



FULFILLING THE PROMISE OF CHOICE: Challenges and Opportunities in School Choice Decisions Made by Latino Families

Executive Summary

Denver Public Schools has embarked on a comprehensive effort to provide parents with choices over their children's education. But do low-income Latinos, the largest demographic in Denver Public Schools, have access to the tools and information that can help them make an informed decision about where to send their children? To address this question, Together Colorado, Stand for Children Colorado, and the Piton Foundation commissioned research to examine how Latino parents who went through the 2012 Denver Public Schools SchoolChoice process made decisions. Several themes emerged:

- Latino families view education as key to their children's success and view involvement in their child's school as necessary to ensure their child receives the best education possible.
- Distance to a child's school is a significant consideration in school choice, especially under current transportation arrangements in the district.
- The process of choosing a school is often collaborative, involving the perspectives of key members of participants' social and community networks.
- Parents are often unaware of information on school academic performance, largely find the School Performance Framework difficult to follow when they are aware of its existence, and do not typically incorporate academic performance from the Framework into their choices.

These findings point to clear steps that Denver Public Schools, as well as all districts seeking to expand public school choice, can take to improve outreach to Latino parents:

- Comprehensive, proactive outreach using creative approaches is necessary to ensure parents understand and take action based on all relevant information. This can include capitalizing on word-of-mouth information sharing and engaging Latino community members as messengers.
- Parents are eager for more detailed information on transportation, extracurricular activities, and academic performance beyond what was presented in the choice materials utilized in 2012. In particular, the format of information presented must meet one of Latino parents' primary concerns: geographic proximity to home.
- Complex jargon and terminology interfere with the incorporation of school performance data into parents' choices and their willingness to consider the broad array of school options available. Information on school performance and school descriptions must be presented much more clearly.
- Websites need to be simple and streamlined, with an easy-to-find Spanish language option. They also need to allow school data to be searchable using geographic criteria, rather than simply comparing schools against each other.

We applaud Denver Public Schools for its current efforts to provide parents with choices over their children's education and its recent changes in outreach strategies. By improving outreach efforts to meet Latino families' particular needs, districts like Denver Public Schools can realize the full potential of school choice.

