would consult the principal, associate principal to prepare those [documents].” Mr. Graves rarely sent out communications to the Latino students unless the documents need personalization. According to the administrators, the personalized communications, which were the fewer of the communications sent, were the ones that did not receive input from other members of the staff. Mr. Graves also had a series of calendars that are released in April and Might to inform the students of the upcoming events and graduation requirements that concern them. These were released at an annual Senior Assembly for the students where he explained the information in detail to the graduating student body.

The practice of reviewing the information with other contributing adults seemed to be a standard response and almost expectation at Urban High School. In guidance, Ms. Stephen followed the pattern of having another person review the letter. When asked in a follow up, Ms. Stephen said that “review” meant to “check for errors.” She also noted, in her original interview, that “Most recently, [she’s] been having [her] notifications translated into Spanish – just Spanish,
none of the other languages – and those are being disseminated to those students as well.” Ms. Stephen was the only member of the interviewed administrators who focused on Spanish communication without directives in the question. Recently, she had been participating in professional development that focused on community inclusion; her interest in the subject was high and she sought new ways to expand communication to the community.

The principal, however, chose to discuss a different route of providing communication where he outsourced the message and had the students prepare the communication. He mentioned that “we have a variety of different types of students. I try to go through the clubs, the student council and the class offices.” This method placed the responsibilities on the students and allowed them to maintain a student-centered communication.

The principal mentioned that in the upcoming year, “[the school is] opening up a parent portal [online] which will allow students better communication with their school, and with their teachers. One of the things we’ve tried in the past, we used the website.” The website proved to be problematic because “for us to keep it updated, we have difficulty. We don’t have a large staff that can assign themselves to that.” The website was maintained by a Java teacher in the building; it was updated as often as she had time to do so.

One of the reoccurring themes that occurred during the interviews was the need for collaboration. The collaboration seemed to occur for major communications, and these communications included items such as Urban High School’s Program of Studies and the school’s student handbook. It was important to each administrator that the other administrators had input in the decisions and information included within these items.
Paradoxically, one of the major concerns that administrators had about the communication at Urban High School was a lack of communication amongst the administrators. Ms. Greene showed concern over the sample documents because she had not seen the Fail Letter and asked, “So this is what really goes out? I didn’t even know that because I don’t see everything. This doesn’t come through me.” Ms. Ryder echoed the statement that information does not cross all members of the administration when she said “Because [the administrators] have to work with so many different people, [information can be] inaccurate and we have to go back and fix it. And that messes the kids up.” Despite the fact that they seek assistance with their own communications for the students, they often do not have an opportunity to reference the communication of the other members on their team.

Mr. Austin mentioned a serious concern when discussing the fact that he does not get to review every communication sent to the students. He stated

... we don’t censor anything, so I have seen individual teachers send out communication which are not only poorly written, but we always should have a positive climate. And that is what I try to do in my communications. So, a teacher, or an administration, who sending out a letter – even if it’s a reprimand – it can be positively, positively done without demeaning character, degrading, and degenerating anything about that individual. You know, if he’s late to school, he’s late to school; we’re going to improve on it. Yes, you can throw the threat in there, but once you say you’re late, you don’t have to say you’re continuously late. There is a certain way we can do that. And we probably as administrators and teachers don’t do a great job in what we’re trying to convey.
Mr. Austin did not suggest that it was necessary to review every communication but certainly that there needed to be more reflection and protocol when sending it to students and families – especially when sending personalized communication.

**Creating Their Communications**

The administrators agreed that most of the communications they created were directed “at parents and students.” It was important to understand their answers to this question because this answer would align to the purposes and audiences of the sampled documents.

Ms. Greene first mentioned the staff as her primary communications but stated that she envisions parents and students as her audience. Ms. Stephen, the director of the guidance department, discussed the audience as “the student body at the high school and their parents. I try to keep what I’m doing for the students very generic so it doesn’t single out any type or any specific group.”

However, this statement contradicted the content that was released in email blasts and fliers. Even though the information and language was generic, much of the content did not include the Latino community in its audience. Ms. Greene stated that some of her informational communications were directed at specific audiences --

- scholarship programs, upcoming seminars, information that they need to be aware of – notifications regarding upcoming events that they might want to attend, events for their parents, updates about college/career/acceptance programs – updates to our Naviance guidance programs, checking with counselors. Sometimes it’s just information about something going on in the community. AP students get a notification letter from me
regarding their program with things that they need to do and times of their exams – I’d say that covers all of it.

Upon further investigation, this information is communicated in English; it is not translated. The information from the College Board was directed at a specific demographic of student (usually the top 20-10% of the class) and does not appear to include information for vocational schools or trade schools in the area or beyond. There is one day in the year where the guidance students meet directly with the class to explain the college process, but there was little information available that expresses the possible interests of postsecondary educations in Spanish or directed at Latino communities.

Ms. Ryder was more specific by describing them as “urban district families that would include income, low income, middle of the road.” This information was noted because many of the students who were repeating or retaking MCAS were at-risk students that included low income and English Language Learner students. For the class of 2011, 27% of the students did not meet proficiency on MCAS and therefore were either placed on an EPP or had to retake the test; this number does not account for the members of the school community who received their Certificate of Attainment.

Sometimes, the most important communications happened in person. Mr. Graves stated that “90% of my interactions during the day are with the students. So, that is my audience.” Mr. Graves was adamant that most of his communication is actually verbal, face-to-face communication with students; this required his daily level of communication to be formal and professional.
The principal mentioned that there were different audiences for the communication and again, his medium depended on the purpose of the message. He sent the staff emails “four or five times a month” and “something to administration much more frequently.” When it came to students, he explained again that he made the purpose part of the students’ goals. He stated that he used “their club members or class advisors” “depending on the situation.”

He also mentioned the specific electronic all-call as a means to meet audiences. He explained it was “basically for parents. 90% of the time, and 10% it’s for students. So I would say I try to communicate more with parents than I do with students.” He was the most knowledgeable about the different languages available and how to translate a call into those languages; it was possible to translate the all-call alert messages into 15 different languages.

Also, Mr. Austin mentioned that “the staff would be on the same page as I am trying to get the message out. I think it is I believe the staff is on the same page as I am trying to get the message out and I think we’re very fortunate here in [Urban High School] that the staff does get the message out.” Mr. Austin was the only administrator to mention the staff’s importance in communication and to praise the fact that the staff, even though they might occasionally send out a poor communication, did consistently attempt to support the process of reaching student and parent and receiving a response.

**Modifications for English Language Learners**

Urban High School administrators made some effort to accommodate audiences that speak Spanish as their primary language. There were concerns and deficiencies in the process that do impact the execution of the message and possibly the response.
There was a translator for entire the district who translated the documents into “standard Spanish.” These documents were translated and then sent back to the high school to be, as Ms. Ryder stated “double sided with an English and Spanish version on the back.” Mr. Graves stated that “If they are things that are factual in nature and informative, I contact the woman who is in charge of the ELL department and she arranges for that to be translated.”

Human error and time could often be obstacles for completing this communication transaction. With so many other concerns and issues in the office, it could be possible to forget to translate if it is not a natural reflex. Ms. Greene mentioned that “I try to remember all the time—if it’s just to the one student, then it’s easy to remember but you know sometimes when we’re sending out a general letter, we have try to remember to get it done and get it interpreted—translated I guess is the right word.”

Mr. Austin seconded the concern after he explained how the all-call alerts were converted for second languages. They were easier to execute than written communication:

*We’ll make the alert in English, it’s converted to the languages we’ve clicked off, and it will go out to parents. Another way is if I’m doing a personal notification by mail, we have an interpreter who works for our ELL program. She’ll interpret things. Problem – problematic – is you have to give her like a week, week and a half in advance, so you have to give her. So anything that is immediate never gets translated.*
Mr. Austin sounded and appeared concerned as he explained the time gap of the language barrier. This concern was an important one because occasionally, a response from parents was needed by the next day or a message might be immediate for the family, but without that translation, they were denied the information and chance to communicate with the school. There were bilingual staff members, but none of them were available for immediate language services.

While Ms. Stephen followed the same pattern of using the district translator for documents, she also mentioned that

*I’ve been working with [members of the ELL team] and also the teachers in the ELL program and try to get the information to those students specifically and with someone that they are familiar with. I find that that’s worked rather than hearing it from me. I went to a seminar for the ELL students to get them ready to take their MEPA testing, and I wanted to promote an evening that I was having just for them, and I went to the [members of the ELL team] because they [students] are more comfortable with the people that they know and can speak to.*

Including staff with which the students associated a level of comfort and ability to communicate could be a great asset to developing relationships with the Latino families and students.

Having the translator for written communications was not enough at the high school; Section 1118, Title I of the No Child Left Behind Act (2001) stated that schools must provide parents with limited English proficiency and/or parents of migratory children “full participation”
opportunities. Schools were also required to inform parents in an understandable and uniform format in the language that the parents understand. It was possible that while the school is attempting to accommodate families with limited/no English proficiency, they might not be meeting the requirements of Title I expectations. In a high school with 2,000 students, where 22% of the school did not understand English as their first language, one might expect more than one translator – especially when a linguistic translator was not located at the high school.

