

Barriers to Higher Education for Hispanic Students in Arkansas

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CSPS 7340 Practicum II

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April 15, 2025

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Abstract

Arkansas has one of the fastest-growing Hispanic populations in the country, yet Hispanic and undocumented students in Central Arkansas continue to face significant barriers to accessing higher education. Although efforts nationwide have focused on advocacy, community-based support, and culturally responsive practices, systemic inequities, financial constraints, and policy restrictions remain persistent challenges. This study investigates the barriers faced by Hispanic students in Arkansas, with particular attention to low-income, and first-generation students. Using a mixed-methods approach, including interviews, focus groups, and surveys with Hispanic high school students, college students, and parents involved in the Mamás Unidas program, the study identifies finances and lack of support as key barriers. This study highlights resources that may better support Hispanic students and families in accessing higher education.

Barriers to Higher Education for Hispanic students in Arkansas

Access to higher education is a critical pathway to upward mobility and long-term economic success. Over the past decade, Hispanic student enrollment in the U.S. has steadily increased, with a nationwide rise of approximately 140,000 students, or 6%, between 2019 and 2020 alone (Mora, 2022). From 2000 to 2020, the number of Hispanic students enrolled at four-year institutions grew from 620,000 to 2.4 million, marking a 287% increase, compared to a 50% increase in overall student enrollment during the same period (Mora, 2022). Despite this national progress, Hispanic and undocumented students in Central Arkansas continue to face significant barriers to higher education, including systemic inequities, financial constraints, and restrictive state policies. Data from the Arkansas Division of Higher Education highlights that Hispanic students experience lower postsecondary enrollment rates than their White peers, often citing financial insecurity as a primary barrier (Enyioha, 2019). The lack of state-level policies supporting undocumented students in Arkansas compounds these barriers, limiting their access to scholarships and financial aid.

Community-based organizations such as Mamás Unidas Little Rock play a vital role in addressing these barriers. Through initiatives like the Mijo Program, Mamás Unidas provides targeted support for first-generation and low-income students, equipping them to overcome academic, financial, and cultural barriers to higher education. By fostering a culturally responsive and inclusive framework, Mamás Unidas empowers students and families to navigate an inequitable system while advocating for systemic reform.

Project Description

This project investigates the barriers impeding higher education access for Hispanic students in Arkansas and formulates strategies to address these inequities. Partnering with

Mamás Unidas Little Rock (LR), the research aims to identify systemic barriers and recommend solutions that ensure equitable educational opportunities.

The outcomes include a comprehensive report detailing key findings, actionable recommendations, and identification of key resources tailored to the needs of Hispanic families. These deliverables support Mamás Unidas' advocacy efforts, strengthening its capacity to address barriers to educational equity and fostering community trust.

Research Questions

Building on our project's goals we seek to answer the following questions: 1.) What are the barriers to accessing higher education for the Hispanic community in Central Arkansas (including Pulaski, Lonoke, Saline, Faulkner, and White counties)? 2.) What best practices and recommendations for Mamás Unidas LR can we identify to better support the Hispanic community better? 3.) What key resources can be identified to support Hispanic students and families in overcoming these challenges? These questions narrowed the scope of our research and directly guided our literature review and methodology.

Literature Review

This literature review synthesizes research on the multifaceted barriers that are faced by the target population and identifies best practices for supporting their access to and success in higher education. Deploying a thematic approach, this review examines systemic issues, family and cultural dynamics, the role of community organizations, and effective strategies for creating inclusive educational pathways for Hispanic communities in the United States.

Systemic Barriers to Higher Education

Economic Challenges

Economic instability is one of the most pervasive barriers faced by Hispanic students, particularly those from undocumented families. Hispanic households are overrepresented among low-income populations, with a significant proportion living near or below the poverty line (Boundless Immigration Inc., 2025). For undocumented students, these financial challenges are compounded by ineligibility for federal financial aid programs such as FAFSA, which excludes non-citizens and DACA recipients. Consequently, many undocumented students must rely on out-of-pocket payments, private scholarships, or work-study opportunities, which are often insufficient to cover tuition and associated costs (Mansfield & Hernandez, 2024).

In states like Arkansas, the situation is exacerbated by the lack of state-level financial aid for undocumented students. While DACA recipients qualify for in-state tuition, they are excluded from most scholarships and grants, leaving many students unable to afford even public college tuition (Enyioha, 2019). Beyond tuition, additional expenses such as textbooks, transportation, and housing disproportionately burden low-income Hispanic families. Many students must work full-time or part-time jobs to support their families, often at the expense of academic performance and extracurricular involvement (Suárez-Orozco et al., 2015).

This financial precarity also impacts long-term educational attainment. Studies have shown that Hispanic students are more likely to take extended breaks from college or enroll part-time due to economic pressures, which reduces their likelihood of degree completion (Darolia & Potochnick, 2015). Addressing these economic barriers requires systemic reforms in financial aid policies and expanded access to institutional scholarships.

Policy & Legal Constraints

The legal framework surrounding undocumented students in the United States is a significant barrier to educational access. Policies such as the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA) and the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act (IIRIRA) of 1996 granted states the authority to determine educational access for undocumented individuals, creating a patchwork of state-specific rules (Enyioha, 2019).

Arkansas, for example, lacks comprehensive policies to support undocumented students beyond granting in-state tuition for DACA recipients. This leaves many students unable to access financial aid, academic support, or career services. The Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program, while beneficial in providing temporary relief from deportation and work authorization, does not offer a path to citizenship or permanent residency. This legal uncertainty fosters a "state of limbo" for many students, who fear that investing in higher education may not lead to long-term opportunities (Perez, 2020).

The absence of federal policies ensuring equitable access to education exacerbates these challenges. The variability in state policies forces undocumented students to navigate complex legal landscapes with little guidance, adding psychological stress to an already daunting process. Additionally, the stigma associated with undocumented status often prevents students from seeking help, further isolating them from critical resources (Hsin et al., 2020).

Educational Gaps & College Readiness

Educational disparities begin early for many Hispanic students, with limited access to quality K-12 education setting the stage for long-term inequities. Schools in low-income neighborhoods, where many Hispanic families reside, are often underfunded and lack resources such as Advanced Placement (AP) courses, college counseling, and extracurricular activities

(Cook et al., 2019). This lack of academic preparation leaves students ill-equipped to meet college admission requirements or succeed in higher education.

Language barriers present another significant challenge. Many Hispanic students are English Language Learners (ELLs) and attend schools with limited bilingual education programs. Even in states like California, where bilingual policies exist, financial and resource constraints hinder implementation, leaving students without adequate language support (Gándara & Mordechay, 2017). These barriers contribute to lower test scores, reduced college readiness, and a lack of confidence in navigating the college application process.

Inadequate Support Systems

High school counselors are significant in guiding students through the college admissions process, yet systemic inequities limit their reach. Counselors in underfunded schools often manage disproportionately large caseloads, leaving little time for individualized support. Hispanic students report feeling neglected or unsupported by counselors who lack understanding of their unique challenges, particularly those related to undocumented status (Welton & Martinez, 2013).

Schools with strong college-going cultures tend to have higher rates of counselor engagement, but these environments are rare in low-income communities. As a result, many Hispanic students are forced to seek guidance from community organizations or navigate the process independently, which increases their risk of making uninformed decisions (Robinson & Roksa, 2016).

Family & Cultural Dynamics

Parental Influence and Involvement

Parental involvement is a critical determinant of students' educational outcomes.

Research consistently shows that parents play a dual role in shaping college aspirations: they provide emotional and motivational support but may also unintentionally hinder progress due to their own lack of familiarity with the U.S. education system (Mitchell & Jaeger, 2018). For many Hispanic families, cultural values emphasizing family responsibilities and collectivism take precedence over individual pursuits such as higher education. Parents often prioritize immediate economic stability over long-term investments in education, particularly for first-generation students (Dávila et al., 2023).

Barriers to parental involvement include work schedules, language limitations, and a lack of access to information about college pathways. Many parents are unable to attend school meetings or workshops due to work obligations or childcare responsibilities. Additionally, limited access to transportation and a lack of community networks further isolate parents from educational resources (Manzano-Sánchez et al., 2022).

Despite these challenges, familial bonds remain a source of resilience. Parents often encourage their children to overcome obstacles and pursue education as a means of achieving a better future. Programs that provide workshops in Spanish, address logistical barriers, and create opportunities for parent-school collaboration can empower families to better support their children (Davenport, 2016).

Cultural Expectations & Identity

Cultural norms and expectations within Hispanic families significantly influence educational trajectories. The emphasis on family obligations often results in students prioritizing

caregiving responsibilities or financial contributions over academics. First-born children, in particular, are expected to act as role models and take on significant family responsibilities, which can conflict with the demands of higher education (Marrero, 2016). Additionally, traditional gender roles often place greater educational expectations on male students, while daughters are expected to focus on household duties (Gonzalez, Fernandez, & Wilson, 2020).

These cultural dynamics, while challenging, also provide opportunities for asset-based approaches. Programs that recognize and integrate cultural values into educational support frameworks can help students navigate these expectations while pursuing their academic goals. For example, mentoring programs that connect students with role models from similar cultural backgrounds foster a sense of belonging and validate students' experiences (Perez & Taylor, 2016).

Best Practices for Addressing Barriers to Educational Access in United States

Over the years, various best practices in terms of policy intervention, culturally responsive practices, mentorship, family empowerment and community-based initiatives have been advanced to help undocumented students overcome the barriers to accessing higher education in the United States. This section draws on extant literature to explore the most effective practices or initiatives targeted at addressing these barriers.

