

# CHICAGO LATINO COMMUNITY NEEDS ASSESSMENT:

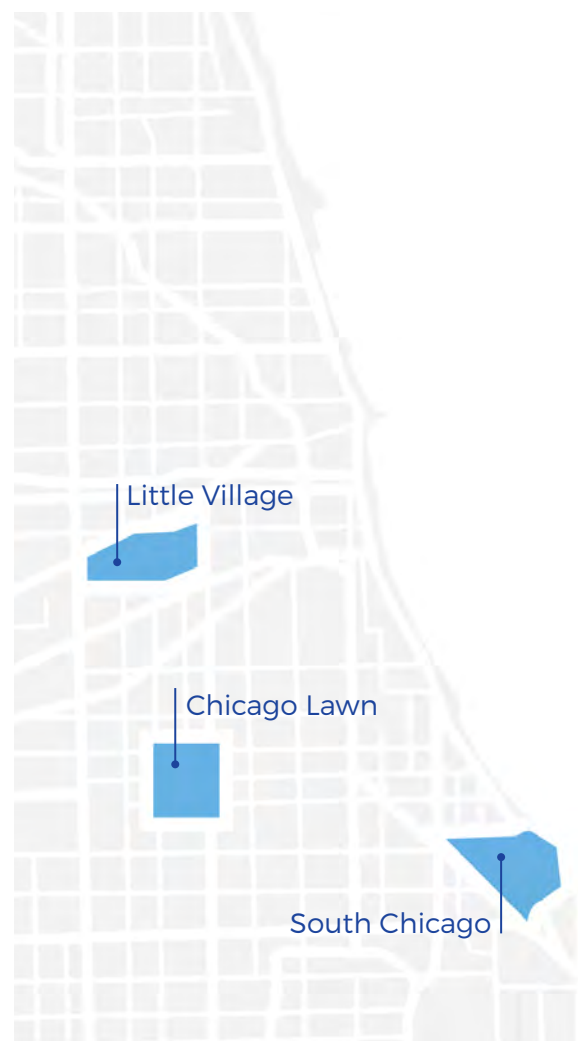
## Opportunities to Invest in Children and Youth

### PART 2: COMMUNITY VOICES



### Introduction.

This report presents findings from deep dives into three focus communities: **Chicago Lawn, Little Village, and South Chicago**. Data for these findings include 21 respondents of the Community-Based Organizations (CBO) survey. The survey was sent to 79 contacts representing 64 unique organizations, resulting in a 27 percent response rate per email and 33 percent response rate per organization. We also interviewed 17 community leaders and spoke with 13 teachers and 28 parents across three focus groups each. Altogether, the findings emerged from in-depth data collection from 79 community stakeholders. The rich qualitative data was systematically analyzed to shed light on important community assets. Data also explained challenges unique to each community, highlighting educational needs and identifying how assets can be leveraged to address needs. Before presenting key findings, it is important to understand Latino families in the focus communities, their strengths, similarities, and differences. Below, we present a portrait of Latino families in the three communities.



## Understanding Latino Families.

### FAMILY STRENGTH AND RESILIENCY

Family-oriented culture is a defining characteristic of Latino families. For Latinos, the family unit extends multiple generations to include grandparents, aunts and uncles, and other relatives. This interconnectedness and support network is critical for the Latino community, which is described by community leaders as hardworking and dedicated to providing financially for families. One community member noted, *“They [Latinos] are very community oriented, very family oriented, from what I’ve witnessed... It’s beyond mom and dad, extended family, aunts and uncles, cousins.”* This familial atmosphere can also permeate schools and influence the relationships teachers have with students and families. One teacher from Little Village remarked, *“It still feels like, it’s all families. They’re all trying to protect each other. They’re trying to do what’s best for their*

Family-oriented culture is a defining characteristic of Latino families.

*kids and they’ll do anything for what’s best for their kids.”* Another stakeholder shared, *“We’re definitely a hardworking community, however it is low-income.”* Community stakeholders described parents working multiple jobs and *“a lot of parents working second, [and] third shifts.”* Almost all community leaders emphasized Latino families’ strength and resiliency, and this trait is best described in the following observation:

**What I see, speaking more specifically to the students and parents with whom we work, is the commitment, the drive, the motivation to provide for family. To ensure that the next generation is better off. Regardless of how, ultimately, one of our students came and arrived in Chicago, the students and their families endure a lot. Whether it’s the actual journey, or just the mental struggles in English, and with that comes resilience. With that, comes a lot of that drive and determination.**

### CULTURAL IDENTIFY AND VALUES

Culture describes the entire way of life shared by a group of people, and cultural identity is a feeling of belonging to a group related to nationality, ethnicity, religion, social class, and generation.<sup>1</sup> Across the three communities, particularly in Little Village and South Chicago, stakeholders emphasized historical cultural roots and a strong cultural presence as strengths. One

<sup>1</sup><https://www.nationalgeographic.org/media/cultural-richness/> and Moha Ennaji, Multilingualism, Cultural Identity, and Education in Morocco, Springer Science & Business Media, 2005, pp.19-23

stakeholder shared that there is *“deep cultural legacy that exists...there’s a long legacy of creative projects and activism and cultural value on the south side.”*

A second stakeholder remarked, *“Yes, I think this is very much a thriving community, it’s a very culturally rich community, it has a really strong cultural identity throughout the city.”* Many stakeholders remarked that Little Village and South Chicago are predominantly Mexican and Mexican American. Some stakeholders did acknowledge the presence of other Latin Americans, including Central Americans and Puerto Ricans. Community members also noted that in some communities, such as Little Village, they suspected that at least a quarter of the population were undocumented immigrants.

Having a large and historical presence influences community leaders’ decision to remain living and serving in their communities. In Chicago Lawn, one teacher shared how cultural identity factored into the decision to serve the community:

**I guess I went into teaching to give someone ... [within the teachings of] social studies, to portray the narrative of American history through the lens of an immigrant, which is what I am, and to let my students know that everybody here belongs...and for them to actually see it manifest.**

Consistently, the themes of family strength, resiliency, and cultural identity emerged throughout conversations. These themes serve to protect and buffer many Latino children and youth from the possible adverse conditions of their communities.

