Learning, Living, and Laughing in Two Tongues: A Comparative Analysis of Bilingual Education & LATAM Student Integration in Chicago Public Elementary Schools Explored from the Central and South American Migrant Parent Perspective

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Abstract

Beginning in late August 2022, Chicago experienced a massive Latin American refugee and asylum-seekers migration wave. Around mid-2024, several migrant families relocated into permanent housing within various Chicagoan community areas, including those that are not predominantly Hispanic/Latinx. Chicago Public Schools (CPS) in these neighborhoods may have lacked bilingual programming or large numbers of English learners. Through interviews that form a distinct regional comparative analysis, my work explores two distinct CPS elementary schools: one with a one-way Dual Language Education program and a more standard Transitional Bilingual Education program. This study aims to answer the following central question: How do these Latin American migrant caregivers perceive the effectiveness and adequacy of their English-learning child's designated bilingual education model, specifically regarding cultural, linguistic, and social-emotional growth? Ultimately, parents are highly satisfied on a day-to-day basis with their child's English Language Program model, with minor criticism regarding sufficient work loads. Although I assessed that CPS is indeed adhering and meeting their program's defined obligations, there is certainly room for improvement mediated through state-wide policy that amplifies public education for all children regardless of their English-speaking capabilities.

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First and foremost, I would like to express my deepest gratitude to the remarkable parent participants who generously dedicated their time and energy to speak with me for this project. We laughed, reflected, connected, and held space for one another. I feel incredibly privileged as a Mexican-American student to have listened to your insights regarding one of the most priceless gifts we can offer future generations: education. Your courage and selflessness are inspiring. This work stands as a testament to your resilience, as well as the immense sacrifices made for your child(ren) to have new opportunities in the city of Chicago. *Muchísimas gracias.*

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Mami, este trabajo te lo dedico a ti. Te quiero eternamente. Gracias por 21 años a mi lado. Eres toda mi alma. Llegamos juntas. ¡Lo hicimos!

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"Real education should consist of drawing the goodness and the best out of our own students. What better books can there be than the book of humanity?"

- César Chávez, American civil rights activist

I. Introduction and Problem Statement

In the coming decades, it has often been said that America's future will be heavily influenced by Hispanic/Latinx populations. As one of the country's fastest-growing demographic groups, they have played a pivotal role in shaping our most nuanced, intricate national dialogues and greatly enriched our social landscapes, whether in small towns or bustling cities. One federal entity that embodies such diversity and potential is within Chicago Public Schools, or CPS, where students of varying cultural heritage, socioeconomic status, religious or spiritual beliefs, and life experiences unite to create the fourth-largest school district in the U.S. Especially in elementary schools, where our youngest and most impressionable minds begin to prosper, learning alongside peers who may look or live differently is not only eye-opening, but also personally fulfilling, as it broadens global perspectives. It is this rewarding experience that extends into the unique, multidimensional realm of communication and language.

Unfortunately, in March 2024, Chalkbeat Chicago reported that "CPS has struggled to provide bilingual programming to English language learners," citing critical dilemmas such as a severe trained bilingual teacher shortage, a failure to properly launch bilingual parent committees, insufficient teaching materials, inadequate tracking of English learners' academic achievements, and general negligence (Amin 2024a). Many non-English-speaking CPS elementary schoolers face overcrowded classrooms and bullying related to linguistic barriers, which can diminish their confidence and discourage self-advocacy. As a result, many remain

"trapped" in their given English Learners Program well into high school, finding it difficult to make meaningful linguistic progress like biliteracy in both English and their native language.

In 1980, the CPS Desegregation Consent Decree was an agreement between the federal government and CPS aimed to promote racial integration while also mandating that the district provide English learners with instructional services needed to ensure full participation in school. In 2009, U.S. District Court Judge Charles P. Kocoras lifted the consent decree arguing the bilingual education provisions duplicated protections in state law, despite DOJ evidence that English learners' support was deficient. This had real consequences. Courts became more hands-off and district auditors reduced routine school visits, leading to weakened federal oversight and local accountability. A few years later, in a widely condemned 2017 investigation, the Chicago Reporter conducted dozens of interviews and reviewed CPS records, including a school-by-school audit of bilingual programs during the 2015-16 school year, discovering that 71 percent of the 342 schools audited by CPS had bilingual programs that were in serious violation of state law. The remaining schools were mostly in compliance (Belsha 2017).

Acknowledging this complex history, I am performing a dual-school comparative case study analysis that seeks to uncover both longstanding and emerging flaws in CPS elementary school bilingual programming based on the unique perspectives of Central and South American asylum-seeking, refugee, and/or migrant parents and legal guardians. This data strictly applies to children in 1st through 5th grade, particularly focusing on the 2023-24 and 2024-25 academic years. Beginning in late August 2022, Chicago experienced a massive Latin American refugee and asylum-seekers migration wave. Around mid-2024, several migrant families in temporary shelters relocated into permanent housing within various Chicagoan community areas, including those that are not predominantly Hispanic/Latinx. CPS schools in these neighborhoods may have

lacked bilingual programming or large numbers of English learners. My work explores two distinct CPS elementary schools: one with a one-way Dual Language Education (DLE) program and the other with a more common, specialized English Learners Program, where English has traditionally been the dominant language of instruction. The selected schools are in a predominantly Black lower-middle-class South Side neighborhood and middle-income southwest neighborhood mainly inhabited by Hispanic/Latinx residents.

Through qualitative interviews, this study aims to answer the following central question: How do these Latin American migrant caregivers perceive the effectiveness and adequacy of their English-learning child's designated bilingual education model, specifically regarding cultural, linguistic, and social-emotional growth? Throughout my investigative process, I will also attempt to uncover whether state-mandated CPS Language Education curriculum and resources are appropriately rigorous, accessible, and effective in improving linguistic skills. In general, are they in accordance with their legally defined obligations, perhaps even exceeding expectations, or do they fall short in practice? This will be assessed through parental observations, feedback, reflections, and anecdotes about the child's language learning progress in the classroom, as well as how it influences their behavior and development outside of it (moments that CPS staff and faculty do not witness firsthand).

My investigation serves to fill a notable gap in the existing American literature. Research has largely overlooked gathering and analyzing firsthand insight from vulnerable, displaced Latin American immigrant populations in the U.S. regarding how they actively experience new large-scale federal services such as K-12 public education. Studies similar to mine are largely non-existent considering that the Central and South American migration phenomenon in Chicago is still relatively recent as of April 2025.

At a time when the American sociopolitical landscape is rapidly evolving, understanding parental criticism and praises towards U.S. public schools enables policymakers to better serve the rising generation of multilingual Chicagoan students. For reference, the paper is structured as follows: first, the Literature Review, followed by the Data and Methods section, then the Results and Discussion, Policy Recommendations, and finally, the Conclusion.

II. Historical Background and Statistical Insights

Existing literature unequivocally confirms the longstanding presence of young English-language learners (ELLs)[1] within the U.S. public education system, particularly among elementary schoolers spanning between 5 to 12 years old. Based on recent data published in May 2024, the National Center for Education Statistics reported that the percentage of public school students in the United States who were ELLs was higher in fall 2021 at 10.6 percent, or 5.3 million students, than in fall 2011 at 9.4 percent, or 4.6 million students. When categorized by grade level, the majority were enrolled in lower grades, with the highest prevalence at 15 percent in first grade and 14.9 percent in second grade; as expected, the numbers gradually decline as ELL children attain stronger English proficiency, where only 6.1 percent (the smallest value) are high school seniors. Notably, regarding racial and ethnic composition, nearly 78 percent of them were Hispanic, representing a substantial 4 million individuals, with Spanish/Castilian being the most commonly reported ELL home language.

While it may be evident that states containing historically large Hispanic/Latinx populations possess the greatest numbers of ELL students—such as primarily Texas, California, and New Mexico at 20.2, 18.9, and 18.8 percent, respectively—Illinois trailed closely behind in

[1] These individuals are also often referred to as English as a Second Language (ESL), English as an Additional Language (EAL), or Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CLD) students.

sixth place at 12.8 percent in autumn 2021. In stark contrast, the U.S. average was at 10.6 percent. In that same timeframe, Illinois was surprisingly among one of only four states where the percentage of ELLs receiving services in English language instruction educational programs (LIEPs) was less than 75.0 percent (at 55.3 percent), a significant difference from the national average at 93.1 percent (National Center for Education Statistics 2024).