Policy Intervention & Initiatives

The most notable legal instrument employed in the country to grant educational access to (un) documented immigrants is the “Plyler vs. Doe” Supreme Court ruling (1982), which accords immigrant children's K-12 (elementary and secondary) education. The ruling allows the children of immigrants to attend Kindergarten to secondary school regardless of their immigration status in the United States (Gonzales, 2016; Manfield & Hernandez, 2024). Although the legal

instrument does not provide access to higher education, it lays the foundation for activism, efforts, and initiatives for overcoming barriers to the education of (Hispanic) immigrants in the United States. For example, some states, such as Texas, Virginia, Maryland, and California, have advanced policies that allow undocumented immigrants to enjoy in-state financial aid (e.g. tuition) (Manfield & Hernandez, 2024).

Gonzales's (2016) study empirically demonstrates how the DACA program has positively impacted higher education access, as it allows some immigrant students to work legally and contribute to their higher education cost of attendance while also reducing the psychological stress connected with the risk of deportation. Also, early engagement in college readiness programs significantly improves educational outcomes for Hispanic students. Programs like Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID) demonstrate the effectiveness of sustained intervention, particularly when implemented from middle school through high school. Research shows that AVID participants are more likely to enroll in rigorous coursework, graduate on time, and pursue higher education (Morley et al., 2021).

Culturally Responsive Practices

Culturally responsive education emphasizes the importance of integrating students' cultural identities into the learning environment. Strategies such as bilingual resources, heritage studies, and peer mentorship create inclusive spaces that foster academic engagement and retention. For example, universities in California have implemented heritage-level Spanish courses and Latino-American studies programs to increase cultural connection and retention rates among Hispanic students (Rios-Ellis et al., 2015).

Family Empowerment

Programs that empower families to actively participate in the educational process are vital. Workshops conducted in Spanish, community events that address childcare needs, and accessible resources tailored to parental concerns bridge the gap between families and schools. Research shows that such interventions significantly enhance parental confidence and engagement, ultimately improving students' academic performance (Davenport, 2016).

Mentorship & Representation

Mentorship programs that connect Hispanic students with role models who share their cultural backgrounds have transformative effects. These programs not only provide academic and career guidance but also foster a sense of belonging and aspiration. Representation within faculty and staff further reinforces the importance of diversity and inclusion in educational institutions (Perez & Taylor, 2016; Vega et al., 2015).

Community-Based Organizations' Support

Community-based organizations such as Mamás Unidas Little Rock, The Dream.US, Educators for Fair Consideration, and United We Dream, offer various support ranging from legal to financial assistance to help immigrant students with no legal status to pay tuition and navigate the higher education system and overcome barriers (see Perez, 2020; Gándara & Mordechay, 2017; Mamás Unidas, 2024). The Mamás Unidas' Mijo Program, for example, offers one-on-one support for first-generation, low-income students, equipping them with the tools needed to navigate higher education successfully (Mamás Unidas, 2024).

These organizations also extend support to parents, offering workshops and resources that help families understand the college application process. By addressing both student and family needs, community organizations create a holistic support system that enhances educational

outcomes. However, despite the impactful work Mamás Unidas has done, our research indicates that critical gaps remain, particularly in early college guidance, scholarship navigation, and access to consistent mentorship, which continue to leave many students and families feeling overwhelmed and underprepared.

Methodology

Data Collection

The study employed both primary and secondary data collection methods. Primary data included a semi-structured interviews, focus groups, and surveys, while secondary data included a survey administered by Mamás Unidas. All data collection instruments aligned with themes identified in the literature review to ensure consistency in examining barriers. See Table 1 for an overview of themes and relevant questions.

Additionally, the project integrates a mixed-methods design by combining qualitative and quantitative data collection. Interviews and focus groups explored the lived experiences of students and families, while surveys provided measurable insights into their perceptions and challenges. Participants were recruited through Mamás Unidas' and personal networks to ensure diverse community representation.. This project was reviewed and approved by the Institutional Review Board at the University of Arkansas; all participation was entirely voluntary and information collected remained confidential.

Qualitative Data Collection

The qualitative component included in-depth interviews and focus group discussions. Semi-structured interviews explored individual experiences with systemic, financial, and cultural barriers. Focus group discussions (FGDs) were segmented into two categories: Hispanic high school students and parents. For the parent focus group, there were ten participants; the high

school student focus group had six participants. This segmentation allowed for capturing a broad spectrum of perspectives and experiences related to the identified barriers. FGDs were conducted in person, while the three interviews were held virtually. All interviews and focus groups were audio recorded, transcribed verbatim, and supplemented with written notes. Identifying information was redacted, and transcripts were securely stored to maintain confidentiality.

Interviews. Interviews were conducted with three high school students who are participants in Mamás Unidas' Mijo Program, which provided guidance through the college application process. The interviews lasted approximately one hour and focused on barriers these students encounter including financial constraints, lack of support, and cultural expectations. For interviews, purposive sampling was used to ensure participants have direct experience with the barriers under investigation. Steve Colley, a representative from Mamás Unidas, assisted in connecting the research team with student participants. Prior to interviews, assent was obtained through paper assent forms. Participants had the option to withdraw from the interview at any time.

Focus Groups. Two focus groups were conducted: one with Hispanic high school students and another with Hispanic parents in Central Arkansas. Sessions lasted approximately one hour and explored systemic, financial, and cultural barriers, as well as participants' suggestions for improving access. Convenience sampling was employed, leveraging participants from Mamás Unidas' ACT workshops. Parental consent and assent was obtained via paper documents prior to the focus groups.

Quantitative Data Collection

Surveys. Surveys were distributed through Qualtrics to Hispanic college students and parents of Hispanic high school students. The surveys measured perceptions of systemic,

financial, and cultural barriers, along with awareness of available resources and support distribution occurred through Mamás Unidas' ACT workshops and Mijo Program meetings for parents, and through university partners for college students.

Convenience sampling was used. The parent participants were also allowed to choose between Spanish or English versions of the survey. Mamás Unidas administered a survey that targeted high school students and shared the data they collected for the team to analyze. This is the total number of completed surveys for each category: college student (N=97); high school student survey (N=56); parent survey (N=85). Survey responses were anonymized, and identifying information was stored separately to ensure confidentiality. Virtual consent was obtained prior to survey participation.

Participants. The study targeted Hispanic high school students, their parents, and Hispanic college students in Central Arkansas. Participants were recruited through Mamás Unidas' programs and events, as well as through faculty and staff at five public and private universities across the state at the University of Central Arkansas, University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff, Hendrix University, University of Arkansas at Fayetteville, and Arkansas State University at Beebe. This approach ensured a diverse range of experiences with barriers to higher education.

Measures. Survey instruments assessed participants' knowledge, perceptions, and experiences related to barriers in accessing higher education, focusing on financial concerns, college preparedness, cultural expectations, and institutional support. Most questions used Likert-scale formats to measure agreement with key statements (e.g., "I am familiar with the process of applying to college"). Demographic questions collected information on age, gender, ethnic background, language spoken at home, immigration status, and socioeconomic status.

Parent and college student surveys were designed to capture the distinct perspectives of each group. Parents answered questions about their ability to assist with college applications, provide financial support, and navigate cultural expectations. College students reflected on their academic preparedness, current financial challenges, and the support they received from schools, families, and community organizations.

Qualitative data from interviews and focus groups supplemented the survey results. Participants responded to open-ended questions about the challenges they face, the resources they find helpful, and their recommendations for improving access to higher education. Interviews were semi-structured to allow for flexibility while maintaining alignment with the study's core themes.

Table 1

Themes and Relevant Questions

Economic Challenges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How are you financing your college education? (e.g., scholarships, loans, family support) • Are you aware of financial aid options available to your child?
Support Systems	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Did you receive any support with the application process (e.g., counselor, mentor)? • Who has helped you with the college application process?
Family & Cultural Dynamics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have you spoken to your child about their college plans? • Do you feel your cultural background has impacted your college experience?
Educational Gaps & College Readiness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are you familiar with the college application process in the US? • Do you feel prepared academically for college? Why or why not? • How many college-level courses have you taken in high school (e.g., AP courses, concurrent credit courses, etc.)? • Have you taken any standardized tests (SAT/ACT)? If so, how did you feel about the experience?

Analysis. The research team used deductive coding for qualitative data, guided by literature-based themes like systemic and cultural barriers. To ensure consistency, coding was conducted collaboratively. Key themes and illustrative quotes were identified. Quantitative survey data was analyzed using STATA to produce descriptive statistics, including frequencies.