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## Community Assets

### KEY FINDINGS

- ▶ Community leaders across the three focus communities were much more likely to identify community-based organizations and faith-based organizations as assets in the community.
- ▶ Parents from Little Village were more likely to mention faith-based organizations compared to parents from Chicago Lawn or South Chicago.
- ▶ In the survey of community-based organizations, community leaders reported spending the most time and resources on civic engagement/community organizing, youth development, and early childhood development and education.
- ▶ Of those who completed the CBO survey, few community leaders reported working on health issues (including mental health) or workforce development.

A community asset or resource is anything that improves the quality of community life, including people, organizations, partnerships, facilities, funding, policies, and a community's collective experience. As mentioned in the previous section, residents in the three focus communities are hardworking and greatly committed to

their families and communities. In interviews and focus groups, we asked stakeholders to identify community resources available in each community, as well as key individuals and organizations who are leading efforts to improve the quality of life for residents and advocating for greater resources. Table 8 summarizes the

**Table 8. Community Resources Reported by Leaders and Parents**

Community Resources	Little Village		Chicago Lawn		South Chicago		Overall
	Leaders	Parents	Leaders	Parents	Leaders	Parents	All
1: Community-Based Organizations (CBOs)	17	4	36	2	24	1	84
2: Faith-Based Organizations	18	6	19	0	14	1	58
3: Social Services	8	1	20	1	4	1	35
4: City of Chicago	6	1	5	0	12	1	25
5: Local Businesses	2	0	4	0	6	0	12
6: Schools	7	0	0	0	0	0	7

*\*Data represent how often a theme was referenced, not the number of stakeholders who mentioned the theme.*

community resources most often mentioned and disaggregates data by stakeholder type. Specifically, we disaggregate responses by parents (N=28) and all other community members (N=30), which represent teachers, principals, priests, hospital executives and executive directors of CBOs—collectively referred to as community leaders.

### COMMUNITY-BASED ORGANIZATIONS

As displayed in Table 8, community-based organizations (CBOs) were most often mentioned by stakeholders. Interestingly, community leaders were driving the high overall saturation, with 77 out of the total 84 references on community organizations. In Little Village, community leaders most often mentioned CBOs such as the YMCA and other youth groups and programs. In contrast, very few parents in Little Village mentioned CBOs, and they most often cited youth groups and programs such as the Boys and Girls Club. In Chicago Lawn, leaders most often cited the Southwest Organizing Project (SWOP), a parent mentoring program, PODER and Reclaiming Southwest Chicago. Parents in Chicago Lawn were aware of SWOP since most had participated in the organization's parent mentoring program. However, Chicago Lawn parents did not cite other CBOs. In South Chicago, community leaders tended to reference arts related organizations, such as SkyArt. One parent mentioned El Valor, an early education center. Overall, knowledge of community resources is not as widespread among parents, and in focus groups, parents asked for more access to information. One parent said, *"It would*

*be good to empower parents with all the information. There are many parents who do not know about these services."*

To better understand and assess CBO efforts in addressing community residents' needs, we asked CBO survey respondents to identify which issues the organization spends the most time and resources. The top two issues identified were civic engagement/community organizing and youth development, which is reflected in the qualitative data described above. The third issue CBO respondents reported spending the most time and resources on was early childhood education and development. Very few respondents reported working on health issues (including mental health) or workforce development.

### FAITH-BASED ORGANIZATIONS

There is a strong Catholic church presence in the three communities. For example, in Little Village, there is the Good Shepherd Catholic Church, Epiphany Catholic Church and School, St. Roman Catholic Church, St. Agnes of

The most frequently cited community resources are community-based and faith-based organizations.

Bohemia, and Our Lady of Tepeyac. In South Chicago, there are numerous Catholic churches including St. Michael the Archangel, Immaculate Conception, and Our Lady of Guadalupe. Chicago Lawn is home to not only Catholic churches, but also Christian, Muslim, and Jewish faith-based organizations, such as the Inner-City Muslim Action Network or IMAN.

Thus, not surprisingly, leaders across the three communities frequently mentioned faith-based organizations as a key resource in the community. In Little Village, leaders and parents referenced specific parishes and Catholic Charities. Additionally, leaders mentioned Big Shoulders Fund (BSF) and religious education programs (i.e., catechism). In South Chicago, leaders spoke about faith-based organizations in terms of churches and parishioners, though they rarely named a specific church. Only one parent in South Chicago mentioned BSF and Catholic Charities. Of all three communities, parents in Little Village were most likely to mention faith-based organizations; specifically, summer programs offered by parishes and Catholic Charities. In Chicago Lawn, leaders most often mentioned IMAN and its family health clinic, as well as work on healthy food and employment. Community leaders emphasized that IMAN serves the entire community, not only Muslims; for example, one leader shared, *“it has a free clinic on 63rd Street that serves a large number of immigrants who don’t have access to*

*insurance, Medicaid.”* Faith-based organizations were not mentioned by parents in Chicago Lawn.

## OTHER RESOURCES

Leaders and parents referenced additional resources available in the community, particularly the Chicago Park District. Distinctively, in South Chicago, teachers often referenced the Science Club at the Museum of Science and Industry, which provides professional development and curriculum and materials to teachers for use in teaching science. Schools were the least mentioned resource; and those that did mention schools were leaders in Little Village. This is likely because CBOs, such as Enlace, are working with multiple public schools in the community.

Leaders across the three communities frequently mentioned faith-based organizations as a key resource in the community.

## Challenges for Latino Families

### KEY FINDINGS

- ▶ Parents in the three communities are working multiple jobs for numerous reasons, including low wages, low educational levels, and immigration status. This leaves parents few opportunities to help children with homework or to address emotional concerns.
- ▶ The current political climate and changing immigration policies have made parents

fearful of completing registration forms for their children to participate in summer or after-school programming.

- ▶ Certain challenges are unique to one community, such as limited transportation options in South Chicago, low participation in early childhood education in Little Village, and affordable housing in Chicago Lawn.

Despite the assets and strengths identified within the three communities, gaps still exist in meeting community needs. Families face social and economic challenges to maintain financial stability and/or experience upward

mobility. Many of the challenges are reflected in the data trends presented in the overview of this report. Here, we further unpack the data trends by describing why these challenges exist for Latino families. In interviews and focus groups

**Table 9. Challenges Facing Latino Families**

Challenges	Little Village		Chicago Lawn		South Chicago		Overall
	Leaders	Parents	Leaders	Parents	Leaders	Parents	All
1: Low Educational Attainment, Long Work Hours, Absent Parents	14	9	15	4	6	6	54
2: Undocumented Status, Immigration, Feeling Vulnerable/Unwelcome	14	0	9	4	8	1	36
3: Transportation	4	0	4	2	5	9	24
4: Housing Instability, Transience, Homelessness	7	0	7	1	4	1	20
5: Child Care, Early Childhood Programs	9	2	4	0	2	1	18

*\*Data represent how often a theme was referenced, not the number of stakeholders who mentioned the theme.*

(i.e., qualitative data), community stakeholders overwhelmingly identified adult education, employment, and immigration as pressing challenges for Latino families. Transportation, housing, and access to childcare/early childhood education also emerged as challenges in certain communities. Table 9 summarizes the frequency with which these challenges were mentioned in interviews and focus groups. The table also distinguishes challenges referenced by parents (N=28) and all other community stakeholders (N=30).