**Level of Language**

There was a divide in the answer about the level of language the administrators use when they are communicating with students and Latinos. The principals believed that they were communicating in a formal, standardized manner. Mr. Austin and Mr. Graves indicated what Ms. Greene stated: she “tries to make it formal.”

Mr. Graves mentioned that he was “pretty much a hands on, walk the hallways, so it is a verbal. And when it comes to specific things like, graduation or upcoming events, proms, I communicate that in writing but everything is very verbal with the students.” His communication was professional to the students in both paper and by word of mouth.

However, Ms. Ryder and Ms. Stephen, the guidance department, stressed that they use language that is “mostly informal. We don’t want to stress anybody out” when discussing MCAS retest information. Ms. Stephen mentioned that her mass statements are “always formal, I don’t change when I write to the students or the parents.” It was important to note that she perceived her communications as standard and respectful.

**Delivering Communications**
Delivering communications to roughly 2000 families is a difficult task and different methods are required to reach a majority of the families and students in the building. The most common delivery methods are delivering fliers by hand, sending out “email blasts” that are fliers via email, and the alert system. The direct of guidance stated that the information sent to students and parents, “primarily goes out as a flier. We’ll usually start with that – or we’ll do email blasts. That works out really well. We’ll also do a verbal blast over the phone which we will also translate into languages.”

Mr. Graves explained that “[he doesn’t] think any one technique is particularly effective; when we meet with seniors who are failing one or more required classes, we try to use several different strategies to reach them. One is by phone. A letter is sent out, and then a conversation is held with the student. So those three things increase the likelihood, in my experience – but simply sending home a letter [doesn’t work].” He also expressed that he would like to see Urban High School “move to other vehicles to communicate our messages other than just the standard form letters and things like that.”

Ms. Greene mentioned that delivering paper communication to students can be difficult because “usually they think they are in trouble for something.” Delivering paper information requires more specific, spoken detail for the students so they will accept the communication. She explained “when I’m sending something home via student, I always say ‘This is your 504 plan, you’re not in trouble.’” She also stated that “if it’s a mass mailing, I don’t know that there is any reaction from them” and later explained that addresses and information might not be accurate and therefore, the family might not receive the information at all.
Mr. Austin also included a different style of communication. He would often use the school’s students and teachers to relay messages. If the message pertained to specific club and he had the ability to reach that group, he would utilize the students to push the information to the rest of the faculty and student body. This incorporated many of the students’ peers and therefore might produce a different reaction because the information appears to come from a different source.

**Responses to Communication**

All five of the administrators stated that they received very little to no communication from the Latino community. The responses were solemn. However, there was hope amongst the educators that there would be further communications and that changes were being made to the system.

Ms. Stephen expressed her major concerns with the communication. She said, in regards to all students, “I think they throw [the fliers] away. I don’t think they pay much attention to them at all. I think that might be the students who are a little more academically focused will at least glance at it, but I feel like my efforts are futile.” She mentioned, however, she “would enjoy getting feedback to know that they received something from me. Probably the only time I get notification back is if I sent out an alert or an email about some type of event. If those parents show up to the event, I usually ask them how they learned about the event.” It was nearly impossible to determine whether the information was ignored or not received; however, the administrators clearly recognize there was no response to their communication from either
Latino families or Latino students – and their responses also suggested this problem might be larger than one demographic. The information provided seemed to suggest that the rest of the community paid little to no attention to the information released from Urban High School.

Although Ms. Stephen states that she is “very concerned that we don’t communicate enough with the parents. I don’t feel we bring them in – I don’t feel we bring them in enough. I feel like if we did and made them more part of our community, regardless or race or language barriers, we’d definitely have a better response from students,” there have been instances where major communication has prevailed. There were two specific incidents that were mentioned, and the administrators not only spoke highly of the events but also showed pride in the communication process. Both Mr. Austin and Mr. Graves beamed as they reflected on their events, and in general, their language and facial expressions reflected their approval of the situations.

Mr. Austin mentioned that specific, personalized, translated letters were sent to the student’s Latino family at least one week prior to the student receiving an academic award at Urban High School. Mr. Austin explained

_Last night we had the awards ceremony for outstanding and most improved students – largest Latino turn out and they might have been late because it was on island time but there was a large, large turnout. But they appreciated it. We did send out that letter in Spanish through their registration information. In that case, I think it really worked. It really worked._
Mr. Austin recognized the importance of the translated communication and understood the shared positive response that both the administrators and the families had. This shared appreciation and success encouraged them to continue such specified, personalized, translated letters when appropriate.

To continue the trend of the families and the students working in tandem with the Urban High School faculty, Mr. Graves mentioned the Class of 2011’s graduation ceremony. This ceremony took place at the traditional location of the field; however, the worn grass had been replaced by AstroTurf; this specialized material required specific treatment and it was essential that people who were allowed on the field did not smoke, did not bring refreshments, and did not wear shoes that could puncture the brand new equipment. It was also very important to the superintendent that the ceremony appear as traditional as possible, so he also requested that inflatable items, balloons, and air horns were to be left outside of the stadium.

Mr. Graves explained that the school system took an active approach to promoting and communicating the importance of the changes at graduation.

And we basically did a campaign blitz – we sent home letters to parents in English and Spanish, a report did a story that was published in the paper, we did an All-alert call.

Depending on the issues, I think – that was a pretty important thing because graduation attracts several thousand people, it had to be done.

The faculty also helped create signs that stated “For our guest’s enjoyment, please do not bring or use air horns, balloons, or beach balls into the stadium. Thank you,” or, “Por favor, para el
disfrute de nuestros invitados, no use los cuernos, y no llevar globos o pelotas en el estadio. Gracias.” The signs were created to express the exact same message in both English and Spanish – ensuring that all guests regardless of language or culture would be able to understand the expectations of entering the stadium. This communication blitz was very effective and the graduation was successful without any damage or concerns. This event process proves that is possible for the school to complete communications for the entire community; however, it took more than one form of communication and multiple attempts to communicate the message.

Administrators’ Concerns

Many of the administrators stated that their major concerns for the development of communication stemmed from miscommunications and technology issues. They felt that even though the information was necessary, the document could make it seem like an overload; at the same time, it might not be possible to use other avenues for communication because of the behavior patterns in the demographics.

Mr. Graves stated that “sometimes at work, at home, at school, you get so much bulk mail that sometimes you are programmed to discard it right away.” This concern followed with the mentions from Ms. Greene and Mr. Austin that sometimes the information did not make it out of the post office because the addresses for the students are unreliable and often wrong. If the information does arrive at the proper location, there was always the concern that the student might discard it before the parent has the opportunity to review it.
Ms. Greene also worried about misinterpretation. She noted that “sometimes, sometimes a letter might set a tone you don’t intend” and Mr. Austin also echoed that sentiment when discussing the communication sent from some of the staff.

*I have seen individual teachers send out communication which is not only poorly written but we always should have a positive climate. And that is what I try to do in my communications. So, a teacher, or an administration, who sending out a letter – even if it’s a reprimand – it can be positively, positively done without demeaning character, degrading, and degenerating anything about that individual.*

The concern about tone and purpose was a difficult one to control at Urban High School because so many individuals have the ability to send communications to various members of the community.

Two administrators noticed that there was concern with the language in the sample letters. Ms. Greene held the Failure Letter and explained, “I wish this one would be more like we will be calling you and having you come in to a meeting or something of that effect.” She clarified by adding “it just says ‘it is imperative you speak with your child.’ this one is putting it all on the parent to do something.” She maintained the position that it was the responsibility of the faculty and administrator to initiate and persist to create communication with the families.

Ms. Ryder also commented on the letters. Her concern with the Administrator Failure letter was summarized in one word: legal. The tone, the language and the presentation suggests that the information was presented for the legal purpose of informing the family, not of suggesting any sort of remedy or communication.
Mr. Graves’s response indicated his understanding that more than one medium of communication was necessary if the administrators wanted positive responses from the receivers; it was not necessarily that they did not understand but that they did not receive the initial information. He explained, “It’s a singular attempt to communicate with parents, and my feeling is that if the issue is important – as it is – it requires several different avenues to communicate with the family. This is just very perfunctory and frankly a lot of parents totally ignore it or don’t understand it. I don’t get a lot of calls on this.”

Lack of Technology

One of the major concerns that the staff had was the ability of the Urban High School community to communicate through technology. The administrators were aware of the preconception that it might be difficult for Latino students and families to communicate through technology. However, a 2010 Pew study revealed that there has been an increase in Latino families using technology such as internet, smart phones, and other devices that would serve as a means of communication delivery.

Figure 4. Technology Used by Race and Ethnicity, 2010 Pew Research
Livingston (2010) found that 77% of Hispanics (referring to ethnicity and language) utilize other applications on the phone other than the voice command compared to 75% of whites. She also found that “Spanish-dominant Hispanics trail bilingual and English-dominant Hispanics in internet use, home internet access, home broadband access and cell phone ownership.” It seems that language affects the person’s use of technology; 47% of Spanish-dominant Latinos use the internet compared with 74% of bilingual Latinos and 81% of English-dominant Latinos (Livingston, 2010).