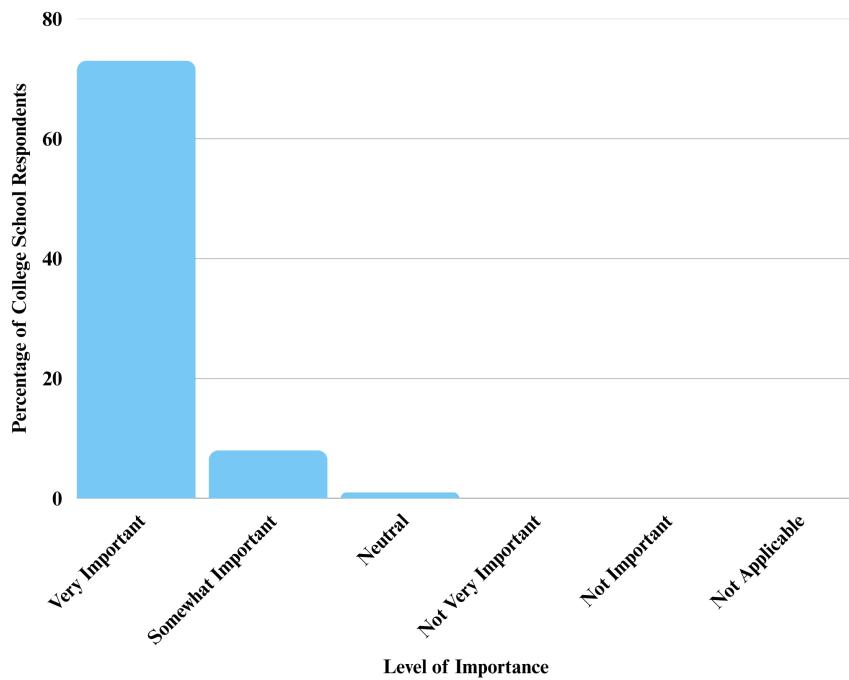
Findings

Barriers

Through our research, we identified a variety of barriers for Hispanic students who want to access higher education. First, the most commonly reported concern, across all forms of data collection, was the cost of attending college. In a survey conducted among Hispanic college students in Arkansas, 90% of the participants indicated that the cost of college was important to their decision to attend college, compared to 10% who felt the cost was less important as shown in Figure 1. Similarly, in a survey of Hispanic high school students in Central Arkansas, 48% of high school students said that they were “very concerned” about paying for college; 27% students said that they were “somewhat concerned.” This is shown in Figure 2. This suggests a general trepidation among the students about the college cost.

Figure 1

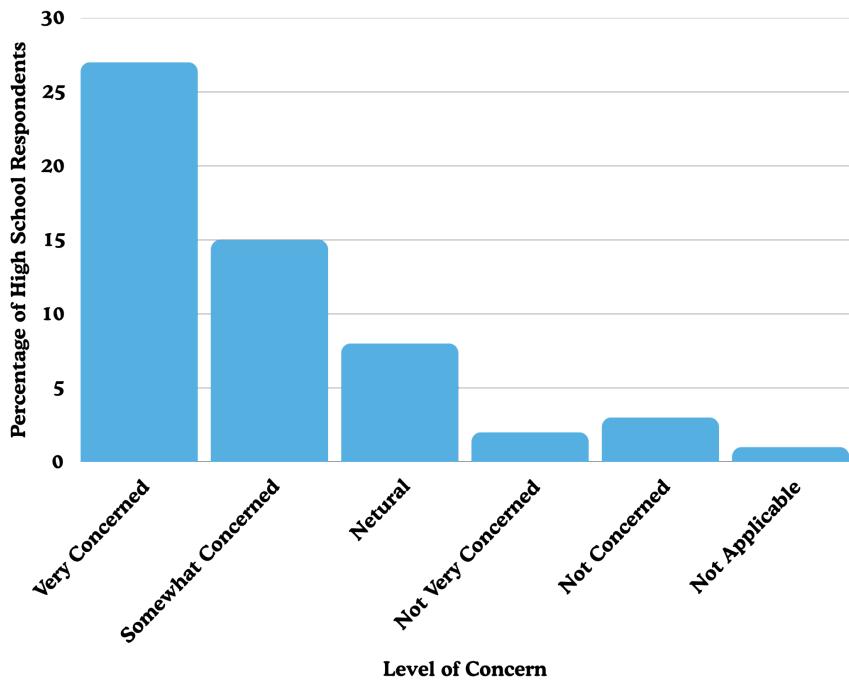
How important was the cost of college in your decision to attend?



Note: 90% of college students said that the cost of college was important to their decision to attend.

Figure 2

How concerned are you about paying for college?

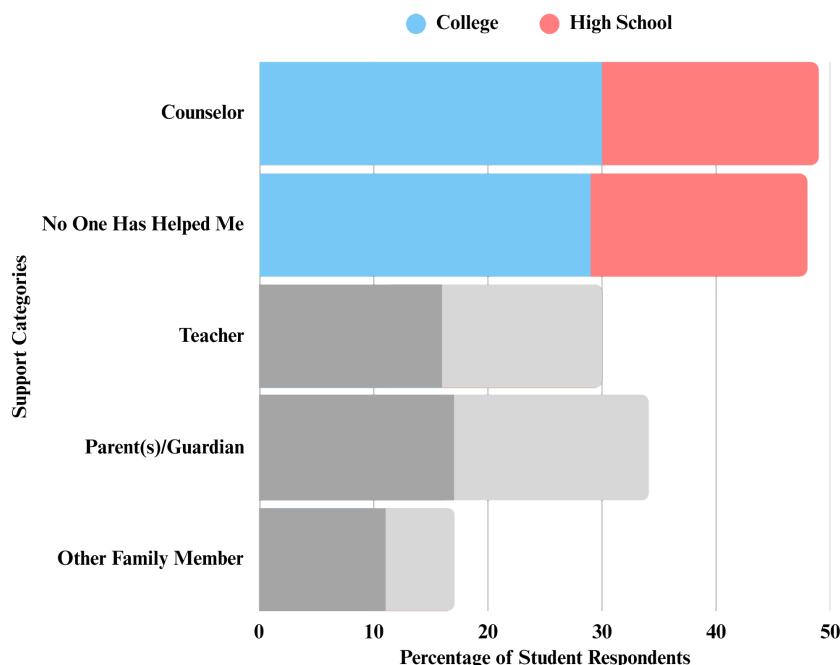


Note: Almost half of high students said that they were very concerned with paying for college.

Second, across all forms of data collection, students reported receiving inadequate guidance. As one interviewee shared, “.....I think that like the biggest challenge I face is as a 1st generation student.... I have no one older than me to explain like, oh, this is how you do it. So I feel like a lot of it is just like me trying to figure it out on my own.” This quote underscores a recurring theme: students want more tailored, consistent guidance but often don’t know where to turn. When Hispanic college students were asked who helped them with the college admissions process, 37% said that they were helped by a counselor followed by 36% said that no one helped them. There is a similar trend among Hispanic high school students, with 34% indicating that they either received help from a counselor and 34% did not receive any assistance at all. These trends are displayed in Figure 3.

Figure 3

Who has helped you with the college application process?



Note: According to most students, they were either assisted by a counselor or had no help at all during the application process.

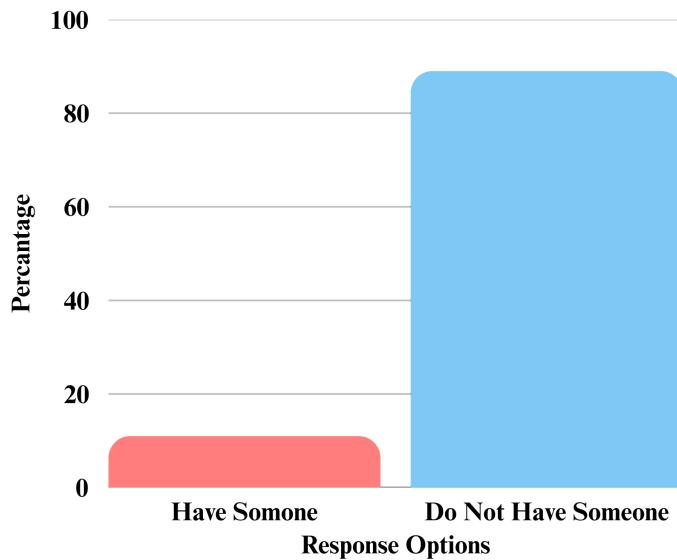
Despite the emphasis on the reliance on high school counselors, many students emphasized how unhelpful and unavailable their high school counselor is in the college admissions process. One high school focus group participant said,

He's [Counselor] the person who's very isolated in his office and..... he usually bonds with the seniors, especially since they're going, they have to get like their application done and it's really hard to find him in a position where he's free to talk to like people, below seniors. So I just really don't find myself approaching him.

Another high school student in the focus group echoed that sentiment by saying, "You rarely ever see them [Counselors]. And you try to go into their office and it would be like some days they're there, some days they're not there." In general, parents could also be a good resource; however, when parents were asked, "do you have someone that can answer your questions about the college admissions process besides Mamás Unidas LR?", 89% of parents surveyed said no as seen in Figure 4.

Figure 4

Do you have someone that can answer your questions about the college admissions process besides Mamás Unidas LR?