### EMPLOYMENT AND EDUCATION

Across the three communities, leaders commented that parents are working multiple jobs (two to three) and have little time to help children with homework and emotional concerns. Working multiple jobs becomes a necessity because parents often work in low wage jobs due to low levels of formal education, and at times, because of immigration status.

Parents are working multiple jobs to compensate for low wages. This leaves little time to help children with homework and emotional concerns.

Community leaders highlighted current efforts to provide adult education opportunities such as GED and ESL classes. Further, one leader shared, *"In talking to other providers, we are figuring out what our best practices are, [and] aiding providers in really clearly defining who the Little Village adult learner is, so we're in the process of this project right now."* While some adults seek to further their education and expand their skillsets, the majority do not have this option and continue working long hours. As a result, children tend to be left under the care of relatives or an older sibling. As one leader noted, *"Kids are raising kids."* And most of the time, the burden of raising younger siblings rests *"especially with the girls; they are usually the family caregivers, especially if you are an older girl, you are at home and taking care of brothers and sisters."*

### IMMIGRATION

The current political climate and changing immigration policies have created great trepidation within communities; specifically, regarding administrative requirements like completing forms and accessing basic resources and services. Community leaders noted that while some residents are undocumented, in many cases, families are comprised of members with mixed status. Therefore, even if the person completing the forms is not undocumented, there could be someone in the family who is, which leads to an overall fear of sharing personal information. Community leaders reported that parents are fearful of completing registration forms for their children to participate in summer



or after school programming. Further, recent changes in the CPS volunteer verification policy have deterred Latino parents from volunteering during and after school. As one community leader shared:

**When CPS shifted around the accessibility, it had a ripple effect on involvement and afterschool programming. One of the programs had a long history of bringing back alum to mentor and tutor in an after-school program. After July 1, 2018, that was pretty much completely eliminated because of level 1/level 2 clearance. And administrators are cracking down because of fear that something might happen [to them].**

Teachers also described the traumatic effects the current immigration climate has had on children. One teacher described how third and fourth graders were concerned about the possibility of a parent being deported and never seeing him again. Immigration concerns are causing anxiety among children and adults.

## **IN SEARCH OF AFFORDABLE HOUSING - CHICAGO LAWN**

Across the three communities, community stakeholders reported high mobility as families search for better and more affordable housing. High mobility has a negative impact on schools as it disrupts student learning. A South Chicago community leader explained:

**Many of the students, for whatever reason, move a lot. They don't stay in one place. So, there are always students transferring in and out [of schools] .... And the other challenge is that a good 10 percent are considered homeless."**

In Little Village, community leaders also reported high mobility, with students transferring in and out of schools because families continually look for affordable housing. Additionally, gentrification is increasing the cost of living for residents of Little Village. One community leader elaborated on the impact of gentrification on affordable housing:

**The neighborhood is gentrifying a little bit, and property values have gone up. Our community doesn't have the income to support that, so people are looking to either go somewhere cheaper, or in some cases, people are actually looking to buy houses and find a little bit more stability for their families."**

Stabilizing housing and reducing vacant lots has been a focus of community organizers in Chicago Lawn. According to Local Initiatives Support Corporation (LISC), vacant properties— whether empty or with residential, commercial, industrial, or mixed-use buildings— can attract crime, create unsafe conditions, lower the value of surrounding properties, and have negative impacts on mental

health.<sup>2</sup> With support from LISC Chicago, SWOP partnered with Brinshore Development and United Power for Action and Justice to fundraise over \$11 million for its *Reclaim Southwest Chicago* initiative. Through this initiative, SWOP purchased and rehabbed 100 units of the 673 vacant lots. Community leaders in Chicago Lawn are very aware of this initiative and its positive impact.

### LIMITED TRANSPORTATION OPTIONS - SOUTH CHICAGO

Another challenge that emerged, particularly in South Chicago, is inadequate access to public transportation. Parents shared that high school children are traveling two to three hours, each way, on public transportation. Available train stations are located far from South Chicago, and few bus routes exist. One parent suggested, *“It would be ideal, if there were more bus routes or if the bus came more frequently.”* Although there is a Metra station in South Chicago, the cost is almost twice the cost of Chicago Transit Authority [CTA] (~\$4.00 versus ~\$2.25), and compared to the CTA student fare, Metra is 5x more expensive (~\$5.00 versus \$0.75). As one parent concluded, *“The cost of Metra is too much, so it is a last resort. And the red line is still far from here. If there were another bus to take us to downtown, it would be more convenient.”*

While stakeholders mentioned transportation across the three communities, in Chicago Lawn stakeholders acknowledged that they had access to multiple bus routes; however, accessing the city’s downtown remains a challenge since CTA train stations are located further away from the neighborhood. In Little Village, the issue of transportation centered on “safe passage” through the community for children and youth seeking to participate in enrichment programs. As one community leader summarized, *“When we talk about access, it’s not simply just having a (free) program, but asking can a child attend and preserve their safety or their quality of life, and sometimes the answer is no.”*

In South Chicago, parents shared that high school children are traveling two to three hours, each way, on public transportation.

