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PUBLIC POLICY & MANAGEMENT CENTER

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Newton Hispanic/Latino Community Survey

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Disclaimer

This study was conducted by the PPMC at Wichita State University. The PPMC is an independent research body unaffiliated with *Latinos Unidos*. This report was prepared by the research team and data collected from external sources. PPMC's findings are based on assumption of data accuracy received from internal and external sources. The findings represent the findings, views, opinions, and conclusions of the research team alone. The report does not express the official or unofficial policy of Wichita State University.

Background

The City Manager's Office, in association with Latinos Unidos, wants to serve as a community builder, connecting Hispanic/Latino residents and other communities and institutions in the City of Newton.

The purpose of this work is to acquire information that will inform the development of a plan to address local concerns and understand the capacity of the Hispanic/Latino community to self-advocate and navigate community institutions independently.

This project aims to understand the experiences, barriers, and concerns of the Hispanic/Latino community across the following six areas:

- Education
- Healthcare
- Finances/Financial Institutions
- Housing
- Nonprofits Organizations
- Government

This research investigates how these sectors contribute to real and perceived opportunities for economic stability and upward mobility among the Hispanic/Latino community in Newton.

Process

Focus Groups

Four focus groups were conducted with community members in Newton, providing a platform for participants to discuss their experiences and perspectives on the six priority areas. Results were coded using thematic analysis, a rigorous qualitative method used to systematically identify, organize, and interpret patterns of meaning. This approach involves coding the data, followed by categorizing these codes to uncover underlying themes that offer insights into the research question. Additionally, the feedback and themes from the focus groups were used to inform the development of a subsequent survey. This iterative process ensured that the survey questions were relevant and reflective of the community's concerns and viewpoints.

Survey

Following focus groups, a survey was conducted to identify barriers members of the Hispanic/Latino community face in accessing services in the six priority areas. The survey combined a doer/non-doer study design with perspective analysis to systematically identify real or perceived barriers by demographic characteristics, including linguistic challenges, socio-economic factors, and cultural nuances. In addition, the analysis unpacks differences in access and perceptions based on age, gender, education level, and immigration status. These findings serve as a critical foundation for developing a plan that addresses the unique needs of the Hispanic/Latino community, ensuring more equitable access to essential services in the six priority areas.

Focus Group Results

Key Findings

The PPMC conducted a series of four focus groups with members of the Newton Hispanic/Latino community to explore issues that matter in economic mobility. These were analyzed for themes, and informed survey development. Following are key findings from focus groups:

- Strong emphasis on community and personal responsibility: Success is viewed as a combination of strong social networks (family, mentors, community) and individual traits like hard work, determination, and a willingness to learn and "figure things out."
- Education is highly valued but narrowly defined: A four-year college degree is considered the gold standard of education, with less emphasis on alternative paths like trade schools.
- Homeownership and transportation are crucial: Owning a home and having personal transportation are seen as essential for stability and success in Newton.
- Intergenerational tensions exist around work ethic and entitlement: Concerns were raised about instilling the same values of hard work and self-sufficiency in younger generations who may have more opportunities and resources.
- Success is about balance, not just wealth: Participants emphasized the importance of balancing work with family and community time and cautioned against excessive material consumption.

Cross-Cutting Themes

Several themes emerged repeatedly across all domains of interest. These represent meaningful structures organizing how community members approach topics related to economic mobility. Following are cross-cutting themes impacting all key areas:

- Community Engagement: Social networks, mentorship, and family play a vital role in personal and professional development. Services should aim to build capacity and leverage existing client networks to reach more people.
- Self-Reliance: Success is linked to a willingness to persevere, learn, and overcome challenges independently.
- Balanced Perspective: Success involves balancing work, family, and community, and living within one's means. True success is about having basic needs met and time for loved ones, not just accumulating wealth.

Domain-Specific Findings

Several domain-specific themes emerged during focus groups as well, including:

- Education: A four-year college degree is seen as the primary marker of educational success.
- Housing: Housing decisions are complex, involving considerations of family needs, schools, and opportunities.
- Transportation: Personal transportation is considered essential in Newton.
- Financial Literacy: New immigrants may bring assumptions about financial systems from their home countries, which can influence their early experiences with finances in the US.