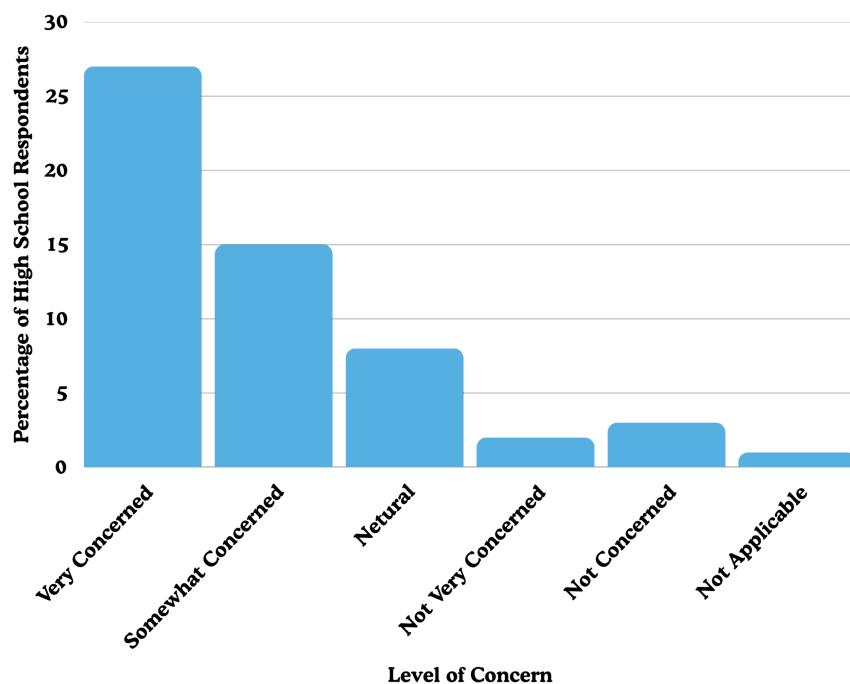
Note: Parents report not having someone to answer questions other than Mamás Unidas.

Because high school counselors and parents were lacking in knowledge, students consistently turned to peripheral connections, like a friend's older sibling, to get information about the college admission process. A high school interviewee said, "A couple of my closest friends may have older siblings... if I ask, like, 'Hey, what did your sibling do to achieve this?' and they'll tell me." Another high school student said: "If [staff at Mamás Unidas] didn't exist, [my friends] would still have their siblings that they could go to. So I could go to them too." Similarly, another high school student we interviewed said, "My friends, I know they have older siblings that have gone to college... I could ask them to ask their siblings." These resources are situational dependent, so they are inaccessible to larger groups of students. This general lack of adequate guidance manifests in a lack of confidence in the college admissions process. While 61% of the high school students that were surveyed said that they were confident about applying

for college (Figure 5), 60% of the college students that were surveyed said that applying for college was challenging (Figure 6). One high school interviewee said, “.....because this whole process [college admissions process] is kind of really hard to figure out on your own.....I think this whole process is kind of really overwhelming.”

Figure 5

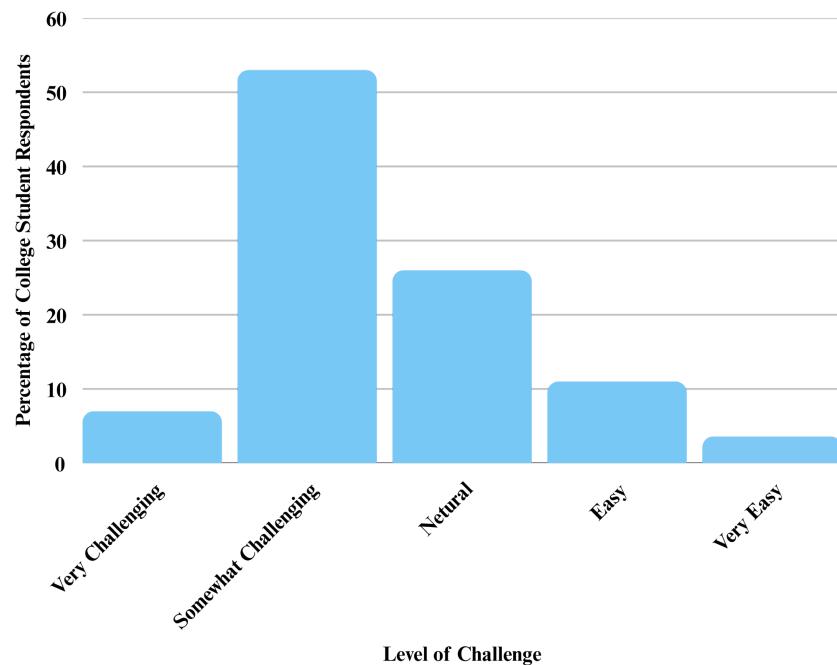
How confident are you about paying for college?



Note: Only 25% of high students are very confident about applying to college

Figure 6

How challenging was applying to college?



Note: More than half of college students said that applying for college was challenging

Our findings reveal that scholarship access remains a significant barrier, not only due to a lack of awareness, but also because students often don't understand how to pursue available opportunities. Even when students are aware that scholarships exist, many struggle with how to apply or meet the requirements. As one focus group participant shared, "The requirements that they have to do scholarships, because some of them [scholarships], like you don't know how to access it." This confusion contributes to financial stress and discourages students from seeking support. These insights suggest a clear need for step-by-step guidance, not just promoting financial aid, but offering practical support to help students navigate the process.

Many students in our study shared that they did not begin learning about college until their junior year of high school, at which point the process already felt overwhelming and rushed. Early intervention is particularly important because high school GPA begins counting in

9th grade, and many students are unaware that their academic performance from the very start directly impacts their eligibility for scholarships and college admissions. When an interviewee was asked about what kind of support they wished they had more of, the interviewee said, "Just earlier, I wish that I had someone who just gave me information, who told me the opportunities that are available, who is telling me about how to apply to colleges, how the college applications are."

This theme also emerged in the parent survey. When asked, "What is the biggest challenge you've had in accessing higher education for your child?" over half of the 39 respondents (21) cited difficulties applying for scholarships or financing college. A parent in our focus group echoed this concern: "Sometimes you see it [paying for college] as impossible, but it's the same because we don't have the knowledge that there are resources available or scholarships available or subsidies available to help our children." Students also emphasized this challenge. One college student responded, "Not knowing what scholarships are out there for me to apply to... I had nobody to help me with any of the processes." Another wrote, "Applying to scholarship and FAFSA on my own." A third shared, "Scholarship and grants applications were also challenging because I did not know much about them." A high school student further explained:

One of the biggest challenges I've faced in accessing higher education is the difficulty of finding clear and reliable information. With so many resources available, it can be overwhelming to determine which ones are accurate and up to date. Whether it's understanding scholarship opportunities or financial aid details, the information is often scattered across multiple platforms, sometimes buried in complex language or conflicting advice. This has made the process of making informed decisions more challenging.

Several high school students also expressed serious doubt about their ability to pursue college. One student wrote that their biggest challenge in accessing higher education was, “*Not being smart enough for some education that seems interesting to study.*” This kind of internalized self-doubt reflects how systemic barriers can take a personal toll on students’ confidence and aspirations. A mentorship program would offer a powerful counter-narrative, helping students see real-life examples of Hispanic college students overcoming similar doubts and barriers.

Together, these responses paint a clear picture: navigating scholarships is overwhelming and often inaccessible. This challenge is even more pronounced for families with limited English proficiency. Spanish-language access emerged as another major barrier. In our parent survey, 89% of Hispanic parents reported speaking Spanish as their primary language at home, compared to just 11% who primarily speak English (see Figure 7). This highlights a gap in accessible resources, that many college materials, websites, and workshops are only available in English, leaving Spanish-speaking families uninformed or confused. Given that Hispanic culture is deeply family-centric, it is vital that parents have access to the same information as their children in a language they understand. Parents are often a student’s most consistent support system, but language barriers can limit their ability to help. One parent put it plainly:

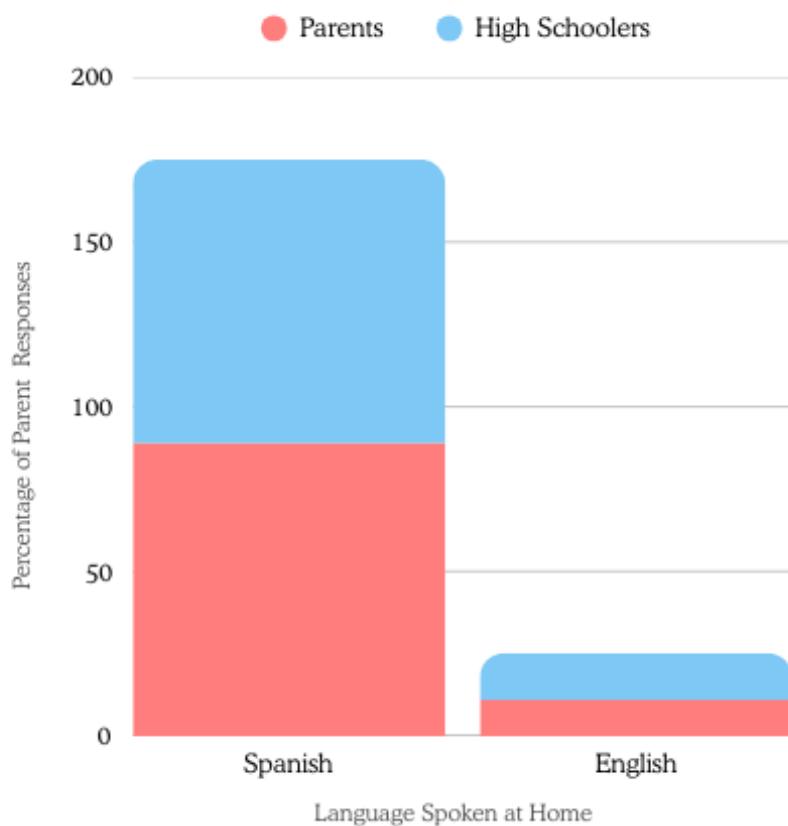
It's another barrier for our children to go to university because when you don't speak English with your parents and the information is in English, then how can we have that help, us parents, if we don't speak English? Unfortunately, we are ignorant in being able to help them because there is no adequate information that we need to be able to push our children or be able to tell them, 'There is help, I had this information from the school, I

have this help and this help,' but if we don't understand it, how can we help our children in this way?