Mr. Austin mentioned that “with the electronic age and technology, you know we’re on Facebook now through guidance, and we’re going to be on Twitter shortly. We will get more techno-savvy people, but the people we really want to reach, I’m not sure we’re going not get.” His preconceived notion of the lack of technology echoed the findings of the data; the Spanish
dominant families might not utilize the electronic communication; however, Mr. Austin predicted that “in the 21 century you’ll see more and more electronic communication. Again, that might leave a segment of the population out and I’m not sure but we’re making a conservative effort to go forward.” Mr. Graves advocated as well: “I would like to see us move to other vehicles to communicate our messages other than just the standard form letters and things like that.”

The administrators utilized email and phone alerts to send information to the community; however, when the information was not updated in the system or was lost because of the system glitches (as Mr. Austin suggested), then the information did not reach the intended audience. These systems appear to need further development and stability in order to make them productive tools.

**Document Descriptions**

Sixteen separate documents were analyzed to determine to what extent communication and language may have an impact on a Latino student’s academic status. There were four types of documents presented in this study.

Figure 5. Different categories of information sent from Urban High School
Qualitative data relies on understanding and interpreting the behavior and responses of others (Creswell, 2009). In this particular study, the formal communication given to 11 and 12 grade students in regards to their graduation and achievements was analyzed; in addition, the Urban High School website was analyzed for ease of understanding. These documents and websites included:

- The September 2010 letter to a parent/guardian from the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education explained the results and eligibility requirements from the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System and the graduation requirements.
- The September 2010 parent letter (available only in English) to explain the new Alert Now Notification Service and how it will help students and parents receive important information in the future was released by the Superintendent of Schools. This letter was English only.
• The “Meet the Faculty Night” flier was delivered in homeroom to the students. It invited the parents to attend the annual open house and explained the procedure for determining the student’s schedule. This version was available in English.

• The “Meet the Faculty Night” flier that was delivered in homeroom to the students. It invited the parents to attend the annual open house and explained the procedure for determining the student’s schedule. This version that was not updated is available in Spanish.

• The November 3, 2010 Urban High School Administrative Failure Warning to Parents, which was handed out in homeroom, explained the absences and the school policy. It was available in English only.

• The November 17, 2010, memo for parents about First Quarter Report Card Conferences was distributed in homeroom with report cards. This memo was English only.

• The February 2011, letter to a parent/guardian from the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education explained the results and eligibility requirements from a retake test. It was available in only English.

• The March 28, 2011, letter to parents explained the school’s state report card in regards to teacher qualifications, student achievement, and school accountability. The letter was available in both English and Spanish but the data was available in English only.

• The April 28, 2011, from guidance reported a student is failing and would not meet graduation requirements. This was a letter of high importance to students and families who are at risk. This letter was available in English.
- The April 28, 2011, from guidance reported a student is failing and would not meet graduation requirements. This was a letter of high importance to students and families who are at risk. This letter was available in Spanish.

- The June 2, 2011, Alert Now Message was the emailed transcript of the district wide phone call that occurred to inform the families, staff, and students of regulations for the graduation ceremony. This alert was English only.

- The standard letter sent to a student who did not pass the MCAS that he might retake it to attain a diploma. This letter sent by the MCAS coordinator in guidance was only available in English.

- The standard letter sent to a parent whose child might need extra services. “Whom It Might Concern” that MCAS tutoring is available for your child and when it is available. This letter is in English only.

- The standard parent/guardian letter that discusses the changes to the MCAS and the development of an EPP. This was released by the principal and only available in English.

- A reverse side of a fourth term report card was available in English only. This was part of the standard release of grades.

- A fourth term progress report was available in English only.

- The Urban High School Website main page was printed and archived on June 7, 2011. The main page and the parent and student links were printed out. These were available in English only.

**Document Review**
Many of these documents were not translated to Spanish, but nonetheless it was important to review the documents that were available for content and language. Urban High School’s mission statement promised all students would effectively speak, read, and write in English; therefore, the parent and student, working together, might be able to comprehend the gist of an English only document’s message. In addition, English has many Spanish cognates, so it was possible that a Spanish speaker might translate the main idea of the document.

Understanding the different levels of language and their influence on culture was important to understanding behavior. Creswell (2009) explained that studies that look for specific instances and patterns that pertain to specific cultural groups were described as ethnographic. The diction and ease of reading can be categorized to determine whether language influences the communication between Latino parents and the faculty at Urban High School.

**Visual Communication**

The visual presentation of information is an important element of communication because it affected the perceptions the receiving audience might have toward the communicator. The perception of the information affected the next steps that the person would take to continue the communication or complete the task expected of him; furthermore, the culture and linguistic abilities of the person might also influence the person’s ability to interpret just as it might also influence the person’s creation of the document.

The documentation was examined for font, letterhead, and visual clarity. The font was examined because the size, clarity, and narrowness of a font can influence a person’s understanding of the information. Oppenheimer and Alter (2009) determined that a clear font,
such as a size 12 Arial or Times New Roman, would be the ideal font for communicating information in a simple, nontreating manner. The fonts discussed in the chart did not include the standardized letterhead fonts.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Font</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Documents Used</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Times New Roman</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>Guidance, report cards, guidance, progress reports, and main office letters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arial</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>Fliers for parent events</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arial Narrow</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>Flier from the central office for alert information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Georgia</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>State report card</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Urban High School presented clear font documentations to their audiences; the information is printed primarily in either Arial or Times New Roman in a size of 12 or larger. Only one document, the September 2010 letter that requested an update for information, used Arial Narrow; it appeared difficult to read because of the narrowness of the font as well as the reprint from a photocopier; this minute detail might seem fickle but the wavering of the narrow font might contribute to the difficulty of reading the document. The fonts, even on the website, were presented in standard black font – the easiest visual for interpretation. These fonts were
wise choices because they are easy to read and subconsciously inspired confidence in the reader’s ability.

However, the letterhead within the school lacked consistency. The Urban High School standard letterhead contained a pixelated image of the school’s mascot but documentation varied as to whether the letterhead contained footer (with the school’s mission statement) or contact information. This symbol was a necessity because it offered nonverbal information as to who sent the information; the contact information was critical so the receiver could contact the source.

Figure 7. Information present on the 13 documents released specifically by Urban High School

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Information</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pixelated mascot</td>
<td>69%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contact information</td>
<td>46%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mission statement</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Title of school or department</td>
<td>85%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It was important to recognize that two of the documents that should certainly contain easily accessible contact information or a recognizable mascot did not include them: the progress report and the report card; however, it does have the high school embossed and watermarked. Furthermore, there was no easily available contact information on the website; one had to click other links to additional pages and know to whom he wished to contact to locate the necessary information.

**Document Readability**
The readability of the documents was scored using the Flesch-Kincaid Readability and Ease programs that are included in Microsoft Office. The average score of the document was 46.1; the Flesch-Kincaid Readability score that of average English is 65. This difference meant that the documentation from Urban High School as well as from the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education contained a higher reading level than the average universal English documents, and therefore they might be more difficult for the average reader to process and comprehend because of the length of the sentences as well as the level of language used in the documentation.

The website was not included in the test because there were too many links (which are often sentence fragments) and images that contained words but no sentences, thus altering the scores. The progress report was not included because there were too many variables in the system; progress reports could come with multiple combinations of comments and letters that do not process as sentences. This combination then would create a false reading.

Figure 8. Flesch-Kincaid Readability Test and Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level for sampled documents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Letter</th>
<th>FK R</th>
<th>FK GL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. The September 2010: Massachusetts DESE</td>
<td>36.5</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. The September 2010: Notification Service</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>12.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. The September 9 2009: Meet the Faculty Night Conferences</td>
<td>10.4</td>
<td>15.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Spanish version)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Document Title</td>
<td>Grade Level</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>The September 2010: memo Meet the Faculty Night Conferences</td>
<td>55.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>The November 3, 2010: Administrative Failure Warning to Parents</td>
<td>44.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>The November 17, 2010: memo</td>
<td>45.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>The February 2011: letter from the DESE</td>
<td>35.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>The March 28, 2011: letter</td>
<td>40.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>The April 28, 2011: letter from guidance (Spanish)</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.</td>
<td>There is a standard letter to “Whom It May Concern”</td>
<td>62.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13.</td>
<td>There is a standard letter for Certificate Attainments</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14.</td>
<td>EPP letter, no date</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15.</td>
<td>Report card information</td>
<td>50.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16.</td>
<td>Progress report</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17.</td>
<td>School website</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The average Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level score for the English documents was 11. This score was five grades above the United States’ average document and newspaper reading level, 6. For comparison of level of language, literary works that score in the 11 range include the works of Shakespeare and Hawthorne; scores of a 6 include *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* or the writing of Beatrix Potter. When examining the chart below, the researcher could visualize how
far about reading level the documents from Urban High School were when compared to the average document level of language.

Figure 9. Visualization of Flesch-Kincaid Grade Levels for documents from Urban High School

The Flesch-Kincaid scores did not indicate whether the work would be comprehensible; it determined at what level a person would be able to read the words and sentences provided. Therefore, these numeric results were not enough information to indicate whether the documents are effective for their intended audience; it was necessary to look at the audience, the purpose, the language, and the organization of the documents as well.

