



# Hispanic Heritage Month Project Spotlight Pt. 2



by Grace Frye, Senior Associate of  
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Each year from September 15 – October 15, we recognize and celebrate National Hispanic Heritage Month. This year we will shine a spotlight on our incredible providers and partner organizations who work to build an equitable future in education for Hispanic and

Latino communities. Over the course of the next few weeks, we will use this space to elevate the work of some of our partners and providers working directly within the Latinx community. **For part one of this series, [click here](#).**

## The Partner

Based in San Antonio, [MindshiftED](#) was founded by Joe Cantu and Maribel Gardea, two Latino parents from San Antonio. Joe says the organization seeks to “connect with and empower parents to come into the school system, make it their own, and hold the school system accountable.” They do this by training parents through their Academy of Powerful Parents programming on how to use their voice and collective power to band together and demand change in the public education system.

“My background is in IT, so that makes me incredibly comfortable with data,” Joe says. “What I noticed as I was going through my educational experience with my own student, was that no one was really having a conversation of metrics or what it is that the school is achieving. And I know that those are tough conversations, however, we want to make sure that parents understand their rights within the school system to advocate for change—to make sure that all kids in a school are reading at grade level.”

Maribel was similarly introduced to the realities and fundamental barriers between parents and the education system as she navigated it with her own children.

“Being a native Texan I thought I knew everything about the school system until I had my kids and they became part of that system,” she says. “I have a child with severe multiple disabilities, and navigating that with him was beyond what I even imagined. If parents had data in a digestible manner, we would be in a different place. Our education system isn’t where it needs to be, and parents need to be a part of it. Right now, they’re absent—not because they want to be, but because there’s a lot of barriers prohibiting them from actually participating.”

MindshiftED’s primary approach to advocacy education is through the Academy of Powerful Parents. This fellowship is offered in both English and Spanish, and it is through this program that MindshiftED trains participants to take tangible actions to demand change in San Antonio schools. As the organization has grown and graduated 11 generations of parents through the program, there has been a marked increase in interest from parents to dive deeper and take their learning to the next level.

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"Our original Academy touches on the basics of "What to Understand as a Parent," but now there is a need for more," Maribel explains. "Questions like, 'How do you take it to the next level?' 'How do you actually start leading your own efforts in your own schools?' Parents are asking for it, we're seeing the need for it, and that's why we decided to go into Academy 2.0."

## The Provider

[Amplify Equity](#), based in Austin, Texas, approaches its work with equity baked into all parts of a project scope.

"Our approach to any project uses an "Inside Out, Outside In" framework, which necessitates that our partners constantly toggle between the "inner" work of unpacking identities, beliefs, values, and biases, in order to understand and effect change at the systems level," says Kelly Ocasio, founder and principal consultant of Amplify Equity. "We believe that organizations and systems (such as school systems) can only change when individual people start to shift their mindsets and beliefs."

Kelly shares that she's spent her life as a "cultural border-crosser," balancing and transitioning between her White and Latinx identities. This experience has informed her approach to and experience within education.

"I was inspired to teach in order to serve in bilingual communities – seeing my border crossing as an asset within these communities where I could help other Latinx individuals navigate the dualism I felt. I continue to be inspired by the people I meet and the ways I see injustice play out within our Latinx community. I leverage my border-crossing superpower on a daily basis now to translate between the world of White Supremacy and my Latinx roots. I hope to continue leveraging bilingualism and biculturalism to create the change I want to see in the world."

Kelly and her consultant partner, Yara Flores, say the proximity and deep connection to the MindshiftEd mission drew them to the project.

"As parents ourselves of school-aged Latinx children in Texas, we felt an immediate connection with the MindshiftEd staff and with the families they serve. We are excited about their work and have been honored to build these courses in partnership with them."

## The Project

In 2022, MindshiftED plans to expand its parent and family-oriented programming by introducing phase two of the Academy of Powerful Parents fellowship; a course focused on the how and why of advocacy work and organizing campaigns.

"This program will build parents that have a sharper knowledge set and are able to really utilize what they learned in Academy 1.0, and start to put that knowledge heavily into practice. Academy 2.0 will make parents more cunning and more agile in their advocacy as they continue to move forward," Joe says.

These courses, developed in partnership between Amplify Equity and MindshiftED, are being constructed to be delivered in a hybrid and bilingual (Spanish/English) setting. The courses will cover subjects such as Racial Equity, Parent Organizing (2.0), Texas School Ratings, Texas Representation and Speaking Truth, and Media Coaching.

"We worked with the MindshiftED team to identify course topics that are grounded in the requests and needs of participants from the first series of Academy courses" Kelly says. "We also built courses in a way that brings in

Academy courses, Kelly says. We also built courses in a way that brings in participants knowledge and expertise to discussions and allows them to build shared knowledge together. We also thought about accessibility and inclusion through identifying and building activities, resources, and tools that are available in both Spanish and English.”

Vital to building strong programming for the Academy 2.0 was finding a provider with the cultural context and lived experience that matches MindshiftED’s target audience.

“It was vital for our team to have somebody with lived cultural experience of being Latino,” Maribel says. “The majority of our participants in the Academy are Latinos. San Antonio is made up of a lot of Latinos. We wanted to have somebody here that had shared knowledge in their experience here in Texas. That was another big part of why we chose our provider—because they were in Texas as well.”

Joe agrees.

“To find someone that was really going to understand that and bring that to the work was a non-negotiable point to be quite honest.”

## The Outcomes

While a change in education will not occur overnight, the team says this kind of programming is an essential step in serving the families of San Antonio.

“This project is allowing the MindshiftED team to meet the needs of their stakeholders, who are anxious for more learning and content to cultivate their advocacy voices,” Kelly says. “Their first generation of courses was a powerful beginning for families that began to equip them with the knowledge needed to understand the challenges of the education system. This project will take participants into the next level of learning and will ultimately be a huge step toward building a community of parents in San Antonio who can be powerful advocates for children. Having an educated, informed, and active community is how systemic change truly happens. Our hope is that this project is helping to build that community!

Maribel reminds us that making change is slow, exemplary work built on trust, understanding, and community.

“We have a huge opportunity as Latinos as leaders in this community, to direct, to guide, to shape, to form, to create, to build things the way that we think should be built. And it’s not something that we take lightly,” she explains. “It does weigh heavy on us. But the opportunity has been given to us to be able to do that. And we will walk in our passion. We will continue to build and continue to create systems that are actually made and created for us. And that is why we do the work that we do.”

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