This quote underscores the urgent need for all materials, programming, and outreach efforts to be fully accessible in Spanish to ensure families can actively support their children's higher education journey.

Figure 7

Primary Language Spoken at Home Reported By Parents and High Schoolers



Note: Most students and parents reporting primarily speaking Spanish at home

Throughout our research, we found that immigration status was acknowledged as an existential barrier for many of our participants and their families. While we refrained from collecting any direct demographic data regarding immigration status, it was noted several times

that this was a major factor into the decisions and roles played throughout the college admissions experiences of many of our participants. When the high school students were asked at the end of the survey, “What is the biggest challenge you've had in accessing higher education?,” several of the written responses were explicitly about immigration and legal status. Additionally, one high school student interviewee said, “I worry a little about how that can impact me and the community and I'd also like to say that because of this political atmosphere I worry about the opportunities that might be available and how that might impact me.” It's also very important to note that while a good majority of participants might not have been directly impacted by their immigration status, direct relations and surrounding members of their community are/have been. One of the parents wrote that “their status as immigrants” was the biggest challenge they face in accessing higher education for their child. This major variable of immigration status contributes to a much more widespread stigma around college application processes and admissions due to the rigorous process of personal data collection through financial aid (FAFSA), and academic institutions.

Discussion

The findings from this study highlight persistent, structural barriers that hinder Hispanic students' access to higher education in Central Arkansas. Despite growing awareness of college opportunities, many students remain underprepared and overwhelmed due to late-stage guidance, limited access to culturally relevant resources, and widespread uncertainty about financial aid. This research underscores that these challenges are not the result of individual shortcomings but rather systemic inequalities shaped by language barriers, limited institutional support, and gaps in information delivery.

Students and families consistently desired earlier and more personalized guidance, especially around navigating the complex college admissions and financial aid processes. These responses reflect a broader issue: college readiness resources are often designed with assumptions about language, parental involvement, and prior knowledge that do not align with the lived experiences of many Hispanic families. Our literature review also highlighted the importance of connecting students with role models who share their cultural background, as this representation can strengthen motivation, sense of belonging, and belief in one's potential to succeed in higher education.

Additionally, the data revealed a clear disconnect between school-based resources and the needs of Spanish-speaking households. With nearly 90% of surveyed parents reporting Spanish as their primary home language, it's evident that language access is a foundational issue, one that influences not just information uptake, but the confidence and capacity of parents to support their children's educational aspirations. The lack of bilingual communication from schools and institutions leaves students acting as intermediaries, which adds pressure and can lead to misinformation.

Overall, this study reveals that while progress is being made, significant gaps still exist in the support systems meant to guide Hispanic students and families through the college-going process. The recommendations that follow are rooted in the lived experiences of participants and are intended to build on the promising foundation Mamás Unidas has already established. If implemented, they have the potential not only to improve individual outcomes but to influence systemic practices in schools and community organizations across Central Arkansas.

Limitations

This study offers important insights but is not without its limitations. Participant recruitment relied heavily on Mamás Unidas' existing network, which may have introduced selection bias, as individuals already engaged with the organization tend to be more informed or proactive than others in the broader Hispanic community. The geographic scope was limited to five Central Arkansas counties, potentially excluding perspectives from other rural or urban areas across the state. Language barriers also posed a challenge, while efforts were made to provide Spanish-language support, some families may still have struggled to fully engage with the survey or interview process, leading to gaps in understanding or participation. Additionally, most student participants were high school sophomores, which limited the depth of insight into later-stage college planning challenges typically faced by juniors and seniors. The use of self-reported data introduces the possibility of recall errors or socially desirable responses, and concerns around immigration status may have led some participants to withhold information despite confidentiality measures. Future studies should aim to diversify recruitment methods, increase geographic and linguistic accessibility, and use a longitudinal design to better capture the evolving needs and barriers faced by Hispanic students and families.

Best Practices and Recommendations

Mamás Unidas has already established a strong foundation in college access and advocacy, but scaling up these practices with more structured programming, multilingual resources, and inter-organizational partnerships can increase both reach and effectiveness. Moreover, as Mamás Unidas continues to implement these community-based initiatives, the organization is uniquely positioned to act not just as a direct service provider but as a catalyst, inspiring, guiding, and mobilizing surrounding schools, nonprofits, and institutions in Central

Arkansas. The recommendations below are offered with the intent that Mamás Unidas serve not only as an independent nonprofit but as a community practice model that others can replicate or collaborate with, to create a more equitable college-going culture for Hispanic students across Little Rock and beyond.

Earlier College Prep Support

Normalizing college planning early in a student’s academic journey can build confidence over time, encourage academic focus, and help reduce the stress associated with late-stage decision-making. To address this gap, we recommend that Mamás Unidas begin offering college-readiness programming by 7th or 8th grade. These efforts could include classroom visits, informational sessions at community events, and early mentorship pairings to introduce the college conversation well before students face application deadlines. By fostering early exposure, Mamás Unidas can help shift the mindset from “college as a possibility” to “college as a plan.”

Peer Mentorship Program

To complement early planning efforts, we recommend launching a mentorship program that connects Hispanic high school students with Hispanic college students. Many participants in our research appreciated the personalization of the Mijo program, and a mentorship initiative would allow for continued guidance in a similarly supportive format. Our literature review also highlighted the importance of connecting students with role models who share their cultural background, as this type of representation fosters confidence, aspiration, and belonging.

With limited staff at Mamás Unidas, a mentorship program could also serve as a cost-effective method of expanding support and disseminating college admissions information.

This recommendation aligns with national best practices and builds on the strength of peer-to-peer learning.

Financial Aid & Scholarship Workshops

Many students and parents in our study expressed confusion and frustration with the financial aid process, often citing a lack of clear, timely information about scholarships, FAFSA, and institutional aid. Even when students are aware that scholarships exist, many do not know how to find or apply for them, which creates anxiety and discourages college applications. Because Mamás Unidas has a successful track record with ACT workshops and other college admissions support, we recommend that they also offer recurring financial aid and scholarship workshops. These sessions should provide step-by-step guidance on FAFSA completion, identifying scholarship opportunities, filling out applications, and submitting required materials. Workshops should include real-time support, suggested timelines, and opportunities for questions and answers. Importantly, these events should be parent-inclusive, as many parents expressed a desire to understand the financial aid process so they can better support their children. Creating a supportive, bilingual environment where families feel equipped to navigate the financial aid process would address one of the most frequently cited barriers to higher education: the cost of college and the inaccessibility of financial aid information.

Guidance Counselor Partnerships

Our next recommendation is to increase collaboration with high school counselors. By building a stronger partnership between Mamás Unidas and counselors could serve as a strategic asset in ensuring Hispanic students receive timely and culturally relevant information about college applications and opportunities. If the partnership operates like that, the counselors should experience a reduced workload. One suggested model for this collaboration is “Lunch & Learn”

sessions facilitated by Mamás Unidas. These workshops could focus on specific challenges faced by Hispanic students and highlight targeted resources. Research shows that facilitations and lunch workshops have been proven to lead to higher outcomes overall in comprehension and application of learned materials.

Website Updates for Access

We recommend investing time and energy into updating the ‘Resource’ tab on the Mamás Unidas website. While the tab currently features scholarships, many listings are outdated and the selection is limited. Since anxiety about immigration status emerged as a recurring theme in our research, we recommend curating a more robust and current list of scholarships geared toward people who are not from the United States. Mamás Unidas has already seen a limitation of in-person services as a result of the political climate, but the website allows students to access needed resources with less anxiety about the consequences of being an undocumented person. If finding individual scholarships is too demanding for the limited personnel, we recommend uploading a link to a scholarship hub that specializes in financial resources for undocumented highschool students approaching admissions. The updated website should also feature scholarships that are easily accessible to U.S. citizens of Hispanic descent, such as those offered through the Arkansas Scholarship Lottery (Arkansas Academic Challenge Scholarship, Concurrent Challenge, and Challenge Plus).

Spanish-Language Access

To strengthen the parent–student support system and remove a major barrier to access, we recommend that Mamás Unidas fully integrate Spanish-language accessibility across all programming. This includes translating all printed materials, workshop content, and online resources, as well as offering simultaneous interpretation at in-person events whenever possible.

Ensuring that parents can fully engage in their child's college preparation process will not only foster trust and participation but also reinforce family involvement as a key driver of student success.

In addition, we recommend that Mamás Unidas expand its translation and interpretation services by forming partnerships with local high schools, community organizations, and nearby college admissions offices. These partnerships can help bridge language gaps in materials or guidance that fall outside the organization's immediate scope. By creating a multilingual ecosystem of support, Mamás Unidas can ensure that no family is left behind due to language barriers.

Key Resources

The team has created a resource guide for parents that explains the basics of the college admissions process. We included the often confusing jargon of universities, a basic timeline of college application broken down by school year, and a breakdown of common standardized tests (ACT/SAT). We've also included a brief description of the various types of financial aid and how they are or aren't paid back. We used the most common themes that emerged in our focus group to determine what should be included. For example, many parents in our focus group talked about the anxiety of paying for college, finding scholarships, and confusion over the different types of financial aid. As a result, we included all that financial information. Additionally, parents expressed a desire to have a complete application timeline defined by years, so we also included a college application timeline broken down by high school year.