<sup>2</sup>[http://www.lisc.org/media/filer\\_public/3f/e1/3fe1ae5d-cdb4-43d7-88bc-5e7825fa3a6a/issue\\_brief\\_vacant\\_property\\_strategies.pdf](http://www.lisc.org/media/filer_public/3f/e1/3fe1ae5d-cdb4-43d7-88bc-5e7825fa3a6a/issue_brief_vacant_property_strategies.pdf)

## INCREASING PARTICIPATION IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION— LITTLE VILLAGE

Of the three communities, Little Village is the youngest and most populous, and while childcare and early childhood programs seem to abound, *“there’s thousands of children who do not attend any kind of schooling or early childhood program before they have to enter Pre-K.”* This leader went on to state, *“the fact of the matter is that a lot of our children are either staying home, going to a home provider that is not quote-unquote technically, official or whatever, an actual, I think the term is ‘licensed’ So...that unfortunately is something that happens all across.”* An education leader corroborated this perception by stating, *“Attendance in preschools is normally horrific. We really worked hard to improve that.”* This leader believes the lack of commitment to early childhood education is reflective of when parents believe learning begins, which he conjectures is first grade when students start receiving letter grades. The leader explains:

Unfortunately, in a community like ours, when a parent sees the letters A, B, C, D or F, that resonates for some reason because that’s what they experienced growing up. And what happens is that there’s a mentality that learning starts more in first grade because that’s when they get real grades, and then preschool and kindergarten are seen more sometimes as extended daycare.

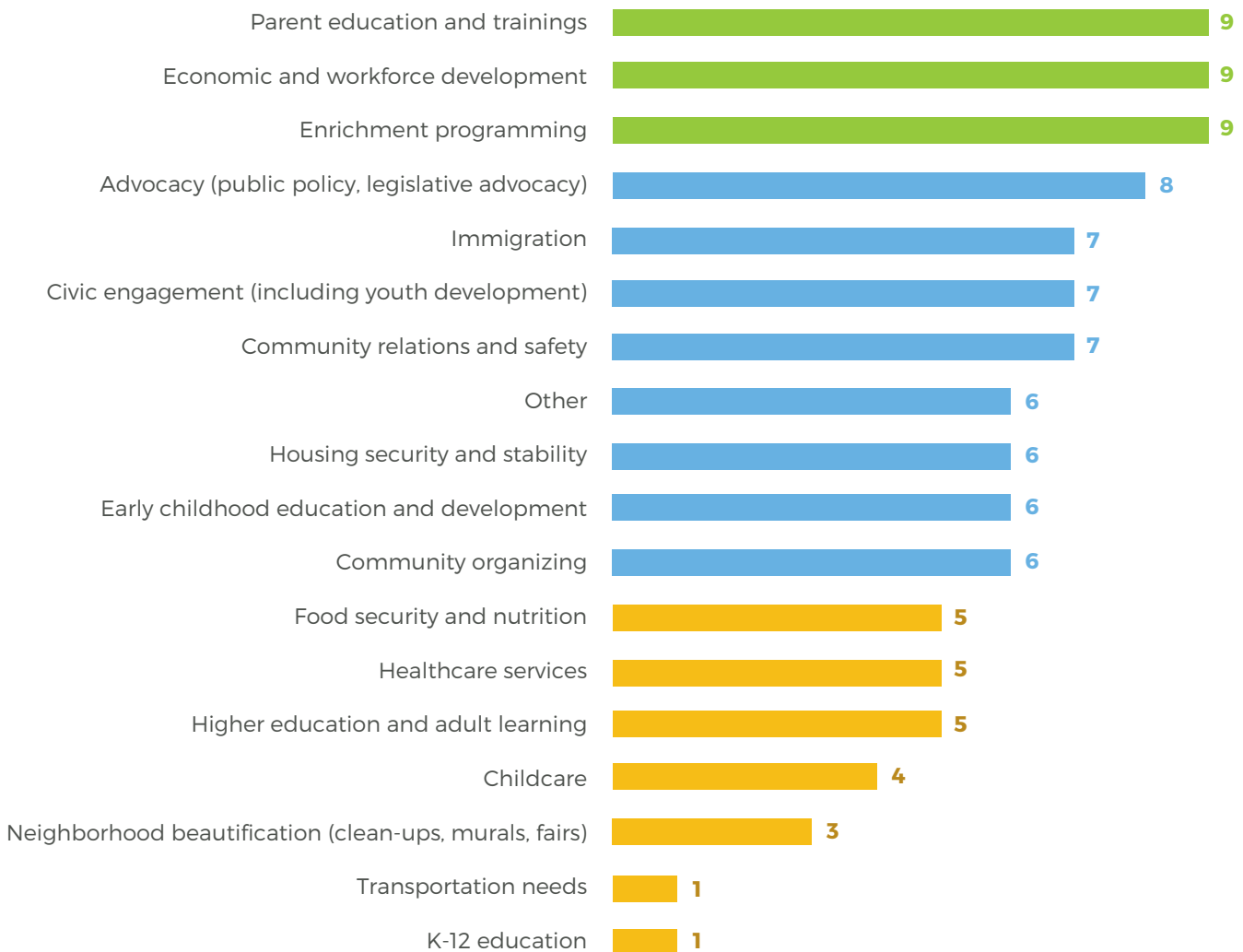
Nonetheless, some parents do understand the value of quality childcare and early childhood education. One parent remarked, *“From my experience, there is a need for programs for young children, children from months to 4 years, maybe more programs, [and] nurseries.”* According to leaders, another challenge with increasing participation in early childhood education is the CPS Universal PreK (UPK) application and registration process, which asks parents to apply online. This assumes computer literacy and access to internet. While parents have the option to call a phone number or go to a Family Resource Center (typically a public library), it is unclear how parents are gaining information about UPK and its process. One leader commented:

Parents don’t like the [CPS UPK] process because you have to go online and apply, then you have to go to another site, then you have to come in [to the school] and register. And most of the time, it’s not even at the local school, you have to go to other places for Pre-K...and principals don’t understand why CPS is treating preschool registration differently than K to 8.

**CBO ISSUE AREAS.** In the CBO survey, we asked organizations to identify the main issue areas they work on (see Figure 9). While many of the issues reported in the survey align with challenges described in interviews and focus groups (i.e. affordable housing, transportation,

and early childhood participation), some issues do not. The top three issues organizations reported working on were: parent education and trainings, economic and workforce development, and enrichment programming (after-school care and out-of-school time enrichment opportunities). Many organizations are working on immigration issues as well as community relations and safety (i.e., community safety, community, and police relations).

**Figure 9. Issues Organizations Mostly Work On**



Source: Survey of Community-Based Organizations

## Educational Needs of Children and Youth

### KEY FINDINGS

- ▶ Children’s need for mental health services emerged consistently in the three focus communities and across various stakeholders.
- ▶ Parents reported insufficient student support services, and believe that subsequently, children are being overidentified for special education.
- ▶ Community stakeholders reported limited recreational spaces, including green space.
- ▶ Community stakeholders acknowledged the need to support students and parents during the transition to high school; however, greater emphasis was placed on gaps in availability of high-quality out-of-school time programming for middle school children.
- ▶ Parents and community leaders, specifically those working in and with schools, reported incidents of cyberbullying in schools where staff appear unaware of these incidents.

