

Swarthmore College

## Works

---

Senior Theses, Projects, and Awards

Student Scholarship

---

Spring 2024

# Beyond the Classroom: Examining the Impact of an After-School Program on LatinImmigrant Youth in Philadelphia

Lucia Navarro , '24

Follow this and additional works at: <https://works.swarthmore.edu/theses>



Part of the [Anthropology Commons](#), [Education Commons](#), and the [Sociology Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Navarro, Lucia , '24, "Beyond the Classroom: Examining the Impact of an After-School Program on LatinImmigrant Youth in Philadelphia" (2024). *Senior Theses, Projects, and Awards*. 893.

<https://works.swarthmore.edu/theses/893>



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-Share Alike 4.0 International License](#). Please note: the theses in this collection are undergraduate senior theses completed by senior undergraduate students who have received a bachelor's degree.

This work is brought to you for free by Swarthmore College Libraries' Works. It has been accepted for inclusion in Senior Theses, Projects, and Awards by an authorized administrator of Works. For more information, please contact [myworks@swarthmore.edu](mailto:myworks@swarthmore.edu).

**Beyond the Classroom:  
Examining the Impact of an After-School Program on Latine  
Immigrant Youth in Philadelphia**

by Lucia Navarro

Advised by Professor Lisa Smulyan  
and Professor Nina Johnson

An Undergraduate Thesis  
Submitted to the Educational Studies Department

In Fulfillment of the Requirements for a Bachelor of Arts  
in Educational Studies and Sociology & Anthropology

Swarthmore College  
May 2024

## Table of Contents

Acknowledgements.....	2
1. Introduction.....	3
2. Methodology.....	5
3. Literature Review.....	12
4. Community Care Alliance.....	22
5. Student Experiences.....	48
6. Conclusion.....	83
Appendix A: Informed Consent Form.....	90
Appendix B: Interview Protocols.....	92
References.....	95

## Acknowledgements

I'd like to start with thanking both of my advisors Professor Lisa Smulyan and Professor Nina Johnson for mentoring me and advising me in the thesis writing process this past academic year. It's been a rough couple months and I am so, so grateful to them for their patience and willingness to help me as I navigate my last year at Swarthmore and the challenges that come with it all while getting me to complete this project. Especially Lisa Smulyan who I have the privilege to not only call my professor, advisor and a mentor but a friend. Lisa has been the one person who I genuinely have connected with during my journey at Swarthmore. I truly do not believe I'd be where I am without her support. It is through her confidence and belief in me that I have grown to see myself as someone worth being listened to, as someone whose insights matter. I thank you with all my heart and being Lisa.

I'd also like to thank Community Care Alliance and its Education department staff for these past two years. The work we've done together has been life changing. It is through them that I discovered my passion for working with immigrant youth in a holistic manner. They have shown me the possibilities of what praxis can look like and how to actually get it done. They welcomed me with open arms and have engaged with me in all my crazy ideas of what education can look like. I'd also like to thank the community and my students for allowing me to connect with them and serve as an educator in collaboration with them. Without them as my audience my confidence as a teacher would have never blossomed as it did with them.

Lastly, I would like to thank my friends and family who have supported me during my time at Swarthmore. To my Class of 2023 friends but especially to Giselle and Yusra who have made this fifth year possible and memorable. Without them I wouldn't have had the sanity to keep going. Without them I wouldn't have pushed myself to pursue the things I believe I did not have the capability to. Thank you for encouraging me to put myself out there and to believe in my abilities.

I love you all.

## 1: Introduction

My project centers around students' experiences in an after-school program for Latine high school youth in South Philadelphia. I have been working with this organization for about two years, volunteering in their educational programs and eventually becoming the facilitator for the program central to this project. Due to my history with the organization, I approached this project through a participatory action research model collaborating with the Adolescent Program Supervisor as I wished this project to primarily serve the organization for the development of their programming, hoping my findings can be used for grant writing purposes as this is the least funded program in the department. This is a key aspect of my project as during my time in academia I've come to the realization that research about marginalized communities can be very extractive and more often than not takes a deficit-approach reducing these communities to their "lack" of being and having. This process erases the knowledge and strategies these communities have used to not only to survive but thrive in a society that is designed to keep them at the bottom.

In my findings, it became clear that the diversity of Latine identities was an extremely valuable asset to students. For many it was the first time being exposed to so many different types of Latine people, both in terms of not only their ethnic origins, and, but more importantly, in the values they carried with them. This exposure to vast ways of being Latine –from staff, to volunteers and students themselves–has allowed for these high school students to explore and manage their often conflicting identities. There is vast literature surrounding this phenomena. Many, if not all, of these students are second-generation immigrants. These students have had to learn how to navigate this country mostly on their own as there was no one to teach them. These students are not only Latine but also American, they are not either, nor but both.

So, how must one stay true to your heritage while living in the US, while being influenced by American values, values that often clash with your own cultures? What if there's aspects of your culture that you do not agree with? Or understand? Or feel disconnected from? Even more

importantly, how are you supposed to be proud of your heritage when it has caused you harm? Especially within Latinidad, which censures and ignores conversations around mental health, sexuality, gender expression, religion, and racism.

In my role as a researcher I wished for this to be a partnership to benefit both of us—me in the fulfillment of my thesis requirement, experience conducting research, and honestly discovering my passion for this type of work. I now know I love being an educator, I love working with immigrant youth as I once was in their shoes. My time with this organization has allowed me to now be able to say that I want to be a social worker when I grow up, and who knows maybe start my own non-profit. However, more importantly, this partnership allows for the organization's voice, and thus the community's voice, to be at the forefront of this project in the telling of their own story, in sharing the necessary work they do and hopefully getting the recognition they deserve.

## 2: Methodology

The aim of this research is to explore South Philadelphia's Latine youths' experience of an after-school program centered around social justice and to understand how the community organization providing this programming develops and works towards their goals. I use the pseudonym Community Care Alliance (CCA) to replace the name of the community-based organization providing these services. I aimed for the research to be as collaborative as it could be between the program manager and me as we researched and built the curriculum for the semester ahead together. I collected data through interviews with participating students and education department staff, through participant observation, and by collecting student generated materials from workshops. My guiding questions are as follows.

Research questions:

1. How does Community Care Alliance, a community-based organization dedicated to serving Latine immigrants in South Philadelphia, work towards and meet their goals?
  - a. How do they decide what to include in their programming and curriculum?
  - b. How do community-based organizations improve/aid/reinforce the knowledge their community already holds?

Focusing on Community Care Alliance as a case study, this research aims to provide insights into the operational strategies of community-based organizations devoted to the welfare of Latine immigrant communities. By delving into the decision-making processes behind programming and curriculum development, as well as the ways CBOs reinforce community knowledge, this review seeks to contribute to a deeper understanding of the holistic impact of after-school initiatives.

2. What are the experiences of Latine immigrant youth in an after-school program focused on social justice?
  - a. What topics do the students enjoy/interact with/find the most meaningful out of the workshops?
  - b. How do they apply the knowledge they have learned in programming to everyday life?

In exploring the experiences of Latine immigrant youth, this research seeks to uncover the intricacies of their engagement within after-school programs with a social justice orientation. Understanding the specific topics that resonate most with the participants and how they translate acquired knowledge into real-world applications is pivotal in gauging the effectiveness and relevance of such programming.

Through an in-depth exploration of these research questions, this project aspires to contribute valuable insights to the existing body of knowledge on after-school programming, emphasizing the unique needs and experiences of Latine immigrant youth in the pursuit of social justice and community empowerment.

### **Site Background**

Community Care Alliance (CCA) is a non-profit organization that partners with Philadelphia's rapidly growing Latine immigrant community to build long-term prosperity by addressing immediate education, health and social service needs. They aim to create a responsible learning environment for future generations of advocates, educators, and healthcare providers to examine social justice and structural violence, and to explore their impacts on the social determinants of health within a marginalized community. Because most of the underlying causes of inequality are social and structural in nature, their actions must be too. For this reason, they offer integrated services to support full mental, emotional, and physical well-being from the individual to the community.

CCA's Education's education programs foster multilingual and intergenerational learning and teaching spaces that fuel cultural exploration and connection and support youth and families to recognize and exercise their power in the world. CCA's education programs currently serve young people ages 3 to 18 and their families. I will go much further in a following chapter.



**Positionality**

I am an undocumented, Latine, queer, neurodivergent, first-generation, low-income woman. I grew up between my hometown in Mexico and Houston, TX in a community very different from Swarthmore. I had never been exposed to wealth in the way I was at Swarthmore. Nor had I been exposed to work striving for social justice before. My initial experiences at Swarthmore forced me to realize there was a lot of work needing to be done and that it was possible. I placed undocumented first in my range of identities due to its great significance in my life experiences and possibilities as it directs my devotion to serving immigrant communities, more specifically immigrant youth, through educational awareness and educational access.

I'm a Sociology & Educational Studies Special Major with a Minor in Peace & Conflict Studies. I believe that education serves an extremely important role in society and that children and youth deserve educational environments where they can experience joy as learners and thrive. However, I am very aware of the social structures and systems in place that favor certain populations at the expense of others. This is why I am devoted to fighting amongst others in the fight for liberation from anti-Blackness, anti-immigrant policy and practice, as well as structural racism and other systems of oppression. I believe this fight takes place in the classroom, wherever it may be, through the guidance of committed educators and leaders in the committed, communal disruption of the master narrative and the valorization of the 'other'.

My interest in working with Community Care Alliance lies in the fact that I hope to continue doing this type of educational programming upon graduation. I really enjoy my time interacting with the young people and I would really like to be part of the process of planning these programs, and not just volunteering, which is why I served as the main facilitator this semester.

I have been working with Community Care Alliance since the summer of 2022. I have worked in their Cultural Literary Immersion Summer Camp with 5th graders, their Sex Education workshops with 5th and 6th graders, their High School Application workshops with

8th graders, and currently serve as a co-facilitator in their Rising Leaders high school tutoring and mentoring program. This work, in addition to the fieldwork for my education classes, has allowed me to gain a theoretical and practical sense of what education looks and should look like. My interactions with teachers, facilitators, and program directors have provided me with some understanding of their experiences as they navigate educational bureaucracy and policy in the creation of their community programs that strive for civic and social justice. I am very familiar with CCA staff as well as with the RLP program and some of its students.

### **Research Design**

I aimed to follow a participatory action research model which centers the belief that those who are most impacted by research should be the ones taking the lead in framing the questions, the design, methods, and the modes of analysis of such research projects. However, only a few aspects of this project ended up following the PAR model.

Over the summer Maria Arreaga, the program manager, and I worked together researching to build the curriculum for this semester. Together we decided on the topics for each week and developed lesson plans. The students were not involved in this aspect of the program and research, however, on the first day of the program we showcased our ideas and topics to them and they had the opportunity to give us feedback on what they hope to see throughout the semester. All other research materials (interview protocols and this proposal) have been looked over and approved by the program manager but written by me.

I collected data through interviews with participating students and education department staff, through participant-observation field notes during programming, through collecting student-generated materials from workshops, and by keeping a record of meeting notes with the program manager.

## **Data Collection**

The program ran from September 28, 2023 to December 7, 2023 every Thursday from 3:30pm to 5:30pm at the Community Care Alliance office. We had 11 students enrolled in the program. On the first day of the program I introduced my project to the students and provided them with a letter in Spanish and English with information about my project for them to take home. The following weeks I asked each student if they would be willing to participate in interviews and 7 agreed to be interviewed. I conducted the interviews on-site so the program manager could be present/around the area. I obtained written consent from all interviewees and written consent for use of student materials produced in workshop sessions. A consent form was given to each interviewee before the start of the interview and thoroughly explained to them at that time. They were asked if they need further clarification from the primary investigator on anything contained in the consent form or further questions and/or concerns before signing the form. I also explained to the interviewee that the written informed consent gives them the right to decline the interview or end the interview at any time. I told interviewees that declining the interview would not influence the relationship the interviewee has with the primary investigator or their participation in RLP. Potential participants were informed of the steps I would take to best reduce any identifiable information given in their interviews.

I conducted the interviews within three weeks, meeting with students before programming, during tutoring time and after programming ended. I could only do 1-2 interviews a week as we only meet on Thursdays.

I conducted interviews with staff in the month of January 2024. I interviewed the Adolescent Education Supervisor (RLP's program manager), the Education Director, the Education Supervisor, the Volunteer Coordinator, and hopefully the Art & Culture Program Director.

Throughout programming I collected field notes during participant-observation at weekly sessions, I collected student-generated materials from workshops as well as program materials. I also kept notes from meetings with the program manager.

The field notes collected for the workshops I taught, as well as the workshops in which I was a participant-observer, were recorded by hand into a notebook and later digitally transcribed. Interviews were conducted in a private room in Puente's office. They were audio recorded on two different devices and digitally transcribed. Student-produced materials, generated as part of the workshops I both observed and taught, were photographed, de-identified, and maintained as JPEG images on my personal laptop.

### **Data Analysis**

This research takes a qualitative approach as several researchers have used interviews and ethnographic/participant observation research with adolescent participants from minority populations without undue risk to the human participants. I analyzed my students data by going through individual interviews and pulling out topics based on question categories from my interview protocol. I repeated this for every student participant. Topics/themes emerged from students' anecdotal stories and experiences. Some students provided me with more information on individual topics/themes. I created notes documents for every student and then combined them into one master one. From here I was able to categorize topics under a few aspects of what after-school programming provides its students with.

For the staff interviews I approached the data analysis differently. I focused on four main themes: goal, processes (on how to achieve the stated goals), challenges, and hopes.

### **Benefits and Limitations**

The research I am proposing and its discoveries has the potential to benefit Community Care Alliance, more specifically the RLP program, as it will collect and provide data about the direct impact on their students. RLP will be able to use the data and discoveries to further

structure their program and hopefully for grant-writing purposes. RLP is the least funded program within CCA' education department. RLP students will also be able to express their thoughts, opinions and experiences with the program in a more private and thorough manner.

This research is a case study of one education program at one community-based organization in South Philadelphia. These findings can not be generalized to all education programs from community-based organizations serving Latine populations. However, I do believe there are important takeaways from this research project about what these types of programs offer Latine students, especially within the realm of identity development.

A major limitation from this research is the question of how to tangibly measure the impact of the after-school program on students' own sense of identity. Identity development is a lifelong process so how can we measure the impact this program has on its students, while excluding outside influences? We must first assess students' own self of perception before their involvement with programming, however, without an established relationship can we really expect the trust that is needed for a raw and honest answer?

In order to truly understand the impact of this after-school program on its students the researcher must not only observe students during their time in programming but outside of it as well in their daily lives (school and home life). This research must also extend beyond their current involvement with the program. How are students thinking about this experience in a year, in 5 years, in their adulthood? What is the long-lasting impact of RLP?

### 3: Literature Review

In recent years, after-school programming has emerged as a critical component in shaping the educational experiences and social development of youth, particularly within immigrant communities. This project seeks to delve into the nuanced realm of after-school programs, with a specific focus on the experiences of Latine immigrant youth participating in initiatives centered around social justice. By examining the dynamics of after-school programming, this review aims to shed light on the impact of such initiatives on the educational, social, and cultural landscapes of Latine immigrant youth.

#### **Historical Background**

After-school programming began receiving a lot of attention throughout the 1990's, more specifically for low- and moderate-income children, demonstrated by the numerous federal proposals for new or expanded after-school program funding, new foundation grants programs, new state- and city-level initiatives, and efforts by scores of community groups around the country to create more after-school programs in their communities (Halpern, 1999). The main four reasonings for this newfound interest were 1) unsafe public spaces for children's out-of-school time (ie. streets and playgrounds), 2) concerns for children's out-of-school and alone time as being unproductive (most likely by parents), 3) apprehension around schools not being able to provide enough individual attention to children in order for them to master necessary skills, 4) a belief that low-income children deserve the same opportunities to explore arts, sports, and other developmentally enriching activities (Halpern, 1999). However, Halpern makes it clear that there are forces pulling after-school programs in different directions as there are tensions between the new policy interest in after-school programs and the marginal conditions under which many programs operate.

This literature review will focus on after-school programs for high school students.

## **After-School Programming for Students**

In the evolving landscape of education, the role of after-school programs has gained prominence as educators recognize the need for supplementary activities to support students beyond traditional classroom hours. After-school programs have emerged as vital supplements to traditional classroom learning, providing students with opportunities for academic support, personal development, and enrichment. This literature review explores the multifaceted impact of after-school programs on students, encompassing academic performance, socio-emotional development, community and family engagement, efforts to close achievement gaps, and the challenges inherent in their implementation, focusing on how these initiatives contribute to the holistic growth and preparedness of students during their critical adolescent years.

Academic Impact Participation in after-school programs consistently correlates with improved academic performance (Smolensky & Gootman, 2003). After-school programs serve as academic lifelines for high school students, offering a structured environment for homework completion and providing valuable assistance from tutors and mentors. The goal is to reinforce classroom learning, ensuring that students grasp and apply key concepts. Additionally, they extend beyond mere homework help, incorporating skill enhancement activities targeting specific academic areas such as writing, math, and critical thinking (Greenberg, 2014). Furthermore, the enhanced learning opportunities provided by after-school programs, such as hands-on activities and enrichment projects, contribute to a more comprehensive and engaging educational experience.