Conclusion

Through our extensive research and analysis, in partnership with Mamás Unidas LR, we have both confirmed and revealed a series of barriers that Hispanic students and families face in

their pursuit of higher education, specifically in Central Arkansas. From the cost of college attendance, limited guidance, and language and immigration status, it is fair to summate these challenges as persistent and systemic, which leave an indelible legacy on the experience that many of these Hispanic students and families endure while trying to access higher education.

In order to maintain this practice of achieving more significant equity, we recommend actionable strategies such as earlier intervention in the college readiness pipeline, expanded scholarship workshops, provision of key resources, mentorship opportunities that could foster a form of community between high school students and college students, and the development of robust online and in-person resource hubs where an array of curiosities and unfamiliar systems can be addressed by experienced professionals. We've also provided a resource guide for parents that explains the basics of the college admissions process.

Ultimately, this project highlights areas for programmatic growth and reinforces the importance of community-based organizations like Mamás Unidas. By working in partnership with families, educators, the path to college for Hispanic students can become more accessible, navigable, and equitable, leading to higher achieving academic outcomes and ultimately elevating community standards of practice.

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Appendix A

Focus Group Questions

High School Students

- Opening:
 - Tell us a little about yourself and your plans after high school.
 - What are your thoughts about going to college?
- Educational Gaps & College Readiness:
 - Do you feel prepared academically for college? If not, why?
 - What are the most challenging parts of applying to college for you?
 - Where do you go for information or help with college applications?
- Economics Challenges:
 - Are you worried about how to pay for college?
- Family & Cultural Dynamics:
 - How does your family feel about you going to college?
 - Do you feel your cultural background influences your college choices or plans?
- Support Systems:
 - Do you feel like your school provides enough support for Hispanic students applying to college?
 - What resources would be most helpful to you as you apply to colleges?

Parents

- Opening:
 - What are your hopes for your child's education?
- Educational Gaps & College Readiness:

- What are your biggest concerns about your child applying to college?
- What resources have you used to learn about the college application process?
- What are your thoughts about your child going to college?
- What are your expectations for your child's education and career?
- What kind of college do you envision for your child?
- Economic Challenges:
 - What are your biggest concerns about helping your child pay for college?
- Family & Cultural Dynamics:
 - Are there any cultural or family traditions that affect your child's college plans?
- Support Systems:
 - How do you feel about the current support, information and resources available to you and your child about applying to college (besides Mamás Unidas if applicable)?
 - How do you feel about being able to help your child prepare for college?
 - What resource would be most helpful to you as your child is applying to college?

Appendix B

Interview Questions

High School Students

- Opening:
 - Tell me a bit about yourself, your family, and what you enjoy doing outside of school.
 - What are your plans after graduation?
- Educational Gaps & College Readiness:
 - What are the biggest challenges you've faced in preparing for college academically?
 - How have your grades, test scores, or extracurricular activities impacted your college plans?
 - What are your thoughts and feelings about going to college?
 - What do you already know about the process of applying to college?
 - What are your biggest concerns or questions about college?
- Economic Challenges:
 - What are your thoughts about how you'll pay for college?
- Family & Cultural Dynamics:
 - How does your family feel about you going to college? Do they support your plans?
 - Do you feel like your cultural background has presented any unique challenges in pursuing higher education?
- Support System:

- Who are the people you rely on for advice and support about college?
- What kind of support do you wish you had more of?

Appendix C
INTERVIEW & FOCUS GROUP (HIGH SCHOOL)
PARTICIPANTS' DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

What is your gender? _____

What is your age? _____

How would you describe your racial or ethnic background? _____

What is the primary language spoken in your home? _____

What is the highest level of education you have completed? _____

FOCUS GROUPS/ INTERVIEWS PROTOCOL (PARENTS)

PARTICIPANTS' DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

What is your gender? _____

What is your age? _____

How would you describe your racial or ethnic background? _____

What is the primary language spoken in your home? _____

What is the highest level of education you have completed? _____

Appendix D

Mamás Unidas: College Student Survey

Q1 Thank you for participating in our survey. We are interested to study the barriers to Latino students in accessing higher education in Arkansas. Participating in this survey will take about 10-15 minutes to complete. We will ask you questions about your experience with applying to college, the resources available to you, and the barriers to applying. You may end the survey at any time. Your participation in the research is completely voluntary and may be stopped at any time. No individual will be excluded from participation in this study based on race, ethnicity, nationality, or gender. Participants must be at least 18 years old. Should you choose to participate, you will be eligible for a drawing to receive a \$200 book scholarship by email. There are two \$200 book scholarships in total. You must indicate your interest in receiving this gift card by answering 'yes' at the bottom of this form and writing your name and email in the space provided. Your contact information will not be shared in the final report, and any identifying information will not be connected to your survey responses. If you have questions or concerns about this study, you may contact the principal investigator Enrique Carbone by email at ecarbone@clintonschool.uasys.edu or the Faculty Advisor Dr. Nichola Driver at nddriver@clintonschool.uasys.edu. For questions or concerns about your rights as a research participant, please contact Ro Windwalker, the University's IRB Coordinator, at (479) 575-2208 or by e-mail at irb@uark.edu.

1. I understand that participation in this study is voluntary and refusing to participate will not adversely affect my relationship or reputation with any organization.

2. I understand that all data collected will be kept confidential to the extent allowed by law and the University of Arkansas' policy.

3. By selecting "Yes, I consent", I am giving my consent for my responses to be used in this research as described.

- Yes, I consent (1)
- No, I do not consent (2)

End of Block: Consent Conformation

Start of Block: Are you over 18

Q51 Are you 18 years or older?

- Yes (1)
- No (2)

End of Block: Are you over 18

Start of Block: Hispanic or Latino/a origin

Q38 Are you of Hispanic or Latino/a origin?

- Yes (1)
- No (2)

End of Block: Hispanic or Latino/a origin

Start of Block: Educational Gaps & College Readiness:

Q4 How challenging was applying to college?

- Very Challenging (1)
- Somewhat Challenging (2)
- Neutral (3)
- Easy (4)
- Very Easy (5)

Q6 How important were the following factors in your decision to attend college:

	Very Important (1)	Somewhat Important (2)	Neutral (3)	Not Very Important (4)	Not Important (5)	Not Applicable (6)
Proximity to Family (1)	0	0	0	0	0	0
Location (2)	0	0	0	0	0	0
Academics Program (3)	0	0	0	0	0	0
Cost of College (4)	0	0	0	0	0	0
Campus Facilities (5)	0	0	0	0	0	0
Reputation of the College (6)	0	0	0	0	0	0

Extracurricular	o	o	o	o	o	o
Opportunities/Sports (7)						
Diversity and	o	o	o	o	o	o
Inclusion (8)						
Campus Culture	o	o	o	o	o	o
(9)						
Recommendatio	o	o	o	o	o	o
n From a Family						
Member or Friend (10)						
Scholarship or	o	o	o	o	o	o
Financial Aid						
Opportunities (11)						
Internships or	o	o	o	o	o	o
Employment (12)						

Size of the College or Class Sizes (13)	0	0	0	0	0	0
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Q7 How challenging are the following aspects in your college experience:

	Very Challenging (1)	Challenging (2)	Neutral (3)	Easy (4)	Very Easy (5)
Academics (1)	0	0	0	0	0
Finances (2)	0	0	0	0	0
Social Life (3)	0	0	0	0	0
Time	0	0	0	0	0
Management (4)					
Mental Health (5)	0	0	0	0	0

Homesickness	o	o	o	o	o
(6)					
Extracurricular	o	o	o	o	o
Activities/Sports (7)					

End of Block: Educational Gaps & College Readiness:

Start of Block: Economic Challenges:

Q8 How are you financing your college education? Select all that apply:

- Scholarships (1)
- Loans (2)
- Family Support (3)
- Personal Savings (4)
- Part-time or Full-time Work (5)
- Grants (6)
- Military Benefits (e.g., the GI Bill) (7)

- Employee Tuition Assistance (8)
- Work-study Programs (9)
- Not Listed (Please Specify) (10) _____

Q9 Have you or are you currently working while in college?

- Yes (1)
- No (2)
- Maybe in the future (3)

Skip To: Q10 If Have you or are you currently working while in college? = Yes

Skip To: Q12 If Have you or are you currently working while in college? = No

Skip To: Q12 If Have you or are you currently working while in college? = Maybe in the future

Q10 If yes, how many hours per week?

- 1-10 hours (1)
- 11-20 hours (2)
- 21-30 hours (3)
- 31-40 hours (4)

- More than 40 hours (5)

Q11 Are you working to support your family?

- Yes (1)

- No (2)

Q12 To what extent do you feel your financials impact your academic performance?

- Very Impactful (1)

- Somewhat Impactful (2)

- Neutral (3)

- Not Very Impactful (4)

- Not Impactful (5)

End of Block: Economic Challenges:

Start of Block: Support and Guidance:

Q13 Who helped you with the college application process? Select all that apply:

- Counselor (1)
- Teacher (2)
- Parents (3)
- Other Family Member (4)
- No One Helped Me (5)
- I Don't Remember (6)
- Not Listed (Please Specify) (7) _____

Q14 How many college campuses did you visit before making a decision?

- None (1)
- 1 (2)
- 2 (3)
- 3 (4)
- 4 or More (5)

Q15 How supportive was your high school with the college admissions process?