Survey

The PPMC carried out a barrier analysis asking members of the Hispanic and Latino community who live in Newton, KS about their ability to carry out tasks identified as relevant to economic development by *Latinos Unidos*. Domains of interest included housing, finances, education, healthcare, government, and non-profits. Respondents were asked to indicate if they had ever:

- Gotten a desirable job in Newton.
- Found housing of your own in Newton.
- Opened a bank account.
- Opened a retirement savings account.
- Completed college.
- Enrolled a child in preschool.
- Helped a child enroll in college.
- Purchased health insurance.
- Visited a doctor in Newton.

The survey circulated from November 2024 to January 2025. Following are descriptive statistics about data collection so far:

- Participants
 - 231
 - Male: 29%
 - Female: 68%
 - Prefer not to say: 3%
- Income level
 - Less than \$29,999: 28%
 - \$30,000-\$49,999: 24%
 - \$50,000-\$89,999: 22%
 - \$80,000 or more: 19%

- Prefer not to answer: 9%
- Education
 - No high school diploma: 29%
 - High school diploma or equivalent: 27%
 - Trade or Associate's: 26%
 - Bachelor's or higher: 22%
 - Prefer not to answer: 5%

Following are overall results from the survey describing the most pressing issues noted by respondents across all areas.

Money

When asked what would make it easier for them to do a task, respondents consistently noted that access to money was important, whether discussing education, housing, transportation, or finances. Respondents indicated a preference for opportunities to earn money for themselves and for their families; money is occasionally described as a hinderance to pursuing desirable work if less enjoyable opportunities pay better. Educational and other opportunities were often described in terms of their ability to broaden horizons and access to better paying work. *Latinos Unidos* has identified a problem that is relevant to community concerns by focusing on economic mobility. Any opportunity to enhance access to financial resources, including financial literacy, responds to this need.

Informational resources

Another major barrier consistently noted across all domains of interest was a lack of informational resources, including online resources, explaining the processes required to complete a task; this was especially the case for Spanish speakers, who frequently reported not being able to complete a task or access a service due to a lack of information in Spanish. In the case of enrolling a child in pre-kindergarten, for example, respondents noted that they could not access information about enrollment in an

accessible format. This lack of awareness of where to start or who to ask is a complete barrier disallowing access to some demographic groups.

Language skills

Related to the above, Spanish speakers frequently noted a need for language skills to carry out most of the tasks identified as relevant to financial mobility by *Latinos Unidos*. This could include:

- Access to materials in Spanish, including informational and application materials, where relevant.
- Access to assistance from others who are bilingual, especially in customer service contexts.
- Ability to speak and/or write in English, especially in professional development (education and career advancement) contexts.

This points to two opportunities. The first is in producing materials, where possible, in Spanish for distribution to Spanish speakers, and in furnishing staff in service roles with the ability to communicate with Spanish speakers, either because they are bi-lingual or by using language assistance tools, such as translation software. The second is in English language education, offering classes in spoken and written English for professional and educational contexts (resume writing, interview skills, email conventions, scholarship applications, etc.).

Help from others

As noted in the focus group results, survey respondents frequently referred to a lack of help from others as creating barriers. Several respondents noted that few places in Newton, notably in healthcare and housing, offer bi-lingual or translation services, making it difficult or impossible to access them without English language skills. Some also noted a sense that customer service agents were not always kind to people they perceived as Spanish-speakers, due to a lack of resources for communicating across languages. This barrier is related to the above two, as lack of information in Spanish and the need for English language skills are related to the necessity of seeking out help

from others for assistance with translation. It is important to note that several respondents who spoke some English still required assistance due to a lack of confidence in domain-specific vocabulary, such as in the case of financial tasks, like opening a new bank account or starting a retirement savings account.