College and Career-Readiness One of the primary goals of after-school programs is to prepare high schoolers for the next phase of their academic journey or entry into the workforce. College preparation activities, including test preparation and application guidance, are common features. Additionally, programs facilitate career exploration through workshops and hands-on experiences, empowering students to make informed decisions about their future pathways.

Enrichment Activities Recognizing that education extends beyond the classroom, after-school programs incorporate a variety of enrichment activities. These include extracurricular pursuits like sports, arts, music, and clubs, allowing students to explore and develop their talents (Blau & Currie, 2004). Cultural events, field trips, and recreational activities broaden students' horizons and contribute to a well-rounded educational experience.

Socio-Emotional Development High school is a time of significant social and emotional development, and after-school programs play a crucial role in supporting students through this period. By facilitating peer interactions in a structured environment, these programs help build social skills and foster healthy relationships. Positive socialization is facilitated through structured yet informal interactions, promoting teamwork, communication skills, and conflict resolution. Students engaging in extracurricular activities within these programs experience increased confidence and self-esteem, as they develop skills and interests beyond the traditional curriculum. Additionally, many programs offer emotional support services, including counseling and workshops, addressing the unique challenges of adolescence.

Leadership and Personal Growth An emphasis on leadership development sets certain after-school programs apart. Workshops, projects, and mentorship opportunities aim to cultivate leadership skills among high schoolers. Community engagement activities, such as volunteer projects, instill a sense of responsibility and civic duty, contributing to personal growth and a broader perspective on societal issues (Baldrige, 2017).

Flexible Scheduling Understanding the diverse schedules of high school students, after-school programs offer flexible timing to accommodate academic and extracurricular commitments. This flexibility ensures that students can participate in these programs without compromising their other responsibilities, fostering a healthy balance between academic and personal pursuits.

Community and Family Engagement The success of after-school programs hinges on partnerships with families and community involvement. Recognizing the crucial role of parents



and caregivers, successful programs maintain regular communication to create a supportive network for students as regular communication with schools helps align program activities with academic goals, ensuring a cohesive educational experience. Involvement of families through updates, workshops, and engagement events strengthens the support network around the students. Additionally, collaborations with local organizations and businesses contribute to a sense of community and shared responsibility for the educational well-being of students (Mahoney, 2005).

Closing Achievement Gaps Addressing disparities in educational outcomes, after-school programs targeted at “at-risk” or “disadvantaged students” aiming to narrow the achievement gap. By providing additional resources, personalized attention, and a supportive environment, these programs contribute significantly to creating more equitable educational opportunities. It's important to note here that when students are categorized as “at-risk”, the type of programming will be deficit based, focused on trying to help poor kids of color "catch up" rather than on capitalizing on their strengths and knowledge.

Despite their potential benefits, challenges exist in ensuring equitable access to quality after-school programming (Hynes & Sanders, 2011). Race and socioeconomic factors influence children's participation in these programs, with African-American children being more likely to attend (Hynes & Sanders, 2011). This discrepancy may stem from the prevalence of single-parent families, poverty, and the availability of childcare subsidies in certain communities (Hynes & Sanders, 2011).

### *After-School Programming for Immigrant Children*

The educational experiences of immigrant students present unique challenges that can be addressed through targeted interventions. This section explores the significance of after-school programming in supporting the academic, socio-emotional, and cultural needs of immigrant students.

Academic Support and Language Acquisition After-school programs play a crucial role in providing academic support tailored to the needs of immigrant students (Suarez-Orozco, 2008). This includes language development programs, tutoring, and homework assistance, addressing language barriers and helping students navigate the academic curriculum effectively. Research suggests a positive correlation between participation in after-school programs and academic achievement among immigrant students (Greenberg, 2014). The support provided in these programs contributes to closing educational gaps and preparing students for long-term success.

Socio-Emotional Development Immigrant students often face acculturation challenges and may feel isolated. After-school programs create a supportive environment for building social connections, fostering a sense of belonging, and promoting cross-cultural understanding (Baldrige, 2017). Engaging in extracurricular activities can enhance confidence, self-esteem, and overall well-being.

Cultural Enrichment After-school programs offer opportunities for cultural enrichment, helping immigrant students maintain and celebrate their cultural identities (Halpern, 1999). Cultural activities, events, and mentorship programs contribute to a more inclusive and diverse learning environment.

Parent and Community Involvement Successful after-school programs for immigrant students involve parents and the wider community. Providing resources and workshops for parents on navigating the education system in a new country can strengthen the support network for immigrant students (Hynes & Sanders, 2011).

In conclusion, after-school programming emerges as a valuable tool in addressing the unique needs of immigrant students. By providing academic support, fostering socio-emotional development, celebrating cultural diversity, and promoting community engagement, these programs contribute to a more inclusive and equitable educational experience. While after-school programs offer significant benefits, challenges such as language barriers, cultural

sensitivity, and access to resources may impact the effectiveness of these programs for immigrant students. Tailoring programs to address these challenges is crucial for ensuring positive outcomes. Recognizing and addressing the challenges associated with immigration, successful after-school initiatives have the potential to empower immigrant students on their educational journey and facilitate their integration into a new academic and cultural environment.

### **Mentors/Role Models**

In exploring the multifaceted impact of after-school programs on students, it becomes imperative to understand the mechanisms through which these programs achieve their diverse goals. After-school programming often employs a combination of curriculum design, mentoring initiatives, and partnerships with community organizations to effectively support students' academic, socio-emotional, and cultural needs. Transitioning from the discussion of after-school programming to the exploration of role models and informal mentors, it's evident that these individuals play a crucial role in shaping the cognitive, emotional, and social development of young individuals (Stanton-Salazar & Spina, 2003).

While after-school programs provide structured support and enrichment, role models and informal mentors offer additional guidance, inspiration, and support outside formal educational settings. Effective role models exhibit authenticity, relatability, and a commitment to positive values, serving as sources of inspiration and guidance for youth navigating various challenges (Stanton-Salazar & Spina, 2003). By understanding how after-school programming intersects with the influence of role models and informal mentors, we can gain deeper insights into the holistic development of young individuals and the synergies between formal and informal educational interventions.

Cognitive Development Research indicates that exposure to positive role models positively impacts cognitive development in youth (Rhodes & DuBois, 2008). Observing the

achievements and behaviors of role models can inspire academic aspirations, foster curiosity, and instill a growth mindset. Moreover, interactions with informal mentors can provide valuable insights and knowledge beyond the classroom, contributing to well-rounded intellectual development.

Emotional Well-Being Positive role models play a crucial role in promoting emotional well-being among youth (Stanton-Salazar & Spina, 2003). By embodying resilience, optimism, and a sense of purpose, these figures help young individuals navigate challenges and setbacks. Informal mentorship relationships, characterized by trust and open communication, provide a safe space for expressing emotions and seeking guidance during turbulent times.

Social Development The impact of role models extends to social development, influencing interpersonal skills, communication, and the development of empathy (Rhodes & DuBois, 2008).. Youth who have positive role models are more likely to exhibit prosocial behavior and engage in constructive social interactions. Informal mentors contribute to the development of social competence by modeling healthy relationships and providing guidance on navigating social dynamics.

Identity Formation Role models and informal mentors play a pivotal role in the identity formation process of youth (Stanton-Salazar & Spina, 2003). Exposure to diverse role models allows young individuals to explore various aspects of their identity, including cultural, academic, and personal dimensions. Informal mentors, through their guidance and support, contribute to the development of a positive self-concept and a sense of purpose.

In conclusion, the literature supports the vital role that positive role models and informal mentors play in the holistic development of youth. Their influence extends beyond academic achievement, encompassing emotional well-being, social competence, and identity formation. While the impact of role models and informal mentors is generally positive, challenges exist. The lack of accessible role models, the potential for negative influences, and the need for culturally

responsive mentorship programs are critical considerations in designing effective interventions. It is also not clear who is better suited for immigrant children. Acknowledging the challenges and addressing the nuances of mentorship relationships can enhance the effectiveness of interventions aimed at harnessing the power of role models and informal mentors in shaping the future of our youth.

### **Community-Based Organizations and Educational Spaces**

Community-based organizations (CBOs) have emerged as crucial partners in the provision of after-school programs, contributing to the holistic development of students. Here This literature review explores the significance of CBOs in shaping after-school programming, focusing on their role in academic support, socio-emotional development, community engagement, and addressing educational disparities.

Academic Support Community-based organizations play a pivotal role in providing academic support to students during after-school hours (Walker & McCarthy, 2010). By offering homework assistance, tutoring, and targeted enrichment programs, CBOs contribute to improved academic outcomes. The personalized attention and resources provided bridge educational gaps, ensuring that students have the tools needed for success.

Socio-Emotional Development Beyond academics, CBOs actively contribute to the socio-emotional development of students (Walker & McCarthy, 2010). The supportive and inclusive environments fostered by these organizations create spaces for positive peer interactions, mentorship, and the development of essential life skills. Students engaged in CBO-led after-school activities often exhibit increased confidence, resilience, and a sense of belonging.

Community Engagement The involvement of CBOs in after-school programming extends beyond the school setting (Walker & McCarthy, 2010). Collaborations between schools and community organizations create a synergy that strengthens community ties. This engagement

not only benefits students but also involves parents, local businesses, and other stakeholders in the educational process, fostering a sense of shared responsibility for the well-being of the community's youth.

Addressing Educational Disparities CBOs are instrumental in addressing educational disparities by targeting at-risk or underserved populations (Walker & McCarthy, 2010). Tailored after-school programs designed to meet the specific needs of these students contribute to narrowing the achievement gap. By providing resources, mentorship, and a supportive environment, CBOs empower students who may face systemic challenges in their educational journey.

While CBOs play a vital role in after-school programming, challenges exist. Funding constraints, logistical issues, and the need for sustained community support can impact the scalability and effectiveness of these initiatives. Addressing these challenges is essential for maximizing the positive impact of CBO-led after-school programs.

The literature strongly supports the pivotal role of community-based organizations in shaping after-school programming. From academic support to socio-emotional development and community engagement, CBOs contribute to creating holistic and inclusive learning environments. Recognizing the challenges and working collaboratively to address them will be essential in harnessing the full potential of community-based organizations to enrich the after-school experiences of students and foster a thriving, interconnected community.

In conclusion, after-school programs emerge as integral components of a holistic approach to student development. Despite facing challenges, the overall consensus is that well-designed, adequately funded, and inclusively implemented after-school programs significantly enhance the educational experience for students. By addressing academic needs, fostering social-emotional growth, engaging families and communities, and striving to close achievement gaps, these programs contribute to the comprehensive development of students in our

educational landscape. As we navigate the future of education, the role of after-school programs remains a promising avenue for nurturing well-rounded and successful individuals.

## 4: Community Care Alliance

This chapter wishes to understand how non-profit community-based organizations establish and work towards their goals by focusing on Community Care Alliance (CCA), paying particular attention to their own relationship with the community they serve. The organization's website and interviews with staff guides the information presented in this chapter.

Community Care Alliance is a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization that promotes the health and wellness of Philadelphia's rapidly growing Latine immigrant population through high-quality health care, innovative educational programs, and community building. In their About Us section on their website they state that:

*Community Care Alliance is founded on the principles of Social Determinants of Health and Social Justice. We believe that community health, wellness, and empowerment result from a collaborative, multidisciplinary effort to address the conditions in which we grow, learn, live, work, and age. These conditions influence an individual's quality of life and the development of the community as a whole. Community Care Alliance aims to improve community and individual health and wellness not only by providing immediate services, but also by acknowledging and challenging embedded social inequalities and injustices.*

*Community Care Alliance works in partnership with community members, local public schools, universities, governmental institutions, and other nonprofit organizations to address the adverse structural, economic, and social conditions that profoundly affect the prosperity of this community. At Community Care Alliance we are challenging the idea that deep and long-standing inequalities are acceptable realities within our society. We are not only re-imagining but also fostering an environment in which our vision of equitable access to health care, education, and empowerment exists.*

It's very clear that CCA takes a holistic approach to fighting the social injustices their community faces. They care not only for their community's bodily health, but their minds and their futures in society. They do so through high-quality health care, educational programs, and social service initiatives. These services are aimed at the Latine population in South



Philadelphia, more specifically undocumented immigrants who have exhausted all other options for health care.

In the past year, CCA has focused on “stabilizing sustainable growth” as they have resumed programming and services which had been put on hold due to a focus on emergency relief work due to the pandemic. In their “2022 Year in Review” they state how:

*Our Wellness team formalized our food access and case management programs and grew our behavioral health team, our Education team resumed our bilingual literacy-focused summer program and offered in-person after-school programming for our high school age youth for the first time since the onset of the pandemic, our clinic team increased their capacity by hiring an additional nurse practitioner and extending clinic hours, and our Art & Culture team celebrated the completion of phase one of Projecto Grandote, a community-driven, interactive public art project.*

CCA has four departments within their organization which provide corresponding services, Medical Care, Wellness, Art and Culture, and Education. This chapter will focus on their Education department.

The Education department focuses their education programs towards their community’s youth. These programs span across three age groups: early childhood, elementary and middle school, and high school. The educational programs they provide are as follows:

1. **CCA to the Arts** - “We developed this program in partnership with the Barnes Foundation and with support from the William Penn Foundation’s Informal Learning Initiative. Through this program, we work with emergent bilingual learners ages 3-5 and their caregivers and use art to grow children’s early literacy skills in Spanish and English. After-school virtual program sessions include interactive read alouds, art observation, and art making that all foster conversation and shared creative exploration. This program also includes occasional weekend in-person family art and literacy workshops for program families from the larger South Philadelphia Latinx community.”

2. **CCA Towards the Future Education Programs** - “CCA Towards the Future works with young people in grades 1-8 through a variety of out-of-school time programming that nurtures students’ creativity, personal development, and exploration of their cultural heritage while also providing support for school-based work and learning. This program offers individual homework and academic tutoring, bilingual social justice and sexuality education workshops with collaborator YES! (Your Empowered Sexuality), art opportunities with Fleisher Art Memorial, support for 8th graders applying to high school, family workshops, and more. We are actively working on designing student and parent leadership structures for the coming years to grow the ways that youth and families determine program content and vision and can engage as actual teachers and mentors, themselves. CCA Towards the Future is a proud partner of Southwark School, one of the first community schools in Philadelphia.”
3. **Rising Leaders Adolescent Program** - “Rising Leaders is our after-school youth program for Latinx high school students. Programming focuses on academic support, mentoring opportunities, and leadership development. Students in this age group work with individual mentors and participate in interactive workshops that are centered on the interests of students, with topics spanning postsecondary readiness, socioemotional life skills, health and wellbeing, and social justice. Since 2017, ten students have graduated from high school and Líderes to pursue next steps in their education and training.”
4. **Summer Literacy Program** - “The Community Care Alliance Summer Program offers a month of programming for 30, 1-5th grade Latinx youth in South Philadelphia. This program strives to center the voices and perspectives of the young people we work with, recognize and honor the many ways of knowing that exist within their communities, and offer spaces for learning and self exploration. We celebrate our students’ identities as multilingual or emerging multilingual young people and invite students to explore their

own language practices with curiosity and playfulness. While our program does have an “Exploring Literacies” focus, we believe that “literacy” extends far beyond learning to read and write in English, and encompasses the many different ways that people come to know, explore and communicate with the world around them. Finally, our program creates intentional space for rest and play.”

### **Goals of Education Department**

On their department website they state that:

*We believe that a comprehensive strategy to promote wellness in any community must also target the social determinants of health. To this end, we run a full range of educational programs for youth ages 3-18 and their families.*

This reflects the organization's overall goal of addressing the whole being.

In order to get a better sense of how this comprehensive strategy maps onto educational programming I conducted interviews with the entire staff of the department. I will now outline my findings, first starting with the overall education department goals and then narrowing it down to individual staff members goals, which are dictated by how close they work with students and the age of students which they work with. I also interviewed the Director of the Art and Culture department as there is a lot of collaboration and overlap among these two departments.

The main goals of the Education department are:

1. Accessible, Empowering and Progressive Education for All
  - Consent-Based, Language Justice, Anti-Oppressive
2. Uplifting/Recognizing Ancestral Knowledge Parents Carry Within Them
  - Multigenerational Approach
3. Creating Future Leaders Through Representation
4. Working *with* the Community // Being a Reflection of the Community
  - Dedication and Willingness to Change and Adapt to Community's Needs

As I delve into each goal I will talk about the processes that allow these goals to be enacted into fruition. At the end I will talk about Puente's Promotoras program which perfectly encompasses and demonstrates these four goals.