In interviews and focus groups, stakeholders discussed the social, emotional, and learning needs of children living in the communities. Table 10 shows the five educational needs most

often mentioned by parents (N=28) and leaders (N=30) in each community. In this section, we summarize the gaps and concerns that emerged under each category in the table.

**Table 10. Children’s Social, Emotional and Learning Needs**

	Little Village		Chicago Lawn		South Chicago		Overall
	Leaders	Parents	Leaders	Parents	Leaders	Parents	All
1: Mental Health, Trauma, SEL Skills	9	3	9	11	2	11	45
2: Special Education, Special Services	7	6	1	6	5	8	33
3: Enrichment Opportunities	7	1	4	2	1	9	24
4: Peer Relationships, Peer Pressure	3	2	4	2	2	5	18
5: Transitions to High School, College and Career	7	0	5	3	1	0	16

*\*Data represent how often a theme was referenced, not the number of stakeholders who mentioned the theme.*

## MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES FOR CHILDREN

### INCREASING SCHOOL COUNSELORS AND PROVIDING TEACHER TRAINING.

The need for mental health services for children emerged consistently in all communities, across various stakeholders. Teachers reported being approached by parents to help address their children's emotional concerns but noted that they are not qualified to provide counseling for students. Thus, teachers reported needing more counselors in schools. One teacher stated, *"The children are witnessing so much violence and upheaval in their own lives. We need more counselors."* Parents emphasized the need for more social and emotional learning in schools. One parent succinctly captured this sentiment by suggesting that schools *"focus not just on academics, but on social emotional learning in the community we live in."* While teachers are concerned about not being qualified to support the emotional needs of students, parents are equally concerned that teachers do not have the time or space within the education system to



Focus not just on academics, but on social emotional learning in the community we live in.

really focus on the emotional needs of children. Parents reported that schools place great emphasis on testing and measuring academic performance. They acknowledge that teachers are under pressure to demonstrate academic improvement. One parent explained:

**It's not [just about] education [learning], it's emotional [well-being of students]. Teachers are very stressed. The poor teachers don't have time to focus on social emotional learning. Students are stressed. There is no space for students to express themselves. [The school environment is] Do this, don't talk, don't laugh, do your homework.**

### RETHINKING SCHOOL DISCIPLINARY APPROACHES.

Community leaders agreed that schools need to do more to address the social and emotional needs of children as opposed to focusing solely on resolving behavioral concerns with punitive measures. Some leaders mentioned working with schools to address this issue. For example, Erie House is working with schools on implementing restorative justice practices, not only with students, but also with parents and school staff. A primary goal of the work is to show school staff how to divert from their initial instinct to suspend a student, and instead find other ways to resolve disruption or conflicts. One community member noted, *"It's kind of like a zero tolerance for any of those things [behavioral disruptions] ... how do we step in with families and try to figure that out?"*

## SPECIAL EDUCATION SUPPORTS AND SERVICES

### OVERIDENTIFICATION AND INADEQUATE SERVICES.

Consistently across the three communities, parents reported insufficient learning supports for students, and, subsequently, believe children are being overidentified for special education. Parents feel that schools are quick to identify students as special education without taking the proper time to assess and inform parents in culturally responsive language. One parent shared:

**All I notice is that they [schools] want to identify children as special education, give him that designation, there is a deficit or give him medication. So, his grades do not matter because he has a deficit. We come from a different culture, so we do not realize that they are identifying as...they use unfamiliar words here.**

Moreover, parents report that after students are identified for special education and receive an Individualized Education Plan (IEP), there are inadequate special education services. In one instance, a parent shared that her child has an IEP because the school requested an evaluation and determined her child qualifies for special education. Although the IEP requests an aide for the student, services are yet to be rendered. The parent shares: *"We have an IEP, and my son needs a teacher to support him, but he still does not have the teacher assigned to him. This was three to four months ago... When you ask the principal a question, she responds so rudely."*

## COMMUNICATION GAPS BETWEEN FAMILIES AND SCHOOLS.

Parents shared concerns about communication with school leadership and staff, particularly around special education identification and services. One parent reported that her child was identified for speech therapy. The parent shared that the child spoke clearly in Spanish, but *"I not am not in the school, so I do not know what is happening in the classroom. What is causing or provoking an issue? Communicate with me in my language. I do not speak English. They said he had trouble with the letter r."* Fortunately for this parent, her pediatrician informed her of the rights to access speech therapy without a special education designation. The parent stated that she advocated for speech services, despite displeasing the principal.

Two-way, open communication, in Spanish and English, is needed between families and schools regarding students' needs.

## **SCHOOL STAFF LACKS COMMUNITY TIES AND AWARENESS.**

Parents noted that most teachers do not live in the communities and, aside from working in the schools, do not spend much time in the communities. As a result, parents reported that educators are unfamiliar with family situations, such as if the child is witnessing domestic violence, and community happenings, such as if there was a shooting in the neighborhood. One parent went on to state, *“They [school leaders and teachers] do not take time to assess and reflect on why students behave the way do in the classroom. It is simply, the child is hyperactive. Perhaps, there are other solutions than identifying them as special education.”*

## **RECREATIONAL SPACE AND ENRICHMENT OPPORTUNITIES**

### **SPACE FOR PLAY AND RELAXATION.**

Community stakeholders reported limited green spaces, especially in communities like Little Village, which is densely populated. One community leader explained, *“we’re a very land locked neighborhood, so finding green open space is also something that would be great and having use of occupying those spaces.”* Where green spaces do exist, community members worry about crime in parks and safety of playground equipment. One community leader would like elected officials to take greater interest in addressing needs that would be addressed swiftly in other communities, such as a rundown playground. The leader would

like to hear from elected officials, *“we’re trying to change the culture of messaging around this.”* However, the leader said, *“that doesn’t happen in our community. And I hear it differently when I’m talking to my peers in other neighborhoods.”* Further, recreational spaces provide families and children an opportunity to unwind after a long stressful day at work and school, and community members contend that this is much needed. Another gap in communities is the lack of swimming pools. As one leader noted, *“Chicago’s surrounded by water. It would be nice if we would have funding for a pool.”*

While some out-of-school programs do exist, there are limited slots and a lack of enrichment and quality.