- Very Supportive (1)
- Somewhat Supportive (2)
- Neutral (3)

Not Very Supportive (4)

Not Supportive (5)

Q46 What resources did your high school offer in the college admissions process? Select all that apply:

Free ACT/SAT Workshops (1)

Access to Your High School Counselor (2)

Visits with College Recruiters (3)

None (4)

Other (Please Specify): (5) _____

Q47 How often did your family talk to you about college?

Daily (1)

Weekly (2)

Monthly (3)

Every Few Months (4)

Never (5)

Q16 How supportive was your family with your decision to go to college?

- Very Supportive (1)
- Somewhat Supportive (2)
- Neutral (3)
- Not Very Supportive (4)
- Not Supportive (5)

Q17 How supportive is your college? (e.g., Academic Advisors, Faculty, Clubs, Extra Curriculars)

- Very Supportive (1)
- Somewhat Supportive (2)
- Neutral (3)
- Not Very Supportive (4)
- Not Supportive (5)

End of Block: Support and Guidance:

Start of Block: Family & Cultural Dynamics:

Q18 How many hours away from home did you go to attend college?

- o Less than an hour (1)
- o An hour (2)
- o Two hours (3)
- o Three hours (4)
- o Four hours or more (5)

Q19 Before attending college, how concerned were you about adjusting to college life?

- o Very Concerned (1)
- o Somewhat Concerned (2)
- o Neutral (3)
- o Not Very Concerned (4)
- o Not Concerned (5)

Q20 How welcoming does the college environment feel to you and your family?

- o Very Welcoming (1)
- o Somewhat Welcoming (2)
- o Neutral (3)
- o Not Very Welcoming (4)

Not Welcoming (5)

Q21 How influential has your cultural background been to your college experience?

Very Influential (1)

Somewhat Influential (2)

Neutral (3)

Not Very Influential (4)

Not Influential (5)

Q22 In what ways do you feel your cultural background has impacted your college experience? Select all that apply:

Academics (e.g., study habits, classroom participation) (1)

Social Interactions (e.g., friendships, social events) (2)

Sense of Belonging (e.g., feeling accepted or included) (3)

No Impact (4)

Never Considered (5)

Not Sure (6)

Other (7)

Q23 How frequently have you experienced discrimination or bias on campus?

- Very Often (1)
- Often (2)
- Sometimes (3)
- Rarely (4)
- Never (5)

Q24 How much do you agree with the following statement: I feel like I belong on my college campus.

- Strongly Agree (1)
- Agree (2)
- Neutral (3)
- Disagree (4)
- Strongly Disagree (5)

Q25 What was the biggest challenge you faced in accessing higher education? Please briefly explain.

End of Block: Family & Cultural Dynamics:

Start of Block: Demographics:

Q26 What is your gender identity?

- Male (1)
- Female (2)
- Transgender (3)
- Non-binary / Third Gender (4)
- Not Listed (Please Specify) (5) _____
- Prefer Not to Say (6)

Q27 How old are you?

- Under 17 (1)
- 17 (2)

- 18 (3)
- 19 (4)
- 20 (5)
- 21 (6)
- 22 (7)
- 23 (8)
- 24 (9)
- 25 (10)
- Not Listed (Please Specify) (11) _____
- Prefer Not to Say (12)

Q45 What college or university are you currently attending?

Q28 What is your classification?

- Freshman (1st year) (1)
- Sophomore (2nd year) (2)
- Junior (3rd year) (3)

- Senior (4th year) (4)
- 5th year or Higher (5)
- Graduate Level (6)
- Not Listed (Please Specify) (7) _____

Q29 Are you a first-generation college student? *NASPA's FIRST-GEN Forward defines first-generation as your parents did not attend or complete a 4-year college or university degree in the United States regardless of other family member's level of education (e.g., older siblings, Aunt, Uncle, cousins). Students with parents who attended international universities are still considered first-gen
<https://firstgen.naspa.org/why-first-gen/students/are-you-a-first-generation-student>

- Yes (1)
- No (2)
- I don't know (3)

Q49 Are you an out-of-state student?

- Yes (1)
- No (2)

Skip To: Q31 If Are you an out-of-state student? = No

Skip To: Q33 If Are you an out-of-state student? = Yes

Q31 Which county do you live in?

- Pulaski: (Includes Little Rock and North Little Rock) (1)
- Faulkner: (Includes Conway) (2)
- Saline: (Includes Benton) (3)
- Lonoke: (Includes Cabot) (4)
- White: (Includes Searcy) (5)
- Not Listed (Please Specify) (6) _____

Q33 What is your family's place of origin? Select all that apply:

- Mexico (1)
- El Salvador (2)
- Puerto Rico (3)
- Guatemala (4)
- Honduras (5)
- Not Listed (Please Specify) (6) _____
- Prefer Not to Say (7)

Q34 What is the primary language spoken in your home?

- Spanish (1)
- English (2)
- Not Listed (Please Specify) (3) _____
- Prefer Not to Say (4)

Q35 How well do you speak English?

- Very Good (1)
- Good (2)
- Acceptable (3)
- Bad (4)
- Very Bad (5)

Q36 How well do you speak Spanish?

- Very Good (1)
- Good (2)
- Acceptable (3)

- o Bad (4)
- o Very Bad (5)
- o Not at all (6)

End of Block: Demographics:

Appendix E

Mamás Unidas: Parent or Guardian Survey

Q1 Thank you for participating in our survey. We are interested to study the barriers to Latino students in accessing higher education in Arkansas. Participating in this survey will take about 10-15 minutes to complete. We will ask you questions about your experience with helping your child apply to college, resources available to you and your child, and barriers to applying. You may end the survey at any time. Your participation in the research is completely voluntary and may be stopped at any time. Withdrawing from this survey will not impact your child's eligibility to apply to college or any Mamas Unidas programs. No individual will be excluded from participation in this study based on race, ethnicity, nationality, or gender. Participants must be at least 18 years old. Should you choose to participate, you will be eligible for a drawing to receive a \$100 gift card by email. You must indicate your interest in receiving this gift card by answering 'yes' at the bottom of this form and writing in your name and email in the space provided. Your contact information will not be shared in the final report, and any identifying information will not be connected to your survey responses. If you have questions or concerns about this study, you may contact the principal investigator Enrique Carbone by email at ecarbone@clintonschool.uasys.edu or by phone (501) 605-3722, or the Faculty Advisor Dr. Nichola Driver at nddriver@clintonschool.uasys.edu. For questions or concerns about your rights as a research participant, please contact Ro Windwalker, the University's IRB Coordinator, at (479) 575-2208 or by e-mail at irb@uark.edu.

1. I understand that participation in this study is voluntary and refusing to participate will not adversely affect my relationship or reputation with any organization.

2. I understand that all data collected will be kept confidential to the extent allowed by law and the University of Arkansas' policy.

3. By

selecting “Yes, I consent”, I am giving my consent for my responses to be used in this research as described. Yes, I consent No, I do not consent

- Yes, I consent (1)
- No, I do not consent (2)

End of Block: Informed Consent

Start of Block: Hispanic or Latino/a origin

Q40 Is your child of Hispanic or Latino/a origin?

- Yes (1)
- No (2)

End of Block: Hispanic or Latino/a origin

Start of Block: Educational Gap & College Readiness:

Q3 How familiar are you with the college application process in the US?

- Very Familiar (1)

- Somewhat Familiar (2)
- Neutral (3)
- Not Very Familiar (4)
- Not Familiar (5)

Q4 What are your expectations for your child after high school? Please select all that apply:

- College (1)
- Work (2)
- Military (3)
- Technical School (4)
- Undecided (5)
- Not listed (please specify) (6) _____

Q5 How many resources do you have to help your child apply to college?

- A Lot of Resources (1)
- Some Resources (2)
- Neutral (3)
- Few Resources (4)

- No Resources (5)

End of Block: Educational Gap & College Readiness:

Start of Block: Economic Challenges:

Q6 How aware are you of financial aid options available to your child?

- Very Aware (1)
- Somewhat Aware (2)
- Neutral (3)
- Not Very Aware (4)
- Not Aware (5)

Q7 How willing are you to contribute financially to your child's college education?

- Very Willing (1)
- Somewhat Willing (2)
- Neutral (3)
- Not Very Willing (4)

- Not Willing (5)

End of Block: Economic Challenges:

Start of Block: Support Systems:

Q8 Have you spoken to your child about their college plans?

- Yes (1)
- No (2)

Skip To: Q9 If Have you spoken to your child about their college plans? = No

Q9 If yes, how often do you talk to your child about college?

- Daily (1)
- Weekly (2)
- Monthly (3)
- Every Few Months (4)
- Never (5)

Q10 How much support does your child's school provide for the college admissions process?

- A Lot of Support (1)
- Some Support (2)
- Neutral (3)
- Little Support (4)
- No Support (5)

Q11 How confident are you about being able to help your child prepare for college?

- Very Confident (1)
- Somewhat Confident (2)
- Neutral (3)
- Not Very Confident (4)
- Not Confident (5)

Q12 Do you have someone that can answer your questions about the college admissions process besides Mamás Unidas LR?

- Yes (1)
- No (2)

Skip To: Q13 If Do you have someone that can answer your questions about the college admissions process besides M... = No

Q13 If yes, who?

End of Block: Support Systems:

Start of Block: Family & Cultural Dynamics:

Q14 How influential is your cultural background to your child's college choices?

- Very Influential (1)
- Somewhat Influential (2)
- Neutral (3)
- Not Very Influential (4)
- Not Influential (5)

Q15 How many hours away from home are you comfortable letting your child go to attend college?