### Accessible, Empowering and Progressive Education for All

This goal has three foundational aspects to it, educational programming must be 1) accessible, 2) empowering and progressive. During my conversation with the staff it soon became clear that CCA is dedicated to being as accessible to people as it can be. A staff member says:

*The goals of the organization, I think that, at its core, it's all about accessibility. I think that CCA is striving to always be as accessible as they can be to the community...How can we continue expanding our services so that everyone feels welcomed and that they are at a sacred space, a safe space that folks can come to?*

This accessibility is for the sake of the community feeling welcomed, seen, heard, and supported as there may not be other places where they can go. The community is able to access the organizations services as long as there is someone in the office, especially the Food Pharmacy run by the Wellness team, which provides community members with free food supplies:

*You may come into CCA and you may be wanting an appointment and you might not get an appointment until six months out. I think that's really unfortunate, but I've never seen the food pharmacy turn anyone away. There have been times where I'm at CCA after clinic closing and let's say Olivia's still around and I'll go open the door for someone who's just looking for food, and it feels really nice to not have to be like, "Clinic is closed. Sorry, you have to come back the next day that we're open," and that could be four days from now. I know that, if Olivia's around, I can go to them and say, "Hey, there's someone here and they're looking for food. Is it okay if I let them come back?" And they're usually pretty open to saying yes.*

CCA must also be able to cater to all members of the community within their programming. Part of this accessibility includes indigenous folks; when talking to the

Adolescent Supervisor she tells me about how the population they serve is not *only* Spanish speaking, she states:

*For example, there's an understanding that a lot of immigrants that are coming from these countries that we're really familiar with don't necessarily speak Spanish. They might be speaking an Indigenous language. I think that's pretty cool how [CCA] has tried to branch out services that way. It's about how we make programming a good fit for everyone and for other students to understand that there are people who come from the same countries as us that may not use the same language as us.*

CCA has a commitment to not only include and make their services available to indigenous folks but also to highlight their place and belonging within the community and our Latinidad. They've done this by including the Nahuatl language into the services and programs that the organization provides, particularly through the art department who has created a vocabulary game for children to play with in the clinic's waiting room. You are also able to find information materials in the language. [Are there staff members that speak the language?]

A second part of the goal is for the educational programming they provide to be empowering and progressive. When talking to the Adolescent Supervisor she tells me she was a little nervous about not having a formal education background when she started her position but she soon realized that education:

*Doesn't have to exactly look like what the classrooms are looking like at schools. We're all about finding these innovative ways that we can empower our youth. Empowering that didn't have to be only just providing basic needs, but finding other ways to empower, such as student education.*

The Director tells me how all programming is done through “a student education lens” which centers the student, their needs and experiences when making programming decisions. Educational programming is guided by three principles: it must be Consent-Based, center

Language Justice, and be Anti-Oppressive. When talking about what exactly Consent-Based education means, one of the staff members says:

*I think that consent based is really important, that we're very adamant that all of our programming is consent based, people have the autonomy to say yes or no whether they want to participate. And I think that's especially important for our community's youth, because I think that our community's youth tends to be really overpoliced in the classroom. I just think that it must feel really nice for students to have to go through eight hours of what essentially must be like, "Do this, do that. You have to be doing this," to then go to CCA and feel the comfortability of, "I get to do what I want to do. If they're presenting something that I want to do, then, I'll do it. If they're presenting something that I don't want to do, then, I won't do it and I'm not going to be punished for that." I think that's really valuable to our programming.*

This staff member wishes to create an alternate space where students are able to make choices for themselves free of any punishments. The ultimate goal is to treat students as human beings capable of making their own decisions, not as children who don't know anything about the world, a feeling that they often get from their interactions with adults, especially parents and teachers. One of the staff member describes the way they view themselves in relation to the students:

*I never go into it like, "I'm the authority figure here. You have to listen to me." I really do try my best to be like, "Am I the older person here? Am I the adult or whatever? Yes, but that doesn't necessarily mean that I get to control you." And I think that that's what the students must really appreciate at the end of the day. Obviously, there's a threshold, but I think it's really nice that they more so see me as a friend than someone that they have to be intimidated by. And I think that that's why we ultimately have to have that approach, because otherwise, who is going to participate in our programming?*

If the ultimate goal is to empower students in their own abilities, you can't can't impose ways of being onto them. You must give them the space to make informed choices for themselves. First step in this process is wanting and choosing to be part of programming, no students should be there if their parents are forcing them. Through consent-based education you

are able to establish genuine relationships with students as they are formed on the basis of trust and care for one another.

This aspect of programming goes hand in hand with Anti-Oppressive education. As already stated, CCA actively tries to stay away from replicating the harmful dynamics students have to deal with in their everyday lives. Because of this, Anti-Oppressive education pushes for critical thinking among our students:

*We like to encourage students to learn about their world, learn about their history, learn about their culture, and how and why this is important to them and how the world impacts these identities, histories, cultures.*

Empowerment and liberation go hand in hand. In order for students to be liberated from oppressive systems they must first understand these systems in place, even if those systems have been placed there by our own culture. Students must also be able to envision alternative futures in which they see themselves being their true selves:

*For example, when you were a part of the sex ed workshops at Southwark, allowing students to be able to understand and learn what sex ed is, gender expression, gender identity, basically who you are as a person...Allowing that sense of identity and creativity, but also, especially with our community, knowing the history of who we are and where we come from, the different history that there is, and allowing that to give you a sense of, you come from this identity or this certain group of people, now it's up to you to realize who you are as a person within this group of people and what change you can make. And essentially the main thing is be who you are and not really stick to those norms, stereotypes, that society has put in place.*

At its core, anti-oppressive education seeks to normalize differences among groups through awareness, curiosity, and acceptance.

Lastly, CCA emphasizes Language Justice for its programming participants. Most community members are Spanish speakers and/or English speakers, with some Nahuatl speakers. There is a lot of diversity within the language abilities of the community from the languages spoken to the level of fluency. Within educational programming:

*We don't emphasize just one language, it's both. But also at the same time, we understand that students may feel more comfortable speaking English or speaking Spanish, so it's not really up to us to ask students to just speak this one or both. We communicate in a way that they feel most comfortable and then the way they feel like they can express themselves more. So I think that's a big one that we have that I feel like not many people know. Because we have students who only speak English and very little Spanish, or students who only speak Spanish and they're learning English, so we have to be able to speak to students the way they feel most comfortable and also not feel pressure at all.*

*We want to make sure that our programming is accessible to all of the kids. And so that is something that is very important to us, making sure that our volunteers are able to communicate with students, our volunteers speak Spanish, and then all of our programming is bilingual. Any of the directions, instruction, readings we have, if we'll do a read aloud or activities, they're all always in English and Spanish.*

Language ability is a sensitive topic for a lot of the community's youth, especially when it comes to their relationship with their Latinidad. I will talk more about this in my next chapter. A lot of students, those who grew up in the US and those who have recently arrived, feel a sense of shame for not being able to speak the other language fluently, affecting their sense of belonging within their community, their culture and family.

Overall, the Education department's goals for accessible, empowering and progressive education for all is for the ultimate success of all its students as they move through their lives. One staff member explains the reasoning for these choices:

*I think in terms of choosing this, I think we want kids to feel comfortable and safe in our program and feel welcome. We don't want to replicate the harmful and dangerous structures that may exist either at school or just in society in general. And so we want to make sure that we are honoring all of their identities and being very explicit about who we are as a program so that kids also know and kids know our expectation, know how it is that we expect them to be treated, but also how we expect them to treat their classmates, their friends.*

### Uplifting/Recognizing Ancestral Knowledge Parents Carry Within Them

A second goal of the Education department, as well as the Arts and Culture department, is to recognize and uplift the knowledge of parents and caregivers. This goal is an extension of



the previous goal to provide empowering and progressive education for all. “All” includes the parents and older folks in the community as well. When talking about the CCA a las Artes program (see program description above), the Director says:

*It's interesting, because what we're trying to do is empower our parents to feel like they're also educators, because formal education isn't the only type of education. A lot of the parents come here, and they don't think they have enough conocimientos or knowledge. They're probably a lot more knowledgeable than a lot of us in different ways, and so what the arts and ed department is, is trying to empower parents to see themselves with all this knowledge that they can pass down to their kids in terms of, not just language, but culture and norms.*

Here the Director acknowledges the ignored and often forgotten *conocimientos* (knowledges) that parents have within them. These *conocimientos* have been brought with them from their home country when they immigrated to the US, however, this knowledge is not recognized and instead is deemed illegitimate, unnecessary, and unrelated in formal education settings. The Arts and Culture Director explains to me her current project where she expands on the reasoning for this goal:

*I don't know if you've seen the murals here at CCA, they're talking about traditions and ancestral knowledge that the parents bring to this country. Usually we as parents and as foreigners, we forget to teach our children about our culture because we want our kids to just belong. But the problem is yes, you belong, but you're missing a big part of your background and your ancestry, your knowledge of it.*

*So the project is called El Proyecto Grandote [The Big Project]. So it's very much about knowledge “de los ancestros” [ancestral knowledge] that all of us have with us, that we're born and raised with in the countries of origin, and the things that we can teach our children through that. For agriculture, you need to know a lot about the sky and the seasons because you don't just plant whenever, there's a reason for everything and how deep you plant a bean, it's important how many together, how much corn. And I mean, without that basic knowledge nobody could really survive.*

Here the Director recognizes that often parents don't pass on these *conocimientos* to their children once they are in the US as the parents wish for their children to “just belong”. It's clear the parents are aware that there is no place for their *conocimientos* in American society.

Their *conocimientos* lose their value when the context in which they were formed is taken away even if that knowledge can be life saving. She continues:

*So it's very much for the parents to know that they know because that's the other thing, they come here and because they don't handle computers and whatever's thought to be knowledge, it's not true. That's not the only knowledge that there is. So all this ancestral knowledge is very important to bring forth plus whatever they have experienced. And for the children, it's also very empowering to see that their parents know a lot. So then to make this collaboration with the families and there's so many things that they have taught us, depending what culture you belong to and the differences in exchanges.*

The acknowledgement and uplifting of the *conocimientos* parents and older folks have with them serves not only their own sense of self but their childrens and wider community's empowerment.

This led the Education department to take a multi-generational approach in their programming. The Directors states:

*As an education department, we each strive to foster identities through multilingual intergenerational teaching and learning spaces that nurtures creativity and cultural connection with youth and families. This is at the forefront of what we've been speaking about, is that multi-generational approach of having parents and students being involved in educational processes, its not leaving one or the other behind.*

This multigenerational approach, in combination with the previous goal, is a strategy for the community to carve a place for themselves in a society that is constantly telling them that they don't belong, a society that tells them that they have nothing to contribute besides their labor, a society that tells them that in order to fit in and succeed you must give up your sense of identity as there is no space for difference. There is great power in these strategies.

Counternarratives directly challenge the dominant discourses that perpetuate these ideologies and ways of thinking. This segways into the next goal, to foster future leaders through representation.

### Creating Future Leaders Through Representation

A very important, and very needed, goal of educational programming is to provide community members with representation. This goal is a driving principle in the high school program as students aspire for their future and dream of the possibilities for their future in this society. These dreams can encompass a career, their goals and future achievements, or finding their passion, but most importantly these dreams must encompass becoming the best versions of themselves they can be. As I talk to the Adolescent Supervisor she explains to me how:

*I hope that these students ultimately feel represented. I try to be really intentional about the volunteers that we bring on. I try to be really intentional about what we're teaching in workshops. I know that, for example, RLP has the whole post-secondary readiness and social emotional life skills. Those are pretty broad, but I can still find a way for it to relate to their identities because I think that's really what separates our programming from other afterschool programming that's doing similar stuff with post-secondary readiness and prepping high school students for the world after high school and after graduation. And I hope that, my hopes for them is that they go through RLP and they finish RLP and they don't just think, "Well, that was that. That was support that I had for four years, or whatever. Now, I move on." I hope that they can see that they're welcome to come back whenever. Especially, it's just continuing that, continuing, you once felt represented in this space, and now, you have the opportunity to be that representation for someone else.*

Here the Adolescent Supervisor touches on various processes of how she incorporates representation within the high school after-school program. She does this through the volunteers she chooses to become mentors for the students (most of the mentors are Latine college students, this allows for the students to envision themselves as college students in the universities that the mentors attend); the topics chosen for workshops (content is tailored through the lens of Latine culture as students must be able to relate to the workshops through their own lived experiences); the community partners and professionals that are invited to programming (guests speakers share identities and lived experiences with the students); and the resources and media shared with students. A staff member expands on this goal for her students and community members:

*But I think what makes it more effective is that once you see someone who looks like them, someone who comes from the same experiences as them, be that person to teach or offer them all this information, I feel like it makes it easier for them because they see representation. And I think that's really important for students and also parents to see, now you don't have just, for example, white men teaching or white women teaching. Now you have people of color teaching, people who come from the same country you come from, or things like that. So it's expanding, which allows families and students to be more comfortable and be more open to, okay, if I see this person be this, that means I also can do this myself.*

CCA does not only wish to provide students with representation in programming but to encourage them to be that representation for others as well. Representation transcends mere visibility, it holds transformative power for students beyond just seeing themselves reflected in their mentors, workshops, and community partners as it can serve as a catalyst for empowerment and self-realization, helping students recognize the inherent value in their own knowledge, experiences, and identities. By witnessing individuals who share similar backgrounds, identities, and paths to success, students are not only inspired but also empowered to embrace their own unique perspectives and contributions. They begin to understand that their voices matter, that their experiences hold significance, and that they too can serve as beacons of representation for others. Another staff member continues as she shares a student's journey through the educational programming CCA provides:

*I hope they understand this, at least, that they are now that representation that exists for other students. It's not just, "Oh, my parents signed me up for this program and now I have to do it all these years," or whatever. I think that they see the value in the available opportunities it has for them. For [student's name], for example, they participated in CCA Towards the Future, and now, they are a CCA Towards the Future intern, and they get to explore what it is exactly they liked about CCA Towards the Future, what exactly it isn't they liked about CCA Towards the Future, and I think that it's even inspired them to even inspire them to even want to pursue education on their own. I think that's really cool about continued participation throughout the programs. It's not only just an afterschool program. It's an opportunity to learn about what you love, and especially what you love about your community, and obviously, ultimately, becoming a community leader.*

The representation and encouragement from the staff fosters a sense of belonging and

validation, affirming students' identities and experiences within their communities instilling confidence and self-assurance, enabling them to navigate challenges with resilience and determination. Students realize that they are not alone in their journey and that their aspirations are attainable. Moreover, representation empowers students to become agents of change within their communities. By recognizing the value of their own experiences and perspectives, they are motivated to advocate for themselves and others, to challenge stereotypes and biases, and to strive for inclusivity and equity. As they embrace their role as representatives, they become catalysts for positive social change, inspiring others to embrace their identities and pursue their dreams.

The Adolescent Supervisor tells me how:

*I'm hoping to pilot a summer book club...And that was something that I also wanted to be really intentional about. I picked a book that would resonate with the students that we serve, so by Latine authors, that the main character is Latine, and also, whatever they're going through would be similar to what our students that we serve are going through.*

### Working *with* the Community/Being a Reflection of the Community

Lastly, the most essential goal of the CCA as a community-based organization is to *work with* the community. This is different from *servicing* the community or working *for* the community as one staff member pointed out to me in our interview after I mistakenly used the former phrase. In all the interviews I conducted with staff, they all emphasized their duty to build community with those who use the organizations services as CCA ultimately wishes to be a reflection of their community's needs. This duty is not overtly emphasized on their webpage as they talk about their mission yet it is an implicit core value in the organization's purpose.