According to the Migration Policy Institute (MPI), from 2015 to 2019, Spanish was the top spoken non-English language in a dual language learner's (DLL)[2] household, accounting for 57 percent, with 172,000 Illinoisan families actively speaking it at home (Giang and Park 2022). More recently, in 2023 the U.S. Census Bureau released its annual American Community Survey and reported that Chicago, the third-most populous city in the U.S. with over 2.7 million residents, remarkably had roughly 875,612 people (5 years old and above) that spoke a language other than English at home; an impressive 573,602 of them, or 22.7 percent, spoke Spanish.

CPS[3] catered to 325,305 students in grades Pre-K through 12th, known as the total enrollment at the start of the 2024-2025 academic year. This is about 2,000 more children compared to the previous 2023-2024 academic year. There are approximately 45,137 total staff working strictly in CPS since March 2025 and, consistent with the diverse student body, most identify as either African-American (32.8 percent), White (30.6 percent), or Hispanic (29.1 percent) (Chicago Public Schools, n.d.). Holistically, as of October 2024, spanning Kindergarten to 12th grade, 47.3 percent of students identify as Hispanic and 71.6 percent are economically disadvantaged.

[2] DLLs are defined by the MPI as "young children who have at least one parent who speaks a language other than English at home, meaning that they have the potential to develop as multilingual and multiliterate individuals, given appropriate support" (Migration Policy Institute 2024).
[3] It is officially categorized as City of Chicago School District #299.

Most ELL students are federally classified as having Limited English Proficiency (LEP), a term widely used by the U.S. Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights and Office of English Language Acquisition. The official definition is as follows: "Individuals who do not speak English as their primary language and who have a limited ability to read, speak, write, or understand English can be limited English proficient, or 'LEP.' These individuals may be entitled language assistance with respect to a particular type or service, benefit, or encounter" (Limited English Proficiency.Gov n.d.). CPS states there are about 88,807 students formally classified as English Learners (ELs), or 27.3 percent of the district total, and this value includes pre-school, elementary, and high school. After completing an English language proficiency test, they are placed into either a Transitional Bilingual Education (TBE) or Transitional Program of Instruction (TBI), which are the two principal EL Programs (Chicago Public Schools 2024b).

For transparency and clarity, Figure 1 provides a glossary of key terms related to current CPS refugee/newcomer student services as officially defined by the Office of Multilingual-Multicultural Education (OMME) that have already been or will be referenced throughout this work. OMME is responsible for "providing native language instruction" and "developing English language skills," overseeing three main Language Education Programs: EL Programs, which includes TBE, DLE Programs, and World Language Programs. Every school implementing a state-mandated TBE Program is required to establish a Bilingual Advisory Committee (BAC), and many DLE schools also have one as well. The BAC must meet at least five times a year, providing parent training and workshops. Five officers are elected annually and report directly to the Local School Council (Chicago Public Schools 2024a). As of August 2024, out of 415 traditional, district-run CPS elementary schools, only 36 are labeled as DLE schools; in contrast, they are vastly outnumbered by those using a TBE Program as their Language

Education Model, as it has clearly long been the more manageable, feasible, and widely adopted approach (Chicago Public Schools, n.d.). Many OMME services assist students who primarily speak Spanish and are striving to strengthen their English skills among native-English speakers and other fellow non-native English speakers.

Figure 1

Key Official CPS Terms Related to Refugee/Newcomer Student Services
City of Chicago School District #299
(Definitions current as of Nov 2024)[4]

English Learners (ELs)	"Students who come from non-English speaking homes and who are learning English."
Transitional Bilingual Education (TBE)	"Schools with 20 or more ELs who speak the same home language are required to provide a Transitional Bilingual Education Program… [they] must receive instruction in all of the following areas: ● Language Arts in the home language ● English as a Second Language (ESL) instruction to help develop students' English language proficiency ● Core subjects (math, science, social science) provided in both English and the native language ● Instruction in U.S. history and culture ● Instruction in the history and culture of the native land of the ELs (or of their parents) ● All instruction provided in English must include supports and modifications that are appropriate for the EL's level of English language proficiency"
One-Way Dual Language Education (DLE)	"Students in DLE Programs include those identified as English Learners (ELs), non-English Learners (non-ELs), or heritage language learners. One-way dual language programs provide instruction in two languages and serve mostly ELs, former ELs, and heritage language learners in the same classroom. ● [Goals] include perform[ing] at or above grade level in all academic areas in both languages [and] demonstrat[ing] positive cross-cultural flexibility and behaviors. ● [Program benefits] involve engag[ing] in a learning environment that develops bilingualism, biliteracy, and cultural understanding among English Learners and non-English Learners [and the] potential to obtain the State Seal of Biliteracy upon high school graduation."
Bilingual Advisory Committees (BACs)	"Empower parents of ELs to participate in their student's education and advocate for the academic, social, and cultural development of all ELs.

[4] (Chicago Public Schools 2024c)

	BAC meetings address issues relating to the education of ELs in TBE or TPI instructional contexts; provide information about CPS services, programs, and resources for students and families; and train parents to effectively participate in the overall governance of bilingual education."

Chicago's rich migration history has shaped its modern vibrant, diverse metropolitan regions. Midway through the 19th century, immigrants from Ukraine, Poland, Russia, Greece, Italy, China, and Lithuania arrived in the city; in the early 1920s, post-World War I, tens of thousands of Southern African Americans began settling on the South Side, such as the Bronzeville neighborhood, where racial tensions started to brew and escalate violently, leading to mass riots and massacres. Mexican Americans, the first major wave of Hispanic/Latinx, also migrated thousands to engage in blue-collar, manual labor jobs in southwestward communities like Pilsen and Little Village. In the 1950s, shortly after World War II, Puerto Rican, Korean, and Japanese refugees arrived in large quantities. Around 1975, Cambodian, Thai, and other Southwest Asians groups gathered in northern Uptown, particularly within present-day Little Saigon, or formally the West Argyle Street Historic District. By the early 21st century, the Chicagoan population was approximately 33 percent African American and approximately 40 percent white (Schallhorn and Duis 2024).

Now, according to the 2020 U.S. Census, Chicago has a population of roughly 2,746,388, including 801,195 Black or African American residents, 819,518 Hispanic or Latino residents, and 986,280 White residents (United States Census Bureau 2020). At its core, Chicagoland's racial, ethnic and linguistic landscape has consistently evolved over time. The city has rightfully earned a reputation for its working-class, multicultural neighborhoods and vibrant LGBTQ+ hubs that offer unique opportunities in art, employment, urban wildlife, cuisine, and, of course, education.

Since 2014, more than 7 million Venezuelans have emigrated and sought asylum in the U.S. to escape economic hardship, rampant crime, and political unrest, mainly attributed to President Nicolás Maduro's authoritarian administration (gained control in 2013) and a highly disputed re-election in July 2024 that citizens criticized as illegitimate and rigged (Castellanos-Canales 2023). Most have embarked on the often perilous, month-long journey towards the U.S.-Mexico border, determined to seek asylum in America. Since August 2022, "Chicago has experienced an unprecedented and alarming surge of forced migration," where Texas Governor Greg Abbott and his conservative counterparts haphazardly sent about 40,000 asylum-seeking migrants, overwhelmingly from Venezuela, in buses and airplanes to the city, creating a massive humanitarian crisis (Vásquez 2024). Since late October 2024, the total number of migrants overall arriving specifically out of Texas has soared to just over 50,000 (City of Chicago 2024).

In early-to-mid 2023, two prominent and contentious emergency shelters, the Standard Social Club in downtown and the Lake Shore Hotel in East Hyde Park, had collectively housed thousands of Venezuelans temporarily before they both shut down in October 2024. These facilities, in addition to other notorious ones on the Lower West Side, had frequently been reported as overcrowded, unsanitary, and poorly managed. In May 2024, 484 families had chosen to live permanently in South Shore, a South Side community area situated along Lake Michigan (Amin and Bloom 2024); at that point, it had become the most densely populated refugee and asylum seeker settlement zone in the entire city, where many South American families opted to transition into long-term government-subsidized apartments—a popular living arrangement that remains prevalent as of November 2024. This helps explain why my research

focuses on exploring CPS elementary schools that have been heavily impacted by the significant presence of mainly Venezuelan migrants.

Further, many lifelong Chicago residents, particularly low-income Black and Brown individuals with conservative political views, have publicly voiced strong criticism and frustration over the City Council's million-dollar spending on accommodations for South American migrants under Mayor Brandon Johnson. They argue that these actions overshadow longstanding, infamous crises like high robbery rates, unemployment, and homelessness, causing heightened tensions between disadvantaged Chicagoans of color and newly established migrant Latin American communities.