- Less than an hour (1)
- An hour (2)
- Two hours (3)
- Three hours (4)
- Four hours or more (5)

Q16 How concerned are you about your child adjusting to college life?

- Very Concerned (1)
- Somewhat Concerned (2)
- Neutral (3)
- Not Very Concerned (4)
- Not Concerned (5)

Q17 How welcoming does the college environment feel to you and your family?

- Very Welcoming (1)
- Somewhat Welcoming (2)
- Neutral (3)
- Not Very Welcoming (4)

- Not Welcoming (5)

Q18 What is the biggest challenge you've had in accessing higher education for your child?

End of Block: Family & Cultural Dynamics:

Start of Block: Demographic Questions:

Q19 What is your gender identity?

- Male (1)
- Female (2)
- Other (3)
- Prefer not to say (4)

Q20 How old are you?

- 34 years old or less (1)
- 35-44 years old (2)
- 45-54 years old (3)
- 55-64 years old (4)
- 65+ years old (5)
- Prefer not to say (6)

Q22 What county do you live in?

- Pulaski: (Includes Little Rock and North Little Rock) (1)
- Faulkner: (Includes Conway) (2)
- Saline: (Includes Benton) (3)
- Lonoke: (Includes Cabot) (4)
- White: (Includes Searcy) (5)
- Not Listed (please specify): (6) _____

Q23 What is your highest level of education?

- Less than High School (1)
- High school (including GED) (2)
- Some college (no degree) (3)
- Technical certification (4)
- Associate degree (2-year) (5)
- Bachelor's degree (4-year) (6)
- Master's degree (7)
- Doctoral degree (8)
- Professional degree (JD, MD) (9)
- Prefer not to say (10)

Q24 Do you have any formal education or training in any country other than the United States?

- Yes (1)
- No (2)

Q26 What is your annual household income?

- \$0-\$22,590 (1)
- \$22,591-\$30,660 (2)

- \$30,661-38,730 (3)
- \$38,731-\$46,799 (4)
- \$46,800 or more (5)
- Prefer not to say (6)

Q27 How many people live in your household including yourself?

- 1 (1)
- 2 (2)
- 3 (3)
- 4 (4)
- 5 (5)
- 6 (6)
- 7+ (7)
- Prefer not to say (8)

Q28 What is the primary language spoken in your home?

- Spanish (1)
- English (2)

Not listed (please specify) (3) _____

Prefer not to say (4)

Q29 How well do you speak English?

Very Good (1)

Good (2)

Acceptable (3)

Bad (4)

Very Bad (5)

Not at all (6)

Q30 How well do you speak Spanish?

Very Good (1)

Good (2)

Acceptable (3)

Bad (4)

Very Bad (5)

Not at all (6)

Appendix F

Mamás Unidas: High School Student Survey

Thank you for participating in our survey. We are interested to learn about barriers to Latino students in accessing higher education in Central Arkansas. Participating in this survey will take about 10-15 minutes to complete. We will ask you questions about your experience with applying to college, resources available to you, and barriers to applying. You may end the survey at any time. No individual will be excluded from participation in this survey based on race, ethnicity, nationality, or gender.

* Indicates required question

1. Are you of Hispanic or Latino/a origin? *

Mark only one oval.

Yes

No *Skip to section 12 (Selected Not to Participate)*

College Planning:

2. How academically prepared do you feel for college? *

Mark only one oval.

Very Prepared

Somewhat Prepared

Neutral

Not Very Prepared

Not Prepared

3. How confident are you about applying to college? *

Mark only one oval.

Very Confident

Somewhat Confident

Neutral

Not Very Confident

Not Confident

4. How confident are you in graduating from college? *

Mark only one oval.

Very Confident

Somewhat

Confident

Neutral

Not Very Confident

Not Confident

5. Have you taken the SAT or ACT? *

Mark only one oval.

- Yes, I have *Skip to question 6*
- I have plans to take it *Skip to question 7*
- No and I don't plan to take it *Skip to question 7*

You answered yes to taking an standardized tests

6. Please describe your standardized tests (SAT/ACT) experience.

College Planning (continued):

7. What are your biggest concerns about applying to college? Select all that apply: *

Mark only

one oval per row.

	Somewhat concerned	Neutral	Not Concerned	Not Applicable

Being

academically

prepared

for college

Payiing

for

Colllege



Grades/GP

A Language



Beiing away



frrom home



Ballancii

ng worrk

and

schooll

Getttiing

accepted to

colllege

Immigratt

ion Sttattus

Economic Challenges:

8. How confident are you in finding scholarships? *

Mark only one oval.

Very Confident

Somewhat Confident

Neutral

Not Very Confident

Not Confident

9. How confident are you in applying to FASFA by yourself? *

Mark only one oval.

Very Confident

Somewhat Confident

Neutral

Not Very Confident

Not Confident

10. How aware are you regarding financial aid options like grants, scholarships, and loans? *

Mark only one oval.

- Very Aware
- Somewhat Aware
- Neutral
- Not Very Aware
- Not Aware

11. Do you plan to work while in college? *

Mark only one oval.

Yes *Skip to question 12*

No *Skip to question 13*

I'm not sure *Skip to question 13*

You answered yes to working while in college

12. How much do you plan to work? *

Mark only one oval.

Full-time

Part-time

I'm not sure

Economic Challenges (continued):

13. To what extent do you feel your family can financially contribute to your college education? *

Mark only one oval.

- Very Willing
- Somewhat Willing
- Neutral
- Not Very Willing
- Not Willing

Support and Guidance:

14. Who has helped you with the college application process? Select all that apply: *

Check all that apply.

- Counselor
- Teacher
- Parent(s) or Guardian
- Other family member
- No one has helped me
- Other: _____

15. How often does someone talk to you about college admissions? *

Mark only one oval.

- Daily
- Weekly
- Monthly
- Every few months
- Never

16. How many college campuses have you visited? *

Mark only one oval.

None

1

2

3

4 or more

17. What resources does your high school offer for the college admissions process? *

Select all that apply.

Check all that apply.

- ACT & SAT workshops
- Access to high school counselors
- Visits with College Recruiters
- Other: _____

18. How supportive is your school with the college admissions process? *

Mark only one oval.

- Very Supportive
- Somewhat Supportive
- Neutral
- Not Very Supportive
- Not Supportive

19. How supportive is your family with your decision to go to college? *

Mark only one oval.

- Very Supportive
- Somewhat Supportive
- Neutral
- Not Very Supportive
- Not Supportive

Family & Cultural Dynamics:

20. How many hours away from home are you comfortable moving to attend college? *

Mark only one oval.

Less than an hour

An hour

Two hours

Three hours

Four hours or more

21. How concerned are you about adjusting to college life? *

Mark only one oval.

Very Concerned

Somewhat Concerned

Neutral

Not Very Concerned

Not Concerned

22. How welcoming does the college environment feel to you and your family? *

Mark only one oval.

- Very Welcoming
- Somewhat Welcoming
- Neutral
- Not Very Welcoming
- Not Welcoming

Academic Experiences:

23. What is your anticipated high school graduation? *

Mark only one oval.

2025

2026

2027

2028

Other: _____

24. What are your plans after high school? Please select all that apply. *

Check all that apply.

College

Work

Military

Technical School

Undecided

Other: _____

25. What kind of college are you considering? Please select all that apply. *

Check all that apply.

4-year

2-year

Vocational (Trade School)

Online

I do not wish to attend college

Other: _____

26. How many college-level courses have you taken in high school (e.g., AP courses, concurrent credit courses, etc.)? *

Mark only one oval.

None

1

2

3 or more

Prefer not to say

27. What is the biggest challenge you've have in accessing higher education?

Demographic Questions:

28. What is your gender identity? *

Mark only one oval.

Male

Female

Transgender

Non-binary / third gender

Prefer not to say

29. What is your age? *

Mark only one oval.

14

15

16

17

18

19+

Prefer not to say

30. What is your grade level? *

Mark only one oval.

9th grade (freshmen)

10th grade (sophomore)

11th grade (junior)

12th grade (senior)

31. Will you be a first-generation college student? *

NASPA's FIRST-GEN Forward defines first-generation as your parents did not attend or complete a 4-year college or university degree in the United States regardless of other family member's level of education (e.g. older siblings, Aunt, Uncle, cousins). Students with parents who attended international universities are still considered first-gen

<https://firstgen.naspa.org/why-first-gen/students/are-you-a-first-generation-student>

Mark only one oval.

Yes

No

I dont' know

32. What is your family's place of origin? Please select all that apply. *

Check all that apply.

United

States

Mexico

El

Salvador

Puerto Rico

Guatemala

Honduras

I do not wish to share

Other: _____

33. What county do you live in? *

Mark only one oval.

Pulaski: (Includes Little Rock and North Little

Rock) Faulkner: (Includes Conway)

Saline: (Includes

Benton) Lonoke:

(Includes Cabot) White:

(Includes: Searcy)

Other: _____

34. What is the primary language spoken in your home? *

Mark only one oval.

Spanish

English

Prefer not to say

Other: _____

35. How well do you speak English? *

Mark only one oval.

Very Good

Good

Acceptable

Bad

Very Bad

Not at all

36. How well do you speak Spanish? *

Mark only one oval.

Very Good

Good

Acceptable

Bad

Very Bad

Not at all

Selected Not to Participate

Thank you for considering to participate in our survey. Your non-participation is noted, and you will not be included in the analysis of this survey. Neither will you be included in the gift card raffle. Thank you!

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