Transportation

Survey respondents were asked questions about transportation. Most (75%) indicated that they have access to a personal vehicle. Of the remaining, 19 percent reported having access to a vehicle owned by someone in their household, while 6 percent reported having no regular access to a vehicle. In addition, one-fifth of respondents (20%) said they did not have a valid driver's license issued in the United States.

Safety and support

Survey respondents were asked a series of questions addressing feelings of safety in Newton, and feelings of the representativeness of local leadership. Survey respondents overall agreed that they feel safe in Newton (87%) and that they feel comfortable calling emergency services in Newton if they needed assistance (90%). Their feelings about local leadership were more mixed, however, with 51 percent agreeing that they feel well represented by public officials, and 54 percent agreeing that they would be willing to reach out if they wanted a problem addressed.

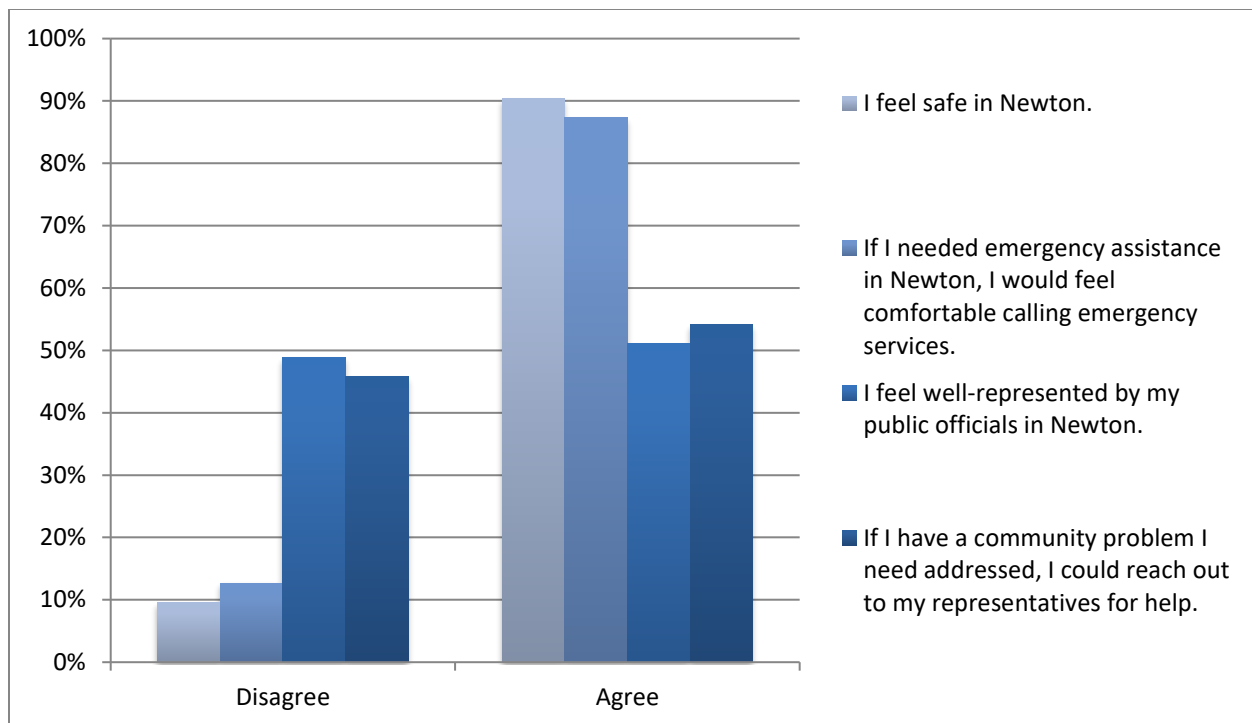


Figure 1

Respondents were also asked if they have ever attempted to reach out to an elected representative in Newton; only one-fifth (20%) reported having done so, despite most being willing. This could indicate that most respondents are not actually comfortable reaching out, or that they have never felt that they needed to. Continuing efforts to make leadership available to this community is sufficient to ensure comfortability.

Characteristics of super-doers

This section compares super-doers to total non-doers to assess if there are differences between these two groups. Super-doers are survey respondents indicating that they had done everything addressed on the survey. Total non-doers are survey respondents indicating that they had never done anything addressed on the survey.