**ENRICHMENT OPPORTUNITIES.** In addition to recreational spaces, community stakeholders perceive a need for more enriching, engaging and high-quality out-of-school time opportunities. One stakeholder commented, *“There are no programs that encourage children to do something constructive...everything is in the suburbs or downtown.”* While some



programs do exist, parents shared that most have extremely limited slots, and some lack an enrichment component. One parent expressed the following sentiment:

**There are no productive activities such as maintaining a community garden, robotics workshops, or working with the adolescents. The parks have activities, but they are limited in space. I think the activities have been disappearing due to lack of investment, not because there is no need."**

The gap in quality programming is evident in quotes such as an educator describing an afterschool program: *"some of our students stay for after school program at our school, but it's not really a program. It's just like, sitting in a room."* The lack of high-quality and continuous enrichment opportunities for adolescents is further discussed in the subsequent section, *Transitions to High School, College and Career*.

## **BULLYING AND CYBERBULLYING**

For some time, schools have been working to reduce and deter bullying. Bullying is defined as intentional, repetitive harm to a victim, and a power imbalance between the victim and the perpetrator(s) of the bullying behavior.<sup>3</sup> Bullying and cyberbullying share many similarities: both may cause considerable distress to the victims; both often occur in part from a lack of supervision; incidents usually start at school and have an impact on the school day; and victims

are most likely to be targeted by someone they know.<sup>4</sup> Research suggests that girls are more likely to engage in cyberbullying than boys, and accounts from parents seem to align with this finding.

Parents and community leaders, specifically those working in and with schools, reported incidents of cyberbullying in schools where staff appear unaware of these incidents. Stakeholders reported knowing of cyberbullying occurring in schools or having firsthand experiences with their own children being cyberbullied. One parent reported observing a change in her daughter's demeanor and attitude toward school. The parent saw her daughter's anxiety heighten and desire to attend school diminish. Eventually the daughter informed her parent that another (female) student and the student's mother were sending death threats through a phone message application. The daughter shared that *"she had*

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<sup>3</sup> <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/0143034313479697>

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

*not said anything because they threatened her that if she told anyone, they would kill her mom and sibling.”*

Many of our qualitative findings on cyberbullying incidents mirror the research. For example, research shows that most cyber-victims do not alert adults, especially those in the school, out of fear that they will not be believed or a lack of confidence in educators’ ability to understand or address the situation appropriately. Parents shared that they reported cyberbullying to school administrators who were dismissive. One parent shared, *“I went and talked to the principal, I showed her the messages and she said it was just children being children. Don’t pay any attention to it. Meanwhile, my daughter was receiving death threats.”* Another parent theorized on why schools are not addressing cyberbullying as follows:

**Perhaps, because teachers are busy with their work, they miss the bullying or do not have time to speak with students. Or teachers are dismissing students’ complaints. The bullying is going unaddressed. There needs to be someone who speaks to the students and parents about this issue to resolve it.**

For educators, the issue stems from students’ access to phones and social media. One educator shared, *“We’re dealing with a bunch of nonsense fights because of Facebook Live.”* Educators noted that arguments that begin on

social media escalate into physical fights that are documented and posted onto social media. Parents commented on the social pressure for adolescents to have phones. Stakeholders agreed that addressing cyberbullying is not only the responsibility of schools, but also parents since most adolescents and youth are on their phones in the late evening and early morning hours.

Related to cyberbullying are issues of self-esteem and human development as children enter adolescence. Leaders stated the need for community organizations to provide seminars on healthy relationships in adolescence and address changes to the human body before they occur, such as preparing girls for what will happen when they begin menstruation. This request was particularly emphasized for children in Catholic schools, where there is speculation of *“discomfort in having those conversations; yet parents want others to have those conversations with their kids.”*

Healthy relationships in adolescence, self-esteem, and cyber responsibility.

## TRANSITIONS TO HIGH SCHOOL, COLLEGE AND CAREER

In 2007, the University of Chicago Consortium on School Research released groundbreaking research that found 9th grade academic performance and educational engagement to be key indicators of the likelihood to graduate high school.<sup>5</sup> While stakeholders acknowledged the need to support parents and students in the transition to high school, they also identified a gap in the middle school years. Community leaders stated that parents need access to information about high school opportunities that exist in a city with open and selective enrollment and school choice. Beyond information, community leaders emphasized the need to help parents understand the process of applying to high school and supporting their child as they navigate the transition to high school. According to one stakeholder, middle school is *“when parents stop becoming involved in their kids’ education. And it happens right at sixth grade...parents think their kids are adults when they’re not.”* When asked about the greatest gaps for children in their community, a second stakeholder shared that her organization conducted a program analysis and found programming gaps for children ages 8 to 12. The community leader went on to state, *“That’s why by the time they get to high school, they’re already disengaged.”* A third community leader underscored the lack of continuity in

Parents believe the likelihood of success in 9th grade is predicated on the quality of their elementary and middle schools.

programming, especially as students transition to middle and high school. He went on to state:

**A student might go to an after-school program for four years of high school or three years of middle school, but if there’s not a continuity to internship opportunities or continuous mentorship opportunities to build on, ...then that doesn’t mean much.**

Like community leaders, parents believe the likelihood of success in 9th grade is predicated on the quality of their elementary and middle schools. One parent commented, *“When you ask what is needed, students are not prepared for the future, to attend high school, to go to college.”* The parent went on to comment on the lack of science classes and overall learning. The parent went on to state, *“If students get good grades, they can go to Whitney Young. If they qualify and go, then*

<sup>5</sup> Allensworth, A.M. & Easton, J.Q. (2007). What Matters for Staying On-Track and Graduating in Chicago Public High Schools. Consortium on Chicago School Research at the University of Chicago. <https://consortium.uchicago.edu/publications/what-mattersstaying-track-and-graduating-chicago-public-schools>

*what happens? The students haven't had biology [in middle grades]; so, they are not prepared; [now] they have stress, depression, even though they are intelligent."*

Parents with children in public charter high schools reported satisfaction and supports for

their children to learn about postsecondary opportunities. In Chicago Lawn, SWOP is focused on engaging high school graduates who are not enrolled in postsecondary. Focusing on the opportunity youth (ages 16-25), SWOP is building collaborations and partnerships with city-wide organizations on job training.