**Delivery of Information**
Reviewing the method used to deliver communication did not reveal how often communication is received or understood. However, the administration indicated that there were various methods of releasing information, and one of their major concerns was that the family or the students would disregard or dispose of the information easily. If there was a fear that the information was not being received, then it was important to determine if the behaviors of transmitting information needed assessment as well.

The protocols used to transmit information were recorded and then included in the chart below. Administrators preferred to speak to the student to explain the importance of the documentation or communication they were transmitting in order to prevent its disposal; however, the documents presented in the folder had specified delivery methods.

Table 10. Methods for delivering communication to students and families

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Method</th>
<th>Type of communication</th>
<th>Percentage used</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hand delivery</td>
<td>Informative letter</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Specific student delivery</td>
<td>Informative/personalized</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technology</td>
<td>Informative/general</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Website</td>
<td>Informative / specialized</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The administrators utilized the traditional release of fliers as their dominant communication; however, handing this information to students did not ensure that any parent or student actually reviewed the communication. While the administrators felt it might be functionally easier to use
the students as a method of message carrying, it did not ensure that the message made it to the receiver. Furthermore, some of these messages were not directed at the student; therefore, the students might recognize this as “not their problem” and then dispose of the documentation.

**Purposes of the Documents**

The written communication from the state was informational and did not require a response from the parents; however, the information for the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education were available to the reader online as well as released from the school. The letters addressed the parent or guardian or adult examinee although not by name. They were reproduced by Urban High School and distributed during homeroom period.

**Educational Letters**

The first letter, the September 2010, notification explained the graduation requirements and expectations of the students. Enclosed was a parent/guardian report for each child. This form specifically explained the numerical scores needed to meet the necessary scores for graduation. The intent of the letter was to inform parents of the student’s academic standing, but there were no directions in the letter. There are statements to indicate direction: “it is imperative that [the parent] speak with [his] child regarding grades, attendance, and behavior.” This letter did not contain a signature or specific person to whom any questions could be directed if necessary.

Document #7, the February 2011 letter, accompanied information about MCAS. Its purpose was to reemphasize the information sent in the September 2010 letter but with fewer explanations. It does offered websites where the parent can look up additional information for EPPs (educational proficiency plans). There was also information about the next retest dates and
the opportunities the students have to take them. This letter was more concise and less informative than the first.

The final letter was also created by the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, but it was released as if it were from the administrators of Urban High School. It informed the parent about the “school report card,” a document explaining how well the high school was performing and helping students achieve proficiency in English Language Arts and mathematics. The information was then accompanied by charts and data. There were links to the Urban High School’s direct website (the main page) if the reader would like to investigate further; this link opened to a PDF document of the same information. In addition, there was no contact information present.

**Central Office**

There was one letter from the executive branch of the school system, the central office. This letter, #2, September 2010, from the Office of the Superintendent, had no contact information to allow a parent to call with questions. The purpose of the document was to inform the parent of the importance of having updating contact information so that the parent can maintain constant communication with the school; there was emphasis that “the successful delivery of information is dependent upon accurate contact information or each student.” However, the message seemed overwhelming, using the system as “a toll to improve parent communication” that would be “deliver[ed] in real time.” It could be assumed the intent of the letter was to request the updated contact information from the parents; however, the actual message was overwhelmed by the lauding of the new system.
Guidance and MCAS

The department for guidance played an important role in the communication system at the school: not only did they inform students about their academic requirements, but they also guided them toward future paths such as post-secondary educations, the workforce, or the armed services. Especially, the MCAS coordinator office sent out some of the most critical information and communication because these documents were the ones that were most necessary to at-risk students. Students who received the communication that indicated they had to make up or take MCAS were often English Language Learners, new to the system, or had other concerns with school (absences, learning, or behavior) that prevent them from succeeding on the exams.

Document #9 from guidance had been translated into Spanish as well as English; it was a notification about report cards and the student’s failure to meet graduation requirements. Its purpose was to inform the parent of an immediately failing student, but the letter passively announced this information and did not suggest directions. The letter stated that “if this situation is not addressed immediately, gradation is doubtful” and stated that “it is imperative that [the parent] speak with [his] child regarding grades, attendance, and behavior.” It did not give any specific information as to what the personal concern was for the student, nor did it discuss how the school would be in contact, if the school would be in contact, or how the situation could be successfully amended. There was a sentence that directs the parent to call the Guidance Counselor if there were questions.

Likewise, #10 suggested the same message; in fact, the information was almost verbatim in translation. However, this version explained the student was “deferring” and “not in
compliance” with the school’s graduation standards. This message also did not give direction for the parents, nor did it specifically say the word “fail,” which greatly impacted the message and tone of the information. The lack of urgency suggested a lack of direction and movement.

The MCAS director used the Guidance Department’s letterhead as the standard stationary. The letters from the MCAS Coordinator were less personal with the title “To Whom It Might Concern” and “Dear” that was sent without a name. The first letter (#12) was undated as it was used previously as a template. This letter clearly stated that it was meant to inform the reader of the next testing dates. It reminded the student that he or she had the opportunity to retest in order to receive a diploma. In the middle of the letter, the third sentence of the third paragraph, there was an imperative sentence for the student to contact the MCAS director; however, the contact information was not present in the letter and letterhead.

The second letter written from the MCAS Coordinator, another undated letter that was a template (#13), was directed to “Whom It Might Concern” and explained immediately that the purpose of the letter is to “inform” that “your child is eligible for MCAS tutoring.” A signature is requested on an enclosed report to ensure that the parents recognized the student’s score on MCAS; in the final paragraph, the writer asked the audience to “please speak to your child about this opportunity.” Although there was discussion as to how MCAS tutoring could help a student, how the student could receive academic credit, and when the student could attend such tutoring, there was no discussion as to how to ensure the student would receive these accommodations. The writer seemed to assume that the parent or the student would take the initiative to ensure the student participated in the tutoring program.
Two of the first informational fliers released from Urban High School were sent from the Principal. The “Meet the Faculty Night” event (#3 and#4), which was often broadcast in both languages, did not have a specific adult audience; however, the school’s plural “we” invite them to “take this opportunity to meet the faculty and become acquainted with the curricula of your student’s courses of study.” There were no specific instructions as to where to arrive nor how to proceed into this event. In fact, it was up to the student to provide the proper homeroom location to the parents so that the parent could attain his or her schedule to proceed with the evening’s events. In either language, this flier was scarce on information that could assist the parent fulfill the expectations of the invitation.

The next informational letter (#5) was personalized to include the student’s name and the number of days the student was absent from the building. The letter opened with the statement that “this is to inform you that [your child] has been absent without excuse.” It follows with the student handbook rule, and then the Principal, whose name was printed at the end of the letter “encourages [the parent] to monitor” attendance. While there was the announcement of absences, there were no specific instructions to communicate or follow through to correct the concern. There was a number to the main office if there were questions. This letter was automated and was delivered to the student in his or her homeroom if he or she appeared in homeroom.

The November 17, 2010 letter was directed to the students (#6). It was given to the students in homeroom with their report cards. The intent of the parent conference evening was to
have the parents “‘touch base’” with the teachers. There was a direct request to “please set up appointments for your guardian/parent.” This memo also appeared as a worksheet, as there were spaces for the student to actively record information or the parent to use at a later date. The purpose of this document was clear to the student but there was not enough information for a parent who had never attended a conference before to navigate the event; there is no indication if there will be a translator or help available for parents who wish to attend but may have difficulty navigating the building.

An email message (#11) that was delivered verbally through the alert system by Ms. Greene was also a communication that came with specific purposes. This message was referenced by Mr. Graves when he discussed the media blitz to ensure the cleanliness and safety of graduation practices. This message began informational and added notes about safety and transportation. The statements were made in an imperative manner, and they either suggested the person take action – “please arrive at least 30 minutes early” or they stated specific rules that were empirical: “no high heels are permitted on the field.” Because this message was informational and did not require further clarification, there was no contact information available.

Document #14 was a letter to the parent or guardian, but it was distributed to the students in homeroom. This letter contained information to explain the development of an Educational Proficiency Plan. It specifically stated that “this letter is intended to keep you informed of what we are going at the local level to continue to support your child’s educational effort.” However, there were no directives for further communication except the office number.
The reverse side of the report card (#15) offered information to the parents, but was presented as a dense, informative page. There were some direction as to how to read the information with some headings (although some are not bolded), but the sheet did not indicate any need for the parent or the administrator to communicate. The lack of specific headings blended the information together in a way made the blocked paragraphs appear as if the entire paper was on the topic of report card grades. However, there was also information about attendance procedures, home study, and unit credit. There were no contact phone numbers present on the front or back of the report card to indicate possible communication.

In the same vein as the report card, the progress report had little to no information available for contacting and communicating with either the parents or the school. These were handed out in the homerooms directly to the student. This progress report, a dummy report for Term Four in 2010 (#16), stated the grade range in the center, automated comments from the teachers, and contained a statement “have a nice vacation.” There were no additional pieces of information that would allow the parent to communicate with the building; furthermore, there was no explanation or purpose for this document.