Total non-doers were less likely to report being married than super-doers. They were also more likely than super-doers to report having a household income of below the median household income for the state of Kansas (~\$70,000/year). In addition, they

were less likely than super-doers to report being able to speak English. Of the respondents reporting that they only speak Spanish, 88 percent are total non-doers. This indicates a relationship between ability to complete the tasks identified as essential by *Latinos Unidos*, English-language skills, and income level.

Total non-doers are also likely to indicate that they have reached out to an elected representative, with 80 percent reporting that they had not. This points to a relationship between civic and other forms of engagement, indicating that people who are unable to carry out tasks indicated as relevant to financial mobility are also less able to engage with local government.

Results by Area

Respondents were asked to select from a list of priority tasks. After, the survey randomly assigned them to a condition based on whether they had indicated they had done something (doer), or they had not indicated that they had done something (non-doer). Following are themes organized by domain area emerging from questions asking doers and non-doers what makes it easier to complete a task.

Employment

Respondents were asked about their experiences searching for desirable work in Newton. Seven individuals were given the doer condition, meaning they had tried searching for desirable work, while three were given the non-doer condition, meaning they had not searched for desirable work in Newton. When asked about what makes it easier to find desirable work in Newton, respondents consistently cited three areas that make it easier: language skills, education, and documentation.

Language skills was the most frequently cited barrier, with respondents indicating that Spanish-only speakers may not find good-paying work without improvements to their understanding of English. One respondent bluntly stated that they could not find a job that pays sufficiently for them to feed, house, and care for their family. Related to this

was documentation, with several respondents mentioning the need for valid identification, such as a driver's license, to assist in the job search. Finally, a few respondents mentioned needing to be better educated to find desirable work in Newton; the relationship between education and employment opportunity is important in this domain as well.

Many respondents noted, however, that finding desirable work in Newton was appealing because of the proximity to family and friends living there. While some respondents noted challenges with feeling accepted in Newton as a Latino/a person, most felt it was desirable to stay in town if possible.

Housing

Respondents were asked about their experiences searching for housing in Newton. Eleven individuals were given the doer condition, meaning they had tried searching for housing in Newton, while seven were given the non-doer condition, meaning they had not searched for housing in Newton. When asked about what makes it easier to find housing in Newton, respondents consistently cited three areas that make it easier: money, safety, and help from others.

Safety was the most frequently cited barrier, with several respondents noting that housing in Newton was sometimes not safe to live in, especially in terms of availability of plumbing. Respondents mentioned finding housing in Newton inadequate for their needs, because affordable housing often felt unsafe for habitation. Related to this, several respondents mentioned that having more money would make it easier to find housing in Newton, increasing their scope of affordability. Several respondents also mentioned that having housing close to family and friends, and that having good neighbors, were priorities for them when searching for housing anywhere. For people with family and friends living in the area, then, moving to Newton is more desirable than for people with family and friends living elsewhere. This is closely related to the above

finding that searching for work in Newton is more desirable for those seeking proximity to friends and family.

Finances

Respondents were asked about their experiences with financial accounts, including bank and retirement savings accounts. Eleven individuals were given the doer condition, meaning they had opened an account at some point in the past, while eleven were given the non-doer condition, meaning they had opened an account sometime in the past. When asked about what makes it easier to open financial accounts, respondents consistently cited three areas that make it easier: money, education, and approachability.

Money was the most frequently cited barrier to opening financial accounts, especially retirement accounts, as many accounts have deposit requirements, and some may have withdraw limits. For households struggling to make ends meet, there may not be a lot of money leftover at the end of the week to deposit. In addition, some respondents did not find banking desirable, with one respondent stating that they simply “don’t want” a retirement savings account, indicating that the value of these accounts may be misunderstood, or that people have alternative investments, such as stocks or real estate, that they plan to use for retirement. Another barrier was education, with several respondents noting that they simply do not know the process and/or documentation required to open an account, and that this information is not always available in Spanish. Related to this, several respondents noted that they would prefer a financial institution with friendly, helpful customer service agents with the skills and resources to assist them, especially for people who prefer to speak in Spanish.