III. Literature Review and Theory

Child Development and Educational Theoretical Frameworks

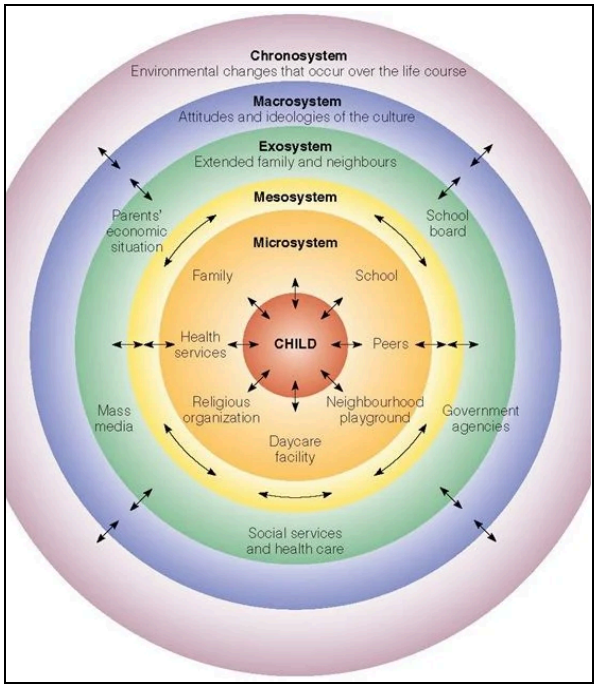
One of the primary theoretical frameworks to approach and interpret EL student dynamics within CPS is through Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory, originally devised by Russian-American psychologist Urie Bronfenbrenner. Formally, it "views child development as a complex system of relationships affected by multiple levels of the surrounding environment, from immediate family and school settings to broad cultural values, laws, and customs" (Guy-Evans 2024). Figure 2 visually showcases Bronfenbrenner's five ecological systems in a nested structural arrangement, where levels closest to the center, embodying the child themselves, have the strongest impact. In this work, I will focus on the model's proposed microsystem and mesosystem levels, where the former consists of school, friends/peers, neighbors, work, and family, and the latter unites two fundamental microsystems that are closely interconnected.

As briefly mentioned earlier, it is important to acknowledge that many Venezuelan migrant children in this study do not live in well-maintained, spacious single-family homes. Instead, they are often housed in immediate city-funded shelters or older, affordable run-down mid-rise apartment buildings with multiple units. A 2014 report published by the American Educational Research Journal establishes that one central mesosystem is the home-school connection. For many Venezuelan elementary students, their mornings begin not in a comfortable, secure, and peaceful residence but in conditions that are typically chaotic, cramped, stressful or in an overall neglected state (Niehaus and Adelson). They have endured traumatic circumstances, such as extreme poverty, mass violence, and malnourishment, which the average American child could scarcely imagine. Bronfenbrenner's overarching framework offers a psychological prism to dissect common social-emotional experiences associated with ELs tied to learning disabilities, inadequate school attire, linguistic diversity, and meaningful parental involvement.

Figure 2

Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory
Visual Diagram[5]

[5] (Guy-Evans 2024)



The Society for Research in Child Development presented a study solidifying that "at-risk students placed in first-grade classrooms offering strong instructional and emotional support had achievement scores and student-teacher relationships commensurate with their low-risk peers," and that those in "less supportive classrooms had lower achievement and more conflict with teachers" (Hamre and Pianta 2005, 949). It does so by influencing two key domains of child functioning: academic achievement and relationships with educators, which naturally fall under Bronfenbrenner's proposed school microsystem. High-quality instructional support was observed when teachers showed responsiveness to individual students' needs, offered proactive behavior management strategies, and sustained a positive classroom climate. A consistent implementation of these two support methods at a high to moderate level in the classroom has been proven to benefit underprivileged children, boosting educational accomplishments and fostering trusting bonds with faculty/staff. This whole theoretical foundation, primarily anchored in Bronfenbrenner's ideas, serves as a valuable lens for detecting

and examining student-school macrosystems in my research that are driven by dedicated CPS EL teachers who, despite the obstacles, remain committed to delivering tailored linguistic support and cultivating a nurturing academic atmosphere.

Established Research on Immigrant Child and Parent School Involvement

The Future of Children, a biannual academic journal, reported in autumn of 2016 that "English learners achieve about the same English proficiency whether they're placed in bilingual or English immersion programs," which is a unique discovery that shows that external academic and personal factors are actively at work while attaining full English proficiency (Barrow and Markman-Pithers 2016, 159). It was also shared that students in bilingual classes do better in their native tongues and reasonably so. Regarding specifically Chicagoland, one suburban case study affirms that university-multi-school district partnership positively shaped the lives of K-12 immigrant, migrant, and refugee students and their parents (Israel et al. 2017). Although this piece dates back to 2017 and is tied in higher education, it nonetheless establishes how a close-knit interconnected academic network clearly uplifts non-English-speaking students and their parents. Therefore, when confronted with a surge in racial or ethnic and linguistic diversity, exclusive parental and community engagement events, such as "Parent's Night," earn a newfound importance; they must focus on prioritizing open communication that guarantees constructive, transparent, and action-oriented dialogue.

Although it is over 15 years old, an article from the Journal of Educational Thought, reinforces how public schools, no matter how collaborative and inclusive they may strive to be, can no longer present technical or highly detailed information bluntly to non-English-speaking parents. There must be an authentic underlying effort toward fostering collective intercultural understanding. In relation to asylum-seeking migrant parents, this hints at a larger need to create

policy initiatives that provide safe spaces where marginalized voices are not only heard, but respected and validated in public forums. After all, it was stated that "many teachers have little idea how to work with parents from different cultural backgrounds; the need to upgrade teacher preparation is a must and it is urgent" (Guo 2009, 186). When their ideas and expectations are properly accounted for, EL parents become indispensable contributors to improving the CPS elementary school experience for *all* students.

Further, in observing how day-to-day language barriers unravel in schools, a 2012 study in the Research in the Teaching of English journal explored different episodes showcasing real-life EL and non-EL student interactions. One of the most significant findings was how attempting to convey something carried much more meaning than the actual word or phrase itself. This suggested that an honest attempt to communicate imperfectly and unapologetically outweighed precise or "robotic" speech (Case 2015). Casual versus formal interactions are rooted in characteristics like delivery, expression, and pacing, where the route to grasping concepts is individualized rather than overly "generalized."

Despite the ample quantitative and qualitative data on EL students in the U.S. and larger Chicagoland, I find that there is a gap not only in the literature, but also in official IL State of Board of Education documentation, most significantly the IL School Report Card, that measures individual school performance. This research is crucial because there are no published responses as of January 2025 for the 2022-23 My Voice My School Parent Survey from the two specific CPS elementary schools being researched in this study. This short, anonymous survey invites parents and legal guardians of CPS students to provide feedback on their child's school and is available in multiple languages. With most schools in the district experiencing answer rates of

less than 25 percent, and many receiving none at all, it is essential to hear directly from underrepresented and disadvantaged caregivers to ensure their stories and concerns are heard.

IV. Data and Methods

Interview Sample and Participant Demographics

This small-scale comparative case study focuses on two distinct elementary schools located in two of the 77 community areas within Chicago: a K-6 school in Kenwood, located along the shore of Lake Michigan on the South Side, and another PK-8 school in Brighton Park, situated on the southwest side and bordered on the north by the Chicago Sanitary and Ship Canal.[6] KW has historically served a predominantly Black/African American[7] student body. Notably, the Hispanic student body has experienced a significant increase, rising from roughly 3 percent in 2020 to slightly over 15 percent in 2024. The percentage of students identified as ELs was 5.4 percent in 2020 and, by 2024 this figure nearly quadrupled to 20.8 percent. The boost was striking, as in 2023 it stood at only 8.2 percent ("Find Your School").

Conversely, BP has historically served a predominantly Hispanic student body. In both 2020 and 2024, the percentage of ELs at the school consistently remained within the 60 percent range, showing no drastic fluctuation. During the 2023-2024 academic year, the majority of the whole student population at both schools was classified as low-income. Throughout this time, although KW maintained an enrollment of around 330 students and BP had around 620[8], the percentage of ELs at BP remains prominently higher. In 2024 alone, almost 66 percent of BP's

[6] Moving forward, the schools will be referred to as KW for the school in Kenwood and BP for the school in Brighton Park.
[7] All racial and ethnic group classifications mentioned in this section are the official terms used by CPS.
[8] BP serves pre-kindergarten and two additional grade levels (7th and 8th) compared to KW, which should be taken into account when comparing these and future enrollment figures.

student body were ELs, while the percentage at KW was less than triple that amount (Illinois School Report Card 2024).