The previous three goals I've described so far stem from this core value as the organization's ultimate purpose is to promote the well being of their community. This work is done through *partnerships* between the organization and the community as only the community itself knows what they need for their own well being. The organization, and thus the education

department, ensures the implementation of their community's voice and needs through various ways. As I've stated, the most important way of developing these partnerships is through building expansive relationships with their community members, more importantly with the parents and older folks of the community. The Primary Education Supervisor explains that there are two instances where these relationships can be formulated within the education programs:

*The first is whenever parents come and pick up their kids after programming, I think that's a really, it's a very informal time, but it's really nice to just talk to them. So they'll come in because I'll wait outside and during those 10 minutes that kids are cleaning up upstairs and grabbing their stuff and coming down, I'll talk to parents and that's a really nice informal way of building community and that's how I've honestly come to know them.*

*And then the other ways, we'll have parent geared events. So we would do parent workshops when we were partnering with YES, which is Your Empowered Sexuality. We would do parent workshops and parents would come in and during those workshops we would talk about how to talk to your kids about sex and gender, how to talk to your kids about sexuality, how to talk to your kids about periods. And that was another way we would build community is just having conversation around what they wanted to learn about those topics. And then just hearing any of their nervousness around talking to their kids about that. And I was saying, some of our outings we plan are family outings. We try to plan outings for kids and then also outings for families as well so that their parents can come or caregivers can come, and those are the ways we build community.*

The education department primarily caters to the youth of the community but recently they have been extending their programming, like the Sex Ed program described above, to parents as well. Educational workshops for parents are also provided through the other departments. For example, the Wellness team does *Charlas* (Talks) with the community around different topics that are pertinent to the well being of their community. In these *Charlas* the staff will also get feedback and questions from those who attend as receiving input and feedback is the best way to adapt programming to the community's needs:

*I think CCA is really great at hearing the feedback from the community and what it is that they are wanting and needing and trying our best to be honest about that and implementing that if we can. I think from what I've seen in across our programs, for example, for clinic, they take*

*diagnoses that they've seen a lot and implement ways to support families. One of the examples is clinic was seeing a lot of folks being diagnosed with diabetes, and so then what wellness started doing is they started having cooking classes where they would give folks food that match their new lifestyle and then showing people how to make this food and having cooking classes and recipes to make together. I think it's just really nice to see the different teams respond to what the community is asking and saying.*

The Director of the education department tells me how they have systematized this approach:

*I believe in 2021, prior to starting, they did a strategic refresh planning, where they interviewed all the families of what they wanted to see, and what they wanted to see was more support in academics, bilingualism, and also arts and culture.*

This highlights the next important step in building partnerships with the community in order to better design and cater their programming: dialogue with the community. All staff from the education department tell me how important program feedback is to them:

*In terms of program feedback, all of our program supervisors touch base with their families at the beginning, at the end of the semester to collect feedback of what they want their students to be learning, and that goes both ways with students, so they touch base with students as well, not just RLP, but the other programs too.*

The most involvement from parents in education programming is in the program for the youngest kids, CCA to the Arts:

*Our parents are heavily involved in the curriculum decisions, so they come on onsite at CCA three times throughout the semester, just to talk about their needs, resources, and what they want to see in their curriculum, which has inspired using that model with CCA Towards the Future and RLP in the future. I get that parents are more involved when they're younger, but it would be really nice to see that with the elementary, middle school, and high school grades.*

In this quote we see that even if the parents' input is valued and encouraged they are not able to provide it as much as the organization wished they could. Most parents are very busy and do not have time that they can dedicate to making programmatic changes as they have their own lives to look after. The staff recognizes this challenge which is why they are pushing for a way to

get community members paid for the time they give to the organization, which is reflected in the Director's hopes for the future or programming:

*I hope that introducing these new initiatives, where we can pay parents in some way, that goes back to grants and funding, to come in and share their knowledge with their kids, or just incentives, is something that is a goal in my mind, because everyone's just trying to survive this economy. And so yeah, it's been very rocky and turbulent, and it's multiple factors. I hope that, in the future we can serve our community in a way that we recognize that there has been a lot going on.*

In the past, CCA has been able to pay community members for their time and involvement in the organization, particularly in the CCA to the Arts program as it requires a lot of time and input from the parents. CCA has been able to expand these paid opportunities through the creation of intern positions within their educational programs which are catered to students who have gone through these programs in the past. CCA wishes to expand this paid opportunity to all aspects of involvement by community members, particularly when they are involved in the decision making process, which leads us to the last step in creating meaningful partnerships with the community.

In order to ensure the community's voice is being heard they must also be part of the decision making process. One way CCA does this is by having students and parents present during interviews for new hires within the organization. One staff member describes:

*When I was being interviewed, there were students in my interview, as well as parents, asking me questions. They were present for [staff member name] interview as well, and so CCA definitely includes representatives of the community when they're electing folks into a position.*

Another example for this process is holding town hall meetings about issues the organization faces in order to keep the community well informed. The Director describes the last town hall meeting:

*We opened up a town hall last summer, because we were supposed to hold summer camp at Southwark School, and they closed because of asbestos, so we opened up a space for parents to*



*see if it's okay to hold virtual learning for now. So you see that pattern of like, "Okay. Something has happened," and then they're like, "Okay. What's happening?"*

She continues to tell me how often the challenges they face are not in Puente's control but the school district. It is important to explain this to the community as the organization manages their own partnerships with the district.

A new way CCA is ensuring the community's voice is heard in decision making processes is by incorporating community members into the board of directors:

*I believe we have, I don't know if yet, but a community member on the board or they will be on the board, and so even a board of directors, and they're all usually doctors or professors, especially at CCA. Having a community member being present in the room, making sure that the governance and decision-making reflects the community is something really huge as well.*

In conclusion, the multifaceted goal of CCA as a community-based organization transcends mere service provision; it is rooted in the ethos of working with the community to address its evolving needs and aspirations. This distinction, as illuminated by the staff's insights, emphasizes a collaborative approach where the organization becomes a reflection of the community it serves. This is evident in the deliberate efforts to engage with parents, caregivers, and older community members, not only as recipients of services but as active contributors to program design and implementation.

In its pursuit of meaningful partnerships, CCA has embraced innovative approaches, such as incorporating community members into the hiring process and expanding representation within its board of directors. These initiatives not only ensure that the organization remains accountable to the community but also fosters a sense of ownership and pride among community members in shaping the organization's trajectory.

Ultimately, CCA's commitment to working with the community reflects a deeper understanding of empowerment, collaboration, and solidarity. By centering the voices and experiences of those it serves, the organization embodies the principles of community-driven change, laying the foundation for a more inclusive, equitable, and resilient future.

## **Promotoras Program**

There is one program that perfectly exemplifies how CCA embodies these four previously described goals—accessibility, empowerment, representation, and reflection of and to the community—the Promotoras. Here’s what CCA states in their website about the Promotora Program:

*Since 2007, Community Care Alliance has been cultivating and supporting a dedicated group of community members who serve as community health workers, or promotoras, in South Philadelphia. The program began in an effort to increase Community Care Alliance’s reach into the community and to tackle important health issues outside the clinic where individuals need direct support with lifestyle decisions. The promotoras address a wide range of issues in the service of their community, including diabetes prevention, heart health, cervical cancer prevention, prenatal care, obesity, vaccination, and nutrition. They lead workshops, contribute to clinic services, and provide individual counseling and patient navigation. The Promotora Program exemplifies the mission and dedication of the staff and volunteers at Community Care Alliance.*

Promotoras means female promoters in Spanish. Promotoras are community members, usually mothers, who have taken upon themselves the responsibility to ensure CCA services reach everyone in the community at the interpersonal level. This program falls under the Medical Services department within CCA as their main concern is medical health and well being, however, this does not limit them to work within this department as there is a lot of collaboration happening across departments.

Throughout my interviews with staff the Promotoras program was brought up every time. Here one staff member refers to the program when asked about CCA being a reflection of the community, she says:

*I think that a really great example here is the Promotora aspect that we have of CCA. I think that we are so lucky to have that program with the Promotoras because no matter what day of the week it is at the clinic, there's always going to be a Promotora. We have a very nice team of Promotoras, and I think that they're very reflective of the community because, for example, CCA*

*the clinic, just very honestly, I think that sometimes, with the medical staff, it can really be front facing white, so I can understand how, even if they speak Spanish, I think it's just not the same. I think, to have, at the very front, be the person to greet you, be the person to ask you what's wrong and to also refer to you with resources or information, I think that's very comforting.*

This quote does a good job at showcasing how the Promotoras embody the four main goals described in this chapter—accessibility, empowerment, representation, and reflection of and to the community. Firstly, the Promotoras program stands as a beacon of accessibility, ensuring that CCA' services are not only available but also easily accessible to all members of the community, particularly Spanish speakers. By having Promotoras present at the clinic and within the community, individuals can access crucial health information and resources in a digestible manner at any time, breaking down barriers to healthcare access and promoting inclusivity.

Secondly, the program serves as a powerful tool for empowerment, especially for the mothers who take on the role of Promotoras. Through comprehensive training and ongoing support, these women become empowered advocates and educators within their community, equipped with the knowledge and skills to address pressing health issues and support their peers in making informed decisions about their well-being.

Moreover, the Promotoras embody the principle of representation, serving as relatable and trustworthy figures for community members seeking healthcare assistance. By having Promotoras who share similar backgrounds, experiences, and language with the community, CCA ensures that individuals feel seen, understood, and respected, fostering a sense of trust and rapport that is essential for effective healthcare delivery.

Lastly, the Promotoras program reflects CCA' commitment to community-centered care, as it is designed and implemented with the community's needs and priorities in mind. By engaging community members as Promotoras, CCA not only expands its reach but also ensures that its services are culturally competent and responsive to the diverse needs of the community it serves.

The Promotoras program serves as a tangible embodiment of CCA' mission and values, exemplifying its dedication to promoting health equity, empowering individuals, and fostering meaningful connections within the community. As a cornerstone of CCA' efforts to create a healthier and more resilient community, the Promotoras program stands as a testament to the transformative power of grassroots initiatives and community-led healthcare interventions.

### **Challenges**

As I delve into the next section, it's imperative to confront the realities and challenges faced by non-profit organizations in their mission to work with their community effectively. Despite their noble aspirations and dedicated efforts, CCA encounters several hurdles that impede its ability to fulfill its goals seamlessly. These challenges not only underscore the complexity of the work undertaken but also highlight the pressing need for innovative solutions and steadfast commitment in overcoming them.

### **Funding**

At the forefront of these challenges lies the perennial issue of funding. Like many non-profit organizations, securing adequate financial resources poses a constant struggle. The demand for services often outpaces the available funding, necessitating creative strategies and diligent fundraising efforts to bridge the gap. One of my interview questions ask about the effectiveness of reaching their goals, one staff member says:

*I would say that CCA is 50/50 in the effectiveness of pursuing their goals, and I think that, at the end of the day, CCA is not really at fault for not doing enough. I think that a big barrier is always going to be the resources that are available to us, and that being said is money. It is sometimes difficult to navigate when, if we have a certain amount of money allotted, we have to make some budget cuts, some aspects of programming have to get cut. That becomes really difficult, but I think that, because of what CCA is to the community, it's not even just, "Oh, you can't service me in the way that I need you to. Fine. You're not something that's important to me anymore."*

All staff who I interviewed stated funding poses the biggest challenge in reaching the

organization's goals. Most of the time, new initiatives have to be piloted in a small scale not being able to reach everyone, certain aspects of programming and services may need to be cut for budgeting reasons, as the staff is a constant battle to balance the work they wish to do with the work they have the capacity to do. However, this does not discourage the community from seeking out the services the organization is able to provide. I'd like to believe there is an understanding from the community about the capacity of the organization which leads community members to involve themselves more rather than hold rancor against them. A staff member further elaborates on this challenge:

*We really are hoping to have more funding to be able to do this [paying parents for their time in workshops] again. So we weren't able to continue it because of funding purposes to have parents in the classroom, so we had to pause that. And so I think that's just the biggest thing that I've seen is funding. And for our parent workshops, we were able to have another grant that we'll be able to continue this and have different kinds of parent workshops. So we're hoping to have parent workshops now where we can help folks who have recently arrived to the US and figure out what support systems there are for them and answer any questions that they may have. But I think just funding is the biggest one.*

The Director explains to me where their funding comes from:

*So a lot of our funding comes from foundation grants, so grants that come from private foundations. So CCA does not have any federal or state grants, so it's all run by foundations, which speaks volumes because, as you know, the staff is very small. It's, I think, 12 of us kind of, not including part-time, and everything else is volunteer work. The doctors are all volunteer, dentists. So for the education division, it's a mix of private foundation grants, but also just general operating grants that goes across CCA, and something that we're trying to do is diversify our grants and funding, in terms of applying to state and federal grants. But that takes a really long time, and they ask for a lot. So that's how our funding goes.*

Its clear CCA heavily relies on volunteers for the work that is being done as they are only able to pay a small staff, everyone else work with the organization for benevolent reasons (including myself). I'm not sure what the difference between private and public grants is but I believe its much easier to receive private grants if the foundation its coming from has similar

values to CCA. State and federal grants will need more documentation and tend to be less progressive/radical. [I'm not sure what to write here.]

A very interesting aspect of the high-school program, the focus of this project, is that the program was started by a group of students from UPenn. They received the President's Engagement Prize in 2017 which provided the initial funding to get this program off the ground. The Adolescent Supervisor brings up this history when talking about funding:

*I think that where I get confused or I see a really weird dichotomy is, obviously, I'm grateful because I get these nice Penn benefits or whatever, but I think it's weird that we're under this umbrella of Penn Medicine in this elite Ivy institution, but no real funding goes into our programming from it. RLP was a president engagement award winning pilot program made by Penn students, but yet, I could probably talk about RLP too with any Penn student, they'd be like, "What? What is that?"*

This quote highlights an intriguing dynamic within the organization's funding landscape, shedding light on the complexities of institutional relationships and the distribution of resources. On one hand, the organization benefits from its affiliation with a prestigious institution like UPenn, as evidenced by the initial funding provided through the President's Engagement Prize. This support undoubtedly played a crucial role in launching the high-school program and laying the foundation for its success. However, the quote also underscores a disconnect between the origins of the program and its current standing within the university community. Despite being conceived and spearheaded by UPenn students, the program's visibility and recognition among the university's broader population appear to be lacking. This discrepancy raises questions about the extent of ongoing support and engagement from UPenn, particularly in terms of financial backing and institutional endorsement.

The Adolescent Supervisor's sentiment reflects a sense of ambivalence or frustration regarding this disparity. While grateful for the initial funding received, there is a palpable sense of disillusionment regarding the program's perceived status within the university hierarchy. The lack of sustained investment or recognition from UPenn, despite its association with the

program's inception, highlights broader issues of institutional priorities, resource allocation, and institutional memory. Overall, this quote serves as a poignant reminder of the nuanced dynamics at play within the realm of funding and institutional partnerships. It prompts reflection on the importance of fostering meaningful, reciprocal relationships between organizations and their affiliated institutions, as well as advocating for greater visibility and support for initiatives that serve the broader community.

### Dedicated Space for Programming & Dealing with the District

The second challenge that the Education department faces is not having their own physical space for programming. Primary aged programming is held at a local elementary school during their after-school hours and the high school program is held in the lobby of the CCA clinic after closing hours. Two staff members bring this up in their interviews:

*But we really want an education space. I think that our dream is having a space. I think it'd be really nice. It's nice to have programming out of Southwark, but it's sometimes hard because we can't put up, if we're doing art workshops, the kids' art or make the space feel like it's their space just because we have to respect the teacher's space and we're borrowing the classroom. But I think also funding in terms of finding a space and being able to rent it, to have it feel like a community space where folks can come in and make that space theirs.*

*The space one is such a big one, not even just because, oh, it's inconvenient to work at a clinic. It would just be really nice to have a space where not only do we get somewhere to work out of, but a space that students get to claim as their own. That would be really nice.*

The main purpose of having a dedicated space for educational programming is for the students and other community members to have a space they can claim for themselves. While these spaces serve as temporary venues for program delivery, they lack the personalization and sense of permanence that a dedicated educational space would afford. This limitation restricts the ability to fully immerse students in their learning experiences and inhibits the creation of a nurturing and supportive environment conducive to growth and exploration. In addition, the borrowed nature of these spaces imposes constraints on the activities and initiatives that can be

undertaken within them. During programming students and staff have to be extremely mindful that they are working in a lended space, because of this there is more pressure to stay within certain boundaries, something that can be difficult for some students and in turn requires authoritative measures from the staff.

This challenge stems from a different struggle: dealing with the school district. This challenge is exemplified by one staff member regarding the CCA Towards the Future program's sex education curriculum:

*And then another one I think is in terms of CCA Towards the Future, when I started, we were doing sex education, then the school district said we couldn't do that. They had said that they couldn't approve it because it was not a SDB curriculum, which was weird because we had been doing that for a long, long time before I started. And so yeah, we were stuck because we were like, "Well, this is something that CCA Towards the Future has been doing for years." And then when I started, that happened, I was like, "Oh my gosh." Yeah, and it was really frustrating because it happened a few weeks before we were supposed to start. We were scrambling to figure out what we were... I think it gave us no time to figure it out, because we had everything planned. We had the curriculum planned, we had all our volunteers, and then the school district had said no. And we were like, "What are we going to do?"*

The quote underscores the frustrations and obstacles encountered when attempting to implement programming that aligns with the organization's mission and goals, only to face resistance or pushback from external entities, in this case, the school district. The abrupt rejection of the curriculum, despite its longstanding presence within the program, highlights the bureaucratic hurdles and regulatory constraints that organizations must contend with when collaborating with institutional partners. The sudden denial of approval for the sex education curriculum not only disrupted the planned programming but also left staff scrambling to find alternative solutions within a limited timeframe. This instance serves as a poignant reminder of the vulnerability and uncertainty inherent in navigating external regulations and policies, which can significantly impact the organization's ability to deliver vital services to the community.



Moreover, the staff member's frustration and disbelief at the district's decision underscore the disconnect between the organization's grassroots initiatives and the bureaucratic structures governing educational programming. This misalignment not only complicates program planning and implementation but also raises questions about the responsiveness and adaptability of institutional frameworks to the evolving needs and priorities of the communities they serve.

## 5: Student Experiences

This chapter will delve into students' experiences within the Rising Leaders program, the focus program of this project. The program description is as follows:

*Rising Leaders is our after-school youth program for Latinx high school students. Programming focuses on academic support, mentoring opportunities, and leadership development. Students in this age group work with individual mentors and participate in interactive workshops that are centered on the interests of students, with topics spanning postsecondary readiness, socioemotional life skills, health and wellbeing, and social justice.*

As I have mentioned in the previous section, this program was originally started by a group of students from the University of Pennsylvania through the President's Engagement Prize in 2017. RLP was created to fill the gap in programming as at the time educational programming by CCA only went up to the sixth grade. Because of the already existing partnership between UPenn and Community Care Alliance, the college students were able to identify this need and organize in accordance with the community's needs. In a video about the creation of this program, the college students state how they wish to "build on what they [CCA] has already created and to complement their work but also to see their mission through as well".