Education

Respondents were asked about their experiences with post-secondary education (trade school, community college, university, etc.) for themselves and for their children, and with enrolling their children in pre-kindergarten. Nineteen individuals were given the

doer condition, meaning they had experiences with the education system in the United States, while 19 were given the non-doer condition, meaning they were not familiar with the US education system. When asked about what makes it easier to educate themselves and their children, respondents consistently cited four areas that make it easier: money, help from others, understanding of the process for enrollment, and language skills.

Money was the most frequently cited barrier, with respondents noting that, especially for college education, they were concerned about how to pay for it. This was strongly felt for college for both themselves, and for children, indicating that Hispanic/Latino parents feel some obligation to financially support students, and may be less aware of alternative options, such as grants and scholarships, available to them. Navigating the process of enrollment was also a frequently cited barrier; respondents noted that they were unsure of what they needed to do to enroll, and that it was often unclear who to reach out to for assistance. Especially when discussing the Newton public schools, respondents felt unsure of how to contact them and receive help from others to enroll their children. Finally, several respondents noted that English is a necessary skill for education attainment in the United States; students need to be able to speak and write in English to succeed, especially at the college level where English proficiency is assumed.

Healthcare

Respondents were asked about their experiences buying insurance and seeking healthcare in Newton. Fifteen individuals were given the doer condition, meaning they had purchased insurance or sought healthcare in Newton, while 15 were given the non-doer condition, meaning they had not purchased insurance or sought healthcare in Newton. When asked about what makes it easier to accomplish these tasks, respondents consistently cited four areas that make it easier: language skills, understanding about the process to obtain healthcare services, help from others, and money.

Language skills were the most consistently cited barrier to seeking healthcare services, especially for respondents to questions about seeing the doctor in Newton: several respondents noted that healthcare services in Newton are limited, and rarely do clinics offer Spanish language translation services. Because of this, they depend on healthcare services elsewhere. Related to this, some respondents noted the lack of specialists in Newton, and their need for a specialist, leaving them no option but to seek services elsewhere. Others noted the difficulty in finding resources explaining the process to obtain and use health services, especially insurance, for Spanish speakers. Some also said that they had felt unwelcome by doctors in Newton, who were unsure of how to approach the language barrier, or to offer them treatment in culturally sensitive ways. Finally, a few respondents noted that the expense of purchasing healthcare services, especially insurance, posed a barrier for them, despite their awareness that lacking insurance would make seeking healthcare services later more expensive. This is less the result of their lack of understanding of the value of insurance, and more an inability to pay among competing expenses, such as food, housing, and transportation that are seen as more foundational to success and to taking care of family than health.

Recommendations

To foster capacity to complete tasks identified as relevant to financial mobility among the Hispanic/Latino community in Newton, the PPMC recommends the following:

- Enhance Access to Financial Resources
 - Offer financial literacy programs.
 - Develop partnerships with local businesses to create job opportunities that align with community members' skills and interests.
- Improve Informational Resources
 - Create and distribute clear, accessible informational materials in both English and Spanish.
 - Develop online resources that explain processes and services in a user-friendly manner.
 - Ensure that all public-facing websites and documents are available in Spanish, or translatable using Google translate.
- Support Language Skills Development
 - Provide bilingual customer service representatives or use translation tools to assist non-English speakers.
 - Offer English language classes focused on professional and educational contexts, such as resume writing, interview skills, and scholarship applications.
- Increase Help from Others
 - Expand bilingual and translation services in key areas such as healthcare and housing.
 - Encourage community volunteer programs to assist with translation and other support services.
- Address Transportation Needs

- Provide information on obtaining a valid driver's license and offer support for those going through the process.
- Enhance Safety and Support
 - Foster a sense of safety and community by maintaining open communication between residents and local law enforcement.
 - Increase efforts to ensure that public officials are representative of and responsive to the community's needs.
 - Promote community engagement and encourage residents to voice their concerns and participate in local governance.