As stated by CPS, "district-run schools are organized into 18 networks, which provide administrative support, strategic direction, and leadership development to the schools within each network," and this eliminates a one-size-fits-all support model (City of Chicago School District #299 2024). They are funded through Student Based Budgeting, or SBB, where dollars are allocated depending on the number of enrolled students. Traditional CPS elementary schools have 13 total networks, each spearheaded by their own Chief of Schools and Deputy Chief. In this research, both schools observed are district-run and fall under Networks 8 and 9. Figure 3 showcases relevant network statistics pertaining to the investigation based on the well-known annual 2024-25 CPS 20th Day Membership Report, typically released around mid-September, containing enrollment figures for the 20th day of the 2024-2025 academic year. Despite BP having a slightly higher student count, it remains reasonable to compare it to KW, though the two schools' student demographic profiles are quite different, except most notably in terms of their shared high rates of economic disadvantage.

Figure 3

Comprehensive CPS Network Support Overview
Elem Schools, Enrollment, ELs, and Economically Disadvantaged Students by Network
City of Chicago School District #299
(Data last updated Sept 2024)[9]

Network #	Network 8	Network 9
Community Area	Brighton Park	Kenwood
Total School Count	27	27
Total Student Count	13,202	10,201

[9] (Chicago Public Schools 2024–2025a); (Chicago Public Schools 2024–2025b)

Geographic Area	Southwest	South
Total Black/African American Student Count	1,126	8,880
Total Latinx Student Count	11,661	758
ELs	7,013	550
Economically Disadvantaged[10]	10,582	7,465

At the start of the Central and South American migrant influx to Chicago in late 2022, Network 8 had 5,394 ELs and Network 9 had 174 ELs. From 2022 to 2023, BP had a small increase of around 2 percent in EL enrollment, while KW saw a slight decline of roughly 4 percent (Chicago Public Schools 2022–2023); from 2023 to 2024, BP's EL enrollment declined by nearly 8 percent and KW's nearly doubled, increasing by 96 percent (Chicago Public Schools 2023–2024). Holistically, from 2022 to 2024, there was an upward trend for KW that saw an approximately 90 percent increase in EL enrollment, unlike BP, which experienced a 5.7 percent decrease (Chicago Public Schools 2024–2025b). The 20th Day Membership Report also revealed Hispanic students experienced the largest year-over-year increase, with nearly 1.5 percent more enrolled, while Black/African American students were the only group to see a decline by about 1 percent. Remarkably, ELs grew by 11 percent, a rate larger than any other student group (Amin 2024b).

The qualitative research data, collected from a non-English-speaking, IRB[11]-defined vulnerable population, consists of 14 semi-structured interviews in Spanish with enthusiastic and engaged participants. Regarding demographics, all are Spanish-speaking Latin American migrants who sought asylum in the U.S. and arrived to Chicago on or subsequent to August 2023

[10] CPS notes that "Economically Disadvantaged Students" are those from families whose income is within 185 percent of the federal poverty line.
[11] UChicago AURA IRB, or Institutional Review Board, approval was obtained on January 11th, 2025 at 12:27 AM.

with a specified child, either on their own or accompanied by relatives or close friends. Born and raised in their country of origin, 50 percent, the majority, are Venezuelan, 35.7 percent are Mexican, and 14.3 percent are Colombian. They were in a specific age range (late 20s to late 30s), averaging 33.43 years. 14 of the interviewees are female-identifying, while one identifies as male. One of the female participants, who had been anticipated to attend the interview alone, unexpectedly arrived with the father of her child; this deviation resulted in them being the only participants interviewed as a couple. As newcomers to the U.S., most of them 85.71 percent had no prior connection to the country, whether through family ties or previous visits. Linguistically, the majority self-identified as having beginner or low novice proficiency in English, demonstrating a stronger ability to comprehend the spoken language than to respond or write effectively. As for the quantitative data collected, I gathered the students' average grades in both Language Arts and Social Studies for the 2023-2024 academic year, when available. These were provided either from the parent's memory or a physical report card that they voluntarily brought in without being asked in advance.

The interviewees are the parents of CPS elementary school children in first through fifth grades, typically ranging in ages six to eleven. They considered themselves as the primary caregivers of the student responsible for their daily care and well-being. Additionally, they are actively involved in or, to the best of their ability, knowledgeable about the child's personal and academic experiences/activities. Most of the students had successfully completed the 2023-2024 academic year at their respective institutions. Appendix 1 presents a comprehensive interview profile overview that includes their age, marital status, arrival date to the U.S., occupation, residential neighborhood, and motive for leaving their Latin American home country to seek asylum or resettle for a new life in America.

Interview Design and Procedure

Private one-on-one interview sessions were conducted during the CPS 2024-2025 academic year throughout the autumn of 2024 and winter of 2025 lasting approximately 50 minutes to an hour each. Only one session total was required. Seven interviews were conducted in-person at each of the KW and BP school campuses in the late afternoon, starting between 2:30 p.m. and 3:45 p.m., in an unoccupied classroom. No external interactions ever occurred, including those at a participant's personal home or any non-public establishment. I sought eager parent and legal guardian participants in a secure, virtual manner. There were two main approaches: The first involved contacting a trusted CPS Language and Culture EL faculty member to help introduce me to potential interviewees and facilitate direct contact through a private, specialized study email. Alternatively, I reached out to a CPS Dual Language Coordinator staff member via a cold email to explain my research objective and seek their advice on the most effective manner to recruit reliable, open interviewees as an undergraduate student.

I primarily used random sampling combined with snowball sampling; I did not have prior connections with the interviewees before inviting them to participate. In some cases, particularly for BP, I relied on mothers referring me to other potential participants. As a result, it is important to note that this sample is not representative of a larger population. The only external assistance I received was from the aforementioned CPS EL educator that kindly vouched and advocated for me. Each participant received a monetary compensation of $20.00 USD for their time and contributions after the interview was completed, which was funded by the Public Policy Studies undergraduate program at the College. It was distributed via physical prepaid Target gift cards. All participants were presented with an official written Consent Form for Research Participation in Spanish, devised solely by me. After a warm welcome and introduction, I provided them with

the form for their review and obtained informed verbal consent directly prior to starting the interview. No written signature was collected.

In order to perform a thorough analysis, I asked 57 questions and accompanying probes, split into six main domains (listed in the order they were discussed): "Personal Background"; "Child's Personal and Academic Profile"; "Cultural Knowledge + Growth"; "Linguistic Knowledge + Growth"; "Social + Emotional Growth"; and "Parental Involvement + CPS Language Education Assessment."[12] Some questions were answered in a quick and straightforward manner, while others require more thoughtful, narrative-style responses. Shortly before concluding the interview, participants were asked to rate their child's CPS language education model on a scale from one (extremely dissatisfied) to ten (extremely satisfied), taking into account everything such as EL faculty/staff, curriculum, resources, assessments, and learning environment. This was a crucial moment devoted to reflecting on the triumphs and tribulations that occur daily throughout the academic year.

All speakers were audio recorded with consent (*no* video). The qualitative research data was collected and stored on the Voice Memos app within a personal smartphone device, and recordings were configured to automatically save to the UChicago Box. The audio file was then uploaded into Microsoft Word under my UChicago Office 365 account for quick, automatic transcription. The generated transcripts were subsequently cross-checked against the original audio recordings to ensure accuracy and prevent any misinterpretation of the narratives provided. Ultimately, each transcript underwent a distinct coding procedure that unpacked the proposed "how" and "why" questions related to the designated elementary school.

Analytical Approach

[12] Refer to Appendix 2.

The data were analyzed using thematic analysis. The analysis process involved the following steps:

1. Familiarization: I reviewed the transcripts multiple times to thoroughly immerse myself in the data.
2. Coding: Initial codes were generated inductively to identify and capture significant features within the data.
3. Theme Identification: Codes were grouped into larger themes and subthemes, which were refined through an iterator.
4. Validation: Themes were reviewed against the dataset to ensure consistency, clarity, and credibility.

This thorough research is primarily grounded in an in-depth case study approach. Via interviews and pertinent statistical data, this work uniquely prioritizaties amplifying the voices of select vulnerable and displaced Latin American immigrants in two quite differentiated Chicagoan communities, focusing on how they actively experience large-scale federal services like K-8 public education in America's third-largest city. In a larger sense, the aim is to contribute to a richer and more comprehensive understanding of the overarching positive and negative outcomes behind EL and Bilingual Education policies managed by the IL State Board of Education's Multilingual/Language Development Department. Due to accessibility, time limitations, practical considerations, and overall feasibility, the final work ultimately seeks to uncover patterns and themes that emerge from these localized, context-specific CPS narratives, serving as a launchpad for expanded future explorations.

