

# Language Barriers for Spanish-speaking Parents Participating in School Activities: 2018-19

**DATA POINT**

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This Data Point uses data from the Parent and Family Involvement Survey of the National Household Education Surveys Program (PFI-NHES: 2019). The PFI survey collects data about students in kindergarten through grade 12. The survey asks about ways parents are involved in their child’s education, such as helping with homework, family activities, and attending events at school. This Data Point examines the barriers faced by parents of students in Spanish-speaking families<sup>1</sup> due to language when they try to participate in their students’ school activities. Please see Data Point, *Participation in School Activities by Spanish- and English-speaking Parents: 1999-2019* (NCES 2024-131), for estimated rates of participation in school activities for students’ Spanish-speaking parents from 1999 to 2019.

In 2019, about 7.9 percent of K-12 enrolled students had parents who primarily spoke Spanish at home or as a first language (**FIGURE 1**). This Data Point explores barriers those parents may face related to language.

### Is language a barrier for Spanish-speaking families trying to participate in activities at their child’s school?

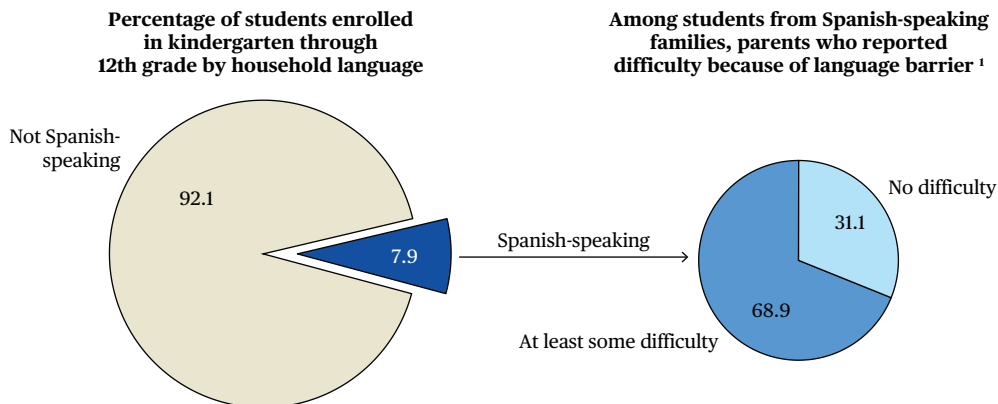
The PFI asks non-English speaking parents questions about whether they have had difficulty participating in school activities because of speaking a language other than English.<sup>2</sup> Some Spanish-speaking parents reported difficulty participating due to language barriers.

Among those students from Spanish-speaking families whose parents reported trying to participate in

activities at their school, about 69 percent had parents who reported having difficulty because of a language barrier.<sup>3</sup>

Language barriers were associated with less frequent participation in school activities for Spanish-speaking families. Overall, students in Spanish-speaking families whose parents reported trying to participate in activities had parents who attended an average

**FIGURE 1. Spanish-speaking parents facing language barriers: Percentage of students enrolled in kindergarten through 12th grade from Spanish-speaking families and, among those whose parents reported trying to participate in school-related activities, percentage whose parents reported difficulty participating because of a language barrier: 2018-19**



<sup>1</sup> Excludes 2.7 percent of students, from among students in Spanish-speaking families, whose parents reported that they had not tried to participate in activities at the students’ school.

NOTE: Students who were homeschooled full-time or part-time are excluded from this figure.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Parent and Family Involvement in Education Survey of the National Household Education Surveys Program (PFI-NHES), 2019.

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of 4.4 meetings or activities at their school. (FIGURE 2).<sup>4</sup>

For students whose Spanish-speaking parents reported trying to participate but did not have difficulty because of a language barrier, the average number of activities during the school year was 5.2.

In comparison, the average for students whose parents reported trying to participate but experienced difficulty was 4.1 school meetings or activities. This one-activity-a-year difference is statistically significant.

### Do Spanish-speaking parents report that their child's school offers language services?

Non-English-speaking parents were asked about certain language-related services their child's school offered. These services may have helped them participate in school activities. In 2018-19, among students whose Spanish-speaking parents reported trying to participate in school activities, 88 percent had parents who reported that the school provided interpreters in the parent's native language for meetings or parent-teacher conferences, and 85 percent had parents who were provided written materials such as newsletters or school notices, translated into the parent's native language (FIGURE 3).

### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Spanish-speaking families are those in which at least one parent in a two-parent household, or the only parent in a single-parent household, primarily speaks Spanish in the home or as a first language and no parent speaks English in the home. Non-English-speaking and non-Spanish-speaking families were excluded from this analysis and represented 3.3 percent of all K-12 students in 2019.

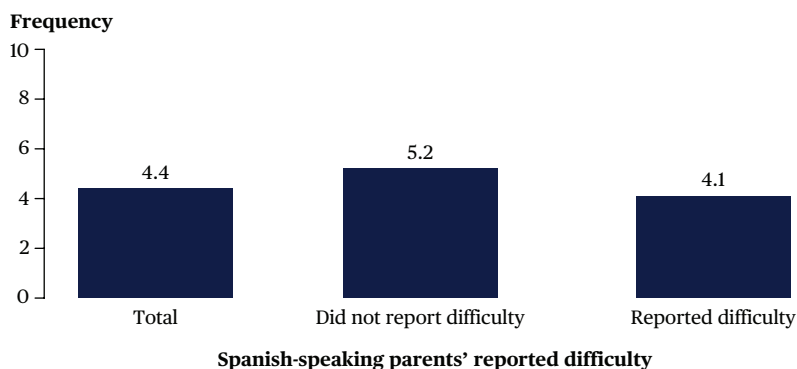
<sup>2</sup> The survey asked, "How difficult is it for this parent or guardian to participate in activities at this child's school because he or she speaks a language other than English?" The parent could respond that it was "very difficult," "somewhat difficult," or "not at all difficult."

A parent is considered to have had difficulty if they selected "somewhat difficult" or "very difficult."

<sup>3</sup> This analysis excluded the 2.7 percent of students, from among students in Spanish-speaking families, whose parents reported that they had not tried to participate in activities at the student's school.

<sup>4</sup> During the 2018-19 school year, among all students whose families reported trying to participate in a meeting or school activity, the average number of activities reported was 6.5.

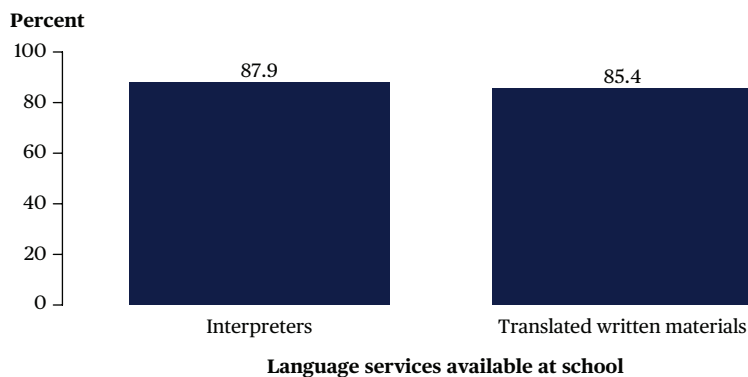
**FIGURE 2. Spanish-speaking parents' participation in school activities: Among students enrolled in kindergarten through 12th grade from Spanish-speaking families whose parents reported trying to participate in school-related activities, average number of meetings or activities attended by an adult in the household, by parents' reported difficulty participating because of a language barrier: 2018-19**



NOTE: Students who were homeschooled full-time or part-time are excluded from the figure. Also excluded are 2.7 percent of students, from among students in Spanish-speaking families, whose parents reported that they had not tried to participate in activities at the student's school.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Parent and Family Involvement in Education Survey of the National Household Education Surveys Program (PFI-NHES), 2019.

**FIGURE 3. Access to language services for Spanish-speaking parents: Among students enrolled in kindergarten through 12th grade from Spanish-speaking families whose parents reported trying to participate in school-related activities, percent of students whose school had interpreters for meetings or parent-teacher conferences or translated written materials in the parent's/guardian's native language: 2018-19**



NOTE: Students who were homeschooled full-time or part-time are excluded from this figure. Also excluded are 2.7 percent of students from Spanish-speaking families whose parents reported that they had not tried to participate in activities at the student's school.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Parent and Family Involvement in Education Survey of the National Household Education Surveys Program (PFI-NHES), 2019.