

NEW AMERICAN FELLOWSHIP

2021

RESEARCH SUMMARY

“EVERY GREAT DREAM BEGINS WITH A DREAMER. ALWAYS REMEMBER, YOU HAVE WITHIN YOU THE STRENGTH, THE PATIENCE AND THE PASSION TO REACH FOR THE STARS TO CHANGE THE WORLD.”

-HARRIET TUBMAN



BACKGROUND

The New Americans Fellowship is a unique 10-week program for DACA recipients hosted by the Santa Clara County Office of Immigrant Relations (OIR). This program provides college students and recent graduates an in-depth research and professional development experience and offers recommendations to County leaders for addressing new and ongoing immigrant-specific community needs.

This summer, the fifth cohort of NAF Fellows conducted community-based participatory action research (PAR) to learn more about the impact of and response to, the COVID-19 pandemic among the diverse immigrant communities of Santa Clara County.

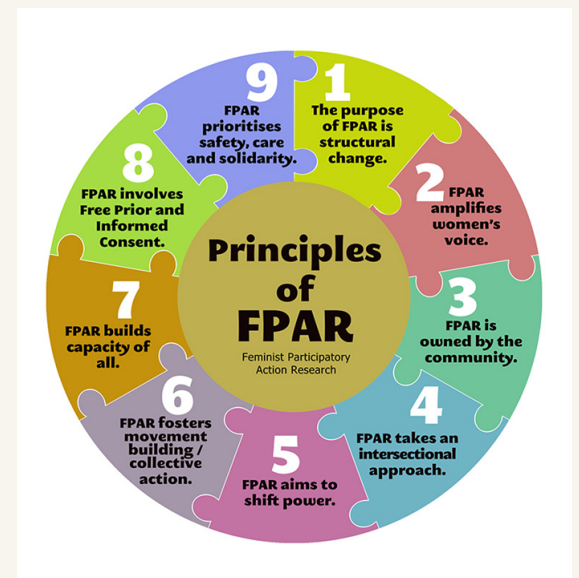
OVERVIEW OF PARTICIPATORY ACTION RESEARCH

| KEY PRINCIPLES OF PAR (Schneider, 2012, p. 153) | | | | |
|---|---|---|--|---|
| A commitment to the participation of ordinary people as co-researchers are involved in every aspect of the research | Respect for the knowledge of all participants | Mutual learning among participants | Attention to the needs of marginalized or disempowered groups and people | Action to promote social justice for those marginalized people and others like them |
| KEY GOALS OF PAR (Schneider, 2012, p. 153) | | | | |
| To produce practical knowledge | To take action and make the knowledge available | To be transformative both socially and for the individual who take part | | |

OIR Participatory Action Research challenges strict divisions between researchers and research subjects and recognizes the value of lived experience. This approach further enables participants to understand systemic issues and systems changed and shifts decision-making power back into the hands of the communities who are most affected by the issues they study. PAR focuses on social change with an equity lens, is context-specific, and implements an iterative cycle of research, action, and reflection.

BASIC ELEMENTS OF PAR:

- Research for action to enhance community building and political change.
- Seeks social justice through social/structural change.
- Collective research process that capitalizes on community knowledge of issues affecting their own lives.
- PAR supports problem solving from a strength-based, community-asset model.



RESEARCH FRAMEWORK:

The immigrant community has been disproportionately impacted by the pandemic thereby highlighting existing inequities that have exacerbated economic disparity, housing insecurity, and unequal access to quality educational supports. The Center for Law and Social Policy recently reported on deepening racial and ethnic inequities during the pandemic: 72% of Latino and 60% of Black households are in serious financial problems compared to 36% of White families.

Hypothesis: Immigrant families in the K-12 system have developed community-driven emergency response and mutual aid strategies that are foundational to immigrant recovery..