The goals for this program stem from the belief that everyone can be leaders in their own lives and through their own leadership they can inspire others as well. The potential of students is limitless. Through enriching, engaging and educational opportunities students will be able to reach their full potential as they strive for their personal and professional goals. RLP is a collective way to give back to the community. The creators also state how they wish for this program to help students in their identity development. They acknowledge their own struggles growing up and living in a bi-cultural and bilingual environment. Navigating American society and culture, which highly values individualism, while managing one's own Latine culture, which emphasizes family and community, is an extremely taxing and conflicting process. An additional goal, stated by the Adolescent Supervisor, is to celebrate students' joy.

Programming takes place every Thursday from 3:30pm-5:30pm at the CCA clinic. The first hour is spent with their mentors where students receive academic support working towards their goals, or simply hang out chatting with their mentors as they develop their interpersonal relationships. The second hour consists of team building activities and educational workshops on the topic of the week which range from postsecondary readiness like college access and financial literacy, socioemotional life skills like communication styles and boundary setting, health and wellbeing like nutrition and self-care, and social justice issues like immigrant rights and environmental justice.

Interviews were conducted at the end of programming. The interview protocol delves into various aspects of the interviewee's background and experiences with RLP. It begins with inquiries about personal details such as name, age, grade, school, and family origin, followed by questions about their daily routine and after-school activities. I then explore the individual's involvement with RLP, including how they heard about the organization, their initial impressions, past participation, and any conflicts that may have arisen. I seek to understand the motivations behind their decision to join RLP for the current semester and their expectations for the program. Subsequent questions focus on the interviewee's experiences during the current semester of RLP, including highlights, challenges, overall satisfaction, and their comfort level within the cohort. I also delve into their experiences with mentorship and tutoring, exploring the benefits they've derived, their relationships with mentors, and suggestions for improvement. Furthermore, I touch upon the interviewee's interests in social issues and activism, examining their exposure to new topics, inspirations for leadership and action, and suggestions for better support from RLP. Feedback on RLP workshops is also solicited, including topics of interest, favorite and least favorite workshops, and learning outcomes. I conclude by exploring the interviewee's personal growth and learning, including surprising discoveries, sharing with others, changes in perspective, and connections with identity and community.

Students' experiences with RLP reflected the creators initial goal of aiding students' identity development. As I interviewed students, it soon became clear how the vast exposure of Latine identities, values, and ways of *being* Latine (modeled by mentors, staff, and students) allows students to explore and manage their often conflicting identities as adolescent second-generation Latino immigrants growing up in the United States. RLP served as a 3rd space for students to be able to freely express and explore themselves in a caring and accepting community among college-aged Latines who served as mentors and role models. RLP allowed students to challenge often-imposed aspects of their Latine culture to which they felt ambivalence or even hatred towards, those aspects being religion, sexuality, and mental health. RLP allowed for students to reconnect with their own Latinidad as they came to terms with their own perspectives and ways of being Latine in American society.

#### **AFTER-SCHOOL PROGRAMMING AS A 3RD SPACE**

The program, and CCA in general, served as a third space, separate from the demands of school and home, within which they could relax and be themselves. Many expressed feeling very welcomed and comfortable during programming, something they could not find in their homes or at school even if they did not know other students well. Most students didn't really interact with each other as they are pretty shy so they would only stick to their mentors or other friends/cousins/siblings they had in the program. There was no pressure to interact with each other from the staff either.

*Student: I don't really talk with a lot of the students, that's the thing. But I feel like if I did talk more, just seeing them from far away, I know that I could get along with them. No one's really critical or anything. No one's judgmental. It's not like anyone's side-eyeing you while you're walking or something. Anybody who you really talk to is welcoming to you and they make you feel like, I don't know the word, you can be yourself.*

*LN: Yeah. Is this something that is very particular to this place? Or do you feel the same self-sense of welcome and comfort? In school, for example.*

*Student: Not in school. I do not feel that welcome in school.*

The program and the space it's held in allows for students to fully be themselves without the need to watch how they express themselves as they would around family members or school peers. They felt free to be themselves without the fear of judgment. This comfortability is mainly attributed to the environment the mentors and staff create, many who are college-aged and share the same Latine identity with the students. A student even expressed feeling much more comfortable due to her ability to speak Spanish at any moment without receiving questioning looks.

*I feel really welcome because everyone's so nice. They ask me questions. Even if the conversation goes awkward, they still ask questions and try to keep the conversation going. Because I don't know how to do that. So yeah, I feel comfortable here. And no one makes me feel like I'm weird, because everyone's also, they all speak Spanish. If I say a word, I'm like, "How do I say that in English again?" I don't have to be like, "Oh."*

*When I was first going to come in here, I was kind of nervous because I thought there was going to be a lot of people, which I mean there is, but it doesn't feel weird. And I thought people were really nice, especially seeing people that I know. And I thought it would be fun. Plus everything's more inclusive and there's a lot of activities. And I feel like everyone has a similar background so you don't feel out of place.*

*Mostly welcome. I guess welcomed in general because you guys always make sure that we have snacks, we have water, candy, so we don't go insane. You guys try to make it not boring, even though obviously we're going to get to the point in life where everything's boring....Even these waivers, making sure that we are totally safe and telling us that we're totally safe. Just the environment and the people.*

Students also expressed enjoying getting to program as it took them into a different part of the city they would usually not get the chance to explore.

*I like how far away it was. I like walking around.*

Many students wished for programming to be longer as they did not want to go home. It's clear that for many students they don't get the chance to physically explore/attend areas outside their own home or school. They expressed this constant back and forth cycle between home and school and how limiting it is for them. This 3rd space allowed for them to be themselves without fear of any consequences or judgment from friends, school peers, teachers, or family members.

*LN: I never went to a program like this where I got to talk to people; it was just me going from school to my house, from school to my house, and so...*

*Student: That's like me right now, kind of. Yeah, so this is a nice place.*

In conclusion, the concept of third spaces, exemplified by programs like CCA, holds immense value in after-school programming. Serving as a sanctuary away from the pressures of both school and home, these spaces provide a unique environment where students can truly be themselves. The sense of welcome and comfort fostered by mentors and staff, many of whom share similar backgrounds with the students, creates an atmosphere devoid of judgment or criticism. The ability to freely express oneself, whether through language or behavior, without fear of repercussions, is a rare and precious experience for many of these students. Additionally, the opportunity to explore different parts of the city and engage in diverse activities adds depth to their after-school experiences. For many, these programs represent a break from the monotonous cycle of school and home, offering a sense of belonging and community that is often lacking elsewhere. As expressed by the students themselves, these third spaces become more than just a program – they become a refuge, a place where they can truly feel at home.

## MENTOR RELATIONSHIPS

As part of this 3rd space, students enjoyed having a mentor to converse with during their tutoring time. Many actually wished that tutoring time would be longer so they could continue talking with each other. Most mentors are college students who volunteer their time; two are grown adults and professionals in their field. Students enjoyed learning about mentors' lives and experiences growing up, in college, and general life. There was always so much to learn from them. Students also appreciated how invested and interested the mentors were in getting to know students, in asking questions others wouldn't as part of making conversation and connections. Students benefit from having individual attention from a mentor devoted to forming good relationships with their students.

*Honestly, just talking to Bridget, getting this close to Bridget. I know I've only known her for basically a few months, because only RLPs a few months, but it was just like... I don't know. Yeah, it's nice talking to adults, or just someone else that's not in my school.*

*Talking, and especially how they keep asking questions even after the conversation has died down and it keeps the conversation going. I like that.*

Each student had a main mentor but in certain activities we would split them up and pair them with other students in order for the mentor and students to talk to new people. One student actually hated being separated from her usual mentor. She would call her Teacher out of respect.

*Student: No, just my teacher Carla.*

*LN: Carla, yeah. Your teacher, that's what you call her, Carla?*

*Students: Yeah. I don't know what to call her. I don't want to call her her name. She's older...We just talk about my day and since then we talk about different things. She listens. I feel comfortable telling her stuff.*

Students described having a common ground with mentors which facilitated these relationships, or “I guess just being relatable”. Students did not cite having similar identities (ie. race or gender) but instead opted for the shared experiences in their everyday lives that allowed for a strong sense of connection, understanding, and relatability. This “relatableness” extended to their experiences in schooling and during the pandemic, humor and values, and shared struggles and challenges.

*I think the more relatable we are, the closer we get, I think....We can relate, kind of, especially with talking about the whole pandemic, and how it really affected us in our school.*

*Just, I don't know, not feel alone, like I'm not the only one having this problem.*

Actually, almost all students stated that I had been one the mentors/adults who they had really connected with.

*You're just fun to talk to. You've got a lot of humor.*

*I mean, I guess you, because you're just so... You get it. And it's just like you are funny and just someone I would love to be around.... I feel like as you, as the oldest daughter, me as the oldest daughter, I think we relate a lot. And a lot of things that you say in your lessons, I think they're relatable and it's like... I guess back to the part where making me feel welcome is what you say. I'm able to relate to, which I never thought I would because everyone's like... Nobody understands me. But honestly, I just think you need to find those people, or somehow the people find you and you realize that you found someone who has been through things that you have been through.*

The students express admiration and appreciation for my ability to understand them, suggesting that I demonstrate empathy and understanding, which are crucial elements in building a supportive and trusting relationship. The second student identifies similarities between themselves and me, particularly in our roles as oldest daughters. They believe that these shared experiences contribute to a sense of camaraderie and mutual understanding. This



shared identity fosters a deeper connection between me, as mentor, and the student, as we can relate to each other's perspectives and challenges. She also mentions that she finds the lessons relatable, indicating that I incorporate personal experiences or insights into my teaching. This relatability enhances the student's engagement and receptiveness to my guidance, as they can see parallels between their own experiences and my teachings.

Empathy, shared experiences, relatability, and acceptance is necessary in fostering meaningful relationships between mentors and students. The mentor's ability to connect with the student on a personal level and create a supportive environment contributes to the student's growth, development, and sense of belonging within the mentorship relationship. These relationships can only be fostered through time and commitment which happens when mentors come back every semester to continue the development of these relationships.

One student provides insight into her perspective on student-mentor relationships and the importance of compatibility and authenticity in such connections. When I ask her if she enjoys having a mentor she responds:

*Yeah, I do, but it just depends on if I like the person and not. If it's just not clicking, then I might not want to have a mentor because having different opinions can [mean] mentoring me to be like them and not to be yourself. So having someone who's mentoring to be yourself is definitely better than having someone who's mentoring you as just strictness. Just being what they were taught to be like.*

The student expresses that her enjoyment of having a mentor or tutor depends on her personal connection with the individual. She emphasizes the significance of liking the person and feeling a sense of compatibility. Once again suggesting that interpersonal dynamics play a crucial role in the engagement with the mentoring relationship. The student expresses concerns about the potential impact of differing opinions and mentoring styles on her own identity and development. She highlights the risk of being influenced to conform to someone else's expectations rather than staying true to herself. This reflects her awareness of the importance of

authenticity and individuality in the mentoring process. She mentions also that “It’s not clicking right now” with her mentor, mainly due to differences in age as well as the fact that:

*We have totally different storylines, point of views, different interests.*

She attributes this to differences in age, background, and interests between herself and her mentor. This suggests that mismatches in these areas can hinder the effectiveness and satisfaction of the mentoring relationship. However, she recognizes the value of diversity in perspectives, acknowledging that she and her mentor have "totally different storylines, point of views, different interests." Despite the current challenges in their relationship, the student’s acknowledgment of this diversity suggests an openness to learning from different experiences and viewpoints.

This student highlights the importance of compatibility, authenticity, and diversity in student-mentor relationships. It underscores the significance of mutual understanding and respect in fostering productive mentoring connections, while also acknowledging the potential challenges that may arise when differences in background and perspective exist between mentor and student.

In conclusion, the mentor-student relationships within after-school programs like CCA exemplify the profound impact of genuine connection and relatability. As described by the students themselves, having a mentor goes beyond academic support; it's about finding someone who understands and empathizes with their experiences. The shared stories, humor, and values between mentors and students create a bond that transcends age or professional status. It's this relatability that fosters a sense of belonging and acceptance within the mentorship dynamic.

The students' insights shed light on the importance of authenticity in mentoring relationships. They express a desire for mentors who mentor them to be themselves rather than imposing strictness or conformity. This highlights the need for mentors to respect and nurture

the individuality of each student, fostering an environment where students feel free to express themselves without judgment or pressure to conform.

Additionally, the challenges that arise from differences in age, background, and interests underscore the complexity of mentorship. While diversity in perspectives can enrich the mentoring experience, it also requires a willingness to navigate and appreciate these differences. Ultimately, the success of mentor-student relationships hinges on mutual understanding, respect, and a genuine commitment to the student's growth and well-being.

Essentially, mentoring in after-school programs serves as a catalyst for personal growth and development, providing students with not only academic support but also a sense of connection, understanding, and empowerment. Through empathy, shared experiences, and acceptance, mentors play a vital role in shaping the lives of the students they mentor, fostering relationships that extend beyond the confines of the program itself.

## **IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT**

In this study I wanted to explore the impact of programming in students' perspectives on and connection to their identity and community, particularly through their own sense of Latinidad as it's the one common marker for this after-school program. I begin by providing context to the demographic makeup of the program, emphasizing the limited exposure students have to diverse Latine identities outside of their own Mexican heritage and the enriching experiences they encounter through the program's exposure to different nationalities, religions, and cultural practices. This exposure serves as a **catalyst** for identity exploration and appreciation, fostering a deeper sense of connection to their own Latine identity as exposure to diverse cultural elements and interactions with peers facilitate the cultivation of pride and appreciation for one's heritage.

Students understand their identities through three main lenses: their race, their culture, and their personality. Students experience their Latine identity mainly through 1) their racial

perception and societal stereotype and 2) family expectations imposed on them through their culture. Students express the challenges which have led to ambivalence and hatred towards their Latinidad, primarily through the role of religion and conversations about mental health highlight the intersection of cultural norms, familial expectations, and personal beliefs. Still, some students highlight that their Latine identity is not the sole marker of their being, choosing to identify more with their personality and personal traits/social behaviors underscoring the transformative impact of programming on their self-perception and interpersonal interactions.

Overall, I provide a comprehensive exploration of identity development within the context of a Latine-focused after-school program, weaving together personal narratives, cultural insights, and critical reflections to illuminate the complex and nuanced nature of identity formation among second-generation immigrant students.

#### EXPOSURE TO DIFFERENT LATINES

RLP is directed at Latine/Hispanic students from South Philadelphia; most of the students originate from Mexico. They all, but one, speak and understand Spanish to some extent. The one who does not speak Spanish is indigenous and speaks Nauhalt. Because these students live in South Philadelphia and attend school in the area most of the other Latines they encounter in their everyday lives are from Mexico as well. Other Latines in Philadelphia tend to be from Puerto Rico or the Dominican Republic, however they tend to live in North Philadelphia so there's not much exposure in school either. Students do not tend to meet Latines outside these three main countries. However, in RLP, students were exposed to people from El Salvador, Peru, Ecuador, and Brazil. Students were also exposed to Latines who were not from the majority religion (Catholic) like Christians, Agnostics, and even Jews. For many students, even myself, it was my first time meeting a Jewish Latine. Mentors also came from different parts of the country, and we had different experiences growing up depending where we came from. There was a lot of learning from each other in RLP due to our different backgrounds even though we all shared the same identity of being Latine/Hispanic.

The diversity within our Latine identities was an extremely valuable asset to students. For many it was the first time being exposed to so many different types of Latine people, both in terms of ethnic origins, and, more importantly, in the values they carried with them. For many students what it means to be Latine is modeled by their parents, family and community, most of whom are older and are themselves first generation immigrants.

Mentors and RLP serve as examples of how to manage your Latine identity and your American identity. These students are not Mexican or American only, they are Mexican-American, they are second-generation immigrants trying to find their place in society. Growing up in the United States as children of immigrants they have had to learn how to navigate this country mostly on their own as there was no one to teach them how to navigate this society, they learned as they parents learned. They have been trying to contend who they are, are they Mexican? American? Both? How can you stay true to your Mexican heritage while living in the US? What if there's aspects of their Mexican culture that they do not agree with? Or understand? Or feel disconnected from? How are they supposed to be proud of their heritage when it's the reason for their oppression?

#### UNDERSTANDING THEIR OWN LATINIDAD

In order to understand how programming has impacted students' relationship with their own Latinidad we must first look back at past experiences and feelings with their culture. During our interview, a student brings up her past hatred towards her Mexican heritage:

*I know I hated being Mexican when I was younger. Because I was in a mostly White school and I was like, "I hate my name. I hate my culture. I hate my language, I hate the food." Then as I started to grow up, I actually, I kind of like it. I kind of like it.*

Initially, the student expresses feelings of detachment and even disdain towards their Mexican identity, however, as they've gotten older they've learned to like that aspect of themselves. This suggests a struggle with self-identity and possibly internalized racism or cultural shame, likely

stemming from being a minority in a predominantly White school environment. However, they continued to state:

*Then when I got to RLP, my mom told me, she told me, "This is kind of a Hispanic kind of group, program." I was like, "Okay, I guess I'll join." And it's like I met so many people and it brought so many opportunities. I'm like, "Wow, that's just wow." It made me love my culture so much, even more. Because all the mural art and everybody having their own accent, and then different types of Spanish and different foods. I know my mentor would bring up some different foods that she would have in her culture, and then I would bring up mine. And it would be so much fun. Even if me and my friend are both Mexican, we both do things differently. That was so cool to learn about. [Other friend] too. It was so cool to learn about. Everybody does everything differently, even if you're the same thing. This program definitely got me to appreciate my culture even more and love it, so that's something that I definitely love them for.*

The shift in the students is not directly correlated with their participation in RLP, however, I believe their long-lasting involvement with CCA may play a role in this as this student is one of the first to graduate from all the educational programs. I believe this shift has slowly happened during their time with CCA, especially during adolescence as they grow more sure of themselves.