Confidentiality and Care in Working with a Vulnerable Population

To ensure anonymity and de-identify verbatim quotes, each participant was assigned the pseudonym "Parent 1" or "Legal Guardian 1," "2," "3," etc., and their given child's CPS elementary school was not directly linked to them. Each student was also labeled as "Student 1," "Student 2," etc., aligning with their caregiver's assigned number. Further, a private coding crosswalk was internally implemented to track, reference, and link interviewees to their real

identities effectively (e.g., Pseudonym: “Parent 1”; Real ID: “Participant 1: Carolina Reyes”; Demographics: Mother, Age 33, Amazon Prime delivery driver; Interview Date: 11/22/2024[13]). All verbally mentioned names or personal information, like birth dates, family structure, and residence details, were redacted and excluded from transcripts, without being publicly disclosed to uphold confidentiality and integrity.

While this study was active, it posed no physical risks, and no substantial foreseeable non-physical risks to participants. However, there was a potential for minor momentary emotional discomfort when answering more sensitive questions that may have revealed information regarding what prompted their decision to leave their home country as a migrant, or if their child had experienced or perpetrated bullying at school, as well as faced racism, misogyny, or xenophobia. This included the student judging others or enduring teasing about delicate matters such as physical looks, religious beliefs, immigration status, food insecurity, or medical conditions. Additional sensitive content that could have emerged was when the interviewee shared a notable negative interaction with another CPS parent or legal guardian (e.g., major intercultural conflicts) and having felt alienation in their own school community, perhaps rooted in racial tensions or linguistic discrimination.

V. Findings and Analysis

First off, there is a large theme oriented around language empowerment and self-confidence development, creating a deeply interconnected family-school mesosystem. All mothers perceive that their child has become more expressive and outspoken due to their Language Education Program. Roughly 71 percent of the students maintain a positive outlook,

[13] This is a fictional example and not based on real life.

embracing their mistakes while practicing English and viewing them as opportunities to grow personally. For instance, Parent 9 explained that her daughter "stays optimistic despite the frequent errors and openly uses her classmates as a dictionary, asking them politely to teach her new words." For the remaining children, their immediate frustration and inclination to give up does not appear to stem from laziness, disinterest, or an unwillingness to learn, but rather from a perfectionist mindset and setting high, sometimes unrealistic linguistic goals in an effort to better assimilate with their peers. Parent 4 gave a simple yet powerful example that illustrates the emotional strain of navigating a linguistic barrier:

> "My daughter told me she was in class when a Black boy who only spoke English asked her for a green Crayola marker. She said, '*Mamá*, I understood what he was saying, but I didn't know how to respond and it was so frustrating. I felt stupid.'"

Parent 2 commented that her daughter "makes a minor mistake and instantly starts to cry, but once she calms down, she decides to keep going." Similarly, Parent 6 describes what feels like high social stakes for her daughter, reflecting a peer-child mesosystem: "She gets so angry when she can't sound like what she calls a 'typical white girl.' She told me, 'If I don't say it right, they'll make fun of me," and she really believes that." It's a disheartening, though understandable, reality for a migrant child striving to belong in a new environment, even if it takes a toll on their mental well-being. They place an intense pressure on themselves to master English at a level that takes years to develop and is not an overnight success.

There also appears to be a small phenomenon, likely influenced by Korean dramas, K-pop and J-pop music, and trendy East Asian pop culture products, in which several kids show intrigue in Asian customs and languages not currently offered at their CPS school, like Korean, Chinese, and Japanese. This was observed in 4 out of the 14 students. Parent 13 was surprised at this new fascination: "One day, we are on the Pink Line and she turns to me and says *ni hao ma*

and, naturally, I'm very confused. Then says she wants to learn Chinese instead of English since it's too challenging and overwhelming."

This growing confidence naturally leads to a role reversal in language-learning dynamics, where all children who have completed at least one full year in either a TBE or DLE Program are actively "teaching" adults, specifically through giving feedback on their parents' spoken English. It reflects a unique parent-child linguistic dependency. These lessons often unfold in public spaces, with the children gently pointing out errors and giving corrections. Common occurrences included students correcting their mothers on numbers, simple English words like "bag," and even full phrases. Parent 5 recalled how a stranger asked her about the arrival time of a CTA bus heading towards Little Village: "I tried to respond, but after the conversation, my daughter pulled me aside and told me I had said it wrong. She then repeated what I should've said in English." Parent 10 revealed: "We were at Target, and I couldn't remember how to say 'umbrella.' I told the twins to ask an employee for it, and they did boldly and without hesitation." Parent 4, who is independently studying English using free online courses, noted: "I depend on my child to correct my pronunciation. If I say something wrong, she gladly steps in and helps me fix it." Parent 1 expressed feeling completely at ease letting her daughter read off the menu and order for the whole family at McDonald's, letting her engage in tasks usually performed by adults.

Interestingly, two parents mentioned their daughters using English in large, crowded sacred spaces, forming an unexpected mesosystem between a religious organization and a school. Parent 3 proudly shared: "At church, my baby got up and said, 'Good morning everyone. Today I will tell you about an experience I had in Ecuador,' and then shared a story connected to her faith." Parent 1 also emphasized that her daughters regularly practice English with members of their congregation in Hyde Park, eagerly discussing Bible scripture and what it means to be a

devout Christian. In these brief, yet meaningful moments, children pass on knowledge they've been formally taught in school, intentionally choosing to teach their loved ones with patience and great pride.

One of the most poignant and unexpected aspects was the ability for children to turn "negatives into positives," as I noticed a trend regarding which version of themselves they brought to their English Language Program. Most of these children endured the harrowing journey through the dense and treacherous Darién Gap, known as the only land bridge connecting North and South America. Parent 8 provided a moving testimony regarding her child's strength and the uncertain road that lies ahead.

> "He's Spider-Man. I was climbing like him, right Mommy? And I said, 'Yes, my love.' It was a height of 100, maybe 150 meters. I swear, we've been through so much. I came out carrying my children in my arms, with cold water up to my shoulders, and the suitcase balanced on my head. And when we opened it—everything inside was soaked. Useless. Bogotá, Montería… even worse. And now look at us. And he just cries and cries. Now imagine—left limping, without a single cent to my name, drowning in debt."

These children, in countless ways, are truly superheroes in their own right, enriching the CPS Language Education curriculum and offering invaluable perspectives along the way. Despite the trauma her child experienced, Parent 8 witnessed a profound character transformation and shift in mindset. Prior to migrating to the U.S., in Colombia her son was timid and refused to speak in class or to peers. Now, he is "extremely self-sufficient" and has come to terms with the harsh reality that "growing up in the U.S. will be anything but simple." Now, he views school as a "safe place" that "shelters him from the xenophobia [him and his mother] experience on the bus and the overstimulating nature of his neighborhood." Reassuringly, all 14 parents conveyed, to varying degrees, that their child's school serves a dual purpose. Not *only* is it a place of learning, but it is also a "safe haven," "refugee," "shelter," and "second home," primarily due to the

English Language Program and its dedicated faculty. For example, in KW, the EL teacher has seemingly become akin to a "second parent," understanding the children's needs and acting as the only liaison (besides maintenance staff) between them and the non-Spanish-speaking staff.

The vast majority of parents firmly agree that many of their sons and daughters have acquired the important life skills of self-sufficiency, self-reliance, and adaptability, all of which have been put to practice and amplified in their designated TBE or DLE Program. At KW, many parents attributed the cultivation of self-driven language acquisition to the EL Program, which they perceived as fostering self-sufficiency and propelling curiosity in students. For instance, Parent 5 shared: "My daughter voluntarily engages with media such as television shows and movies in English"; Parent 1 noted that her daughter "has a fascination with reading my complicated English textbook, which is specifically tailored for adults learning the language." Captured within Bronfenbrenner's model, this uniquely ties together the microsystems of school and home, and affirms that there are strong ties between these two personal realms. Parent 7, a Mexican mother, shared that her daughter frequently practices her English with her paternal grandfather, who moved to Chicago in 2004 and achieved proficiency in the language. Although the child was born in Los Angeles, she was raised in Tijuana, Baja California, Mexico, where Spanish became her first language. When these two microsystems intertwine through a linguistic lens, the outcomes are remarkably positive: the child benefits significantly from the exceptional advantage of having a live conversational partner (a beloved family member), fostering engagement that enhances retention and accelerates learning.

However, on the other hand there appears to be a disconnect between the mesosystem of family and school, where parental involvement appears to be halted due to busy work schedules for parents. Most parents expressed their desire to seemingly have a program for parents to

actively engage in the school community and bridge the gap of isolation. Parents often draw parallels between their child's EL Program and their own need for an equivalent program tailored to adults, complete with similar educational and parental resources. This perspective aligns with previous findings, such as those highlighted by Guo, which emphasize that parents are integral partners within the child-school dynamic and should be equipped with detailed guidance, contrary to generalities or loosely-structured advice, on how to effectively engage with their KW CPS community.