NAF researchers had the following research objectives:

- a) Understand issues and inequities affecting immigrant families by engaging in qualitative research with community members who are parents, teachers, students, workers, educators in administrative and leadership roles.
- b) Identify what has changed, increased, or intensified during the past 15 months by looking at a wide scope of factors influencing families and K-12 education including housing, mental health, digital divide, distance learning, and more.
- c) Distinguish community solutions to cope, address problems, and formulate recommendations for recovery that address deeply rooted inequities.

Outcomes: Develop shared root-cause analysis, understand current impact of the pandemic, and elevate community-driven solutions as viable solutions for equitable immigrant recovery.

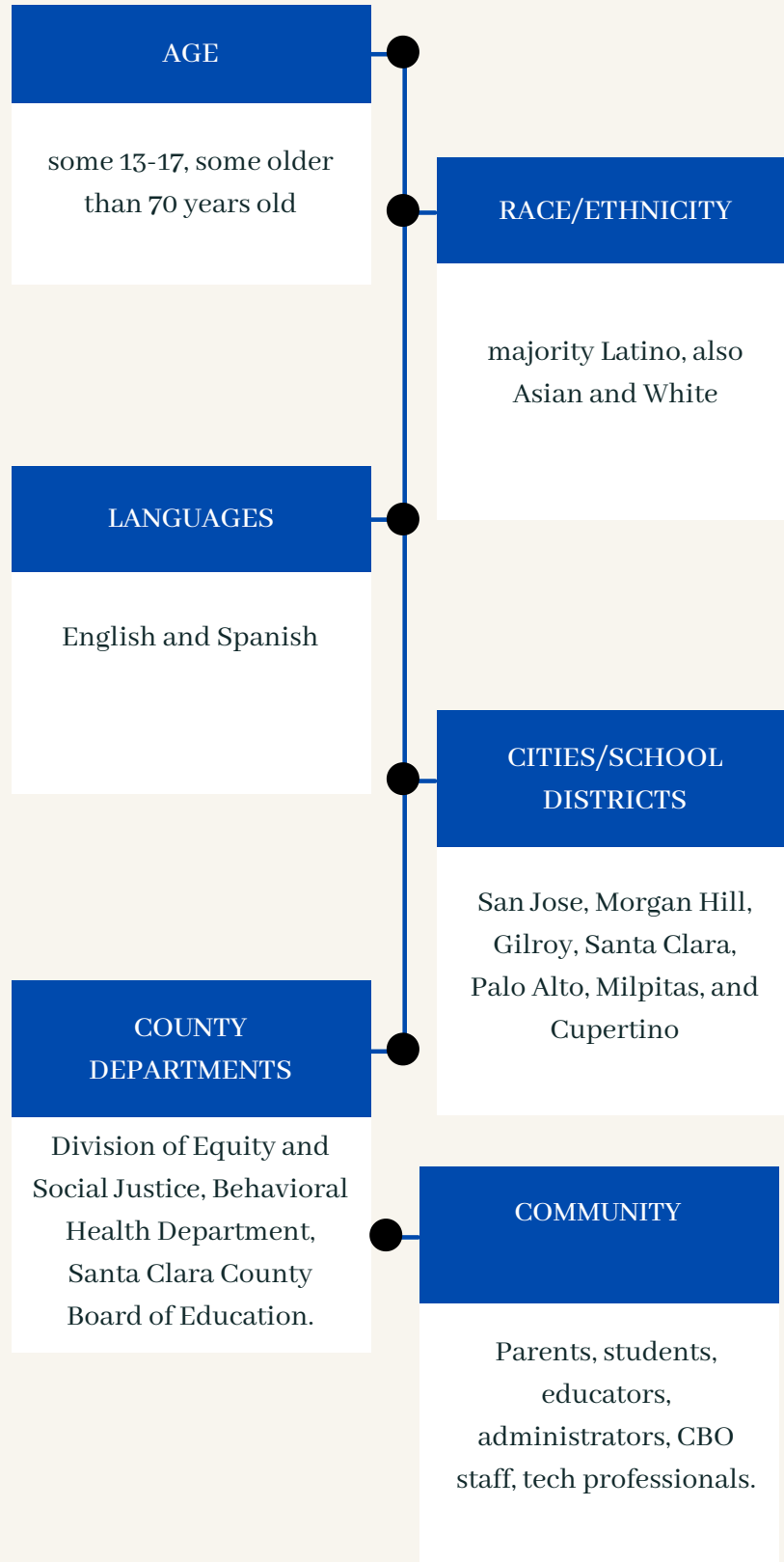
RESEARCH PROCESS:

The PAR research was Guided by the Institute for Community Research and coordinated by OIR. OIR staff members provided daily support to researchers and all participants. Fellows participated in group and individual study, group reflection, and mutual learning. They received training and mentorship by research professionals, County Executives, and Office of Immigrant Relations (OIR) staff throughout the process. After conducting formative research in the community that included informal interviews, observation, and reflection, the Fellows were able to engage in resource/asset mapping and selected a narrower topic for their project. Their intensive data collection process included 81 interviews and development of a comprehensive immigrant community survey.

Methods of data collection:

1. PAR interviews with community members, providers, educators, etc. from across the County.
2. Immigrant community survey in 3 languages to ensure perspective from immigrants with diverse background.

Interviewee Participants and Geographic Distribution





Interviews!

Fellows worked in four research teams to address the most common problems brought up by participants: digital divide, mental health, language and cultural barriers, and parent-school relations and engagement/participation.

DIGITAL DIVIDE

There is a significant disparity in access to computers and quality Wi-Fi depending on economic status and due to accumulated consequences of racial and ethnic inequities. Wealthier students usually have external access to computers and the internet, as well as access to technological coaching and instruction, therefore these students do not have to rely on school staff for support. The digital divide affects the immigrant community's ability to fully participate in the era of technology.

Community solutions described by participants included:

- Increased number of community centers with technological resources.
- Renting equipment and getting accessible free training in wide variety of languages.
- Providing materials for teachers, students, and community leaders.
- Promoting digital literacy through campaigns and partnerships.

Recommendations to address the digital divide:

- Support programs and solutions that connect low-income families with free or reduced internet access. Similar programs are offered by local districts, local internet providers, and other community-driven alternatives such as East Side Union High School District that provided Wi-Fi access to neighborhoods.
- Advocate for lifeline programs and fund Community Tech Centers.
- Subsidize low-cost or free in-home internet for low-income housing.
- Advocate to increase school funds to continue giving and updating technology for every student that needs it at no cost.
- Create relationships with high-tech companies for sponsorship of programs.

STUDENT MENTAL HEALTH

Parents' well-being impacts students' health and academic performance. School-age children are also affected by parents' access to technological devices and levels of digital literacy. Students were given additional responsibilities during the pandemic including childcare of younger siblings and house chores. Many are ostracized and isolated to deal with their family struggles and are at the same time dealing with grief, loss of family members, overall familial instability, lack of social interactions, and communication with friends. In addition to fears related to COVID, children and entire families have been overwhelmed and isolated, and have found some teachers inflexible. For example, many families felt the burden of overcrowding, rent, and risk of eviction as well as access to affordable housing while not having earned income because of the pandemic. The compromised mental health of students resulted in loss of self-esteem, anxiety, depression, online fatigue, compromised emotional intelligence, mood swings, suicidal thoughts, and increased suicidal intent. These factors impact students' academics as they have difficulties focusing and participating which results in lack of motivation and lower attendance.