Still, upon learning that the program is Latine-oriented and subsequently joining, they begin to feel a sense of belonging since others in the program will share a similar identity. Through interactions with peers who share similar backgrounds and experiences yet diverse perspectives, as well as exposure to various cultural elements, the student starts to embrace and appreciate their Mexican heritage more deeply. They are able to explore and celebrate the richness of their culture. They express excitement and fascination in discovering the unique customs, foods, and traditions not only within their own Mexican culture but also among their peers who may share the same background but exhibit differences in their practices. This

exposure broadens their understanding of what it means to be Latine and fosters a sense of pride and acceptance in their own identity.

When prompted by the same question of how the program helped her connect to her own identity, a different student reflects on her journey of self-discovery and the complexities of navigating multiple identities, touching upon issues of racial perception, ethnic background, and personal identity struggles. The student sheds light on the intricate interplay between societal expectations, familial heritage, and individual self-perception in shaping one's sense of identity.

*Yeah, really. Everyone here is, for example, you and me, we're both light-skin. I remember back in eighth grade, I was like, "I'm a White girl," because I'm bright. If I say I'm Latina or whatever, people would be like, "I don't believe you." Because my old school was full of White people. Oh my God, one girl thought I was Chinese.*

*So definitely being here, I definitely learned I'm definitely not White. I definitely have some White in me because of my dad's side, but I'm not 100% White.*

*My dad and my grandma, they both were born in Brazil. But the thing is, my grandparents on my dad's side, they're from Washington State, German, European. But also my grandpa is Brazilian African-American, so he's Brazilian, actually Brazilian. But I mostly say I'm Peruvian, because I don't live with my dad. I see my dad, I saw him I think last week. But I definitely identify myself more Peruvian than my dad's side.*

The student discusses her experience of being perceived as White due to her light skin tone, which led her to question her own racial identity. This suggests once again a struggle with racial categorization and societal perceptions based on physical appearance. As she delves into her ethnic background, mentioning her Brazilian heritage from her father's side and her Peruvian identity (stemming from her mother's side), she acknowledges the complexity of her heritage, with family roots spanning across different continents and cultural backgrounds. This complexity adds layers to her sense of ethnic identity and underscores the diversity within

Latine identities. Despite having a mixed heritage, she expresses a stronger connection to her Peruvian identity, which may be influenced by her lived experiences and personal associations with her mother. The student's narrative underscores the challenges and complexities inherent in navigating identity in a diverse and multicultural society, while also illustrating the importance of self-awareness and understanding in shaping one's sense of self.

This push for a more nuanced understanding of one's Latinidad is not something which is overtly pushed for but invisibly woven into the curriculum of RLP. The Program Supervisor, mentors and I understand the difficulty of what it's like to grow up in the US while trying to balance our culture and the values that come with it. This struggle is amplified the older we get, especially in college and early adulthood. This struggle growing up and living in a bi-cultural and bilingual environment is foundational to the creation of RPL as stated by their creators. Mentors and staff play an incredibly important role in these students' lives by engaging with students in conversations around this shared struggle, something which many of us were not exposed to in our younger years. Growing up our parents were the only ones we could turn to, however, we were having very different experiences adjusting to American society which have resulted in very different assimilation processes. Our Latine culture, which ignores and silences these types of conversations, further exacerbated the struggle this students face.

### DISPUTING THEIR LATINIDAD/AMBIVALENT LATINIDAD

#### *Racial Perception*

This struggle has led many students to feel disconnected from their Latinidad. When talking to students about their Latinidad and their culture there was a lot of ambivalence towards identifying as Latine/Hispanic. One student expressed her frustration about her race being a marker of her identity, of who she is, especially when outsiders impose their perceptions onto her of who she is based on her race. During an immigration rights workshop in the program, the students did an identity wheel activity where they were asked to think about the



different identities they carry with them and how they play out in their everyday lives.

Reminiscing on that activity I ask her:

*LN: When you meet new people, do you think about your own race and your own identity?*

*Student: Yeah, because well, they don't really ask, they just assume what my race is and I don't really like that.*

*LN: Do you encounter things like that often?*

*Student: Yeah. Yeah, because they don't really see me as Mexican. They think I was Asian at first, most of them.*

This often happens to her in school with peers. She states her dislike when others assume who she is based on her looks. She then says that this is not something that happens just at school but with family as well:

*Student: It also kind of happens between family members too. Yeah. Because in Mexico, when I go visit my family, they don't usually ask my name if they're like my family or just a neighbor. They were like, oh, "Esta es la del Norte" ["She's the one from the North"]. Yeah. It kind of bothers me because that means they're saying that I'm from here [the US]. And that kind of gets on my nerves. I don't really like that.*

*LN: You don't like being differentiated?*

*Student: Yeah, because when I'm here, I'm Hispanic, not white, but when I'm in Mexico, I'm white and not Hispanic, so what am I?*

This student is clearly frustrated by what outsiders have to say about who she should be based on their perceptions of her. In our conversations she never expressed hatred towards her Latine identity and culture but hatred towards the assumptions that came with that identity about who she is/who she should be based on the identifying marker. She doesn't get the chance to define who she is as her perceived identities do that for her, reducing her to the stereotypes that come

with them. It's even more devastating when her family in Mexico reduced her to her citizenship in the US, something she had no choice over. They took away her Mexican identity due to the fact that she was born and raised in the US by perceiving her as more American than Mexican. It's clear that who she is changes based on who is perceiving her, thus, erasing her identity and the experiences that come with it, preventing outsiders from understanding what her identities mean to her. Her agency to define who she is is taken away by others choosing which marker defines her identity and bashing her for not embodying those assumptions. Identity is something that is co-constructed by others and oneself, unfortunately, more often by the former. Because of this she is positioned in this liminal space where she doesn't fit into either side as she is rejected for being "too much" of the other. How must she then navigate her two conflicting identities?

Other students approached this challenge by not engaging with their Latine identity. When asking students about their familial background, many did not know much about it. It was clear that many didn't really take pride in their heritage or knew where their family was from within their respective country. There was no interest from them about being connected to their culture within American society.

#### *Familial Expectations and Culture: Religion*

For some this animosity is rooted in the values and morals of their culture, mainly stemming in part from their religious faith, Catholicism. Religion is not a topic of our programming but it does come up in conversations quite often. One student expressed his frustration and annoyance at his mother for forcing him to participate in religious events, specifically at her volunteering him to be Jesus for the Easter Walk his church is holding. He does not wish to do it, not because he does not believe in God, but because there's a lot of disagreements he has with the church's teachings which has led him to see himself as not being religious even though he does believe in God. He states how:

*My relationship with religion is so weird, this Monday, there was a special after mini mass, I don't know, I felt kind of connected. I don't know, it's kind of desperate. I was just venting to myself, or something like that, so I don't know.*

As I continued to talk with him I shared similar frustrations I had with my own Christian upbringing to which he was surprised I was not Catholic. We continue talking about the strains our religious upbringing has placed on our relationships with our parents, so much to where:

*They pushed me to that point where I'm even thinking of Islam, just because my friend is Muslim, and he be telling me about his religion, and, I don't know, I just think it's more intriguing to me. Yeah, I don't know.*

One of the biggest frustrations with his Catholic faith, and inevitably his Latinidad, is the homophobic values so deeply ingrained in people's hearts.

*Yeah, bro, and my best friend is gay, so I can't. What am I supposed to do?, cut them out just because they're gay? There's two points of views I keep getting told like, "Oh, God loves everybody, even if you're gay, or whatever," and then, "Oh, God hates gays. Fuck off," I don't know.*

Later in the interview, I ask him what he has he learned about himself during his time in programming and he states that:

*There were a few times where I just thought about my identity, and maybe just thought about it from the workshops, like sexuality, religion; that's two that really made me think about myself.*

He says that he had never really thought about those aspects of himself before:

*Because I don't know, I just stayed as what I saw myself, or whatever, and never would think about it like, "Oh, I'm just a normal male Catholic, or whatever, and that's what I identify as."*

It's clear that this student has been critical of his religion and the values that they teach, mainly the ones dealing with respect and acceptance for queer people as his best friend is queer. These

are conversations that can't be held at home or at church as this would prompt judgment from his community and his parents. Other students have also expressed their frustrations with their religious faith, mainly their parents taking their agency away in choosing their beliefs, values and morals.

A big part of Latine culture stems from religious faith, Christianity and Catholicism. These religions were imposed on us through colonization and the erasure of our indigeneity by the Spaniards. This is something that is not talked about in our community at all; when it does come up the conversations are often shut down. In RLP, one of the week's topics was about Demystifying Thanksgiving, during this day we also talked a lot about indigeneity in Latin America and the erasure of them. We acknowledge that it's hard to have these taboo conversations with older people, even more so with immigrant parents. Often immigrant parents will blame American society and its values for changing their children which can lead to a lot of tension between them and their children raised in the US. RLP has made space for students to share the struggles they face due to disagreements with their parents and thus their Latine culture. Mentors and staff have been vulnerable in shareign their own struggles and the way in which they have navigated these tensions through their own identities as we all experience the struggles differently.

### *Familial Expectations and Culture: Mental Health*

The second area where students face challenges with their culture is when it comes to conversations about mental health and wellbeing. In Latine communities, discussions about mental health often intersect with cultural norms, familial expectations, and societal attitudes. CCA understands this and strives to demystify this topic with its community which can be seen through their Wellness Department. RLP also emphasizes mental health, well being and self care in their programming through workshops and activities. Three students share their personal experiences and insights, shedding light on the complexities of navigating mental health within the context of Latine culture.

Within Latine culture, there exists a pervasive stigma surrounding mental health issues, making it challenging for individuals to seek help. One student reflects on their struggle with familial disbelief in mental health, expressing:

*That's why I'm in therapy now, because I was not allowed to get therapy because I don't know, in our communities it's like therapy is seen as you're crazy. And it's like, "Damn, I'm not crazy. I just need to talk to somebody." I started to feel the way I did sixth grade, and I didn't get the help I needed until last year. And I'm doing therapy in secret though, because my parents don't believe in that stuff.*

Mental health challenges are often viewed as taboo topics, and individuals may feel pressure to conceal their struggles due to fear of judgment or ostracization from their community. Latine culture often emphasizes values of strength, resilience, and familial unity. As a result, individuals may feel pressure to maintain a facade of strength and positivity, even when experiencing internal turmoil or emotional distress. Therapy may be perceived as a sign of weakness or a last resort for individuals who are considered "crazy" or "unstable." Family dynamics and intergenerational expectations play a role in shaping attitudes towards mental health within Latine households. Traditional gender roles, hierarchical family structures, and cultural norms surrounding emotional expression may influence how mental health issues are perceived and addressed within the family unit. The student's experience of attending therapy in secret highlights the pervasive shame and secrecy that can accompany discussions about mental health within Latine families. Fear of disappointing or upsetting family members may lead individuals to conceal their struggles, further perpetuating feelings of isolation and alienation.

Internalized stigma surrounding mental health and cultural influences shape individuals' attitudes towards seeking help within Latine communities. Another student echoes this sentiment, admitting:

*There was this one instance where I think we were talking about mental health, and I was just*

*thinking about mine. I kind of teared up a little bit, because, I don't know, I was just thinking about it, and I really don't think about my health that much, so that did make me realize maybe I should think more about my health, and just prioritize myself.*

*I will say I'm thinking about talking to a therapist in my school, but I don't know. I'm not someone that's trying to get help, really. I'm kind of nervous letting it all out to one person.*

*That's how I am. Every single time I have a problem, or whatever, I'm just thinking I could probably fix it myself, or I don't believe in myself.*

This student highlights the reluctance to open up due to cultural norms and fears of judgment. The student expresses hesitancy and nervousness about seeking help from a therapist, citing concerns about opening up to someone else and a tendency to try to handle problems independently. This reluctance may stem from cultural norms that emphasize self-reliance and downplay the importance of seeking professional support for mental health concerns. Reluctance to seek professional support stems from feelings of self-doubt, fear of vulnerability, and concerns about judgment from others. The student mentions considering talking to a therapist in their school, indicating a potential willingness to explore avenues for support within their academic environment. However, concerns about vulnerability and discomfort with opening up to others may present challenges in accessing and engaging with mental health resources.

Another student shares with me that being at programming has helped her realize things about herself and her own mental health and wellbeing. When asked what has shocked her or surprised her and she says:

*Like I said, self-care, learning new methods. Because honestly, I think I'm a very anxious person, even though my parents don't believe it in mental health like that. I was going to be prescribed medicine, but I was like, "No, I can't do that." She was like, "No, you're not. You're not that mentally ill." What if I just kill myself? What are you going to do then?*

*I think that wasn't for me, something I related to because honestly, especially before I grew up with the Trump thing and definitely problems around the world that make me very anxious or starting high school alone made me anxious. Even though I had friends, but a lot of simple things make me anxious and a lot of overthinking. That's my thing, I overthink till I get real anxious. Which I don't know how to handle, but I think with that, it definitely helped me realize when I need to start, stop pressuring myself so much or thinking too hard because that is never good, but I think that helped me realize that the healthy habits I have or unhealthy habits I have when I work on my mental health.*

Once again we see how the student's parents' disbelief in mental health issues reflects a common generational gap in attitudes towards mental health within Latine families. Traditional beliefs and cultural norms may lead older generations to dismiss or downplay mental health concerns, contributing to stigma and barriers to seeking help. We can see how various external stressors, such as societal events like the Trump administration and transitioning to high school, serve as triggers for their anxiety, highlighting the intersectionality of individual and systemic factors that contribute to mental health challenges within Latine communities. Yet, despite familial skepticism towards mental health issues, the student recognizes their own anxiety and acknowledges the need for self-care and healthy coping strategies. They reflect on the importance of recognizing their triggers and learning to manage their anxiety through self-awareness and mindfulness practices. Through their journey of self-discovery and self-care, the student learns to recognize their own limits and boundaries. They acknowledge the harmful effects of excessive self-pressure and overthinking on their mental health and prioritize adopting healthier habits and coping mechanisms.

The narratives of these students offer valuable insights into the complexities of mental health within Latine culture. To address the stigma and barriers surrounding mental health, it is essential to promote open dialogue, increase awareness, and advocate for culturally sensitive mental health services. By fostering supportive environments and empowering individuals to

prioritize their well-being, we can work towards destigmatizing mental health and promoting holistic health within Latine communities.

### IDENTITY THROUGH PERSONALITY

When asked about the impact of the program on their identity, some students first refer to their personalities and interests as the markers of their identity:

*I mostly base it off with the things I'm interested in. I like to draw, I like to paint, I like to walk around. I get lost a lot. I put that down.*

*It definitely made me more outgoing. I was very shy, very, very shy. I remember being excited, but also very shy to talk to people. So when we did it in person, I told myself, "You're going to be friendly. You're going to be friendly to everybody. You're going to be outgoing. You can be a tiny bit shy, but not too much. You're just talking to people." Because it's true. I'm a very talkative person in general. Once I get rid of the shyness, I'm very talkative, very outgoing. I'll talk about anything, literally anything I can make a whole conversation about just one thing.*

The students' responses highlight a nuanced understanding of identity that extends beyond traditional markers such as race or gender. While these aspects may still be important components of their identity, the students emphasize other factors such as personality traits, interests, and behaviors as equally significant aspects of who they are. For these students, their personal identity takes precedence over external categorizations, which is interesting as the program caters to students based on this categorization the students don't find as essential to them. They prioritize aspects of themselves that they feel most closely aligned with and that resonate with their lived experiences and preferences.

The programming experience provided them with opportunities for self-reflection and exploration, prompting them to consider what aspects of themselves they value most and how they want to present themselves to the world. The students also discuss the impact of programming on their personality, particularly in terms of becoming more outgoing and



overcoming shyness. This transformation suggests that the programming experience not only influences their self-perception but also affects their behavior and interpersonal interactions. By acknowledging the importance of personality traits in shaping identity, the students challenge simplistic notions of identity and highlight its complexity. They recognize that identity is multifaceted and can encompass a wide range of factors beyond those commonly emphasized in societal and academic discourse.