On average, the data revealed that the children received a B in Language Arts and a B in Social Sciences, while the average parental rating for the designated bilingual education model for CPS was a 9 out of 10, which is significantly high. It is certainly remarkable that there were no scores lower than an 8.5 for either group, demonstrating an overall high level of satisfaction that cannot be undermined. The majority of parents consistently praised how their children truly felt respected and acknowledged within their DL and TBE programs, where 80 percent believed it was their child's main motivation to physically attend school. The excitement of seeing other Spanish-speaking peers and learning new information about the U.S., for instance, were both strong factors in pushing these children to attend their programs.

It is worth noting that three women from BP mentioned how although the child may feel as if they are excelling, they believe not enough homework is being given out to students at home and that many are appearing to be quite "bored." They noted that their children were receiving far less homework than they had been given in other countries passed through during migration, such as Costa Rica and Ecuador, as well as their home countries. The academic workload, specifically via homework, in other Central and South American countries appears to be more intensive, time-consuming, and tedious. It provides a pathway for parents and legal

guardians to critique CPS curriculum using a point of comparison. For example, Parent 9 shared that in those locations her daughter would "come home with stacks of colorful workbooks" and spend about two hours completing homework after school. This contributes to a potential dilemma in DLE programming, which is then "compensated for" through the child willingly teaching themselves outside the classroom.

It is interesting to note that this was not a criticism in KW schools and many parents were satisfied with their child's workload. In fact, they believed that the workload was appropriate enough to allow their child to pursue a self-sufficient learning desire *outside* the classroom, where using English-learning apps like Duolingo and practicing with other people who are also learning English is a common occurrence. Specifically, the family-school mesosystem joins together through a linguistic dynamic, where those who had an active speaking partner in the home appeared to be more confident at school compared to those who did not, based strictly on parent observance and feedback. This included having uncles and older male figures who, due to their full-time work in manufacturing or rideshare transportation services, had acquired a relatively proficient level of English.

VI. Policy Recommendations and Conclusions

Principally, on a local citywide level, I recommend CPS should establish a separate network *exclusively* for all 36 DLE Program elementary schools since their instructional model differs significantly from other language education programs spearheaded by the OMME.[14] Overseen by the existing Office of Network Support, the system could be structured to serve three primary regions—South, North, and West—each with a Chief of Schools designated to

[14] All policy recommendations were developed independently and not willingly influenced by any proposals outlined in the CPS "Proposed Policies or Rule Changes Open for Public Comment" section on the Chicago Board of Education's Policies and Rules web page, as I did not review this content at all.

solely focus on understanding and uplifting DLE.[15] As discussed in the Data and Methods section, BP is currently in Network 8, where only 11 percent of its 27 schools are categorized as DLE schools, making them the clear minority, especially regarding their pedagogical approach, which centers around consistent daily bilingual exposure in the classroom. During a brief interaction with a CPS DLE Coordinator in late February 2025, they expressed that the disconnect between DLE and non-DLE schools often feels like an "apples to oranges" situation, where the students' bilingual development frequently fails to be accurately assessed. They stated that their school's academic progress data is often misinterpreted among senior administrators, mistakenly assuming that stronger Spanish proficiency equates to weaker English skills, leading to ongoing personal frustration.[16]

Under the authority of the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE), this initiative has the potential to enhance academic oversight and foster stronger linguistic unity. Notably, it would directly support the efforts of House Bill 3026 in the 104th Illinois General Assembly (ILGA) introduced by Representative Abdelnasser Rashid (D) on February 6, 2025. It "amends the School Code [105 ILCS 5] by adding the Dual Language Education Article" and pushes the ISBE "to adopt comprehensive guidance for school districts on starting new dual language education programs and expanding existing programs" (Rashid 2025). This aligns with Sections (E) and (F) under Section (5), "Staff quality and professional development," which proposes that school districts

"(E) increase professional learning communities for dual language educators to facilitate collaboration and the sharing of best practices among schools, including professional learning communities that focus on topics such as instructional strategies, assessment techniques, and cultural competency;

[15] Central Chicago, or the Loop (in the center of downtown), would also be recognized as a distinct area.
[16] It is important to remember that students in DLE programs include not only those identified as ELs or heritage language learners, but *also* non-ELs. They may have no familial or cultural ties to Latin America.

(F) create affinity groups for dual language teachers statewide to regularly meet, share best practices, and discuss challenges and opportunities unique to bilingual education and establish teams within the affinity groups to collaboratively develop bilingual curriculum materials."

My proposal to create a specialized network amplifies these two objectives providing an institutional framework that ensures DLE educators can collaborate effectively and remain on the same page, rather than being overshadowed by the priorities of intermittent EL Programs, for example, in a mixed working environment. Further, the affinity groups in Section (F) should not only be statewide but also formally localized. I strongly believe that diverse DLE Program Coordinators and educators across the district who work with significant populations of students belonging to Protected Categories particularly related to "actual or perceived race or ethnicity, ethnic group identification, ancestry, nationality, national origin, religion, color… immigration status," must meet at least once every two months to address specific obstacles these children encounter in school (CPS 2022, "Definitions"). These small, region-based coalitions will be more thoroughly prepared and strategically positioned to collaborate with other DLE staff/faculty in prominent Illinois cities like Aurora, Elgin, Naperville, Rockford, and Springfield.

Secondly, I would also propose, in alignment with parent testimonies, the IL School Code adopted by the Chicago Board of Education (CBOE), and CPS Office of Social and Emotional Learning, the implementation of mandatory bullying prevention presentations (containing a slideshow) tailored to both parents and children in schools offering EL, DLE, and World Language Programs. They would ideally be hosted in-person to maximize engagement and translated into all necessary languages. Through a culturally-responsive and context-specific framework, the goal would be to empower students to advocate for themselves in confronting bullying, while encouraging parents to observe, listen to, and trust their child when they report concerning behaviors happening at school.

The idea directly builds upon CPS Policies Section 705: Student Discipline, under the broader Section 700: Students. Specifically, it refers to Section 705.5A, "Addressing Bullying and Bias-Based Behaviors," from the widely cited Section 705.5: Student Code of Conduct (SCC) adopted June 27, 2024, which is also included in the CPS Student Rights and Responsibilities Booklet, as backed by the CBOE. The following is outlined in the "Preventing Bullying and Bias-Based Behaviors" subsection:

"All CPS principals and staff shall work to develop safe and supportive school environments that prevent bullying and bias-based behaviors through:

- Developing supportive school climate strategies, including clear expectations and shared agreements to guide interactions between students, and between staff and students.
- Teaching all students social and emotional skills and establishing classroom and school-wide practices that promote relationship-building, including teaching all school stakeholders to speak out when they see or hear bullying, degrading language, and bias or prejudice.
- Establishing predictable responses and effective disciplinary practices that address root causes, teach skills, build empathy, and repair harm. Ensure all students, staff, and stakeholders know how your school plans to respond to bullying and harassment.
- Committing to welcoming and inclusive practices that center belonging, affirm cultural differences, and address and support the transformation of bias-based harm."

Inspired by the insights of highly involved parent participants, key messages at the forefront would emphasize setting boundaries and knowing when to say "enough is enough," in addition to highlighting non-violent conflict resolution. For instance, Parent 14, a woman who prioritizes volunteering in her daughters' classrooms despite caring for 11 relatives, shared a story about her Mexican EL nephew at BP, who had been repeatedly bullied and reached a breaking point, feeling the urge to hit the boy responsible in retaliation. Bypassing his father, she expressed relief and gratitude that he came to her for advice and asked her to seek the teacher's help before acting on his anger. She wants children to receive clear messaging about how physical violence can have lasting effects on *both* the perpetrator and victim.

I suggest that they incorporate short videos that simulate real-life bullying scenarios using elementary school-aged actors and, if possible, filmed within their actual school setting. These mini skits should include background noise and ordinary distractions, mixing in background noise like hallway chatter, modern colloquial language in both English and Spanish, and realistic acting methods. This increases the likelihood that children and teenagers take the message seriously and that it resonates with their everyday academic atmosphere. To better prepare slide content, it may be worthwhile to provide a mandatory anonymous schoolwide student survey to identify real-time bullying trends and pressing complaints, even if responses are quite general and lack context. Lastly, schools can also choose to address subset issues, such as cyberbullying or peer conflict, reflecting their *own* multilingual communities.

