LATINO EDUCATION IN BALTIMORE:
REACHING CHILDREN THROUGH THE PARENTS

El futuro de sus hijos está en sus manos, que no se le olvide

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PROBLEM DEFINITION
In the past two decades, the Latino population in Baltimore City became the city's fastest-growing racial or ethnic group, now representing about 4 percent of all residents. Existing data and qualitative interviews indicate that Baltimore City Public Schools (BCPS) does not yet have the infrastructure in place to accommodate the increasing number of Latino students and their families. In particular, the school system relies on telephone interpreters, rather than dedicated or contracted staff, even at parent-teacher conferences. The lack of sufficient numbers of bilingual staff is a problem because many of the city's Latino adults have low levels of educational attainment and limited English proficiency; schools attempt to distribute information in Spanish online and by mail, but prior research suggests such one-way communication through written materials is not as effective as in-person interaction. The literature provides strong evidence that parental involvement plays a critical role in improving students' academic performance; inhibiting that involvement might hinder Latino students' educational outcomes. Historically, Latino students have lagged their peers across national performance measures, from dropout rates to test scores; and researchers attribute lack of parental involvement as one contributing factor.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS
We recommend four programmatic changes the Baltimore City Public Schools could make to increase channels of communication with their Latino parents: 1) start an interpreters bank, where schools could contract with Spanish interpreters, 2) provide cultural orientation for Latino parents at the start of each school year, so parents know about school resources and understand appropriate ways to help their child succeed, 3) increase the frequency of parent-school functions centered in the Latino community and held entirely in Spanish, and 4) start an education-oriented radio show in Spanish.