**Level of Language and Culture**

It was important to check the actual language in the document and not rely on syllables and sentence length. Wiggins (2011) explained linguistic and cultural qualitative research relies on “linguistic methods and data (broadly conceived) as the purest representations of meaning” (p. 47). Kelle (2006) explained that because a qualitative study might be cultural and
linguistic, it might be easier for the researcher to understand the language constraints and to create thematic generalizations that mathematical data might not present.

Hirsch (2001) explained that “English introduced our youth into our national linguistic conventions, stories and traditions – in short, into the shared culture that enables citizens within a large modern nation to communicate with each other, live together peacefully, and work together productively” (p. 372). The new members of the society who wish to be included need to be introduced to the culture so they can adapt and respond. These documents were considered standard documents that would be released by any high school in America; they were common forms of communication to and from parents. When reading through the documents, it was possible to determine four themes in the levels of language used: passivity, jargon, legalese, and information. These levels of language were important to recognize because they might be specific to American educational systems – linguistic and cultural systems with which Spanish speaking and English Language Learning parents and students might not be familiar.

A distinguishable passive tone existed in four of the documents and in the documents sent from guidance. There was little initiation of action in these letters; there was little directive for the parents or discussion of future conversations or strategies. For example, in document #9 and #10, the senior failure notifications, the writers stated “it is imperative that you speak with your child regarding grades, attendance, and behavior. We hope to see ALL seniors at graduation at June” and followed with “if you have questions concerning these requirements” – however, there was no explanation of which requirements were not met, and there was only the phone number for the main guidance line at the top of the page. It is also a standard American report card
(which contains comments that can be translated into Spanish but also contains the American A-F grading standard). These vague statements suggested communication but actually offered little assistance to either the student or parent; it could create a feeling of frustration or helplessness that might lead to the ignoring of the information.

The MCAS coordinator provided a letter (#13) to inform the parent that his or her child was “eligible for MCAS tutoring.” While the intent of the letter seemed to be to help the student sign up for MCAs tutoring, the writer wrote passively and seemed distant because of the lack of direction in the letter. The writer commanded parents to “speak to your child about this opportunity” and explained that a tutor would contact the student; it also asked to the parent acknowledge the report “indicating they are aware of the importance of MCAS exam and the impact on graduation.” The focus of the letter was the understanding of the importance of the exam, not on the actual MCAS tutoring. However, the speaking to the child instead of actively incorporating the parent into the process seemed to be detrimental, as there was little reason given for the parent to become involved if the major concern of the letter was a signature.

There were other documents that were strictly informational in tone. The progress report (#16) did not contain information other than the range of grades and comments; this one particular one had a “Have a nice vacation” comment, but there was no information to suggest communication. The report card (#15) was similar to the progress report; however, the details on the reverse read as if they were a contractual agreement. It stated the expectations, the grouping, the expectations of parent cooperation “in a spirit of understanding and mutual helpfulness;”
there were two short sections on attendance. There were also the “student’s responsibility for promotion and graduation” – which read in a legalese manner the process a student must follow to ensure graduation status. The level of language was specific, legal, and detailed so that there should be no confusion as to what was expected of the students as well as the parents. The lack of personalization might give the impression that the situation cannot be easily corrected or that the outcome might be predetermined.

Document #5, the administrative failure warning to parents was another document that had a specifically informational tone. It used specific language and the school’s definition of administrative failure to inform the parents that the child had missed school. While passively “encouraging you to monitor your child’s attendance,” the letter served more as a citation than a form of communication, albeit there was a number to call for concerns.

There were certain documents that contained simpler, formal language that communicate a certain behavior as a response. Document #11 was the email version of the graduation phone alert sent June 2, 2011. It was clearly and strictly an informational piece, as the deliverer did not offer any means of return communication. It was expected that the return communication would be following the expected and explained protocol. The information was presented in a clear, concise, polite manner with imperative sentences that were short and self-explanatory. This message was considered by Mr. Graves and Ms. Greene to be very helpful in creating a positive, lively atmosphere at the ceremony.
In addition, the Meet the Faculty flier and the Spanish version of the document (#3 and #4), and the First Quarter Report Card Conferences (#6) were informative documents with simpler language. They were presented in paper flier format. The language was much simpler, and it was more direct as to what should be accomplished. However, these conferences did not generate a large population of Latino parents; it was unclear whether the delivery (it was delivered via homeroom) or the message was the concern.

It is important to note that documents that had a translated version, such as the Meet the Faculty Night (#3 and #4) and the Guidance Letter of Senior Failures (#9 and #10), had messages that were almost identical in purpose and language. They addressed the parents as an audience, but the information was presented without additional cultural information. The Meet the Faculty Night fliers were essentially the same in message, indicating that “we hope you will take this opportunity to meet with the faculty.” They referred to the staff and faculty in the proper terms in English as well as Spanish while keeping the language lively and formal. This realization that the information and the message contained the same level of language as well as the same message indicated that there was no differentiation in the presentation for different demographics.

The public documents that were distributed from the state contained a high level of jargon and educational language that might have been difficult for even the most literate adults. While they were mostly informational in content, they did offer some direction for communication; letter #1 suggested that the parents or guardians “see the school principal or
guidance counselor with any questions about [their] child’s results.” At the end of the same letter, there was a website link for more information about Educational Proficiency Plans and the requirements for them. The February 2011 letter (#7) that discussed MCAS retesting also had further information on MCAS appeals and suggested that contacting the principal or guidance would also lead to more information.

The March 28, 2011 letter (#8) from the principal was a standard document from the state of Massachusetts that had some areas that were customized for Urban High School. This letter ended with a sentence that encouraged parents to “please feel free to call [the principal] directly if I can be of additional assistance to you” and the information was available on the school website. They stated that they were “happy to help” if there were further questions and directly offered a person who would discuss issues with them. This statement was part of the standard letter of the NCLB Report Card letter than could be found online.

The diction choices in the letters from the state featured educational jargon, and some of these words were reused in other sentences, and this duplication of words might complicate or blur the meaning of the letters. The three letters were distinctly one page long which might account for the lack of definitions in appositive phrases. One example of the political language that occurred is the definition of the CD (Commonwealth’s Competency Determination), the “part of the Massachusetts Education Reform Act of 1993 to ensure that students graduation from school have the knowledge and skills they need to succeed.” Reading, writing, and critical thinking skills were the skills and knowledge discussed, but that might not be clear to a parent
who must first interpret and then comprehend the message. However, the authors were certain to explain acronyms such as the MCAS (Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System), EPP (Educational Proficiency Plan), and CD (Commonwealth’s Competency Determination).

The three state documents referred to Proficiency, Needs Improvement, and the Educational Proficiency Plan as the options for the students to meet in order to attain a diploma or the Commonwealth’s Competency Determination. The scores were discussed as a “scaled score of” and a specific number is given, but there were no explanations as to how this number was determined with the scores. The requirements for graduation were perceived as an exam with a specific score as the requisite for having literacy skills. This connotation and language might be confusing to families, as there was little discussion of the actual ability of the student and more of a focus on the numerical concerns.

In the March 28, 2011 letter (#8), there was discussion of “teacher qualifications, student achievement, and school accountability” which discussed the school’s ability to meet the expectations set forth by No Child Left Behind and the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System. Jargon such as “restructuring,” “corrective action,” and “improvement” were terms the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education used to determine the progress of a school. However, in order to find more information about these terms, one must wade through the state’s education website. While this letter was necessary information, it could be rather confusing and could repel the reader from grasping the information at hand.
The letter from the Central Office of Urban High School that was released in September 2010 (#2) was one of the most important messages communicated during the school year, but it seemed to miss its audience because of the level of language as well as the method of delivery. The author immediately explained that the audience is a “top priority” and they wished to “send a telephone or email message” for “important information” which was then qualified by “school delays, cancellations due to inclement weather” “report cards, open house, field trips, and more.” It also explained in simple language that the school’s phone number would be displayed but a code of 411 would appear for a “dire emergency.” The instructions for the parents were listed in the fourth paragraph: “please return the attached for to your child’s school by September 17, 2010.” The document in the folder did not have the attached form; it requests the names, phone numbers, emergency contacts, and emails for the family.

There was also a contact line that insists “please don’t hesitate to contact us,” yet there were no contact numbers on this letter or the form. However, this letter had a positive, assertive tone that would encourage parents to participate in this program; however, the narrow font might suggest that the language was more difficult than it truly was (Oppenheimer, 2007). This information was only released through a flier in the homeroom during the first week of school; when compared to the information received from the administrators, it would seem that a “communication blast” would be more appropriate to receive a more positive response from the community.

Summary
Research in the literature review has revealed the importance of communicating with Latino families and their students in order to provide the student with the maximum opportunities to succeed. Latino families and students have a strong familial support system that encouraged the students to excel; however, based on local demographics, languages, and cultural differences, it was not always possible to succeed at the secondary education level.

Urban High School administrators were aware of the need to reach out to the Spanish speaking community and although they plan to extend their reaches, they are at a stalemate with their communication. There was some use of a translator, but few Spanish documents were provided. There were attempts at communication that occur through email, phone alerts, and fliers; however, there were concerns that these communications might not reach their intended audiences for various reasons: some reasons were not preventable, and some required different strategies for implementation. However, when used in tandem, these mediums were effective.