Community strategies to address these problems include:

- Healing circles
- Building Connections and addressing isolation through:
- Gardening
- Cooking together
- Walking
- Dancing

Recommendations for the County related to mental health:

- Support a year-long campaign within the local Latino immigrant communities to emphasize benefits of mental health and to reduce stigma associated with mental health problems. Apply cultural humility principles and encourage Behavioral Health Department to continue to work with immigrant serving centers/agencies, fund, and partner with local CBOs and Promotoras.
- Cultural healing - Tap into the ways immigrant families heal themselves such as circles, cafecitos and neighborhood cohesion.
- Support and promote existing agencies with high levels of cultural proficiency (e. g. Amigos de Guadalupe, National Compadres Network, School of Arts at the Mexican Heritage Plaza and promotoras).
- Create a Central Hub for Families at a location in East San Jose as a one stop shop for various resources
- Relocate jail resources to mental health
- Support legislation such as AB 8 Mental Health Support that requires all schools to have mental health professionals on staff if there is a ratio of 1:600 students or contact with mental health professionals if the ratio is lower. Support and institute more pilot programs for youth mental health and implementation of SB 508 that makes services more accessible on campuses by employing mental health practitioners and using telehealth.

ADDRESSING LANGUAGE AND CULTURAL BARRIERS

Gaps in communication between parents, students, and schools often result in miscommunication, misunderstanding, translation errors, and/or other difficulties in accessing information and resources. There are also other cultural and social issues impacting parent/student/school relations including literacy levels, access to cultural appropriate and relevant information, immigration status, cultural differences, and a family's economic resources also affect engagement and parent/student/school relations.

Community identified solutions:

Advocate for more language inclusivity in education by hiring people who are linguistically and culturally competent and grounded in local communities. If translation/interpretation services are not available for some immigrant communities, collaborate with native speakers to help translate the information provided by schools which can also be an economic engine for immigrant recovery. Replicate parent engagement groups such as Madre a Madre in the Washington neighborhood of San Jose.

Recommendations to improve communication and remove language barriers:

- In partnership with local organizations establish free virtual tutoring programs in different languages.
- Provide educational navigator programs for students and parents, incentivize County employees to serve as educational resources for families/students.
- Santa Clara County should create and/or co-fund a community language bank either as an independent organization or a program of a local CBO. This will provide jobs to local bilingual/bicultural community members to help parents, schools, and entire families experience better communication while receiving services, increase their language capacity, and build a stronger community.
- Include COVID-19 resources in ESL classes.
- Organize donations of bilingual books to students and parents.
- Support legislation to add additional funding for schools to reflect the national average funding rates increased by regional cost of living.
- Support local schools and the SCC Board of Education to acquire interpreters in parent-teacher conferences and increase language access.

PARENT-SCHOOL RELATIONS

When parents and teachers share the responsibility to help students learn and meet their educational goals, parent-school relations are at their best. Parent engagement happens when teachers involve parents in school meetings or events, and when parents volunteer their support at home and at school. Other important impacts of parent engagement in schools include a better school climate and decision-making power in parent groups.


Increased parent involvement often results in better student behavior, higher academic achievement, enhanced social skills, and risk reduction.

Social inequities, language, and cultural barriers have affected parents' ability to participate in school and help students. During the pandemic these inequities have additionally burdened immigrant parents as they experience financial challenges, housing instability, physical and mental health issues, and are more likely to work in essential industries. The demanding and ever-changing schedules of essential workers and the inaccessible timing of school events and meetings make it hard for immigrant and low-income parents to fully participate in their children's education.

The digital divide, among parents and adult caretakers, impacts parents' capacity to fully support their students and respond to school requests. With students spending their schooldays at home due to distance-learning, parents had to learn how to use certain programs, applications, and resources to make sure that their children could continue to fully participate in school instruction. While there are existing resources such as parent groups, PTAs, online groups of parents, family resource centers, district specific resources (that included distribution of food and digital devices), parents still identified additional needs for culturally appropriate translation/interpretation and technological support services. COVID-19 increased workloads for parents who were now expected to be educators, employees, and caregivers.