Ultimately, this initiative is not a one-size-fits-all approach and acknowledges that bullying manifests in diverse ways depending on the *unique* demographics and challenges of each individual K-8 school. CPS DLE or TBE Program schools that have high populations of Latin American asylum-seeking, refugee, and/or migrant families, EL students may be more likely to encounter bullying related to linguistic and cultural difficulties, such as being ridiculed for speaking English with a heavy accent. For example, a vulnerable Venezuelan newcomer student in a DLE Program, whose first language is Spanish, may be taunted by peers about her family being deported or face cruel derogatory remarks related to Immigration and Customs Enforcement's raids. This traumatizing experience can lead to immediate distress, fear, and low self-esteem, as well as long-term psychological harm. At the discretion of each school, educators and administrators are allowed to best determine whether discrimination, harassment, microaggressions or identity-based bullying require prevention techniques beyond general CPS

anti-bullying guidelines. This flexibility can help ensure that these combative strategies and tactics are more "relatable" to school families.

Overall, it appears that the CPS Language Education on the ground level satisfies the overwhelming majority of parents and children across both schools. However, this praise and appreciation is grounded in the support of faculty who supersede expectations and serve as the vital glue that binds their school community together. While the majority of mothers find their child's TBE or DLE program as meeting their *own* personal standards, I find that CPS is also adhering to their state-mandated listed responsibilities. Undoubtedly, there remains room for improvement that takes the weight off educators and provides them with more resources; I firmly believe these goals can be tackled on a broader level through the Illinois legislature. In the end, the journey of these remarkable Latin American children and their families embodies the modern-day essence of learning, living, and laughing in two tongues, one that has the power to transcend linguistic barriers.

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VIII. Appendices

Appendix 1

Overview of Parent Participant Profiles in Chronological Order

(Data current as of Feb 2025)[17]

Key

***:** Kenwood
Without *: Brighton Park

Parent/ Legal Guardian Pseudonym	Age	Marital Status	Child's Home City & State[18]	Total Children (Sex, Grade + Age)	Arrival Date to the U.S. + Chicago	Occupation	Residential Neighborhood in Chicago	Motive for Leaving Home to Pursue a New Life in the U.S.[19]
Parent #1* (Mother)	36 y/o	Domestic partnership	Caracas, VE	Female in 12th grade (17 y/o); female in 5th grade (10 y/o)	Aug 4, 2023 + Aug 8, 2023	UPS truck driver (night shift)	Hyde Park (South Side neighborhood)	Severe unemployment and food insecurity
Parent #2* (Mother)	34 y/o	Married	Caracas, VE	Male in 8th grade (13 y/o); female in 5th grade (10 y/o); newborn *(sex unknown)*	Sept 1, 2023 + Sept 3, 2023	*Unemployed;* full-time homemaker (mother to a newborn)	South Shore (South Side community area)	Political violence and threats from the government
Parent #3* (Mother)	39 y/o	Single	Puerto La Cruz, VE	Female in 12th grade (18 y/o); female in 3rd grade (8 y/o); male not enrolled in school (4 y/o)	Aug 22, 2023 + Aug 25, 2023	*Unemployed*; full-time student at Richard J. Daley College (public, 2-year)	Woodlawn (South Side neighborhood)	Political threats and trauma after the police shot her father-in-law in front of the whole family, causing her to miscarry while pregnant
Parent #4* (Mother + Father)	29 y/o + *father unknown*	Married but separated (cohabiting)	Caracas, VE	Female in 3rd grade (8 y/o)	May 31, 2024 + Jun 5,	*N/A (no response)*	Hyde Park (South Side neighborhood)	Political violence

[17] ("Find Your School") *(a measurement of school performance managed by the IL State Board of Education)*
[18] This may not necessarily be the child's place of birth, but rather the location where they were primarily raised and spent most of their childhood before settling in the U.S.
[19] The motives have been reported as conveyed by each parent or legal guardian.

					2024			
Parent #5* (Mother)	29 y/o	Married	Falcón State, VE	Female in 4th grade (9 y/o)	Sep 2023 + Sep 26, 2023	Housekeeper	Hyde Park (South Side neighborhood)	Government persecution
Parent #6* (Mother)	27 y/o	Single	Guerrero, MX	Female in 4th grade (10 y/o); female baby (1 y/o)	Dec 2023 + Dec 12, 2023	Restaurant worker	Hyde Park (South Side neighborhood)	Eldest daughter convinced her mother to join both her paternal grandfather (living in the U.S. for 20 yrs) and father, who had left for the U.S. when the daughter was 3 y/o, in Chicago
Parent #7* (Mother)	42 y/o	Married	Tijuana, Baja California, MX[20]	Female in 3rd grade (8 y/o)	Oct 17, 2023 *(arrived on the same day)*	Operations Director of an IL-based medical team	Hyde Park (South Side neighborhood)	Wanted to experience a new culture and lifestyle in the U.S. and provide her psychologist husband with opportunities to help more people
Parent #8 (Mother)	34 y/o	Domestic partnership	Montería, Córdoba, CO	Male in 4th grade (9 y/o); *3 other children (sex, age & grade unknown)*	Nov 24, 2024 + Nov 29, 2024	*Unemployed*	Little Village (West Side neighborhood in the South Lawndale community area)	Hometown became unlivable due to a surge in organ trafficking, political violence, and constant disruptions caused by the National Liberation Army (ELN), including an attempted kidnapping of her daughter
Parent #9 (Mother)	31 y/o	Single	Montería, Córdoba, CO	Female in 5th grade	Dec 22, 2022 +	*Unspecified* self-	Brighton Park (Southwest	Displacement due to regional

[20] This child was born in Los Angeles, CA (the only U.S.-born child in the sample) before relocating to Tijuana as a baby, and then moving to Chicago. Spanish is their first language, and they are a native speaker.

				(10 y/o)	Jan 13, 2023	employment	side community area)	conflict with areas controlled by right-wing paramilitary groups (colloquially known as "paracos") who are heavily armed, forcing residents to flee if their territory is targeted
Parent #10* (Mother)	38 y/o	Single	Michoacán, MX	Twin females in 1st grade (7 y/o); *2 other children who both live in Michoacán (sex, age & grade unknown)*	2023 *(arrived in the same year)*	Dunkin' employee	Hyde Park (South Side neighborhood)	*Unspecified* personal reasons and a desire to provide her twin daughters with a better life and opportunities for a positive change
Parent #11* (Mother)	39 y/o	Domestic partnership	Caracas, VE	Male in 11th grade (17 y/o); Male in 11th grade (16 y/o); male in 7th grade (12 y/o); female in 4th grade (9 y/o)	Aug 27, 2023 + Sep 2, 2023	Freelance house cleaner	Englewood (South Side neighborhood)	Shady government vans frequently loitered around her children's schools, creating an atmosphere of severe fear and persecution
Parent #12 (Mother)	29 y/o	Single	Carabobo State, VE	Female in 4th grade (10 y/o); *1 male child who lives in Venezuela (age & grade unknown)*	Sep 4, 2024 *(arrived on the same day)*	Factory worker	Brighton Park (Southwest side community area)	Economic hardship, lack of job opportunities, and disagreement with President Nicolás Maduro's ideology and administration
Parent #13 (Mother)	32 y/o	Married but separated (cohabiting)	Ciudad Hidalgo, Michoacán,	Male in K (6 y/o); male in 2nd	Jul 2024 *(arrived in the*	*Unemployed*; full-time homemaker	New City (South Side community	Political persecution due to her

			MX	grade (8 y/o)	*same month)*		area on the southwest side)	husband's involvement under the leadership of José Manuel Mireles Valverde, commonly known as Doctor Mireles[21]
Parent #14 (Mother)	29 y/o	Married but separated (cohabiting)	Michoacán, MX	Female in 6th grade (11 y/o); female in 2nd grade (7 y/o); baby *(sex & age unknown)*	2018	*Unemployed*; full-time homemaker	Englewood (South Side neighborhood)	Political instability and violence, including threats against her father, brother, and husband

Appendix 2

CPS Parent/Legal Guardian Semi-Structured Interview Guide[22]

Domain	Questions
Personal Background	**1.** What is your age? **2.** What city/town are you from? **3.** Are you married, single, or divorced? **4.** What is your current employment? If applicable, what is that of your spouse? **5.** When did you arrive in the U.S. and with who? ○ When did you come to Chicago and via what mode of transportation? **6.** What prompted your decision to leave your home city/town as asylum-seekers? When did you depart? **7.** What is your current housing situation, particularly regarding the location and surrounding community? If applicable, how has it evolved since arriving in the city? ○ Who lives in your household, including pets? **8.** What language is primarily spoken at home, and is there any consistent exposure to English under your roof? ○ Probes: Media entertainment (TV shows, movies, music); literature; educational games; homework tutor; conversations with an English-speaking family friend who comes over **9.** What is a favorite bonding activity or tradition that brings the entire family together?