The documents appeared less effective than the attempts to use them. The sentence structure and syllable counts often indicated that the diction was above the reading level of the average American reader, let alone a person who might have just started to understand printed English. The documents contained passive language and jargon that made them difficult to navigate for a purpose. There was also some confusion in the formatting; the delivery of the information was inconsistent and assumedly untrustworthy. If there were messages to be delivered, there was a good chance that they had not made it to the intended audience.
Chapter Five

Introduction

This chapter examines the findings, conclusions, and recommendations determined from the data analysis of chapter four. It was clear from the research that Latino families had different methods by which they support each other and manage to achieve academic success despite some of the external obstacles. The introduction of the Pew 2011 survey changed the perception of how Latinos communicate. It was previously discussed that Latinos did not utilize technology nor had the ability to receive technology such as computers and internet in their homes (Ramirez, 2003); however, with the advent of smart technology, new statistics suggested that it was increasingly possible to communicate with Latino adults and teenagers through technology (Livingston, 2010).

There seemed to be an underestimating and preconceived notion about Latino families. They are capable of supporting and succeeding; they are capable of communicating; however, when they do not have the cultural knowledge or the understanding of the American high school system to fully participate, they have difficulty interacting with the school community and their students are less likely to build successful connections (Crosnoe, 2009; Ruiz, 2009).

This study and its data revealed that the administrators at Urban High School recognize the need for the inclusion for bilingual systems. While the school attempted to have their documents translated, they still needed to work on preparing the texts in a timely manner.
Furthermore, the staff realized that there is a serious concern with the delivery of information because there is a strong possibility that the parents (regardless of their demographic) do not receiving the information. The school communication system did not provide enough direction from the administrators nor does it meet a variety of languages and cultural needs present in the district.

The school did not provide an adequate timely system of delivery. The archaic system of delivering via homeroom or first period class was not working for students. Some of the students were not in class, some of them were not required to attend a first period class; some of them did not attend. As well, it was assumed many students just discarded the information because they perceived it differently than a parent would; to them it was junk mail.

When more than one method of communication was utilized and it was done in Spanish as well as English, there was a positive of response from the community. Two separate events had a great response from both the Latino as well as the Caucasian communities in the Urban High School community. When there was more than one release of the information, which the administrators referred to as a “communication blitz,” there was a use of a combination of mediums: fliers, newspaper stories, alert phone calls, and emails. There was a stronger response. Personalized letters to the families in their home language also increased the participation of the families in specific events. These events were positive, celebratory events meant for students who academically excelled and met their goals; the at-risk parents were still not necessarily
contacted by administrators. Positive forms of communication can be used for all events, not just certain yearly celebrations.

In the actual documents that had been released by Urban High School, there was little differentiation in the language presented in Spanish or English. However, there were also very few documents presented in Spanish. The level of language and the Flesch-Kincaid Reading Ease scores were also very high; the average score of 65 is standard for most American texts; in addition, the Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level average is an 11, which means it is five grade levels higher than the average American document. There were some discrepancies as to whether a high school graduate would be able to read these documents and understand them; therefore, a person who does not speak English as his first language would certainly have difficult with the comprehension of the document, as might many lower level readers of English.

Another concern about the documents is the ambiguity of the purposes. The documents were presented in a clear, concise, easy to visually interpret manner, but the actual expectations of the reader and the students involved are not necessarily easy to determine. While the fliers had a simpler premise, generalized letters from MCAS and guidance are more difficult to interpret because they do not offer essential personnel’s contact information or explain the process of communication. For a community that had demographics that need specific cultural directives to be able to participate, there needed to be more social and written cues for them to follow.

The intent to include the community and the spirit of communication were there and need to be expanded for success. The initial attempts to fuse the community with different mediums of
communication and multiple languages worked; there needs to be a continuation and
development of specific, reoccurring communications so that the expectations of both the parents
and the school can be achieved regardless of the home language.

**Research in Regards to the Literature Review**

The perceptions of communication and the importance of communication to the community do not align with the perceptions of those creating it. It appears the administrators are doing a good job by including Latino students and parents with some technology and accommodations, but the problem isn’t the message – it’s the medium. Epstein (1987) reported that many of the communications were institutional interactions such as “parent–teacher associations, open houses, newsletters, or general invitations to a school play or activity” but most teachers, parents, and students would prefer to see a personal interaction occur (p. 27). This statement was true of Urban High School; there are few interactions that do not occur in the form of a flier that would be sent home, and most of the communication is meant for the masses.

While it would be difficult to personalize information to almost 2,000 students, inclusion and personalization needs to be a priority for students who are not meeting the school’s expectations for graduation and competency.

In this case study, it was important to note that this was one location in the Northeast; while it is a specific high school with this concern, it is possible that this pattern of behavior occurs at other high schools. Clearly, each school would have its own demographics and at-risk concerns, but the archaic use of communication and the reach for new technology is a recent
concern for school systems. Latinos, who are the second largest growing demographic in the country, may need the extra assistance to actively participate in American school systems.

This research supports Crosnoe’s (2009) finding that Latino low-income families expected and needed a variety of structured communication models for success. In fact, like the study where Crosnoe utilized more than one method of communication, Urban High School’s communication received a positive response when it utilized more than one medium and more than one language. Ruiz (2009) explained that more than one strategy was necessary to increase effective communication, and when more than one format of it was used, there was more of a positive outreach with both communities – the Latinos and nonLatinos in the district. Nesman’s (2007) discussion of utilizing Spanish language as a tool for parents also proved important because when the information was presented to the parents in a manner that was easy to understand and accessible, they were more likely to participate in school functions.

Wortham (1997) determined that Latinos needed the ability to question and respond to information, and that ability to interact with the authors of the documentation was missing in the communication at Urban High school. Latino students need more time and assurance than nonLatino students to establish confidence in communication with faculty and educators (Ramirez, 2003; Ruiz, 2009). Therefore, the lack of consistency in communication from Urban High School as well as the inability to receive a response at all or in a timely manner can greatly impact the student’s ability to receive the academic support that he or she needs.

In chapter two, it was cited that Bagin et al. (2008) determined “it is reasonable to assume that parents who speak and read a foreign language in the home might experience some difficulty
in understanding report cards, school notices, and school news in the local dailies” even in a native language (p. 19). The information that the families sporadically receive from Urban High School truly may be moot even if the parents do receive it, as they might not understand how to interpret or how to respond to the documentation.

American school system often encourages teachers and students to operate on a more formal level than the students are accustomed to, and Urban High School’s release of communication does not echo the cultural expectations of schools in Latin America (de Anda, 2009; Furrer, C., & Skinner, E., 2003; Ruiz, 2009). Urban High School administrators do not effectively inform Latino parents of their expectations for participation and academic success; Perna and Titus’ (2005) examination of support systems revealed parents need to be aware of the social and academic expectations of the school system.

Urban high schools, not just the one in the case study, are largely unprepared for the behavioral changes that are necessary to include demographics of their developing communities (Wainer, 2006). Many high schools do not understand or recognize the changes in their demographics and the necessity for globalization.

Federal and state expectations can also impede on the ability to communicate in an efficient, helpful manner. Edmonds (1979) mentioned that administrators in declining schools place more emphasis on the public relations aspect of communication than on the actual meaning of the message or the improvement of the students. Samples of the communication from Urban High School suggest that there was an underlying legal need for the document; others are
directly sent from the state level and may not have been as informative to the parent as they intended to be; however, they did ultimately serve the purpose of offering the information to the parents.

The administrators who created the information did a strong job in presenting the information and used the available mediums. Oppenheimer and Frank (2007) revealed that many people have subjective feelings when they are trying to comprehend and process information. The experience that a person has while doing so can influence their judgment and decisions (p. 3). Therefore, there is a cross between what the administrator is attempting to project (formal, educational, structured language) and what the community needs.

**Research in Regards to Theoretical Frameworks**

According to Maddock’s (1999) critical theory, it was not the original plan that has a flaw; people fail to see that the input to the plan – the students and parents–changed and therefore do not meet the previous expectations set forth for them. This philosophy, that the system needs to be reestablished because the input has changed, is certainly true of Urban High School and its demographics. Minor adjusting of the system will help establish a stronger connection not only with the Latino family and students but with the entire community.

Freire (1968) stated that society should not expect the outsiders, which would be the Latino community, to initially fit into the expectations of the society. It is up to the educators to treat them like one of the community and adapt as well as teach so that they can meet the expectations. There can be no waiting for them to catch up or change; the system must adapted
so that it becomes part of their way of life as well. This change must be seen in terms of behavior and attitude as well as action; it is not a simple response but an actual organizational process that all members must be made aware of and in which they must participate so that all members can thrive (Szabla, 2007).

The concern of Vygotsky’s (1978) zone of proximal development suggested that people could only learn what was presented to them and what was at their developmental level applied to both the administrators as well as the Latino members of the community. Tharp and Gallimore (1988) theory supported this concept because they determined that the proximal zone traveled beyond education and testing students – it extended into their social development as well, which would include the school staff.