RECOMMENDATIONS TO SUPPORT SCHOOLS, PARENTS, AND STUDENTS:



Santa Clara County Office of Education along with School Linked Services create a toolkit for parent advocacy

Santa Clara County Office of Education create collective materials that are accessible and in language that school districts can use to further support parents' capacity to participate in their students' academic development

School Districts, Santa Clara County Office of Education, School Linked Services hold countywide conference to discuss best practices in parent engagement and school support of immigrant families

Support appropriate translations of materials: translations should include simple language, not academic-level Spanish (or another language) as many parents do not have high levels of formal education



IMMIGRANT COMMUNITY SURVEY

The main goal of conducting an immigrant community survey was to complement the qualitative data that was collected through the PAR interviews with quantitative data. The survey includes comprehensive questions about the impact of COVID-19 on immigrant families and grassroots solutions/supports used to survive the direct and indirect impacts of the pandemic.

The collection of questionnaires will continue through mid-September. This survey is available online via Survey Monkey in 3 languages (English, Spanish, and Vietnamese). Thus far, participants from all areas of the county have participated in this survey.

PARTICIPANTS AND GEOGRAPHIC DISTRIBUTION

AGE RANGE

35-44

RACE/ETHNICITY/ORGIN

52%

ASIAN

27%

LATINO

14%

OTHER MIDDLE
EASTERN

10%

EUROPEAN

GENDER

65%

WOMEN

4%

GENDER FLUID

LANGUAGES CONDUCTED

SPANISH

ENGLISH

VIETNAMESE

LANGUAGES SPOKEN

SPANISH

MANDARIN

VIETNAMESE

TAGALOG

HINDI

FARSI

CITIES

SAN JOSE

LOS
ALTOS

SARATOGA

SANTA
CLARA

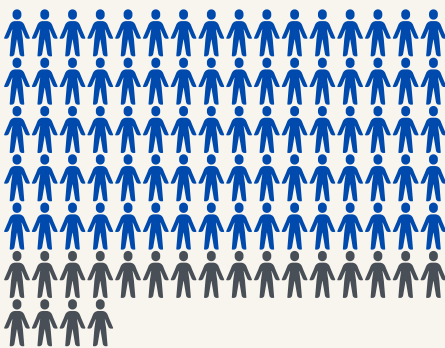
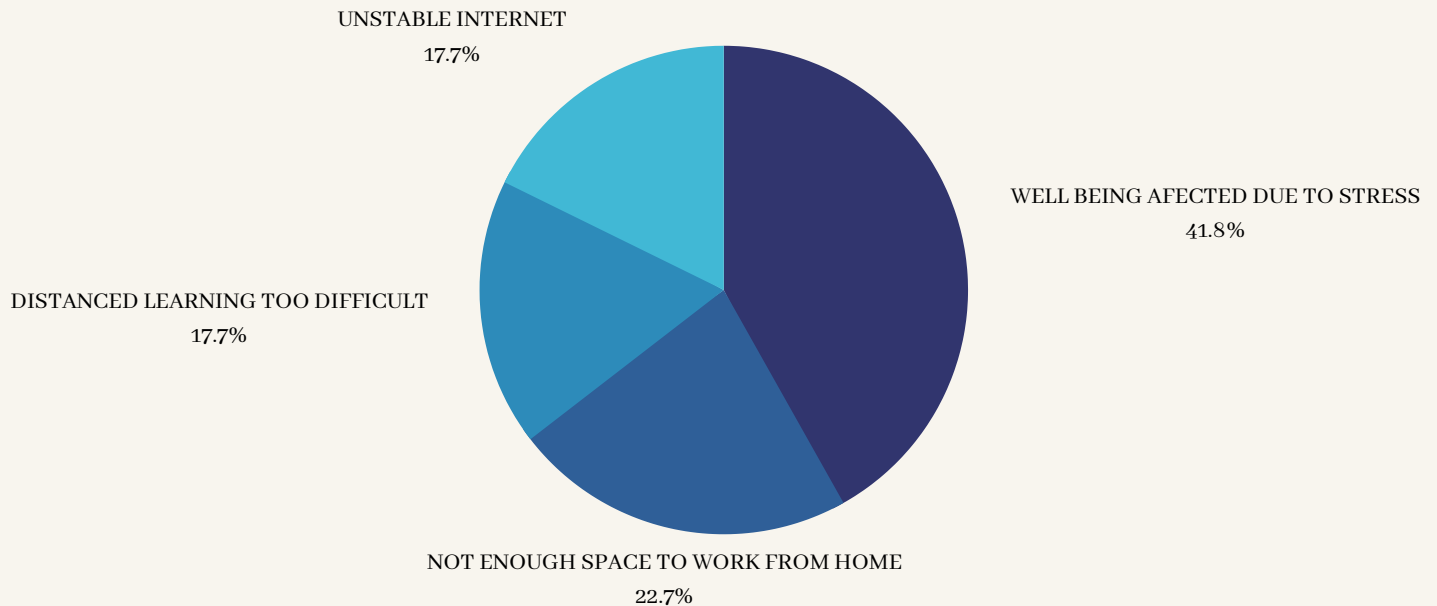
SUNNYVALE