## Basic Needs of Children and Youth

### KEY FINDINGS

- ▶ Children not only live with the stress of potential violence in the community, but many are also witnessing violence at school and at home, such as bullying and domestic violence.
- ▶ Community leaders raised concerns about residents' access to health care, including vision and dental care for children.
- ▶ Community leaders noted the impact language barriers have on children, and the need for schools to respect bilingualism and welcome dual language. However, the extent to which schools are

addressing language barriers depends on the school leader.

- ▶ In all three communities, teachers reported the negative impacts of students' overuse of technological devices, specifically lack of sleep and decreased attention in the classroom.
- ▶ Although CBO survey respondents reported immigration and workforce development as important issues to prioritize, the organizations are not spending time nor resources on these issues.

Children and youth's educational needs are exacerbated by the conditions of their social environment. In all three communities, children, and youth function with the stress of potentially or actually witnessing violence. They live in food deserts, have limited access to health care, all

while succumbing to over engagement with technological devices, which leads to insufficient sleep and lack of attention. Children and youth also shoulder the burden of serving as English translators for adults. These themes, captured in Table 11, are further examined in this section.

**Table 11. Basic Needs Impacting the Education of Children and Youth**

Basic Needs Impacting Education	Little Village		Chicago Lawn		South Chicago		Overall
	Leaders	Parents	Leaders	Parents	Leaders	Parents	All
1: Safety, Crime and Violence	10	4	8	4	5	4	35
2: Health, Food, Nutrition, Sleep	7	1	9	2	6	5	30
3: Language Barriers, English Fluency	8	2	9	2	2	3	26

*\*Data represent how often a theme was referenced, not the number of stakeholders who mentioned the theme.*

## **SAFETY NEEDS: SECURITY AND SAFETY**

### **STRESS OF POTENTIAL VIOLENCE.**

Exacerbating students’ educational needs is the violence they witness inside and outside the home. Although none of the parents reported a serious crime incident against them or their children, they do live with the stress that something could happen to their children. As one parent described: *“I’m always saying ‘be careful.’ I haven’t had a bad experience, and I live where there is more gang presence, and you could hear the shootings. Thankfully, I have never seen anything, but it’s a stress.”* One community leader added that parents *“want to know their kids are safe going to and from the parks and field houses.”* However, like parents, the community leader shared, *“I have not noticed a huge gang problem here in terms of the types of violence. I don’t think we’ve had the kind of gang violence that they’ve had in other places.”* Community stakeholders report

that violence spikes in and near vacant lots, *“both on the commercial corridor and foreclosed homes.”* Therefore, *“It’s kind of a chicken and egg – when despair and not a lot is happening, violence tends to be right there, so if we can find opportunities – recreation, employment – and you give people alternatives, some of that violence will go away.”*

### **EXPERIENCING AND LIVING IN**

**VIOLENCE.** Children not only live with the stress of potential violence in the community, but many are also witnessing violence at school and at home. For example, stakeholders reported that children are being bullied at school and living in homes where domestic violence and sexual abuse is occurring. Community stakeholders, especially in Little Village, discussed collaborative efforts among partners to coordinate services for victims of domestic violence. One community stakeholder described this partnership in the following manner:

There's a strong collaborative building right now around domestic violence. How do we coordinate care especially because there are such high needs, that we are doing referrals and how are we being thoughtful about how we do referrals?

A second community stakeholder shared the challenge victims of domestic violence face when deciding to leave their abuser:

A mom is maybe involved in a domestic violence situation and decides to stay with the partner because where do they go with their three or four kids? How are they gonna afford to pay a rent? That barrier of really finding affordable housing and, even in an emergency, shelter spots are limited for women and children.

Community stakeholders also noted that beyond school and home, children hear gun shots and in some cases witness violence. One community stakeholder shared a recent shooting that occurred while children were at recess on school grounds. The community stakeholder went on to state, *"There were four fourth graders who saw the incident take place, witnessed the perpetrator and they were traumatized."* The stakeholder reported rapid response by the school counselor who reportedly told the teachers, *"There's more to this than just what they saw."* The community stakeholder went on to explain that *"Because children experience trauma all the time, often times they're not*

*recognized as such, and I think that is a huge piece of the puzzle when you're looking at youth."* Not discussed, but clearly disconcerting, is the emotional toll this experience takes on children and their educational performance.



Because children experience trauma all the time, often times they're not recognized as such, and I think that is a huge piece of the puzzle when you're looking at "youth."

## PHYSIOLOGICAL NEEDS: HEALTH, FOOD AND NUTRITION, REST

**ACCESS TO HEALTH CARE.** At a community level, community stakeholders raised concerns about residents' ability to access health care, including vision and dental care for children. One community stakeholder stated, *"Healthcare is another big need. A lot of people don't get it through employment and for one reason or another they do not apply for or receive Medicare, Medicaid, or ACA."* The lack of access

to healthcare affects students' ability to see in class, and/or have all the appropriate forms submitted to schools on time.

**ACCESS TO HEALTHY FOOD.** In addition to access to healthcare, community leaders and parents are concerned about inadequate access to healthy food. Schools play a vital role in safeguarding against child hunger. For the most part, leaders reported that schools provide two meals a day to children (breakfast and lunch), and during the summer, community organizations, such as the YMCA, step in and provide meals. Teachers reported ensuring students eat at schools but noted concerns about the quality of school lunches. As one educator shared, *“a lot of our students are on free and reduced lunch, and I think that just the government lunch is garbage. And they are not getting healthy meals.”* Parents agreed and added, *“Food at school is also very important. The schools provide food that is healthy, according to nutritional data table, but I see more food being thrown than what they consume. I have seen the food and I would not eat it either.”*

Community stakeholders assert that food deserts are contributing to obesity rates in the community. Parents reported living in food deserts where many businesses have closed. One parent went on to share: *“Currently, children have to walk far distances because of the school closings, so they miss breakfast and there is nothing within the community that serves healthy treats. Sure, there is the liquor*

*store, but I am not going to have my child go in there. It's all chips. Meanwhile, we are battling an obesity issue here.”*

**NEGATIVE IMPACTS OF TECHNOLOGY.** According to community stakeholders, another contributing factor to childhood obesity is too much time on technological devices (i.e., tablets and phones). One stakeholder stated:

**We have a lot of kids who are at risk of obesity, [and] diabetes. Healthy eating is important, [but] physical activity is needed too. A lot of parents are keeping their children occupied by handing them a phone. If that is the predominant form of keeping kids occupied, it won't lead to healthy outcomes.**

In all three communities, teachers reported students falling asleep in class because they were up late on their phones or tablets. In Little Village, one teacher shared, *“I had a meeting last week [with a parent]. And I said, “The student falls asleep four times a week. What is the cause of that?” and the parent responded, “Oh, well, she doesn't like to go to bed and so, I often wake up, it's midnight, it's one o'clock in the morning and she's on her IPAD.”* In Chicago Lawn, teachers also reported students falling asleep who tell the teacher, *“Oh, I was up till 2 or 3 o'clock in the morning [playing video games].”* Teachers agree that students are spending more time than recommended on their technological devices. In South

Chicago, one teacher shared, *“we have many kids that they’ll tell you, they go home and they’re on that contraption [phone or tablet] until bedtime, and then they don’t get to play outside.”* In addition to playing video games, students are accessing social media channels and communicating with one another outside of school hours. Parents reported various cases of cyberbullying, as described earlier.