### **FINDING THEIR PASSION**

One of the students found their passion for advocating for comprehensive sex education, boundary setting, and consent which stems from their own negative experiences growing up, particularly within the context of Latine culture. This newfound passion on the students' part is an implicit goal of the after-school program stemming from the curriculum and pedagogy through which we developed the educational workshops. We wish to expose students to topics which they are interested in in order to further develop the curiosity and engagement with these issues to hopefully inspire them to see themselves as agents capable of change. We provide students with educational workshops with a critical approach and develop activities where they can further develop their ideas around these issues. When asked if there's any social justice issues the students is passionate about they respond with:

*I'm trying to think. I don't know if this would count, but it'd be sex education, normalizing that and advocating more for that. I know me and [student's name] did it last year, but then the school district shut it down due to them saying, "Oh, these kids already know enough." But I feel like, I don't know, because I haven't been in elementary, middle school in a long time, but I know when I was around that time, nothing was offered, like health. We did not learn anything about such sex education at all. We just learned the anatomy and that's it.*

*And because of that, when I got into high school, it was last year when I finally learned. I took a whole class about sex education, but that was only a short period of time. It was not a class, it*

*was just a topic and then we moved on. So I feel like that should literally be more normalized. Because when you think about it, there's so many kids who get hurt, are sexually assaulted and they can't describe it because their parents taught them to say cookie or flower. I'm like, "Girl, no." Because if they need to ... If they want to talk about you or something, they should at least know the proper terminology so that way people know what they're talking about. Because if they told me somebody touched their cookie, I'm assuming they actually touched their cookie. You know? So that's why I feel like it should be more normalized, especially with young children so they know, you know.*

*That should be so important, because I know when I was a kid, I didn't like people hugging me. I didn't like people just picking me up. Because I would be like, "I don't know you. You're a stranger to me." But I couldn't say anything because I was told, "Oh, they're family, it's fine." I would rather wish somebody told me, "You have the right to say no. You have the right to set a boundary," which I'm currently learning in therapy, set that boundary. So it's like something we should learn at a young age so that way no kids should feel uncomfortable saying no to a family member, or a friend or regardless of who it is.*

The student's advocacy for sex education and boundary setting appears to be rooted in their own negative experiences as a child. They mention discomfort with physical affection from strangers and family members, as well as a lack of education about consent and boundaries. This suggests that their passion for advocating in these areas is influenced by their desire to prevent others from experiencing similar discomfort or harm. The student's negative experiences may have been exacerbated by cultural norms within Latine culture that prioritize politeness and deference to elders. This can result in children feeling pressure to accept physical affection or interactions that make them uncomfortable, without the ability to assert their boundaries. The student's experiences of discomfort and lack of agency in setting boundaries may contribute to their ambivalence towards their Latine culture and thus their Latinidad. They may feel conflicted about aspects of their culture that perpetuate these negative experiences, while also

recognizing the importance of cultural identity and community. Through their advocacy for comprehensive sex education and boundary setting, the student seeks to challenge harmful cultural norms and empower others to assert their boundaries and advocate for their own well-being. This reflects a desire to create positive change within their community and address systemic issues that impact individuals' experiences of safety and agency.

This student's experience sheds light on the intersection of personal experiences, cultural norms, and advocacy efforts within the context of Latine culture. It highlights the importance of recognizing and addressing systemic barriers to consent and boundary setting, particularly within marginalized communities, while also acknowledging the complexity of cultural identity and the need for nuanced discussions around cultural practices and norms. CCA touches on this need through the services they provide, primarily exemplified by the Promotoras program and its educational programs. It is not overtly stated but woven into the conversations and initiatives for the community. I would say, however, that this need for more nuanced conversations is most pushed for by RLP and its students.

Being part of the program and the organization has allowed this student to put into practice this newfound passion. The organization has a sex education program that works with elementary school aged children to talk to them about the exact things that this student has had issues with. This student has started to work as the intern for this program on a weekly basis. Being part of RLP and the elementary school after-school program has allowed for this student to also discover their passion for teaching and an interest in psychology.

*I definitely love teaching. Leading small group discussions. Yeah, if it's a small group, I love just speaking in front of everybody. Then also participating in games with the little kids and stuff or them telling me ... We're also even helping them when they're in distress. I realized, "Oh my God, I love helping these kids." I don't love it when they're sad, but I love helping them.*

*It was why I decided to do psychology because I am so confused on what to do. Everybody was telling me, "It's okay." But I'm like, "I want to do something." I don't want to go to college just for nothing. I just want to pick at least one major and then I'll change if I feel any different.*

## **RELATIONSHIP WITH SOCIAL JUSTICE ISSUES**

### **EXPOSURE & EXISTING KNOWLEDGE**

During our interviews I asked students which social justice issues they felt the most passionate about, these topics could be from the workshops we had held already in the program or topics we hadn't covered. For some students, the term "social justice" was pretty new. Some students got confused as to what that meant so I had to reframe the question to ask about issues that affect people in an unjust manner that made them angry. When I framed the question like this I got better responses.

A couple of students brought up their frustrations with the immigration process for undocumented immigrants, particularly how long, tedious, and confusing it is to navigate. Many of the students come from mixed-status families, often with undocumented parents/adults and themselves being citizens. Students expressed a want and need to help their parents in their process once they turned of age. There was not a lot of talk for immigrant rights in general but more about helping their own family and direct relatives.

For a particular student, they express a passion for LGBTQ rights and social justice issues, particularly relating to personal identity and self-expression.

*Well, something that I talked about actually, I haven't talked about this either, I haven't talked about this, but LGBTQ things. So I personally include myself in that. And I have taken action in that in seventh grade. I know I was a little young, but I told every single teacher, "I want to go by this name." I don't go by that name anymore. I go by my name now. But I was going through my little identity crisis, but I was telling a teacher, "I want to go by these pronouns." I was trying to tell every single person.*

*Even if the teachers were like, "I'm not going to be calling you by that," I was like, "I'm going to at least try to tell you." So I definitely have tried, but the things I did talk about, I don't think I have done anything about it. That one about the US citizenship, I told you I went down a rabbit hole, I was searching up things like how could I get it faster for my family, but I really didn't do anything except for just research.*

Despite their young age in seventh grade, they took proactive steps to assert their identity by requesting to be referred to by specific pronouns and a chosen name. This demonstrates a commitment to advocating for LGBTQ inclusivity and visibility, even in the face of potential resistance or pushback from authority figures. However, the student also reflects on their limitations in taking tangible action on broader social justice issues. While they engaged in personal advocacy for LGBTQ rights within their school environment, they acknowledge a lack of concrete actions beyond research and personal exploration. This highlights the importance of bridging personal passion with actionable steps towards systemic change. The student's narrative underscores the significance of personal advocacy and self-empowerment in social justice movements, while also highlighting the need for continued activism and community engagement to address broader systemic inequalities. RPL does not focus on organizing and activism but rather in creating a space for students to not only expose them and learn about these issues but as a place to share the knowledge students already carry within them. This allows students to see how prejudices are experienced similarly and differently in order to understand the nuances of systemic oppression empowering the students to see themselves as well-informed agents capable of having these conversations. RPL pairs these workshops with activities that provide them ideas for actionable steps as educators. RPL emphasizes to the students that activism doesn't necessarily only look like protesting but can be done through a simple conversation, often within the family and inner community.

A different student exhibits a passion for being well-informed and advocating for social justice issues, driven by a desire to educate themselves and others. She shares her experiences of

delving into history, politics, and current events, demonstrating a proactive approach to research and advocacy.

*I kind of do my own research. I'd be looking up a bunch of history stuff. History and then political and then... It'll be history, political, and sometimes news. But I dig deep into it. I was recently passing in Israel, but digging into that. I find out what's happening and stuff. First I find a video that interests me. And if I think... Because what I usually do, if it's like for history, if it's a video that I already watched, then no. The topic that I already researched and I watched the video, and then they said half the things that didn't really happen, that's when I dig more into it and find out what actually happened.*

Her engagement with various topics through thorough research reflects her commitment to understanding complex issues. She describes her process of investigating topics of interest, including history and political events, and actively seeking out accurate information to challenge misinformation and misconceptions. Her dedication to informing others extends beyond personal research, as she engages in discussions online, particularly on platforms like TikTok, to correct misinformation and promote factual knowledge.

*Sometimes I get in arguments with people online, but if it's a video and they're talking about it, then they're trying to downplay the situation, getting all that information wrong, then that's when like, "No, you're wrong." And I put all these websites [and tell them] come read this. I remember one time I gave them this link to this website, read this and then talk to me. Because I'm not going to listen to you.*

She recounts instances where she engaged in advocacy within her school environment, notably challenging misleading narratives about historical events like the Holocaust. Despite encountering resistance, she remained steadfast in her commitment to correcting misinformation and advocating for truth.

*And then this one time it happened during school, because we were learning about the*

*Holocaust. And this kid, he kept saying how Hitler wasn't bad, and how they were already... I watched his document, they said. He was like, "Oh, I watched this document. They were saying that he wasn't a bad person." So I got in a whole argument with him. It wasn't a history class. Just say you're not paying attention at all.*

Her awareness of systemic issues, such as racism and misinformation, has heightened as she has grown older. She acknowledges the prevalence of racist attitudes and misinformation perpetuated by individuals in positions of authority, including teachers.

*Yeah. I have this teacher, this old teacher, and I didn't realize it, but the more I think into it, I realized that he was really racist. And I have siblings that had him, and he would say that Trump wasn't a bad person, and how those people that were getting deported were the bad people. And he wouldn't say it to my class, because my class was mostly Mexicans. But he would say it to the classes in which there was very few Mexicans and stuff.*

She actively engages in conversations with her siblings, friends, and parents about these issues, emphasizing the importance of speaking up and addressing injustices.

*Yeah. I tell my younger siblings, because they're the ones that are going to have them. I acknowledge the fact that he's going to be a little racist to you. Tell the teachers about it if he says anything out of pocket. My older sister and some of my friends, and my mom and dad sometimes.*

Despite encountering troubling attitudes and injustices, she maintains a nuanced perspective on human behavior and morality.

*I feel like it interests me, because although we all have the same human body and the same mind and stuff, we all have similarities, it shows how people have different views and morality, and they show it differently, or how they think differently. I feel like it's interesting, but sad at the same time, to see them cause harm to people that are so much similar to them.*

She recognizes the diversity of views and perspectives within society, even as she condemns harmful actions and attitudes. Samantha's reflections underscore the complexity of human behavior and the importance of advocating for truth and justice amidst societal challenges.

This students' experiences highlight the power of informed advocacy and the importance of challenging misinformation and promoting truth. Her commitment to research, activism, and informed discourse serves as a testament to the transformative potential of education and advocacy in addressing social injustices. As I've stated before, RLP wishes to cultivate confident and capable leaders through accessible empowerment for all of its community. RLP does not take absolute credit for this student's approach to advocacy, she already had this motivation within her before her involvement with the program, that is not something that can be taught. Still, I do believe it can be fostered into something greater through properly engaging individuals in their own interests. This is done through the general workshops and activities but primarily done through the individual attention mentors provide their students.

#### NAVIGATING ACTIVISM: BALANCING FEAR AND CONVICTION

As part of my interviews I ask students if they have ever been involved in activism for the social issues they feel passionate about. One student states:

*Something that actually really scarred me was the Trump thing. Just because I was scared my family was going to be affected by it, and I was little, so I had a time where my parents couldn't leave without me, that's how scared I was. But I don't think it was because of that. I don't know why, but I just couldn't let them leave me alone in the house. But when I got older and I saw that deportations could happen, that made me even more scared because I don't know, I couldn't take care of myself. I was really hoping that it would never happen, which it didn't. Thank God. But it was something that I had to be aware of because I just didn't want that to happen. I just really wanted Trump to go away.*



*It was definitely widely talked about on the news, but my parents and people around me acted like nothing really happened just because it didn't really affect us anymore. But one time it did really affect me, it was in third grade when it was the day of no immigrants. It was a protest I guess. But kids of immigrants, immigrants wouldn't go to work or school. I don't know what it's called, but I was scared because most of my friends are Hispanic and they didn't go to school that day. And I was like, "Oh my God. They just deported them and their families and they didn't come." And I was crying in the recess yard because I was just so sad. I was like, "I'm all alone. There's no more Mexicans around. It's just me." And I was like bawling my eyes out on the playground, and my friend was there, she was like, "It's going to be okay. I promise nothing happened." And my mom knew. She knew. I think I went to a therapist for it, but I'm not like that with therapists.*

The student's experiences with political events, particularly those related to immigration and deportation, have left a lasting impact on her mental and emotional well-being. Her fear of potential separation from her family and being sent into foster care highlights the deeply personal and traumatic nature of these issues. The student reflects on her experiences from a young age, recognizing the weight of her fears and concerns even as a third-grader.

*I was going down a whole spiral. It's like, why are you thinking about this as a third-grader?*

This underscores the pervasive influence of political events on her life and the heightened awareness she has developed from a young age due to her lived experiences. The student mentions seeking support from a therapist in response to her fears and anxieties, indicating a recognition of the need for mental health resources to cope with the emotional toll of political turmoil. Her friend's reassurance and empathy during moments of distress also highlight the importance of social support networks in navigating difficult circumstances.

Because of the extreme impact on her mental and emotional well-being, when prompted about whether or not she has involved herself into taking action about these issues she responds that:

*Not really because it hasn't gotten to the point where I think I need to speak out. I don't know if that would be... I mean, I don't protest because my parents are scared. They're scared of everything. But I mean, there's probably been protests, but I'm not aware. I definitely think maybe people shouldn't be deported. I just think family shouldn't be separated in general. That was my fear. My fear was my parents getting deported, and then I would probably go into foster care. Just being sent away.*

The student's inability to take action or participate in activism due to her fear reflects a sense of vulnerability and powerlessness in the face of systemic injustices. Despite her awareness of the issues and her desire to see change, external factors such as familial concerns and fear of repercussions inhibit her from taking meaningful action. This highlights the barriers that marginalized individuals, particularly those from vulnerable communities, may face in actively participating in advocacy efforts limiting their agency.

When continuing to talk about social issues she mentions how:

*I mean, I know about Palestine and Israel because it happened before, but I didn't really learn about it because I think most schools don't encourage students to talk about it because everyone has their own opinions and sides. Which I don't particularly take a side because still I'm not well-informed and I just don't want to participate. It doesn't include me yet. I would support the Black Lives Matter movement, but I wouldn't do anything about it. Just in every situation, I have my opinions, but I don't do anything about it.*

The student expresses a tendency to only engage with social justice issues when they directly impact or include her. She acknowledges awareness of global conflicts like Palestine and Israel but admits to not actively learning about them due to the perceived divisiveness and complexity of the topics. Despite recognizing the significance of various social justice movements, such as Black Lives Matter, the student hesitates to actively participate or take a definitive stance. She cites a lack of confidence and fear of judgment from others as barriers to

vocalizing her opinions or taking action when prompted to explain why she doesn't take action she states:

*Because I don't have the confidence to do anything about it. Scared of what people would think, because I'm just scared of people thinking, "Why does she think that?" Or things like that. I don't want to be in the wrong side because right now people are all going for Palestine, but some people went to Israel and they get hated on, so I'd just rather not give my opinion, except if it's real clear, like the Black Lives Matter movement.*

The student's reluctance to engage stems partly from concerns about how her opinions will be perceived by others. She fears being misunderstood or criticized for her viewpoints, particularly in contentious or polarizing issues where there may be strong societal pressure to conform to prevailing narratives. However, while the student generally refrains from voicing her opinions or taking action on social justice issues, she makes an exception for causes like the Black Lives Matter movement, where she perceives the moral imperative as clear and unambiguous. The student's reluctance to engage fully in social justice activism reflects a broader tension between her personal convictions and the external pressures and expectations she feels from society. This internal conflict contributes to her sense of hesitation and inaction.

The student's reluctance to engage fully in social justice issues, as expressed in the second quote, is connected to her previous quote where she discusses her fears and anxieties surrounding political events, particularly those related to immigration and deportation. In both instances, the student reveals a pattern of hesitancy and apprehension when it comes to addressing societal injustices and advocating for change. This hesitancy stems from a combination of factors, including fear of backlash, uncertainty about taking a definitive stance, and concerns about how her opinions will be perceived by others. Overall, both quotes reflect the student's internal conflict and ambivalence towards engaging with social justice issues, highlighting the pervasive influence of fear and uncertainty in shaping her approach to activism and advocacy. Her experiences with political events have left her feeling wary and hesitant to

take action, despite her recognition of the importance of social justice causes.

## 6: Conclusion

After-school programs emerge as integral components of a holistic approach to student development, addressing academic, socio-emotional, and cultural needs while fostering community engagement and closing achievement gaps. By providing structured environments, personalized attention, and diverse opportunities for growth, these programs empower students to thrive academically and personally. Despite facing challenges such as funding limitations and accessibility issues, the literature underscores the significant benefits of well-designed and inclusively implemented after-school programs for students' comprehensive growth and success. Based on my interviews and findings, I can attest that Rising Leaders exhibits the potential benefits described above by the literature, particularly around issues of identity development for the students.

The literature states how the influence of role models and informal mentors, an integral aspect of after-school programming, emerges as a significant factor in shaping the cognitive, emotional, and social development of youth. Positive role models and mentors serve as sources of inspiration, guidance, and support, fostering confidence, resilience, and a sense of identity among students which is clearly reflected in the student experiences in RLP. The relationships that students developed with mentors and staff became the center of this project's findings as students leveraged this vast exposure of ways of being Latine in order to explore and manage their often conflicting identities as adolescent second-generation immigrants growing up in the United States.