The Latino community in Urban seemed to be at a loss with the communication sent from Urban High school; it was difficult to determine whether they were not receiving the information or not responding to the information. Their zones of proximity were impossible to determine because of the migration of people, the different level of reading abilities, and the actual information they receive are difficult to trace. However, by establishing a reoccurring behavioral pattern of communication with adapted mediums for their range of abilities, it should be possible to include them in the activities and academic lives of their students. There was not a need for them to be present at the school every day, but certainly they must be more included in the academic progress their students make.
In the case of the administrators, they had been in their own zone of educational information for so long that they have become immune to the educational language and documentation that they deliver. There needs to be an educating of the community and its adaptations so that the educators can use this new information to mold the behaviors of not only the staff but also the community. Together, they can create a new working team that can greatly impact the students’ successes.

Rousseau also clearly discussed the separation of members of society and the exclusion of foreigners. His words are far stronger than what many would use to describe the situation at Urban High School, but his point was clear: citizens are often more apt to take care of their own before helping foreigners – even if the foreigners wish to become, as he called them, patriots. This contradiction clearly juxtaposed with Brint’s (2006) argument that public schools were created for developing democratic, productive citizens. Underlying the whole situation, it was most important that the members in the system – regardless of their demographics – stop treating each other as if they are not part of the system and develop new ways of meeting the needs of everyone. By doing so, it will be possible to create life long learners regardless of the level of ability the students might have, and this will transfer into productive citizens and good people, which is ultimately the goal for all members involved in the public school system.

**Determinations for Interview Questions**

One of the causes of the results was the desire to want to meet everyone’s needs and attempt to do so through communication. There was discussion of needing to legally inform
parents, as well as that indicated in the documents. The administration was adamant about incorporating Spanish into the communication and trying to make themselves as available as possible. Part of the larger concern seemed to be to prevent legal implications – not having an Individual Education Plan signed, or not informing a parent that his child was not doing as well as he could be – rather than on the focus of the student himself.

Another was lack of knowledge. The administrators are aware of how to send and format the information, but they are not informed about strategies to include their entire audience. There are few professional developments or graduate courses that are available to help school officials develop accessible communication methods. There was also a lack of knowledge of technology and other formats of communication; there are other methods and programs that can be used as mediums for communication. Furthermore, the staff did not strategize for major events and communications; they had continued to use the previous protocol for years.

They understand why it doesn’t happen; they want to understand how to access change. There is a lack of reverse cultural understanding and understanding of globalization, or the integration of different people and cultures not only from different distances but also in their own location. Although educators discuss the change in demographics and their impact on the things such as testing and achievement, the micro systems such as communication and organization are often overlooked; like Hirsch (1987) explained, people who have recently joined a society of a different culture must become literate in the ways of the new society in order to be productive citizens; in this case, the educators must learn to adapt their own behaviors to help the new members meet the overall goals: success in education and ultimately in citizenry.
Question 1: How effective was the communication that Urban High School offers to Latino Families/students during junior year?

The communication, according to administrators, was not effective because it received little to no response at all from Latino students or their parents. In fact, Ms. Greene explained that she had to purposely seek out the student and explain the immediate need for communication if she wanted it to actually occur; otherwise, there was little chance she would have the response she needed, even on a legal document.

Most of the documentation that was released for the community was standardized for mass audiences and contained the basic information for events. Regardless of the language, the document released the request in the information but did not include basic cultural information so that other members of the community would understand how and why to participate. It should be mentioned that globalizing documentation is a developing trend that Urban High School administrators may want to research and recognize for their documents.

In fact, some of the information was not specific enough for the understanding of the mass audience. The Meet the Faculty night flier was not specific enough in its explanation of how the night would operate. Although the title said Meet the Faculty, the program was to follow the student schedule and move from class to class; the invitation suggested that it would be on the parents’ schedules, but the administrators had an agenda for the parents to follow. The specific inclusion of information as to how to participate in the event would be helpful for all
members of the community, regardless of literacy and demographics, because it would set a standard expectation for both the parents and administrators to which they would adhere.

Letters that contained information about MCAS concerns and failure of senior year appeared somewhat legalized and foreboding. The language was specifically passive, and the purpose did not include enough directives or contact information for students and families. While the information did not need to be simplified for the audience, it would be very helpful to include further steps for action to help both the family and the student who might be panicked by such information.

**Question 2: How effective was the communication that Urban High School offered to Latino Families/students as the students prepared for graduation?**

The specific graduation information was organized by Mr. Graves. He focused on the agendas, calendars, and other necessary information for graduation practices. He and guidance connected on the necessary information when releasing letters for possible student failures; the letters and phone calls are consistent for each member of the senior class who might be in danger of failing. Mr. Graves pressed that there was more than one form of communication utilized to ensure that the message was delivered to the parent as well as the student. This information was fairly effective.

The information for post-secondary education information was released primarily by the guidance department. However, the information for Advanced Placement classes, SAT prep, and other college related events were primarily in English and directed toward an Anglo centric student body. There was little to no information available in Spanish for post-secondary
education experiences, and unless the student participated in the Collegeboard® programs, there was little information available to them about Advanced Placement and SAT classes.

The delivery of this information seemed to be more promising, as Ms. Stephen discussed doing “blitz” to inform not only the parents but also the students; she utilized email as one of her primary modes of communication because it was easily accessible. However, there was a need to develop not only the ability to send communication but also develop an attitude and culture that was used to receiving and responding to it.

**Question 3: How effective was the protocol for communication about academic achievements such as MCAS, graduation, or preparing for post-secondary education?**

When discussing the administrators as a team, there are no established patterns of leadership in creating communication: there was no specific pattern for choosing a medium, addressing an audience, or delivering the message. Without a pattern, there was confusion not only with the students and families of Urban High School but also amongst the administrators. Ms. Greene commented “so this is what really goes out? I didn’t even know that because I don’t see everything” when glancing over the letter of senior academic failure and admitted that in a year and a half, she had not seen that letter. Mr. Graves was aware of the letter, but his premise for communication is to meet with the student in his office to discuss goals, which includes the student in an active discussion but leaves out the parents. Mr. Austin chose to utilize the students to carry the messages to other students, and depending on the actual purpose, the message might or might not be deliverable.
The lack of definitive, decided protocol in communication at Urban High School greatly impacts the understanding and discussion with students and families. It is necessary to have a developed form of communication so that the audience understands what is expected of them when they receive communication; furthermore, it establishes a system of actions and will help the communication between student, family, and administrator develop. The administrators admitted that from Latino families and students, there is little to no response in regards to communication; they were the hardest demographic in the community to reach with the utilized documents and communication methods.

Although there are some tangible mediums of communication, the documentation presented to the students might be difficult to process because of the language. Much of the documentation, whether it was a letter about MCAS or a message from the central office, contained jargon and passive sentences that made it difficult to determine the purpose and action necessary to participate in the event or activity. With a “communication blitz,” the utilization of more than one form of communication to positively express behavior and activities at the school, the administrators were able to control a large, multiple demographic crowd at two different events; the community did listen and responded positively when they understood the message and why it is asked of them.

Question Four: How were the protocols understood by the administrators and staff who created these communications?
Because there was no established protocol for communication regardless of the demographic, it was important to look at the themes the administrators mentioned when creating communication. These themes also appeared in the documentation samples.

However, the administrators were adamant that they wanted to use more Spanish documentation and include more of the local cultures and parents in their documentation. There is frustration with the lack of response they receive and this frustration is good: they want to include everyone in their communications and receive responses from other people in the community. They admit that there is room for improvement and they look forward to incorporating more of the student body and their parents in academic success; this indicated a desire to change and improve their system on an intrinsic level.

**Question Five: How did the administration’s perspective – those who attempted to inform or contact parents or guardians– influence the language presented in the communication presented to the Latino students of Urban High School and parents?**

The researcher determined that there was no distinct protocol in communication; there was no established chain of behavior for the administrators, nor was there an established release of communication that the students, families, and staff would expect. This lack of procedure became clear to the administrators during the interview process, and it became an area of interest for at least two of them who suggested they would follow up on the process and lack thereof. It was determined, post interviews, that there needed to be a direct protocol created and established that would allow all members of the administrative staff to be included in the communication process with students and families. Rather than have satellite issues where one administrator
would handle the situation of MCAS or graduation, for example, all administration would be aware of the protocol and communications that were released. In addition to allowing the administrators to be more knowledgeable about the concerns in the building, this joint effort would create the image of a leadership team that was aware of and actively participating in the events that involved the students and the community.

It is possible to infer that previous laws, such as No Child Left Behind (2001) and local pressure for not clearing Adequate Yearly Progress as well as having pressure from the state because of their status as a Level Three District affected the documentation from Urban High School. There is the implication that the documents are legally required; for example, one of the MCAS documents (#9 in Appendix A) requires a parental signature of receipt, but it does not require movement toward getting the student a tutor. The letter clearly states that the signature “indicates that your child is failing one or more subjects needed to fulfill the graduation requirements” and the purpose of the letter is to assist the student in attaining help – but the focus is on the parent and the school’s safety of informing the parent of the failure. Again, a standard protocol would allow the administrators to focus on the message rather than the behavior of sending and creating the communication; if there are procedures in place to encourage the communication, then the message is more likely to be received and responded to.