### CHILDREN AS LANGUAGE BROKERS

Previously, we discussed communication gaps between parents and schools due to language barriers. In many cases, children serve as language brokers for adults. Research shows children as young as eight, who don’t have training in translation, experience increased responsibility which leads to role reversal where parents depend on children for certain needs. While there may be benefits to children taking on increased responsibility, there can also be unintended consequences in the form of additional stress and pressure on children. Community leaders discussed the impact that adults’ language barriers have on children. One community leader remarked:

**Services that are culturally appropriate and in Spanish are important. English language for adults is also important, and I still see a lot of cases where children are translating for their parents. In certain cases, it’s okay, but in others...there are things parents don’t want to talk about in front of their kids.**

The extent to which schools are addressing language barriers depends on the school leader. In the best-case scenario, one school leader shared *“for many of my students, Spanish is spoken at home and English is spoken at school, so we have to bridge that gap. We have to be conscious within the school of the way we are teaching so students can have access to curriculum, because that vocabulary is different than what is spoken in everyday English or everyday Spanish.”* However, as reported by parents, in many cases, information is not communicated in Spanish or at all. Community leaders recognize the need for schools to respect bilingualism and welcome dual language *“so parents can actually participate in all kinds of social engagements in the community, even if they’re a recent arrival or without having to speak English first.”*

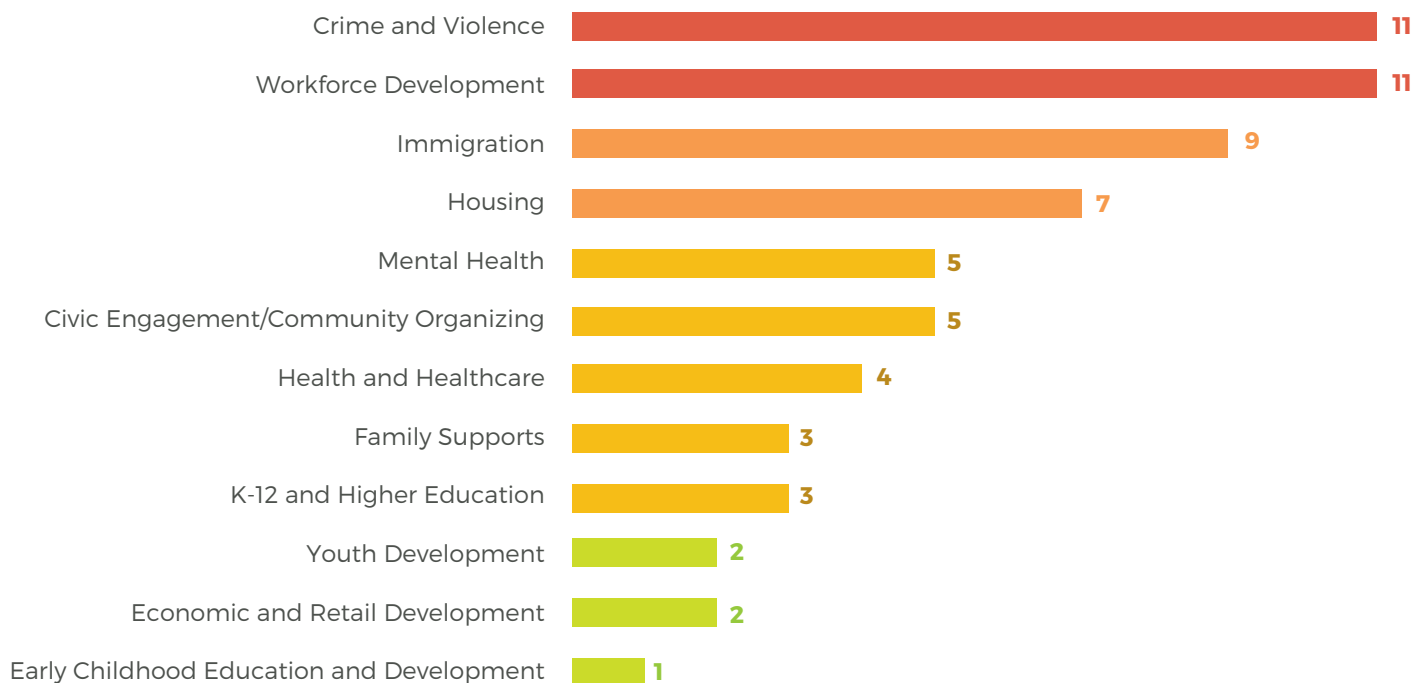
Community leaders recognize the need for schools to respect bilingualism and welcome dual language.



**CBO PRIORITY ISSUES.** In the survey of community-based organizations, we asked what issues community leaders need to prioritize in the next five years to continue improving the well-being of community residents. Overall, the top priorities reported by CBO respondents were crime and violence, workforce development, and immigration (see Figure 10). CBO respondents from Little Village and South Chicago were more likely to identify crime and violence as a

priority issue, while residents in Chicago Lawn were more likely to identify immigration as a priority issue. Almost all CBO respondents from Chicago Lawn said that mental health issues should be prioritized. Although the CBO survey respondents reported immigration and workforce development as important issues to prioritize, the organizations are not spending time and resources on them.

**Figure 10. Priority Issues Identified by CBO Survey Respondents**





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**ABOUT EDUDREAM:**

Established in 2016 and based in Chicago, EduDream is a Latina-owned education consulting firm that partners with foundations, education agencies, and nonprofits working to ensure educational equity for racially and economically diverse students. We advance our mission by providing research and program evaluation, data analytics and insights, and strategic planning. EduDream is committed to empowering communities and making research and data accessible