MILPITAS

CAMPBELL

PALO
ALTO

When asked about the most pressing challenges of the last 15 months of 12 options that were provided participants highlighted:



60% of Spanish speakers and 36% of Vietnamese speakers said that they accumulated significant debt during the past 15 months, in comparison with 20% of those who responded in English.



Distance learning created additional stress and affected the well-being of immigrant respondents, along with the feeling of isolation.

Though all COVID-related resources are available in English, 20% of English speakers reported that they have had trouble finding information and resources.

The survey is ongoing, and results will be reported in September.

GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS

FOR THE COUNTY AND OTHER ENTITIES BASED ON NAF
AND OIR RESEARCH

1

Support legislation that would create regular funding for California's schools for emergency use and protocols that include public health and natural disaster emergencies

2

Increased funding for California's schools must be secured and must fund free computers and free internet access for every student in California

3

Strengthen labor laws to reflect universal labor standards, ensure workplace safety, and to include sick leave in case of public emergency and other paid leave

4

Guaranteed Universal Basic Income in the state of California

5

Create programs that address housing insecurity using an immigrant specific lens.

&

Require a significant percentage of housing options in the state be truly affordable and adopt preference policies that allow for residents to apply and move into affordable housing developments.

6

7

Work with California Immigrant Policy Center and other advocacy organizations to achieve and implement Food for All, Health for All, access to rental assistance resources, and to break down barriers to immigrant employment and access to living-wage jobs that are good for the environment.

Santa Clara County remained steadfast in its commitment to welcoming immigrants and refugees and works tirelessly to ensure that all immigrants have access to safety net programs that allow them to prosper and contribute to the County community.

To learn more about the New American Fellowship please visit our website: <https://oir.sccgov.org/new-americans-fellowship>
NAF 2020 launches June 2022.

"Everywhere immigrants have enriched and strengthened the fabric of American Life" -John F. Kennedy

2021 NAF RESEARCHERS



Juan Hernandez

UC Merced junior with a major in Political Science, participant in student government and San Jose resident.



Luis Vazquez

Junior at SJSU with a major in graphic design who has experience with local community organizations and after-school programs.



Maria Gonzalez

San Jose State junior, Child and Adolescent Development major and participant in student government.



Monica Magallon

SJSU sophomore with a major in Administration of Justice/Justice Studies and a diverse work and engagement experience.



Noemi Gavia

Holds a B. A., SNHU graduate with a major in Business Management and concentration in Public Administration. Coordinator of student resources and advocate for students' needs at a local school.



Oscar Ramirez

San Jose State University senior, Applied & Computational Mathematics major with high-tech professional experience.



Paula Izaguirre

Graduated from UC Merced, with a B. A. in Public Health and a minor in Psychology with experience in leadership programs and as a teacher's aide.



Monica O. Duarte

Completed a graduate program in Counseling Psychology -LMFT/LPCC with practical experience gained through providing therapeutic support to youth.



Yesenia Gaytan

Graduate student at Chabot College with Liberal Arts as her undergraduate major and graduate studies in Early Childhood Intervention. She is also an employee of a local school district.