[21] Mireles Valverde (Oct 24, 1958 – Nov 25, 2020) was a Mexican medical doctor and founder of paramilitary self-defense groups aimed at combating ongoing cartel violence, primarily in Michoacán.
[22] Each individual interview was conducted entirely in Spanish, with the questions and content unchanged.

Child's Personal & Academic Profile	**10.** How many children do you have in total? What is/are their age(s)? ○ Are they (each) currently enrolled at a Chicago Public School (CPS)? If so, which and what grade(s)? ○ How many full academic years have they completed there? ○ Have they ever been requested, persuaded, or forced to switch schools in between academic years or during the middle of one? **11.** What did the selection and enrollment process look like? What triumphs and tribulations did you face along the way? ○ Probe: Did you desire a specific school model from the start, like a Dual Language Education (DLE) or Transitional Bilingual Education (TBE) program? **12.** How has your living location influenced the CPS elementary school your child(ren) attend(s)? **13.** How does your child get to school each day and, if applicable, has it changed over time? ○ Probes: Travel alone or accompanied; walk, drive or use CTA train/bus services **14.** To confirm, is your child considered an English Learner (EL) by CPS standards? *Please provide the following responses based on your child's recent/current experiences, mainly as of this year (2023-24 + new 2024-25 academic years).* Interests + Hobbies **15.** Can you describe your child's personality? ○ Probes: Outgoing; shy; curious; observant **16.** What are their favorite activities or hobbies outside of school? ○ Probes: Sports; music/dance; reading; video games/consuming social media like TikTok; outdoor recreation **17.** What are their favorite books, movies, or TV shows? Academics + Learning **18.** Did they have any knowledge of English before they started at their new CPS school? **19.** What subjects do they like/dislike most in school? Why are they passionate/unenthusiastic about them? **20.** Are they more comfortable working independently or collaborating in partners or big group settings, especially in relation to class projects and extracurriculars? **21.** Are there any learning strategies or habits that work most effectively for them? ○ Probes: Visual; auditory; kinesthetic; reading/writing **22.** Is there a special day at school, like a field trip or Pajama Day, that they remember as being very memorable and impactful? **23.** How do you feel about their overall academic performance during the 2023-24 school year? Do you know how they felt? ○ Probes: Significant accomplishments/awards; monthly improvements; personal motivations to excel; fell behind due to extended absences or extreme tardiness Strengths/Challenges + Aspirations **24.** What strengths or talents do they possess that stand out to you? **25.** What do they frequently struggle with or find challenging, either in an academic or personal realm? **26.** What future goals do they have? Possibly a potential career path, even if it's imaginative or far-fetched? **27.** Is there a new skill/activity they have expressed interest in wanting to master or try? How do they approach learning new things?

	Social Life + Friendships **28.** Describe their friend dynamics. ○ Probes: Racial/ethnic background; primary language(s) spoken; socioeconomic status; group size (few close friends or larger, casual group); and common personality/interests ■ How often do they reunite outside of school, and what activities do they enjoy doing together? **29.** Would you support them expanding their friend group to include more linguistic, cultural, and experiential diversity? **30.** Over time, have you noticed any major changes in any of the personal/academic characteristics mentioned above? Perhaps a distinct shift in their interests or behaviors after settling in the U.S.?
Cultural Knowledge + Growth	**31.** On average, what grades did your child receive quarterly in Social Science for the 2023-24 academic year? **32.** Did they have any prior knowledge or familiarity with the U.S.? ○ Upon learning that they were moving here, did they show any interest in researching or learning more about the country? **33.** How knowledgeable are they about traditional American holidays and customs, such as Thanksgiving, MLK Jr. Day or Independence Day, which are not celebrated in your Latin American home city/town? ○ Do they openly show interest or celebrate these new annual events, or do they dismiss it and instead express preference or longing for familiar Latin American customs? **34.** Have their preferences related to identity expression or interests changed at school/home due to contemporary American influences/taste? If so, how? ○ Probes: Clothes/accessories; music; food; hairstyles; popular products (peanut butter, Girl Scout Cookies); hobbies; sports (LVBP to now Chicago Bulls) **35.** Have you observed them shifting their focus away from practicing familiar Latin American customs or wanting to understand their own history? ○ Do you perceive this to be a consequence of Americanization caused by the U.S. public education system? **36.** At their CPS school, do you believe assimilation is occurring in a way that promotes "whiteness" and strict English dominance? Do you know if they feel empowered/included, disconnected/isolated, or simply indifferent? **37.** Do you fear that they may lose a profound connection to their Latin American roots over time as a CPS EL student? Have they expressed this concern to you?
Linguistic Knowledge + Growth	**38.** On average, what grades did your child receive quarterly in Language Arts for the 2023-24 academic year? **39.** Have they picked up on any American slang, idioms, or proverbs? If so, which ones and are they aware of the meaning, or do they use it "blindly" without capturing the precise interpretation ○ Probes: U.S. Gen Alpha vocabulary ("lit" or "no cap"); "spill the beans"; "break a leg" **40.** Have you detected any significant phonetic or rhythmic change while they are speaking in either language? ○ Probes: Accent; pronunciation; diction; intonation; fluency **41.** Has Spanglish naturally developed in their speech? ○ Probes: Speaking Spanish fluidly at home and then suddenly combining or blending in an English word without fully realizing it **42.** Are they genuinely willing to continue navigating bilingualism at home (not parent-enforced) and consume any mass media in English? If so, what do they often turn to?

	○ Probes: Broadcasted; print; digital **43.** Have you ever noticed them correcting your own English, either in speaking or writing? If so, what happened and how did they do it? **44.** Overall, which language do they have a stronger preference for? Although it may be subtle, have you seen them slightly favoring English over Spanish to communicate with their friends at school or even strangers? **45.** Have they ever praised or complained about any specific element of their bilingual education model? ○ Probes: Fun learning environment; have difficulty keeping up with the material; constantly compare their own progress with that of their peers **46.** What feedback have faculty/staff provided regarding their progress in learning English? Is there a notable pattern or trend?
Social + Emotional Growth	**47.** Have you noticed your child gradually embracing their mistakes while practicing English and using them as learning opportunities? Do they demonstrate resilience when encountering language or cultural barriers whether at school or outside of it? ○ Probes: Difficulty adjusting to American humor/jokes; lunch schedule; unfamiliar school protocols like no uniforms required **48.** Have they made any new friends who are non-Spanish-speaking or not of Latin American descent? If so, what does their communication look like and at what confidence level (low, medium or high)? If not, what might be the reasons for this? **49.** Have they experienced or perpetrated bullying related to learning English? How about racism, misogyny, or xenophobia? If so, how did the situation unfold and what steps were implemented to resolve it? If not, what factors could be playing a role in preventing it? ○ Probes: Judged on physical looks, religious beliefs, immigration status, food insecurity **50.** Are they self-sufficient and comfortable asking for help (primarily from CPS faculty/staff) on English assignments, or do they seem insecure and hesitant? ○ Probes: Heavily rely on private, outside tools like translation apps or YouTube videos **51.** Have they ever been confident or outspoken enough to translate in public and showcase their newly acquired English knowledge? Are they eager to "show off"? ○ Probes: "Teaches" siblings a new word/phrase; helps an older, non-English-speaking loved one translate at the grocery store while checking out **52.** What feedback have faculty/staff provided regarding their social/emotional well-being in the classroom? Is there a notable pattern or trend?
Parental Involvement + CPS Language Education Assessment	**53.** As a non-English-speaking, asylum-seeking/migrant parent/guardian, how are you involved in the school community? Do you feel alienated, or that your active participation is welcomed and valued by EL/DLE faculty/staff and non-asylum-seeking/migrant, non-Latin American parents alike? ○ Probes: Member of Bilingual Advisory Committees (BACs); attends Chicago Multilingual Parent Councils meetings; frequently reaches out to the designated EL teacher **54.** Can you share a meaningful or surprising interaction you've had with (an)other CPS parent(s), whether positive or negative? ○ Probes: Major intracultural/intercultural disagreements or conflicts **55.** What is the general consensus about the childrens' CPS language education model and the school overall specifically amongst other non-English-speaking, asylum-seeking/migrant Latin American parents like yourself? **56.** Holistically, please rate your child's CPS Language Education Model on a scale from 1 (extremely dissatisfied) to 10 (extremely satisfied), taking into account *everything* like

	faculty/staff, curriculum, resources, assessments, and learning environment. Explain your reasoning.