However, it's necessary to understand that not all after-school programs work well, so what has allowed for the success of this program? I believe the role of CCA and its commitment to its values and principles is what distinguishes the RLP after-school program from others. The role of community-based organizations (CBOs) is highlighted in the literature as they play a pivotal role in shaping after-school programming, particularly when contributing to community engagement and addressing educational disparities in the community they serve. By leveraging

partnerships with schools, families, and local stakeholders through a local perspective, CBOs create inclusive and supportive environments that foster student and the community's success. CCA ensures the success of its after-school program through its clear commitment to its four guiding goals of accessibility, empowerment, representation and reflection for and of the community which are highlighted in the fourth chapter of this thesis. I measure the success of the program by evaluating the extent to which the goals of the organization were met through the student experiences highlighted in the fifth chapter. In the literature around after-school programs the extent of the success is often measured by students' academics like grades and test scores or their ability to gain admission to colleges and universities. However, RLP's goals are not solely academic but primarily focused on identity development through students' joy, so how do we go about evaluating the extent of success of these goals?

As I talk to my advisor about this I feel inadequate to speak on the extent of success in meeting these goals. How can I as an undergraduate student evaluate an organization's work? However, students' experiences and their responses in interviews and my own personal observations and experiences with the organization suggest that CCA has met their goals in not only this after-school program for high schoolers but in the rest of their educational programming.

The first goal is all about providing Accessible, Empowering and Progressive Education for All through consent-based, language justice, and anti-oppressive education. RLP strives towards this goal through the curriculum and pedagogical practices central to daily programming. At the beginning of the semester, we allow the students to choose which topic they would like to see through programming, we then take that in as the Supervisor and I wrote the curriculum. The topics of workshops span across postsecondary readiness (career exploration, college access and exposure, and student experiences while in college), socioemotional life skills (financial literacy, boundary setting and communication skills), health and wellbeing (mental health, self-care, nutrition), and social justice topics (immigrant rights,

LGBTQ+ rights, environmental justice, indigenous rights). Workshops urged the students to think critically about the issues we were covering that day, first to understand where these issues stem from, what perpetuates them, how they affect us in our daily life, how they are embedded in our culture, and what we can possibly do about them. All programming sessions are also conducted in both languages, English and Spanish. No student is ever forced to speak in a language they do not feel comfortable in or to participate in a discussion or activity they do not wish to participate in.

The second goal of CCA, to Uplift/Recognize Ancestral Knowledge Parents Carry Within Them through a multigenerational approach, is not as prominent as the other goals. RLP empowers its parents and older community members primarily through collaborations with the Promotoras as it's hard to receive parental involvement the older the students get. Throughout the semester the Promotoras have joined us in workshops about nutrition, mental health and the stigma of it in our culture, as well as in career exploration. The latter was probably the most impactful workshop for the students in terms of exposure to multigenerational knowledge and experiences as we brought medical students who immigrated from Latin America in their adulthood come talk about their experiences moving to a new country, leaving their family behind, and starting a completely new life. RLP always encourages the students to have conversations with their parents about the topics we discuss in the program to share the knowledge but also to gain insight into the perspectives their parents carry with them.

The third goal of CCA is the most important within RLP—Creating Future Leaders Through Representation—which I have extensively dove into in my fifth chapter. As I've mentioned before, a key aspect of after-school programs is providing the students with mentors and role models. RLP embodies the third goal through the volunteers/mentors that they choose to participate in this program as well as the staff that run it, all who share the Latine identity with the students. Most of the volunteers/mentors are college students enrolled in schools around the city pursuing a range of disciplines, we also have some older mentors who are either

in grad school pursuing a PhD or who have started their own business. The supervisor is also a recent college graduate who has been working with immigrant serving institutions across the city through a range of services. My key finding embodies this goal as the biggest take away students get out of this program is the ability to explore and manage their own Latine identity in conjunction with all the perspectives mentors and staff bring in. The students see themselves reflected in the mentors and staff not only based on their Latine identities or ethnic origins but more importantly in the values they share among themselves and the criticality they feel towards their culture. Mentors and staff serve as models for future possibilities of who the students can be as they learn to manage their Americaness and their Latinidad, as they explore their interests and find their passions, as they navigate college and the workplace, and as they settle into their own identities particularly around sexuality and religion.

Lastly, the last and all-encompassing goal, Working with the Community/Being a Reflection of the Community. Everything I have described so far falls under this goal as every choice made for the development of the program is guided by this principle. As we navigate the future of education, after-school programs remain promising avenues for nurturing well-rounded and successful individuals. By embracing innovation, collaboration, and a commitment to equity, we can harness the full potential of after-school programming to create a more inclusive and enriching educational experience for all students.

All of this being said, RLP is not a perfect program, perfection is something we can strive for but the ever-changing landscape of society will never allow for attainment. As part of my interviews, I asked students about areas of improvement or changes they would like to see in programming, most were pretty happy with RLP aside from a few technical/structural recommendations I will outline below:

1. Increase tutoring time - During programming students would spend the first 30 minutes with their mentors leaving the remaining hour and half for the workshop and activities. Originally students would spend the first hour with their mentors but I wanted to allow



for more time for activities as we often would run out of time at the end of programming.

The supervisor was willing to try this new structure. However, it's now clear students really missed that extra time with their mentors so tutoring time has now gone back to being an hour long for the Spring semester.

2. Better structure tutoring time - Some students requested to better structure tutoring time as they not only wished to chat with their mentors but to focus on completing homework assignments while getting the support they need. Each mentor and student are allowed to use tutoring time as they wish, however, most of the time most people end up chatting and playing games during this time which can make it difficult for other students to focus on their work if that is their goal.
3. Small group activities only - Many students shared their dislike for big group activities and participating in large group discussion. They much better prefer small group activities and discussions instead.
4. Providing Incentives - In my interviews I noticed many students were more willing to participate/speak up when they would be rewarded with food or candy. Students wish to see more of that throughout programming.
5. More art making - Almost every student stated their favorite workshop was our collaboration with the Art department where they learned to paint with watercolors as they created their own hieroglyphic/symbol. Students wish to see more art activities in the future as it creates a very relaxing atmosphere for most students.
6. I also compiled a list of students' favorite workshops/topics. The most popular workshops were Art Making, followed by Financial Literacy/Budgeting Activity, Career Exploration/Dental Students Panel, College Access, Mental Health and Self-Care, and lastly Immigrant Rights.

These are all minor programmatic changes I shared with the supervisor for the spring semester of programming which she was able to take into account in her planning. Students also

shared with me that they are more inclined to go to programming and participate if they have a friend or a relative they know in the program. Some students had a sibling, cousin or friend in the program. They were always the most comfortable participating in activities. All other students came on their own.

To end this chapter, I will now give my own recommendations for the program taking into account the limitations the program already faces. I will then talk about my hopes for the future of programming. My biggest overall recommendation is to make clear to the students what the purpose and goals of the program are to equip them to be able to share their experiences in programming with others. As I talked with students it became clear many didn't know what the objectives of the program were, many saw RLP as a place where you could get homework and college access support leaving the other focus areas out of the picture. I think it's really important for students to know what the goals of their participation in the program are in order for them to see the bigger picture of how our workshops connect to our hopes for them. I also think it's good for students to know what the program is so they can share with their friends and others to hopefully increase enrollment.

Another recommendation is to connect the workshops and activities we partake in programming to the rest of the world and students' daily lives. I tried to incorporate this by providing students with a notebook in which they were encouraged to write any and all thoughts on, our first day of programming we spent collaging a front cover for it. We would encourage them to take notes on it, to use it in activities that require writing, to keep workshop materials in it, to journal in it during programming/tutoring time. We would also provide them with reflection questions about that week's topics to think about in the following days. My goal was to create more attentive and critical observers while providing them with a place to keep all their thoughts. I think a digital version of notebook keeping could be more utilized by the students.

My last recommendation is to involve the students more in curriculum writing and/or workshop facilitation. We ask students at the beginning of the program to vote on topics they

would like to see, however they don't get a chance to specify what information they would like to see in the workshops. I'd also like to see students presenting/facilitating their own workshop or activity on whatever topic they would like. The purpose of this is to foster confidence for themselves in their public speaking abilities as it's a necessary skill for the future and to give them the agency to determine the environment they want to create in programming and in sharing information with their peers. I think most students would probably hate this idea as it would require them to speak in front of others but it would be a good exercise to get over that fear. After-school programs have the potential to be the safe places that young people need to not only learn and explore about life but a safe place where they are offered the grace to make mistakes and learn from them.

## Appendix A: Informed Consent Form

### INFORMED CONSENT FORM

#### DESCRIPTION OF THE RESEARCH

You are invited to participate in a research study on the experiences of students who participate in Puentes de Salud after-school program Lanzando Lideres.

You have been asked to participate because you are a student enrolled in the program Lanzando Lideres or a staff member in the education department.

The purpose of the research is to explore the impact of after-school programs on South Philadelphia's Latine immigrant youth and to understand how community-based organizations develop and work towards their goals.

This study will include student members of Lanzando Lideres and staff members. This research will involve two audio-recorded interviews conducted over Zoom or at a place of your choosing, once at the beginning of the program and again after programming ends. Photographs of student-generated materials from workshops will also be collected.

The recording and any transcriptions of interviews will be stored in encrypted and password protected files, without your name attached as will all notes from observations. All identifiable information will be deleted or anonymized. Only I will have access to this information, and all records will be destroyed as soon as the project is complete.

#### WHAT WILL MY PARTICIPATION INVOLVE?

If you decide to participate in this research you will be asked to complete 2 audio-recorded interviews. Your participation will last approximately 1 hour per session and will require two sessions, which will require 2 hours in total. Photographs of student-generated materials from workshops will also be collected.

#### ARE THERE ANY RISKS TO ME?

There are few anticipated risks associated with this research, as the topic and interview questions are not upsetting or embarrassing. You can choose not to answer questions, or stop the interview whenever you want without any repercussions. Your participation will not compromise your membership of the program.

#### COMPENSATION?

There will be no compensation for this research.

#### HOW WILL MY CONFIDENTIALITY BE PROTECTED?

My written study will not be using any real names or details that can clearly identify the people involved. All my notes, recordings, and transcripts will be stored with codes rather than names attached, and in my writing I will change names and specific details to ensure confidentiality.

#### WHOM SHOULD I CONTACT IF I HAVE QUESTIONS?

You may ask any questions about the research at any time. If you have questions about the research after you leave today you should contact Lucia Navarro at [lnavarr1@swarthmore.edu](mailto:lnavarr1@swarthmore.edu) or 832-473-6569.

If you are not satisfied with the response of the research team, have more questions, or want to talk with someone about your rights as a research participant, you should contact the Institutional Review Board at Swarthmore College at 610-957-6150.

Your participation is completely voluntary. If you begin participation and change your mind you may end your participation at any time without penalty, and I will destroy my recordings and transcriptions and not report anything that you said.

Your signature below is not any kind of release; it simply indicates that you have read and understood this consent form, had an opportunity to ask any questions about your participation in this research, and voluntarily consent to participate. I am giving you a copy of this form for your records.

Thank you so much for participating.

Sincerely,  
Lucia Navarro

---

I consent to being interviewed:

Name of Participant (please print): \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
Participant Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

I consent to have my workshop materials photographed:

Name of Participant (please print): \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
Participant Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

## Appendix B: Interview Protocols

### Staff Interviews

1. How long have you worked at CCA?
  - a. How did you hear about them?
2. What drew you to this job?
3. Describe the work you do in this organization.
4. What do you see as the goals of the organization?
  - a. The education department?
5. How effective is CCA at reaching its goals?
  - a. What would make it more effective?
  - b. What gets in the way?
6. How, if at all, is CCA a reflection of the community it works with?
7. What kind of educational programs does CCA provide for its students?
  - a. How would you describe the values and beliefs/educational philosophy that guides these programs?
8. Why has CCA chosen this approach?
  - a. What do you think is most effective about this approach?
  - b. What are the challenges in this approach?
9. How does CCA “promote wellness and target the social determinants of health” through its education programs?
10. How do you think participation in CCA education programs impact students?
  - a. What are the hopes you have for these students? How do you support them in these goals?
11. How many students repeat their participation?
  - a. Why do you think they return?
  - b. What, if any, differences do you see as students repeat their participation?
12. What do you think CCA is best at?
13. What are some areas of your work with students in which you would like to see CCA grow and develop?
14. What future work would you like to see CCA do with students?

**Student Interviews**

1. Tell me about yourself.
  - a. What is your name and age? What grade are you in and what school do you attend?
  - b. Where are you from? Where is your family from? How long have you lived in Philadelphia?
2. What do you usually do after school?
  - a. What activities are you involved with? What responsibilities do you have?
  - b. Were there any time conflicts with you attending RLP?
3. How did you hear about RLP?
  - a. What did you hear?
  - b. What were your initial thoughts about RLP?
4. Are you a new member of RLP or have participated with them before?
  - a. Have you participated in any other CCA education programs?
5. What led you to participate in RLP this semester? (Or what made you come back this semester?)
  - a. Was there anything that peaked your interest about RLP? What was it?
  - b. What are your expectations for this program and this semester?
  - c. What do you hope to get out of your involvement with RLP this semester?
6. Tell me about your experience with RLP this semester.
  - a. What are the highlights from this semester?
  - b. What were some challenges from this semester?
  - c. How would you rate your overall experience?
7. How welcomed/comfortable do you feel with this semester's cohort?
  - a. Is there a particular mentor or student who you have formed a good relationship with?
  - b. What has facilitated that relationship?
  - c. What would make you feel more comfortable with the program?
8. What were the goals you set for yourself this semester?
9. To what extent is tutoring/mentoring time at the beginning of the program beneficial to you?
  - a. What do you usually work on or talk about with your mentor?
  - b. Do you enjoy having a mentor/tutor? Why or why not?
  - c. How could that time be more beneficial to you?

10. What social issues interest you? Why?
  - a. Were you exposed to new topics you didn't know about before?
  - b. How, if at all, has RLP inspired you to take leadership/action for justice?
    - i. Have you ever involved yourself with activism around these issues? If yes, tell me more about it.
  - c. How could RLP better support this?
11. Based on the workshops we've had, do you feel your interests were represented?
  - a. What topic(s) did you look forward to the most?
  - b. Which topic(s) were missing?
12. What were your favorite workshops from this semester?
  - a. What did you like about them?
13. What workshops/topics did you not like?
  - a. What made them disengaging/boring for you?
14. What have been your favorite activities or discussions we've had? Why?
15. What is something you learned about in a workshop that shocked/surprised you?
16. Have you ever shared with others (ie. family, friends) things you've learned in RLP?
17. Did you learn new things about yourself through your time in RLP?
18. How, if at all, has RLP changed your perspective on the world?
19. How, if at all, had RLP helped you connect with your own identity?
  - a. With your community/others?
20. Do you think you'll come back for next semester?



## References

- Baldrige, B. J., Beck, N., Medina, J. C., & Reeves, M. A. (2017). Toward a New Understanding of Community-Based Education: The Role of Community-Based Educational Spaces in Disrupting Inequality for Minoritized Youth. *Review of Research in Education*, 41(1), 381–402. <https://doi.org/10.3102/0091732X16688622>
- Blau, D., & Currie, J. (2004). Preschool, Day Care, and Afterschool Care: Who's Minding the Kids? *NBER Working Paper Series*, 10670-. <https://doi.org/10.3386/w10670>
- Gootman, J. A., & Smolensky, E. (2003). Policies to Support Working Families. In *Working Families and Growing Kids*. National Academies Press.
- Greenberg, J. P. (2014). Significance of After-School Programming for Immigrant Children during Middle Childhood: Opportunities for School Social Work. *Social Work (New York)*, 59(3), 243–251. <https://doi.org/10.1093/sw/swu022>
- Halpern, R. (1999). After-School Programs for Low-Income Children: Promise and Challenges. *The Future of Children*, 9(2), 81–95. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1602708>
- Hynes, K., & Sanders, F. (2011). Diverging Experiences during Out-of-School Time: The Race Gap in Exposure to After-School Programs. *The Journal of Negro Education*, 80(4), 464–476.
- Mahoney, J. L., Lord, H., & Carryl, E. (2005). An Ecological Analysis of After-School Program Participation and the Development of Academic Performance and Motivational Attributes for Disadvantaged Children. *Child Development*, 76(4), 811–825. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8624.2005.00879.x>
- Rhodes, J. E., & DuBois, D. L. (2008). Mentoring Relationships and Programs for Youth. *Current Directions in Psychological Science : A Journal of the American Psychological Society*, 17(4), 254–258. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8721.2008.00585.x>

Stanton-Salazar, R. D., & Spina, S. U. (2003). Informal Mentors and Role Models in the Lives of Urban Mexican-Origin Adolescents. *Anthropology & Education Quarterly*, 34(3), 231–254. <https://doi.org/10.1525/aeq.2003.34.3.231>

Suarez-Orozco, C., Suarez-Orozco, M. M., & Todorova, I. (2008). *Learning a new land: Immigrant students in an American society*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Walker, E. T., & McCarthy, J. D. (2010). Legitimacy, Strategy, and Resources in the Survival of Community-Based Organizations. *Social Problems (Berkeley, Calif.)*, 57(3), 315–340. <https://doi.org/10.1525/sp.2010.57.3.315>