Letters are only personalized when necessary, and necessary includes legal reasons as well as for personal academic achievement. It seemed that the only time a student received personalized, energetic involvement from an administrator was when something needed to be completed in a short amount of time (such as a signature on an Individual Education Plan) or there was dire
need of correction (such as failing prior to graduation). However, even then, some of these letters are not personalized; for example, the senior failure letter is sent with a personalized copy of the student’s report card that has highlighted marks to indicate the concerns. Specific communication, especially written (even in email), is difficult to track at Urban High School and often does not occur with the needed demographics. With none of the administrators being bilingual, it is an immediate issue of time management when documents need to be translated by the interpreter and then responded to by an administrator.

Conclusions

The established communication system at Urban High School needs further development in the strategies and messages implemented if there is to be an increase of effective communication with the stakeholders. There are specific messages that are released to specific audiences for different events. There are annual releases that are common and expected of an American audience – however, the new Latino community members might not be aware of the American expectations and not understand how to participate in events such as Meet the Faculty Night or Parent Teacher Conferences.

There was an effort to communicate, but the system is archaic. According to the administrators, they send out hundreds of documents to communicate with the parents and students throughout the school year; there is little response from the community and even less of a response from the Latino community. They used the alert message system, emails, events, fliers, and reports – but they were not effectively reaching the parents and students – and most importantly to this research, they were not reaching the at-risk Latino families who needed the
extra assistant for their student’s academic achievement. This disconnect could occur for many reasons; first, while there was communication, there was no pattern of repeated communication that would be easily accepted as part of a behavior pattern from the administrators to the parents. The sporadic nature of it might not establish the importance of discussion.

In the letters, there was critical information for parents of students who suffered academic difficulty; however, there was not sufficient information for them to communicate and work with the staff to correct the concern. While the letters might inform the parent of the concerns, they did not offer a strategy for correction, which was what the parents might need in order to help their student remain on the track to success.

Urban High School certainly does care about its students and meeting their academic needs; however, the strategies for communication need adjusting. Asch (1940) noticed that people were willing to make incorrect assumptions even when they realize the truth – but will do so because of what they believe are social expectations; this might explain the belief that Latino families and students do not actively use technology. There was subconscious racism and social stratification in the forms of communication: the documents, even in Spanish, were not directed toward the needs of the Latino community. The ineffectiveness of the communication was not done with malicious intent or on purpose. Urban High School administrators can and should amend the communication and documentation so that their tone, purpose, and message meet the needs of multiple demographics. It would be overly idealistic to suggest that every demographic could be satisfied with every communication, but a larger majority of the audience should be able to receive and understand basic communications from Urban High School.
Discussion and implementation of a stronger, more consistent, thorough communication system is necessary not only for the Latino community but also the previous demographics that still reside in the Urban High School environment. An implementation of a new system could essentially have a ripple effect on the entire community: it could improve graduation rates, school morale, and the community morale. Generally, it could not only affect the ability of students to become better citizens but also their parents (Brint, 2006). This organizational change has the ability to create social, cultural, and economical change in the city.

Recommendations for Further Research

There are recommendations for further research in this field; more information on school communication systems and their impact on Latino success rate. There is a good deal of exploring what happens when one directly communicates with Latin students, but there is little to discuss what happens with the system that is already in place.

Further case studies could be used as tools of comparison to determine whether the pattern of behavior seen with the administrators at Urban High School is common or whether it was an anomaly to the school systems. These case studies, which could be replicated using the research study done here, could then be utilized in a meta-analysis.

The next step for Urban High School is to determine how it is best to reach their demographics and complete action research to see if expanding their communications and allowing for the response from the receivers of the message does in fact increase the success rate of Latino students. Quantitative surveys with Latino families and students would also be helpful in determining what type of communications would work best; however, this research needs to
be done consistently with researchers who have the ability to do the research for the responses, as sending out the information via usual school means would most likely lead to a limited response. It would take at least three years of research to build a system of communication that would be able to meet the needs of the community because of the vastness of the system and the size of the city.

Furthermore, there might be reason to repeat the case study at the middle school levels. Research studies as well as Mr. Austin, the principal, mentioned that communication begins to dwindle at the middle school level. It is important to reengage parents at this level as well as welcome the Latino families at this level as well; starting at the high school level might in fact be too late to encourage parents to participate in their student’s education. With the information about communication at the middle school level, it might be possible develop a new behavioral pattern that will affect the students as they mature through their entire adolescence, making communication and family inclusion part of the local culture.

**Recommendations for Urban High School**

The recommendations for communication change range in three areas: leadership, professional development, and community outreach. All three of these areas are crucial to creating new behaviors and attitudes that will lead to a systematic change of communication. In "Effective Schools for the Urban Poor," Ron Edmonds states: "All children are eminently educable, and the behavior of the school is critical in determining the quality of the education" (1979, p. 20). In urban schools that were productive, Sheng, Z., Sheng, Y., & Anderson, C. J. (2011) found that they “were characterized by such factors as: a well-functioning total system
producing a school climate that promotes positive student outcomes; positive leadership, usually from the formal leaders; high staff expectations for students and instructional programs; strong demand for academic performance; denial of the cultural deprivation argument and stereotypes that support it; and high staff morale” (p.317). Ultimately, it is the guidance of the leadership team that will lead all stakeholders to seeing this vision of a school that can and does communicate with its community of families and students.

The administrators at Urban High School need to utilize their data team to discuss the specific needs of their population and develop strategies to implement them. They must research and learn not only from scholars but also from the community. It is important for them to set professional goals that include learning about the cultures, education, and languages in the community; this process needs to be longitudinal and in depth.

These findings as well should be communicated to the faculty; in fact, the faculty should have an active part in understanding the community and its needs. Thornburg and Mungai (2011) stated that teachers need to be included in a way that will allow them to be responsible stakeholders and help develop and test the protocols for communication. Sheng, Z., Sheng, Y., & Anderson, C. J. (2011) state that “teacher education and professional development are critical for non-ESL/bilingual teachers to successfully instruct and meet the needs of this student population.” Creating professional development and therefore a safe learning environment for teachers as well as students is a necessary systematic change that will take time, as many teachers do realize (Thornburg and Mungai, 2011). Teachers will be concerned with the amount
of time this takes form learning, but creating a community will help with morale as well as a sense of learning in the school.

There must be a change in the language and format of the communication; while it’s very important to increase the participation and response from the parents and the Latino students, it’s also very important to educate them on why and how they can participate. This information must be presented as informational to all members of the community in a positive, active manner so that every member feels they can benefit from discussing education and success.

By creating a standardized process for communication, the administrators will establish a pattern of expected behaviors and consistency for the community. Messages that are released through the alert system, emails, fliers, and website announcements should all contain:

- A basic, active level of reading at the fifth to sixth grade level
- A message available in Spanish at the same reading level
- The purpose of the event
- A basic explanation of how to participate
- Contact information and an encouragement of communication

A system such as this will develop over time and needs to be action research oriented. It is important that the administration develops a strategic plan and uses the data from attendance of
events and responses as benchmarks to assess the effectiveness of their communication. While there should be consistency, it is also important to balance and reassess as necessary.

On a state level, there should also be a consistent form of education and communication for communities, students, and staff. While there may be development for English Language Learners, there is not development for communication with diversity in culture and demographics – so researching possibilities and developing them for piloting is a necessary direct for this state. The reports from the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education contain very important information that may not be fully comprehensible to people who have low literacy in language or culture. Therefore, there needs to be accommodations for additional sources available (in multiple languages) at the state level to explain the education system’s standards, assessments, and graduation requirements. This information should be publicized to the communities often and in a cyclical manner; it should be available schools, in the local government offices, and online so that the information is available for members of the community. To continue the education process, there could be seminars in local communities to inform and for questions and discussion. These sessions would allow all members of the community and opportunity to query and discuss opportunities for academic success – for any demographic.

Summary

The findings of this study support the literature on Latino academic success and communication with families. The communication from Urban High School that is meant to
assist the Latino students and their families is not effective enough to make an impact on the student. Whether it is the delivery system or the level of language, the families and students do not feel compelled to respond to the information, rendering it fairly ineffective. There needs to be a change in the behavior and attitude that surrounds communication from Urban High School; in addition, there also needs to be change in the organization of language, information, and cultural expectations in the communication (regardless of the medium) because the expectations of Urban High School might not be clear to the incoming Latino members of the community.

Additionally, as a result of this study, Urban High School should plan action research on their other communications and plan a strategic, larger “communication blitz.” There needs to be a new plan with an organized effort to include all members of the community in the active process of learning regardless of the students’ abilities or academic successes. It is not only the Latino community that is suffering but also the other demographics because the delivery and inconsistency of information does not send a clear, explanatory message or direction.

Further research on this topic would help explore whether there needs to be a general overhaul of the communication methods used at high schools with changing demographics. This case study or one similar could be replicated at high school with similar demographics; and, with a change in the communication policies and procedures, it might be possible to reassess the same high school to determine whether a major behavioral overhaul affects the effectiveness of the communication with Latino students and their parents.
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