

## Celebrating Latino/Latine Identity and Creating Inclusive Spaces

Over the years, individuals of Latin American descent have been identified by various terms—including Spanish-Americans, Hispanic, Latinos/Latinas, Latinx, and Latine. These evolving designations reflect the community's ongoing journey toward inclusive and respectful language. Embracing this diversity is essential in fostering environments where students and families feel valued and included.

### Supporting Latino/Latine Students and Families

To create welcoming spaces for students and families, educational organizations can:

- **Celebrate Latino/Latine heritage year-round:** Integrate culture into daily teaching practices, moving beyond singular events like Cinco de Mayo and Hispanic Heritage Month.
- **Enhance multicultural and culturally responsive teaching:** Reflect the diversity of the student body at all educational levels by incorporating culturally relevant materials, events, and resources.
- **Offer opportunities for language learning:** Provide all students with access to language education, promoting cognitive, social, and economic benefits.

### Voices from the field



**Dr. Carmen Ayala**, the first Latina and female Superintendent of the Illinois State Board of Education, emphasizes the importance of embracing her identity to connect with the broader

Latin American community and culture: *"Identifying as Latina connects me to all the Latin American countries and cultures. It reflects our language, which uses masculine and feminine forms, emphasizing our roots in Latin."*



**Sara Mendez**, the 2024 Bilingual Teacher of the Year at Monmouth-Roseville Junior High School in Monmouth-Roseville Community Unit School District 238, shares her

experience of identifying as Hispanic and underscores the importance of visibility and celebration culture in educational settings: *"Visibility is key. Finding ways to educate and celebrate our culture is integral to helping us feel seen, understood, and welcome."*



**Edwin Sánchez Molina**, from the Multilingual/Language Development Department and Illinois Ombudsman at the Illinois State Board of Education, discusses his choice of identity and

the significance of representation in educational leadership: *"I choose to identify as Latino. Being born in Mexico and raised in predominantly Latino neighborhoods in Chicago has shaped my sense of belonging to my culture, heritage, and roots."*



**Oriana Wilson**, a lifelong bilingual educator and school leader, currently serves as an Assistant Principal of Instruction at Proviso West High School. *"I believe education organizations can*

*support and celebrate Latine culture by incorporating diverse perspectives, practices, and inclusive environments that honor Latine communities' and its people's contributions and experiences, starting as early as preschool."*



Scan to hear a conversation about identity.